

# ASIAN ART

Winter Quarter 2020

THE NEWSPAPER FOR COLLECTORS, DEALERS, MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES · £5.00/US\$10/€10

## IMPERIAL SCROLL GOES TO MUSEUM IN SHANGHAI

On 8 October, 2020, in what may be one of the longest bidding wars in auction history, extending beyond 75 minutes with more than 100 bids, a 13th/early 14th-century imperial scroll, *Five Drunken Princes Returning on Horseback*, by the Yuan-dynasty master painter Ren Renfa (1255-1328), sold for HK\$306.6 million (US\$39.6 million) to the Long Museum in Shanghai. This establishes the handscroll as the most valuable work sold at auction in Asia in 2020, and the most valuable Chinese ink painting sold by Sotheby's Hong Kong. Measuring two metres across, the scroll depicts five drunken princes – one of whom later became the Tang-dynasty emperor Xuan Zong (685-762), taking a spirited horse ride accompanied by four attendants.

With much of Ren Renfa's output either held in museums, or by private collectors, this widely published scroll is one of the rare surviving works by the painter to come to auction. Having impeccable provenance, it was kept in the imperial collection of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and catalogued in *Shiqu Baoji Xubian*, the second volume of the inventory of the Qing emperors' collection of paintings and calligraphy. Following the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the painting was brought out of the Forbidden City in 1922 by Pu Yi, the last Emperor of China,



Five Drunken Princes Returning on Horseback by Ren Renfa (1255-1327), Yuan dynasty, ink and colour on paper, handscroll, 35.2 x 210.7 cm, sold at Sotheby's Hong Kong on 8 October, making it the most valuable work of art currently sold at auction in Asia in 2020

and taken to the US, where it was subsequently acquired by Walter Hochstadter (1914-2007), a distinguished dealer and collector of Chinese art.

Elsewhere, in the Modern Art sales, the top lot went to Sanyu's *Fleurs dans un pot bleu et blanc*, which realized HK\$187 million (US\$24.1 million), followed by Sanyu's *Nu* at HK\$169 million (US\$21.8 million), and Wu Guanzhong's *Scenery of Northern China* at HK\$151 million (US\$19.5 million). Two other sales in the paintings series were 100% sold. The seven works by Chu Teh-Chun and Zao Wou-Ki had a combined total of HK\$153.4 million (US\$20 million), led by Chu Teh-Chun's seminal painting *No.312*, which exceeded its high estimate to sell for HK\$60.7 million (US\$7.8 million). The Bell's Collection

of Post-war Chinese Art, sold over two consecutive seasons of the 2020 Spring and Autumn sales, saw the top lot, Chen Ting Shih's *Day and Night #25*, sell for HK\$1 million (US\$130,000), five times its pre-sale estimate.

In the Southeast Asian art sales Sudjana Kerton's *Indonesian Village Life*, the top lot, sold for HK\$8 million (US\$1 million) and Handiwirman Saputra's *Weekend and Organic Projects from No Roots No Shoots #3* achieved HK\$2.5 million (US\$325,000), setting a new auction record for the artist.

Chinese furniture also performed well, with 21 pieces of *huanghuali* furniture from a private collection selling for HK\$203 million (US\$26 million) alongside a large pair of 17th-century *huanghuali* square-corner display cabinets,

*wanlingui*, which achieved HK\$57 million (US\$7 million), over 10 times the pre-sale estimate.

There was strong bidding elsewhere in the sale, with the total Autumn 2020 Sales series achieving HK\$3.35 billion/US\$432 million, becoming more successful than the Autumn 2019 Sales series. The sales were in a new hybrid format, devised after the declaration of a global pandemic this year. The live-streamed evening sales in Hong Kong attracted over two million views, across digital and social media platforms, with 46% of sales sold to online bidders. Sotheby's have created additional digital initiatives to attract buyer, such as guided online tours, virtual exhibitions, enhanced digital catalogues, and expansion into Chinese social platforms.

### SCHULER AUKTIONEN



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Asian Art Online Only  
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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### TATE BRITAIN

Chila Kumari Singh Burman has created a new light installation for Tate Britain's annual Winter Commission, which was unveiled in time for the Diwali festival. Burman is celebrated for her interdisciplinary practices which span printmaking, painting, installation and film. It is the fourth in a series of outdoor commissions to mark the winter season and can be seen on the outside of the building until 31 January, 2021.

### BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

The Brooklyn Museum announces more than 150 major new acquisitions across departments. From Korea are six sets of rare ceramic epitaph plaques (circa 1480-1682), gifted by the Carroll Family Collection, making the assemblage of these important documents the largest outside of Korea. The addition of these pieces makes the Brooklyn museum home to the largest collection of epitaph plaques outside of Korea, bolstering the museum's reputation as one of the world's foremost repositories of Korean art. Epitaph plaques are quintessentially Korean objects, invented to provide a durable means of recording the biographies of noted individuals after their passing. Composed in Chinese characters in underglaze pigments on white clay, these objects offer rare examples of dated ceramics and are often the sole source of information about historical individuals.

### GERMAN LOST ART FOUNDATION

The German Lost Art Foundation announced that it will grant an additional

€1.1 million to museums for provenance research, including – for the first time – to institutions with collections of Chinese art. The immediate goal is to have a browsable database by the end of next year. So far, the foundation has funded 23 projects with a total of €2.5 million (\$2.9 million), making the most recent funding round, its third, the largest yet. The foundation, founded in 2015, initially had a specific focus on Nazi-confiscated art, but has since expanded its mission to include colonial contexts and the former German Democratic Republic.

