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PIGEONS painted on glaze, attributed to Giuseppe Castiglioni, known to Chinese as Lang Shih-ning (郎世寧), the renowned Jesuit priest who served as court painter to Emperor Ch'ien-lung.

from the fresh air inhaled in the dawn. Secondly, when the pigeons fly high in the sky, from down below I have to strain my eyesight to tell which ones belong to me and which ones to others. How difficult that is can be left only to one's imagination. My eyes have to follow their trails as they recede further and further away, as if reaching the end of the horizon and beyond the clouds. And I don't do it for one day either, but for days and days on end until my eyes are improved and corrected without my knowledge. Thirdly, when I use a heavy bamboo stick to direct the traffic of the pigeons, I have to rely on the muscles of my arms. By waving the bamboo stick regularly, I can feel my arms strengthen, and gradually the muscles on all parts of my body became much better developed. . . .

"That I love to raise pigeons has become well-known to my relatives and friends. After I gave up this hobby, one day a very dear friend, Mr. Feng Yu-wei, happily told me, 'Wan-hua², I bought a piece of antique by accident and it must have a special appeal to you. It is only fitting that I present it to you as a souvenir.' As he spoke, he produced a painting of a pair of pigeons in a square glass-paneled frame. The background was black, the pigeons were done in white, their eyes and claws in red, standing together on a piece of light blue Yunnan marble. They were painted in the Western style and looked so lively that they could almost move. At first I thought it was painted on paper and framed like an ordinary piece of painting. He explained it to me, however, that it was actually done on glaze, somewhat like the way they paint a snuff bottle. Judging from the style and décor, it must have been more than a hundred years old. It was said that it belonged to the Emperor Ch'ien-lung period and was done by the Italian painter, Giuseppe Castiglioni (郎世寧). Since there was no signature, we could not determine its authenticity. But its vintage and antiquity made it a lovely sight to look at. I thanked him for his consideration and took it home with me to hang on the wall so that I could gaze at it. This souvenir has been with me from north to south for more than twenty years, never parted from me, and is still hung on the wall of my home today. . . ."

²Wan-hua (晚華), Mei Lan-fang's courtesy name.