

# Art Class Can be Monkey Business

By Mary Weed

After viewing the exhibition, *Yani—The Brush of Innocence*, organized by the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, my young art students gained a fresh perspective of Chinese painting. It was an inspiration and a thrill to be able to see the work of a child wonder.

Wang Yani began painting when she was two years old. Monkeys soon became one of her favorite subjects after a visit to the zoo in her rural Chinese town of Gongheng. Her father, who is also an artist, bought her a pet monkey to encourage her to paint playful pictures.

My students acquired her fondness for these primates and created all kinds of monkeys in their imaginations. We used plant-fiber paper, which is very absorbent, and watercolors.

Chinese artists sign their paintings with a “chop” or stamp. My students created their own version of a chop by framing their initials in a small red square. I reminded them to paint their monkeys humanlike, as Yani did. All this resulted in a wonderful mix of personalities—some monkeys playing catch and others playing leap-frog!

Our third grade curriculum has a heavy emphasis on Chinese culture, so we used the *Yani* exhibit as a springboard for other Chinese art projects. Using



Sarah Bishop, grade 3.



Detail.



Suzanne Klemushin, grade 3.

their paintings for reference, students then made their monkeys come to life in three-dimensional form with clay. Then, we went on to create Chinese kites and fans. Each student came to know what it must feel like to be a child prodigy! ■

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