### NEW DIGITAL ART PRIZE, SINGAPORE

The Julius Baer Next Generation Art Prize, which comes with a cash award of up to US\$15,000 (S\$20,490), is open to Southeast Asian artists aged 18 to 40 years old. The deadline for entries is 28 February, 2021. Works can include digital paintings, video art and virtual reality artwork. The award has two categories: Still Image and Moving Image. Three winners will be selected from each category, and receive US\$15,000, US\$10,000 or US\$5,000. Submissions should reflect at least one of these themes: arising Asia, digital disruption, energy transition, feeding the world, future cities, sustainability, or shifting lifestyles and inequality. Send entries to <https://www.juliusbaer.com/en/spotlight/next-generation-art-prize/>

### THE KANGXI ATLAS

The Topographical Collection of King George III, held by the British Library in London captures four centuries of visual impressions of

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REFIK  
ANADOL

by Olivia Sand

Over the past years, many aspects of our lives have taken a different turn, changing and reacting to the development of technology. One of these aspects is the growth of artificial intelligence (AI), a source of unparalleled development and attention. Although perhaps not obvious at first, AI is also bringing a new impetus to contemporary art. Early traces can be seen in the Italian futurist approach from the early 20th century, as well as Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Room*, first created in 1965, which took it one step further. With AI, contemporary art is coming alive and immersive, it explores the notion of time, movement, light, and emotions – to name just a few. A mastermind behind AI painting, sculpture, and installation is Refik Anadol (b 1985 in Turkey), a pioneer of AI art, who is tirelessly trying to increase AI's canvas. Currently based in California, Refik Anadol envisions challenging projects, sometimes being even one step ahead of what technology can offer. In this interview with the Asian Art Newspaper, he describes his endeavour and the opportunities ahead.

**Asian Art Newspaper:**  
**What led you to AI and more specifically to AI art which remains quite mysterious and almost unknown?**

**Refik Anadol:** My first encounter with AI took place when I watched the film *Blade Runner*. It changed my life. The film featured AI and we were witnessing two AIs having their own dialogue. In addition, I have been playing online games since the age of eight, and I guess one could call me a gamer. In games, you always play with machines with AI, as the machine reacts to your actions. From my childhood on, I have dreamt about working with AI. A major change took place in 2016, when I became one of the first artists-in-residence at Google,

allowing me to start using AI in a practical way in my work. Before 2016, AI was something complicated to use, as one could not work with it easily towards simply using a code and consequently understanding how it worked. AI was something very challenging, involving a complex knowledge based on research. Becoming an artist in residence at Google mainly gave me the opportunity to find out, in depth, how AI operated. Before that, I had already been working with data, completing my first projection in a public space in 2011. Therefore, I was already aware how data worked, what data meant, why machines needed data, and most importantly, what we could do with data as humans. Then,



Refik Anadol. Photo: Efsun Erkilic

## NEWS IN BRIEF

places throughout the world, from maps and atlases to architectural drawings, cartoons and watercolours. The collection is a distinct part of the larger King's Library which was presented to the Nation by George IV in 1823. Since last month, the images are available for anyone to view online via the British Library's digital Flickr Commons collection.

The vast first, engraved, edition Kangxi Map of China of 1710, is part of this resource. For the Chinese authorities mapping represented a means of control over areas conquered by the Manchu Qing Dynasty. The resulting Kangxi Atlas (taking its name from the emperor, who ruled from 1661-1722), was completed from the surveys carried out between 1708 and 1718.

In 1705 the Jesuits had been given the task of creating a map of Tianjin region, an area of intense flooding, and the region around Beijing in 1707. Satisfactory results of these initial projects piqued the emperor's interest to see the Great Wall and further areas mapped. This led to the survey of the vast areas of the empire including all the Chinese provinces and parts of Tartary. The Jesuits were not allowed into Tibet, Korea and Eastern Turkistan, and here they used maps constructed by Chinese officials.

The map covers 15 Chinese provinces, Korea, Great Tartary and Tibet. The text on the map is in Chinese and Manchu script. Additionally, the manuscript

annotations in Italian transcribe names of provinces, cities, rivers and islands. The hand is likely to be that of Father Matteo Ripa, the Italian Jesuit, engraver of the copperplate edition of the map. It was also Ripa who presented the copperplate set of Kangxi atlas to George I in London on his way home from China.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF  
ART, NEW YORK

The museum has announced that it is closing its third-floor galleries where the permanent collection exhibition *Masterworks of Himalayan Art* is currently on view, and begin construction on a new interactive space for social and emotional learning for all ages. Scheduled to reopen fall 2021, the third floor, renamed *Mandala Lab*, will bring cognitive science, contemplative practice, and visitor-contributed art experiences to the heart of the Rubin, as well as act as the new home for School and Family Programs.

The *Mandala Lab* draws on the symbolism of a Tibetan Buddhist mandala, which also serves as conceptual inspiration. By referencing Buddhist wisdoms embedded in the art in the Rubin's collection along with psychological findings, the *Mandala Lab* aims to offer tools and new perspectives for coping with the day-to-day challenges, anxieties, and emotional burdens brought about by personal and societal complexities – all heightened by the global Covid-19 pandemic.

ROSEBERYS,  
LONDON

A royal Sidi manuscript highlighting the extraordinary but little explored history of Africans in India sold for £212,500 (est £8-12,000) in London in October. The manuscript comes from first half of the 19th century from the African ruled state of Sachin in Gujarat. A self-contained nation founded in 1791, Sachin had its own cavalry and state band that included Africans, in addition to its own coats of arms, currency and stamped paper. It remained independent until integrated into the Indian state in 1948. The highly prized manuscript was written in Persian and Urdu, during the reign of the Nawab of Sachin, Bahadur (r 1802-1853). Though most of its subjects were Hindu Sachin was ruled by Sunni Muslims of the Sidi dynasty who were of Abyssinian origin. The lot went on to be given the Outstanding Indian & Islamic Art Award during the Asian Art in London event in November.

## NAM JUN PAIK PRIZE

This year's prize has been awarded to the Mumbai-based collaborative studio CAMP. Founded in 2007 by artists Shaina Anand, Ashok Sukumaran, and Sanjay Bhangar, CAMP connects and interacts with independent art and media groups to produce short- and long-term projects such as film, video, electronic media, and public art. The group received an award of US\$ 43,630 with a solo show at the centre in Seoul in 2021.

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Melting Memories (2018), Istanbul, explores the materiality of remembering © Refik Anadol

I understood that AI needed data to create meaning. Aware of what data meant, I was nevertheless not aware of how to use AI.

With all these questions regarding AI, I kept thinking about how, as humans, we take information from life, turn it into knowledge, and eventually, this knowledge becomes wisdom (similar to a very humanistic approach). I was wondering what a machine would do with someone else's memory? What if a machine could take that information and do something with it? I have continuously been inspired by dreams, memories, imagination, which have always been my toolset. AI opened new perspectives, becoming this 'thing' that lets you paint with a thinking brush. That is why I needed to learn how to use AI – to create new stories and new narratives.

