

## **Snuff Bottle**

Sitting on its shelf, this small snuff bottle caught my attention. It quietly displays its beauty as a work of art in miniature with a serene landscape scene painted in reverse.

The snuff bottle story began with Europeans bringing snuff to the Imperial Court of China in the 17th century. Snuff, which is ground tobacco mixed with herbs and spices, was introduced to Europe from South America. It became very popular. Inhaled through the nose, it was believed to cure a range of ailments from headaches and colds to upset stomachs. Snuff was brought to China in boxes with hinged lids that proved unsatisfactory in humid climate. The practical Chinese solution was to make small portable bottles with a narrow opening and a stopper to seal in freshness. They became a sought-after accessory and a status symbol as the popularity of snuff reached the population outside the palaces. Snuff bottles were made in a variety of shapes but were always no bigger than the palm of the hand. Lots of materials were used in their making ranging from jade, glass, amber, rhinoceros horn and even rock crystal and precious and semi-precious stones.

The snuff bottle here is made of glass. The artist used an inner painting technique using a small brush. It can take months to finish a scene in reverse. Some artists became famous, and their painted bottles were highly collectable. I read that the most difficult subject to draw is cats!

I love the fact that snuff came from South America to China via Europe and that a highly collectable form of art arose out of necessity bridging the gap between East and West.