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After WILLIAM ALEXANDER
1767–1816, England

Top to bottom, left to right:
*View of one of the Western Gates
of the City of Peking*, 1796
Etching

*Chinese Barges of the Embassy Passing
Through a Sluice on
the Grand Canal*, 1796
Etching

*Chinese Barges of the Embassy
Preparing to Pass Under A Bridge*, 1796
Etching

*View of a Pai-Loo, Improperly called a Triumphal
Arch, and of a Chinese
Fortress*, 1796
Etching

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Dominis Holt, 1980 (17,973.26,
.19, .33, .2)

At the end of the 18th century the reality of India and China, as opposed to the fantasy of Cathay, were sought as scientific expeditions, traveling gentlemen, and artist-wanders circumnavigated the globe. William Alexander accompanied the mission of England's Lord Macartney to Peking in 1793 and, as official draftsman, executed sketches of China which were subsequently published as etchings on his return to London.

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Two Botanical Illustrations: BANANA and BREADFRUIT,

ca. 1805

Canton, China

Watercolor over graphite on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Christian H. Aall, 1999
(26,599 & 26,600)

From the early 18th century, "China pictures," workshop paintings in oil on canvas or gouache and/or watercolor on paper executed by unknown artisans, formed a regular part of private trade from Canton to England, the Continent, and the United States. Many works on paper were done in sets, such as groups of port views, representations of different trades, shop interiors, Chinese scenes and landscapes, even botanical illustrations. Sets of images which conformed to Western conventions of naturalism were one of the staples of export painting workshops. Interestingly, these finely painted, colorful representations were frequently painted, as were these, on Western paper shipped to China for this use. They were popular in the West through the third quarter of the 19th century for their decorative, picturesque effect.