**AAN:** What type of doors can AI art open compared to 'regular art' created with canvas, colour, and brush?

**RA:** I started thinking about that question around 2012, when I received my second Master's degree in Media Arts studies at UCLA. I asked myself whether data could become a pigment? I know that presently, all the machines surrounding us are based on data, which is true for the systems we are using, for social media, or for our cars: data is everywhere. As a result, the machines are basically learning who we are. They know what we want to eat, what we want to say, where we want to go, what we want to watch and what we want to hear. We have become predictable. But generally speaking, artists are also inspired by what happens in their own living environment. That led me to ask myself how I could work with machine consciousness? If there is

something deciding what I should say, what I should hear, why would I not use machine consciousness? And what would happen if I could use it and turn it into a pigment, or a sculpture, or a performance? That has basically been my mindset since 2012, trying to transform data into a pigment. However, this pigment is not the one we know that dries. This pigment is in flux, in motion. It is in pixel format, like pixelisation, using light as a material, because in my imagination, when data becomes a pigment, it is not static, but always in flux, becoming a living canvas.

The other correlation I draw on is the architecture that surrounds us. I always think that the buildings will remember us, that they will dream. Architecture will go beyond these boring walls, whether in concrete, glass, or steel. The future of architecture will be our consciousness. This leads me to the question of how I can imagine a future that is more realistic than the one that you perceive? It occurred to me that light is the best material to do this as it can hold data, knowledge, information and machine consciousness, and I could paint with this. Basically, the question is whether data paintings, or AI paintings, are so different from the original art experience based on canvas paintings from early centuries? For example, in order to complete data paintings, I can use data based on wind, temperature, humidity or rain, and can turn this weather information into an artwork. Similarly, when I say AI-data painting, we can train an AI with every single photo ever taken on Mars, or on the International Space Station (ISS), or of the cities of New York, Stockholm, Berlin, and Seoul. What I learned over time is that collective memory can also become a

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*I wondered what a machine would do with someone else's memory*  
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pigment when using AI. Basically, these are concepts that were not predictable for the previous generation of artworks. Now, we are truly using human consciousness and machine consciousness together, and collaborate with a thing that does not forget.

**AAN:** Within your projects, what do you consider the most challenging part:

writing the algorithm or collecting the data, or is every step of the way a major undertaking?

**RA:** Every single step is as challenging. First of all, when you work with AI there is a curatorial challenge: what is the data we are dealing with? What is this machine learning? What information do we need to make that concept understandable? For example, for the city of New York, we collected 130 million images of the city. Technically, if I am an AI typing in the words 'New York', as an AI, I download everything in order to learn. But then, after downloading this data, I have to curate it, as I cannot just use whatever I have found. For example, as our projects are not about personal things or moments, we are looking for buildings, skies, floral systems, objects, streets – but not people. In order to make that happen, we need to write another AI algorithm letting the AI learn what a person, a

building, a flower, a tree is, then we can keep only the things we need. Then, we can start the actual project by keeping in mind that there is also the storytelling to manage: how do I tell a story? For example, we have a project in New York, *Hallucinations*, which visualises and projects all these millions of images which was presented in a kind of film format, with people watching it in a three-dimensional, architectural world. Many elements come together as there is storytelling, music, production, imagination, training, and it is all very challenging. It is a huge undertaking.

**AAN:** Is the music we hear during the projection also coming from an algorithm?

**RA:** Over the past 10 years, I have been working with my sound designer, Kerim Karaoglu. He is based in Berlin and graduated from Folkwang University of Arts in Essen, one of the world's best schools for electronic composition. As he is also using data and algorithms, he is composing with a similar approach. For example, when we work with EG data for the human memory, the moment of remembering in *Melting Memories*, the featured music is coming from EG data, from the brain cells. Let us call that 'datasonification'. He can take data and transform it into impeccable sound and harmony. For New York, Berlin, Stockholm, and for the LA Philharmonic project at Frank Gehry's Disney Hall, we trained our AI with every single sound recorded by the LA Philharmonic over the past 75 years whether it was Stravinsky, Mozart, or Beethoven. All these sounds were collected, and subsequently trained AI to dream the music.

**AAN:** It seems that with your projects you manage to capture features like emotions, time, and movement that cannot be achieved in traditional paintings. Are these the elements you are trying to emphasise?

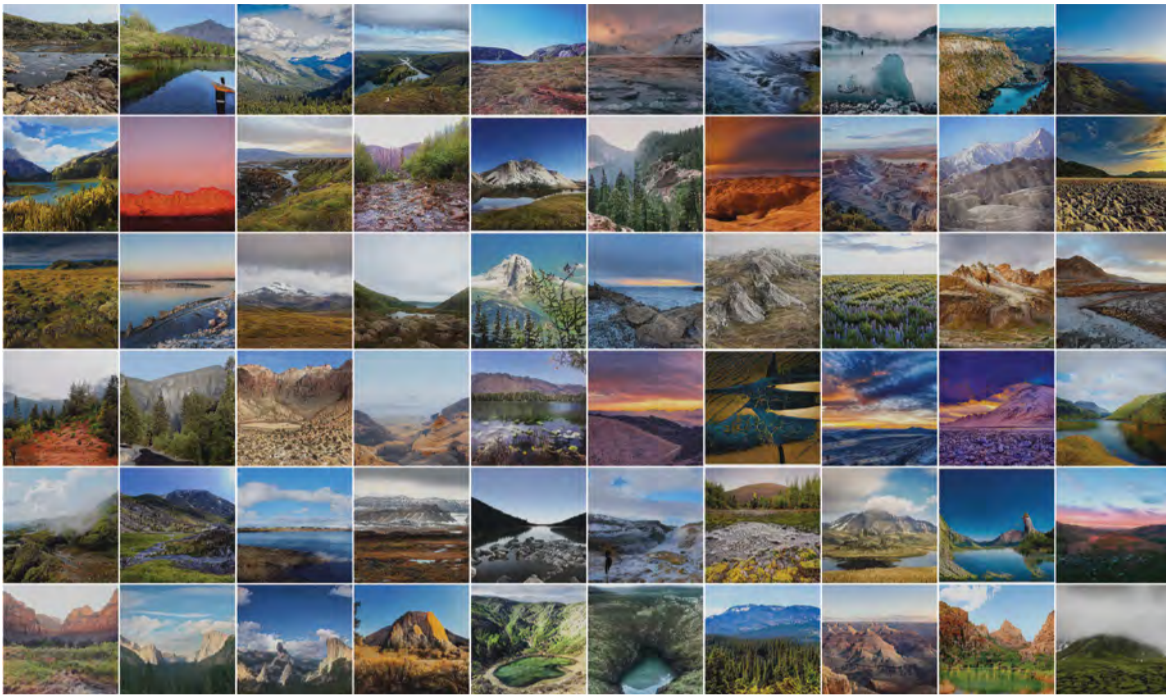
**RA:** Every project is different, but all begin with the data. One project uses all these invisible signals in the world, Wi-Fi, LTE, Bluetooth, etc. We know that millions of people are communicating with each other, our headphones are communicating without wires, the machines are getting data from these signals. As a result, some projects are visualising invisible data, some projects visualise brain signals, whereas some projects visualise the machine's dreams – a sort of hallucination – so it is really all about understanding. The main question is what does it really mean to be a human in the 21st-century? In my opinion, this century is all

