Public access description

This brushpot is decorated with an image of Kui Xing, the God of Literature, standing on one leg on the head of a mythical creature called Ao. Kui Xing holds a writing brush in his right hand and a measure of grain (dou) in his left hand. The measure represents a container for wisdom and inspiration.

The traditions says that Kui Xing, having passed first at the imperial examination, was not awarded the golden rose usually given to the best candidate due to his ugliness. Humiliated, he threw himself in a river where he was saved by a water monster.

Kui Xing is worshipped by candidates to the imperial examinations, and dreaming of him the night before the exams was considered an auspicious sign. The candidate who obtained the highest results, known as the First Scholar (zhangyuan), would walk first on a staircase decorated with the ao design. Representations of Kui Xing and Ao are thus a symbol of literary success and highest achievement at the imperial examinations.

Descriptive line
Porcelain brushpot painted in underglaze blue and red with Kui Xing, China, Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, ca. 1700-20

Physical description
Porcelain brushpot painted in underglaze blue and red with a scene representing the god-star Kui Xing flying above waves; a lozenge-shaped mark is painted in underglaze blue on the base

Dimensions
Height: 14.8 cm, Diameter: 18.5 cm

Museum number
C.976-1910

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O166247/brushpot-unknown/