

Atlas Obscura explores the medical library's unique Lam Qua portraits



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Lam Qua, a 19th-century Western-trained artist in Canton (now Guangzhou), China, painted portraits of patients with tumors and other disfiguring medical conditions for Dr. Peter Parker, a Yale-trained physician and Protestant missionary who opened a hospital in Canton in 1834. Parker used the paintings to promote his medical missionary work and raise funds for the hospital.

Eighty four of the oil paintings make up the Cushing/Whitney Medical Library's Lam Qua Paintings Collection, which is now the subject of an article on the website *Atlas Obscura*. The medical library also holds Peter Parker's papers.

Atlas Obscura writer Veronique Greenwood traces the collection's history and follows several patient narratives, part of the larger [Peter Parker collection](#) [1]. Greenwood also [shows how Lam Qua's work evokes and responds to European portraiture](#) [2] of the same era. Points of connection include the *Grande Odalisque* of Jacques Auguste Dominique Ingres, the British society portraits of Sir Thomas Lawrence, and portraits by Lawrence's contemporary George Chinnery, who arrived in South China in 1825 at the outset of Lam Qua's career.

Beyond their artistic and historical interest, the paintings have also served a distinctly modern use. In April, two Yale professors of dermatology used ten of the portraits for Grand Rounds, a teaching exercise in which physicians and medical residents review and discuss clinical cases. Instead of observing and interviewing living patients, the students were asked to diagnose Dr. Parker's patients based on close visual observation of the portraits. Read the Yale News story, "[19th-century portraits provide dermatology residents a lesson in looking](#) [3]."

See [the medical library's collection description with links to digital images](#) [4].

Image: Detail from Portrait No. 6, showing a woman with a large growth on her right hand, by Lam Qua (1801-1860), Peter Parker Collection, Cushing/Whitney Medical Library

Source URL: <https://web.library.yale.edu/news/2019/01/atlas-obscura-explores-medical-librarys-unique-lam-qua>

Links

[1] <https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwhitney.med.yale.edu%2Fgreenstone%2Fc>

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