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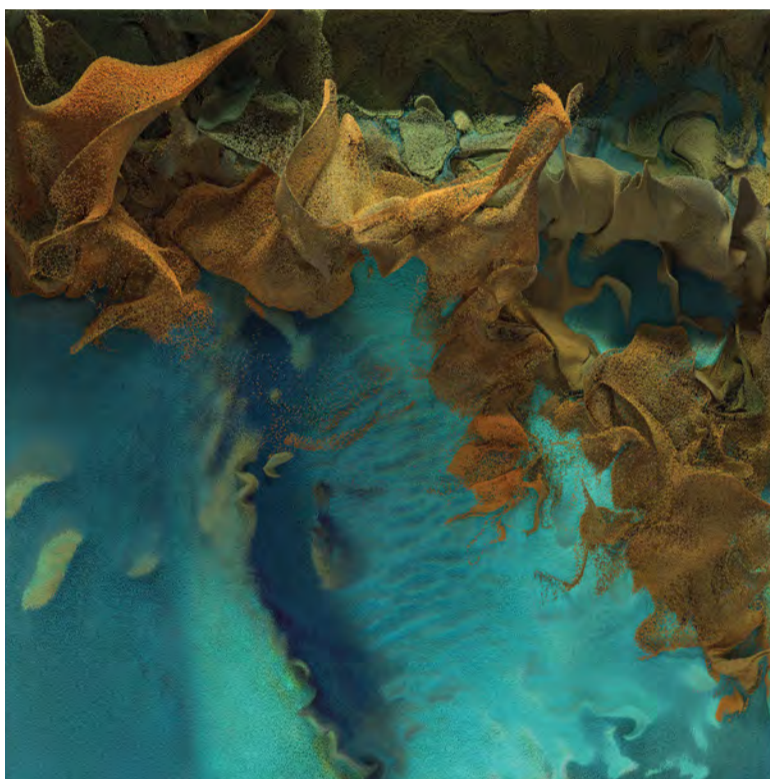


Machine Hallucination (2019), the artist's first large-scale exhibition in New York © Refik Anadol

## 4 People



Quantum Memories: Nature contact sheet (2020) © Refik Anadol



AI-data painting © Refik Anadol

about machines, competition, data, social media, and we are becoming part of something that is bigger than us. We are turning into a small thing as we are no longer the centre. I am trying to understand that, and turn this into an experience, regardless of what the data is about.

**AAN:** When you say you are 'trying to understand what it means to be a human today', what conclusions have you reached?

**RA:** I think what I currently understand is on a very small scale, because it is a journey to which I cannot yet know the answer. But I am aware of the fact that we are all social creatures, who love to connect and share, we love to become beings who care for each other from our core – if there is no manipulation or any other agenda. That is why I hate politics, because to me politicians are the most manipulative beings humanity ever created. That is also why I intentionally do not worry about politics. My only priority is nature and I know this is the one thing everybody cares about. If nature is not there, there is no border, there is nothing.

What I have also learned is that instead of making humans more machine like, we can make the machines more human. That helps us to understand who we are. I am therefore trying to make machines more human in order to tackle this question. In this context, I also realised that our imagination, our

memories especially our memories – constitute our most important data. If there is no memory, there is no 'us'. If there is no memory, there is no consciousness. Therefore, memory is everything, but in a world where AI can learn, how can we use AI to remember better? Technically, I believe we can remember better allowing us to also learn better, to dream better, and ultimately we can imagine better. So eventually, I think by using AI we can take ourselves into a new level of humanity. How do we go about that? I believe art is one way of achieving that. Let us not remain stuck in ramifications, or in the negativity of the things that do not work, which I am not saying we should ignore, but we should never stop asking what else we can do with that? What else can we add on top of this and how could we use it to

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We are all  
social creatures,  
who love  
to connect and  
share  
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become better humans? That is basically my 'mission', as we have to explain to humanity what is actually going on.

**AAN:** Your latest project is about art history and on view at MEET, the digital culture centre, in Milan. Sadly is temporarily shut due to Covid-19 (it is scheduled to run until 10 January 2021). Can you describe *Renaissance Dreams* to us?

**RA:** A year ago, I received The Lorenzo il Magnifico Lifetime Achievement Award for New Media and Installation Art at the Florence Biennale. I was very honoured and deeply touched as at the age of 33, I received a lifetime award. In conjunction with the prize, I learned that this award was given by the Medici family, a very important family since the Italian Renaissance. The Renaissance changed the art world with the liberation of ideas, the increase of architecture, sculpture, painting, and literature, all very important to the future and development of art

While in Florence, I visited the great museums, reading a lot about the Renaissance, which I found to be fascinating. In Milan, the MEET centre suggested last year that we should work together. Last November, we started our project,

collecting every existing painting ever created during the Renaissance, every single sculpture, every single architecture, and every single book and text written between 1300 and 1600, letting AI learn from them. Then, we let the machine 'hallucinate' the Renaissance, which is why I called it *Renaissance Dreams*. We are watching AI remembering those paintings in a unique way, as they are in flux, touching each other, featuring faces, pigments, architecture and even literature. AI is imagining it is in the Renaissance. It is an immersive piece where you are surrounded by a transforming architecture allowing to increase the space. Ultimately, the architecture can dream about the Renaissance.

**AAN:** You are opening a project in Australia this month. What is it about?

**RA:** The new project is for the NGV Triennial (opening 19 December) at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne and is called *Quantum Memories*. It is a very challenging project, as we are training our AI with more than 200 million images of nature. Imagine every landscape, sky, ocean, lake, flower, mountain, landscape, island, all the places in the world where nature is represented. Based on that, we are training our AI to let the machine dream and remember in a quantum state. To me, Quantum mechanics and quantum competition are the most important areas of science after AI. They will facilitate a huge leap for humanity. If you understand what quantum mechanics is, and if you apply it to a quantum competition, things can change very quickly. It may initially take some time, but we are working on it. We are starting a new era and I am collaborating with a Google team who is behind the quantum competition. It is incredibly inspiring. A very powerful imagination and a very powerful computation can actually change the world in a good way.

**AAN:** Commercially, is there a market for this type of art?

**RA:** Right now, my current works are already in public collections such as the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne and the ZKM in Karlsruhe. Over the past few years, cities have also acquired pieces, such as Los Angeles, Boston, New York and San Francisco that all have my artwork in their city's collections. In addition, there are private collectors who have AI-data paintings, enjoying them in their homes. AI art is accepted by collectors who work in the tech industry, who understand the medium and who are predicting the future. They have already acquired pieces for their collections.

**AAN:** AI-data painting is based on the technical collaboration of an entire team. What are the costs related to such work?

**RA:** Data painting can start around \$20,000 and goes up to \$45,000 and then, if we are looking at a huge building, it can reach half a million dollars. It all depends on the canvas and the concept.

**AAN:** Are you working with a gallery that represents you, or do people approach you directly?

**RA:** Both options are available, sometimes people contact me directly, or they go through galleries, such as Bitforms in New York.

**AAN:** Have other artists started to copy your art?

**RA:** I am the pioneer of this idea and, as far as I know, I am also the

pioneer for AI-data sculptures and paintings.

**AAN:** Among your projects, would you also lend your knowledge to make people more aware to defend great causes?

**RA:** Absolutely. For now, I primarily focus on nature, because it is the most important topic of humanity. In my opinion, if you do not have nature, you do not have a future. If you do not protect our nature we will eventually only be able to appreciate and watch it through the lens of AI, or remember it from photographs. This is also one of the messages I want to convey through my projects: if you enjoy this, go and find the real, go and touch the grass, and enjoy life. What I am showing is just AI and these are its limitations. It is a very good simulation, but it is not real. Real nature is right there and you need to protect it.

**AAN:** Would you consider addressing the problem of endangered species, for example?

**RA:** I am already using the sound of endangered species. For the project *Quantum Memories* for the National Gallery of Victoria that opens in December, I am using their sound, simulating the bird songs and many others amazing data that we are visualising.

**AAN:** So far, have you been able to create all the projects you envisioned?

**RA:** I am very inspired by the idea of inventing the library of the future. I think libraries are the most important places where we learn what is real, where information becomes knowledge. I do not think I have created my best project as of yet, and I am still working on designing the library of the future as I see in my mind.

**AAN:** How would you envision it?

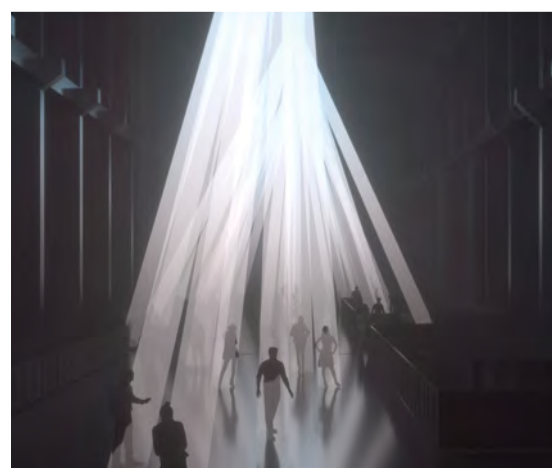
**RA:** As you know, my works are also about architecture and in my projects you can see special designs, three-dimensional designs, and immersive rooms. I am dreaming an immersive room, one that is built by light, but does not actually have any physical books. It could be a room like *Arcade Dreaming*, for example, taking that project to a next level, with a room that holds every single information in the world. It is a very ambitious project, but I think that ultimately, we can do it.

**AAN:** Do you feel people are ready to embrace AI art?

**RA:** When I talk to people saying that I am using data as a pigment and painting with a thinking brush, they need to realise that it is not science fiction, but that it is a reality. Sometimes, it seems to me that the art world is divided in two: there is a classical art world and sometimes, it does not understand or does not want to understand what the future holds and what is coming next. I think with AI, we are ahead of time, slightly rushing our journey in order to find what is waiting for humanity. Therefore, I wish the art world would share our sensitivity to technology and pioneering ideas that rely on software, computers, data and AI so the appreciation of the art begins before the artist dies. A lot of boring things have happened in this century, mainly because collectors and the art world are too slow, too sceptical, without time to think as they are constantly dealing with the past. That is a very 21st-century problem ...

● See the artist's projects on his website, [refikanadolstudio.com](http://refikanadolstudio.com).

● MEET Digital Cultural Centre, Milan, [meetcenter.it](http://meetcenter.it)



Latent Being (2019), LAS Light Art Space, at Kraftwerk Berlin. Photo: Camille Blake © Refik Anadol

# LU YANG

by Michael Young

Lu Yang is a 38 year old multi-media artist based in Shanghai, who is known mostly for her startling video works that utilise the visual *lingua franca* of the gaming generation to explore the universal themes of death, mortality, and consciousness mediated by her passion for neuroscience, Hindu polytheism, and technology. The fast paced and vividly colourful videos are populated by a digitally created motley crew, who maraud and dance their way through dystopian landscapes to the sound of booming techno music. Into this mash-up, Lu casts herself as a gender neutral avatar, spinning in a frenzied stupor, through sci-fi worlds.



Lu Yang with President Macron November 2019, when he was in Shanghai to open the Centre Pompidou outpost in West Bund cultural district. Photo courtesy of Lu Yang/Instagram

Inspired by Eastern deities, Japanese *animé* and no end of pop sub-cultures, the videos fit in equal measure between dead-pan violence and understated humour while negotiating the precarious boundary between life and death. They are often violent, always irreverent, and disturbingly controversial. You might see dead frogs being animated by electrical stimulation or skulls pierced by transcranial needles or cancer cells displaying assumed 'cute' personas. Lu's world is a curious and gruesome one. But you know what you are getting with Lu's work and – ultimately – you either love it or hate it.

I interviewed Lu several months ago, at her studio/home 15 minutes by taxi east of central Shanghai. I had been told by her gallerist that she no longer liked giving interviews and that she would resist having her photograph taken. Also that she no longer thought of herself as an artist. On her website, and in printed material, she had taken to referring to herself in some text by the pronoun 'he'. There seems not to be a statement of a definite preference. However, this is a device that can establish and maintain the anonymity she craves, an anonymity predicated on her name that is gender neutral. Whether she is male or female had no relevance to her work she later said. 'I do not want people to know what I look like.



Lu Yang as 'Doku', a reincarnation of herself that includes her definition of beauty. As she appeared in the music video for the British pop-group 'The 1975'. Doku is Lu Yang, but she is here seen as a nullo, a neutral gender character without any sexual characteristics.

None of my work is gender specific and all is available freely on (the file sharing platforms) Vimeo and YouTube. I am just a creator,' she explained.

She may prefer to be called a creator, but what she has created, since leaving art school in 2010, is the work of an extraordinary contemporary artist who has mastered the technical wizardry of the internet and, in doing so, has gained an international reputation. Her videos have been seen in locations around the globe. Just

recently her high-energy computer environments have featured in exhibitions in Paris and Berlin, as well as on the advertising screens that glare over the iconic Shibuya Crossing in Tokyo. But far from being designed simply to dazzle and entertain youth sub-cultures with attention spans that flit rapidly from one image to the next, they are constructed around Lu's multi-layered and profound interest in science and ancient Asian polytheism. There is a restless ongoing search for the root of

human consciousness – interests that have captivated her since art school.

Lu's studio is also her home, a 1960s duplex apartment at the top of a two-storey block that she shares with her pug, Biabia. 'It was my ambition from very early on to have a pug in my life,' she said. Its wrinkly, short-muzzled face had often appeared in her work, as well as being a feature at her exhibition openings where it would be dressed to match the occasion.

Lu and I met on the main

Continued on page 6

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General view of Lu Yang's studio showing the area where she works

tree-lined road outside. Lu was gregarious and welcoming, and wore a dark track suit – rather than the vividly colourful punk Cosplay-inspired clothes that have become her signature look. Her hair had been dyed a startling, bluey-purple.

Access to the studio was at the back of the block, reached along a narrow alley where the few plants that grew were caked with Shanghai's ubiquitous grey dust. There was no lift and we climbed several flights of stairs that reminded me of a slightly grubby Parisian stairwell.

The apartment had been tastefully renovated and had polished floorboards, ceramic floor tiles and sculpted plaster ceilings, and it was bathed in light that flooded in through doors that opened onto a balcony that ran the length of the apartment. In the main room, upstairs, were several glass-fronted 1940s cabinets that contained Yang's inspirational collection of toys, models, and votive figurines, inflatable faces from the green frog Keroro to Pikachu and Godzilla, alongside various bric-à-brac. They formed a visually compelling and entertaining, three-dimensional bricolage reflecting the hybridised figures and the worlds that Lu renders in her practice. However, there was nothing chaotic about this mélange, each piece had been carefully positioned on the shelves.

Lu's work area, in the space adjoining the living room, had more animé paraphernalia and bookcases packed with publications, as well as three over-sized desks on which sat a host of screens and keyboards. It was here that, in early 2019, Lu began to spend 14-hour days constructing a new, combat-based computer game, *The Great Adventure of the Material World*, which pits a cast of superheroes from her past works against a cult of demons scattered through ancient temples, hyper-urban cities, and the galaxy. After almost a year of this gruelling schedule, however, she decided to shift her mode of working and turned instead to painting. 'I needed to find a way to relax. I thought, maybe I can paint something,' she told me. It was not such a far-fetched idea.

Lu was, in fact, no stranger to the medium. Her first degree was from the painting department of the prestigious China Academy of Fine

Art in Hangzhou, where her professor and mentor had been Zhang Peili – a new-media pioneer in China (see Asian Art Newspaper June 2020). Lu graduated in 2007 with a Bachelor of Fine Art, followed by a Master of Fine Art in 2010 and is currently studying for her doctorate degree in robotics in Hangzhou, again supervised by Peili.

To one side of Lu's computer desk there was an easel, but no paintings. Those had left the studio for her exhibition at Shanghai's Bank Society Gallery. Entitled *Debut*, the show presented brightly hued canvases with the figures inspired by traditional Chinese folktales, Greco-Roman divinities, and wide-eyed *manga* characters. The figures are seen in acts of torture and murder alongside grinning, faces, some of which are based on the artist's own likeness. The paintings possessed the same confronting imagery as Lu's videos with columns of spurting blood, decapitations, and grimacing faces, graphically depicted in a demonic *Danse Macabre*. The premise of the paintings was to blur the binary of good and evil.

Since her student days, Lu has had an ongoing interest in bio-art and neuroscience and even now voraciously reads science books. For her video *Revived Zombie Frogs Underwater Ballet* (2016), which she initiated in 2009, she used electricity to stimulate the muscles of dead frogs. 'You see [the frogs] move and you wonder if it is still alive or dead,' Lu said. On the bottom left corner of the video a pair of gloved hands manipulate the electric signals via a MIDI controller. This pair of hands brings to the fore one of Lu's core concerns: what are the limitations of human control on life and death? In subsequent works, Lu furthered this question, probing how humans have attempted to overwrite the physiological bounds of their control through technological means.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, which utilises electric currents to manipulate brainwaves to diagnose the connections between the brain and the body's muscles, is a procedure frequently used with patients suffering from strokes, multiple sclerosis, and neural diseases, as well as those with anxiety and depression. Lu's video *Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation*

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Since her student days, Lu has had an ongoing interest in bio-art and neuroscience  
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Moving Gods (2015), video installation, which was included in the China Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), where men are cast as Buddhist deities walking solemnly through computer-manipulated temple scenes and urban landscapes that form what is eventually revealed to be a mandala – a part of Lu Yang's iconoclastic meditation on the origins and nature of consciousness



Uterus Man (2013), featuring an animated superhero modelled after the female reproductive system questioning the gender stereotypes often found in video games and popular culture

*Exorcism* (2018) takes it an imaginative step further and begins with a pseudo-informational sequence featuring a doctor who demonstrates the process's applications on a man. Eventually, the same procedure is used to cure the patient from demonic possession. The work thus toys with the idea that physical changes can also alter the state of a person's spirit. This leads to another complex set of questions: where is consciousness located—in the brain? Soul? Body? If our consciousness can be manipulated, is what we understand to be reality a result of the exploitation of our consciousness? In Lu's animated *Delusional Mandala* (2016) there are questions but no answers, though the work, featuring the artist's avatar undergoing a series of neuroscientific tests, was driven by these conundrums.

*Delusional Mandala* also brought to the fore the other major conundrum in Lu's work. The simulacrum of Lu's body is neither female nor male, thereby conferring on her the online anonymity she craves. 'A lot of my work is not gender-based, so a lot of people do not know that I am female,' she stated. 'People who meet me, or follow me on the internet, do not know who I am,' she continued.

Notwithstanding such eccentricities, Lu's life is, it seems, relatively ordinary. 'I hardly go out anywhere. I live on the internet,' she said. Lunch, often dinner, would be noodles at a local restaurant, with Biabia in attendance.

But there are exceptions. Even though courting anonymity, Lu's international reputation has attracted a certain cachet. Last year she met and lunched with President Macron, who was in Shanghai to open the new outpost of the Centre Pompidou named the Centre Pompidou x West Bund Museum project. Twenty Shanghai born artists and actors were invited, Lu included. 'I wanted to take an (Instagram) photo with him. That is the reason I went,' she

explained. Yang sat opposite not only Macron, but internationally acclaimed Chinese actor, Gong Li, along with the Shanghai-based superstar artist Zhang Huan. Lu admitted she was a little star struck.

Lu has travelled widely – less so in the now Covid-19 infected world – and exhibited in countries as far flung as, Denmark, United Kingdom, US and Japan and was included in the China Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015 with a video/installation *Moving Gods* (2015), where men are cast as Buddhist deities walking solemnly through computer-manipulated temple scenes and urban landscapes that eventually form what is revealed to be a *mandala* – a part of the artist's ongoing iconoclastic meditation on the origin and nature of consciousness.

Recently (end of 2019 through January 2020) her animated work was on show in Germany, where she was part of an exhibition, *New Media Art from China*, at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin with her mentor Zhang Peili and artist Cao Fei. Her work was immensely popular, a three-dimensional video *Uterus Man* (2013) featuring a genderless superhero who skateboards on a winged sanitary pad and uses a baby attached to an umbilical cord as a mace, locked in a battle to save an imagined future universe. *Uterus Man* was originally inspired by Japanese artist Mao Sugiyama, whose hatred of gender labels led him to have his own genitals surgically removed, cooked and served to paying guests. Later Sugiyama had his nipples surgically removed to become a *nullo*, the term used to describe genital nullification.

Lu, who has corresponded at length with Mao Sugiyama, has digitally embraced the idea of the *nullo* in a music video commissioned by the British rock band 'The 1975' that responded to a track from their recent album, *Notes on a Conditional Form*. In the video, Lu appeared with her now familiar gender-neutral body with upper limbs and torso emblazoned with iridescent neon patterns, dancing in a digitally created world. Lu has named the character 'Doku' and said it reflected her personal sense of beauty. 'I consider Doku as my digital reincarnation,' she said. A recent collaboration with the Chinese sport fashion brand Li-Ning has seen Doku reappear in the brand's promotional video at September 2020 Paris Fashion Week as a dramatic backdrop to the strutting models and it is the video for this collaboration that can also be seen looming over Tokyo's Shibuya Crossing.

With such a heavy digital workload Lu has temporarily set aside her painting project, Lu said recently by phone from Shanghai. 'But I hope I can continue (painting) each year. It is really more like a vacation,' she said somewhat wistfully.

As Lu escorted me back to the road outside the studio, she defensively reiterated her need for anonymity inside the internet. 'If people like your work they do not really care who you are.' Or where you are, for that matter, I thought. With Covid-19 forcing much of the world into physical isolation and quarantine, the idea of a life lived productively through the internet rather than one predicated on human contact, no longer seems at all far-fetched. Lu sprinted off along the main drag shouting over her shoulder as she went, that she was getting noodles for lunch.

Three distinct Asian cultural identities are expressed through ornament in this exhibition organised to honour the 40th anniversary of the San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA), coming up in 2021. Long-time supporters Elizabeth and Robert Lende have promised the museum their collection of silver jewellery forms one of the themes of the show. For many years, the Lendes have assembled their collection from diverse cultures in the Middle East, Asia, North Africa, and the Americas. Part of their collection, jewellery from the Turkmen people of Central Asia and the Miao people of southwestern China, is now the focus of an exhibition, alongside jewellery from the Hill Tribes of the neighbouring areas of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos.

Turkmen, Miao, and Hill Tribe peoples were all migratory. For centuries, they were subjugated by other dominating ethnic groups and were pushed to the most inaccessible and marginal areas. The exhibition provides an opportunity to explore the heritage jewellery treasured for centuries by these ethnic groups. Silver was valued in these cultures as an auspicious material capable of protecting the wearer. The fine craftsmanship may belie the hardship endured by the Turkmen, the Miao, and the Hill Tribes. Today, under the spread of urbanisation and commercialisation of the living environment, they face great challenges to maintaining their cultural identities.

The term 'Turkmen' refers to several ethnic groups living in the vast steppe land stretching from the Caspian Sea to the west and the Chinese border to the east. The Miao area is just one of some 15 ethnic groups living in the remote and mountainous southwest region of China. In the exhibition, the jewellery is displayed in broad categories, such as headdresses, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, these common accoutrements are shared by both the Turkmen and Miao people. While headdresses, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets are shared by the Turkmen, the Miao, and the Hill Tribes, other objects are unique to each group. In particular, amulet bags, braid adornments, and temple pendants are specific to Turkmen people, and neck rings, combs, and back hooks are found more actively among the Miao and the Hill Tribes.

Presented across three distinct sections dedicated to each culture, the exhibition can show the visual range of these objects, capturing important contrasts and similarities. For example, Turkmen jewellery is often adorned with abstract and geometric forms and perforations. The Miao and Hill Tribes' silver pieces, on the other hand, usually display an array of flora and fauna motifs derived from local beliefs. Where Miao and Hill Tribe works do embrace geometry in their designs, the approach tends to be far more minimalistic than seen in Turkmen pieces. Approximately 120 pieces explore the aesthetic tastes and cultural influences of the Turkmen and Miao peoples.

The Turkmen tribes jewellery is adorned with abstract and geometric forms and open-work and perforations, with forms composed of triangles, squares, rhomboids, and discs, with designs incised or applied. Design include vegetal, zoomorphic, tree-of-life motifs, rams' heads, as well as floral designs (common flowers depicted are tulips). The contrast of silver and parcel gilding is



- 1 Pair of earrings, Miao, China, first half of the 20th century, silver, each 4.8 cm, promised gift from Elizabeth and Robert Lende  
 2 Dorsal ornament, Teke tribe, Turkmenistan, late 19th to early 20th century, silver gilt inlaid with carnelian, 16 x 14.5 cm, promised gift from Elizabeth and Robert Lende  
 3 Necklace, Miao, China, 20th century, silver, 49 x 28.5 cm, promised gift from Elizabeth and Robert Lende  
 4 Neck ring, Hmong, Yao, or Lahu tribe, Thailand, Myanmar, or Laos, first half of the 20th century, silver, 20.4 cm, promised gift from Elizabeth and Robert Lende  
 5 Eame (headdress), Teke tribe, Turkmenistan, late 19th to early 20th century, silver and carnelian, length 58 cm, promised gift from Elizabeth and Robert Lende  
 6 Bracelet, Yao tribe, Thailand, first half of the 20th century, silver, 8.4 cm, promised gift from Elizabeth and Robert Lende

All Photos: Seale Studios

## Turkmen and Miao JEWELLERY

enhanced by studded carnelians.

Miao silver jewellery, however, usually displays an array of flora and fauna motifs derived from local beliefs. The Miao also have their own creation myth. As they have no official written history, oral traditions are highly important and the stories and legends related to their tribe can be seen preserved in their jewellery designs. Miao pieces also embraces geometric forms and shapes, but in a much more minimalistic style, such as the necklace designed to include a series of concentric silver rings and devoid of any surface decoration.

Beyond the apparent visual differences between the jewellery,

the exhibition explores their functions, materials, techniques, and rich symbolism. Similarities in these areas frequently outweigh differences. This suggests a social and cultural dimension shared by the jewellery from these two distinct cultures. Crafted mostly for women, Turkmen, Miao, and Hill Tribe jewellery provides a great deal of information about the wearer, including family wealth, age, and marital status. Silver was valued in these cultures as an auspicious material capable of protecting the wearer, and silversmiths employed surprisingly common craftsmanship vocabularies, including repoussé, filigree, and

granulation, among others. Most importantly, Turkmen, Miao, and Hill Tribe jewellery bears layers of hidden meanings, symbolising happiness, progeny, and feminine virtues. The exhibition looks at these important aspects in detail to understand why the jewellery holds more power and meaning than mere adornment.

Shawn Yuan, SAMA's Associate Curator of Asian Art and the exhibition curator, explained, 'For centuries, the ethnic groups represented by works in the Elizabeth and Robert Lende collection and our exhibition were subjugated by other dominating peoples and pushed to

the most inaccessible and marginal areas. As a result, their artistry and craftsmanship have not been as well studied as that of other cultures, especially in the Western world. The exhibition offers an opportunity to experience the technical mastery, diversity of approaches, and beauty inherent to these objects and to gain newfound understanding of their significance to Turkmen, Miao, and Hill Tribe cultures.'

● Until 3 January, 2021, Exquisite Adornment: Turkmen and Miao Jewellery from the Elizabeth and Robert Lende Collection, San Antonio Museum of Art, Texas, samuseum.org



Lama's lenses case, 17th /18th century, gilt bronze inlaid with corals, Tibet, 9.53 x 5.08 x 1.9 cm, Kipper Collection



Man's gau, silver with inlaid turquoises, Derge, Kham province, Tibet, 17.78 x 7.91 x 20.96 cm, Kipper Collection



Earring depicting Vishnu, Malla period (1200-1768), circa 17th century, gold inlaid with glass, Nepal, Kathmandu Valley, 3.17 x 1.91 x 3.8, Kipper Collection

# BENGALURU

## New Museum of Art and Photography

The new Museum of Art and Photography (MAP) in Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) is set to receive a collection of 464 objects from the Barbara Kipper Collection in New York. Work on the new museum, due to open in December 2020, is now scheduled for 2021, due to coronavirus restrictions. This gift from the Kipper Collection follows promised gifts to the Art Institute of Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. The collection includes over 1,300 objects dating from the 7th century to the 1950s, collected from countries bordering the Silk Road, including a large number of *gau* (an amulet or portable shrines, used for protection on perilous journeys and often gifted to monasteries) its silhouette consciously evokes the shape of a single lotus petal, which is a symbol of purity. It is formed as a box so the contents can be individually created and re-created. Also in the collection are women's ornaments, including necklaces, earrings and headdresses, plus a number of ritualistic items.

As a young woman, Barbara Kipper was fascinated by the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan* (1797) and the Oriental sets and costumes of the Paris-based *Ballet Russes*, whose artistic director created such 'exotic' ballets as *Scheherazade*, *Les Orientals*, and *Le Dieu Bleu*. Today, she recognises these as 'Western Orientalist imaginings of the East, not grounded in scholarship of the region, and certainly not academically respected,' but it was a fascination that grew with her first three-month trip to Asia in 1968. During 30 years of collecting, with the help of her late husband, David, she has assembled a diverse collection of personal artefacts that represented the disappearing nomadic and tribal cultures of Central and South Asia, including Tibetan objects and other regional jewellery, including southwest China.

MAP will be South India's first

major private art museum and is located in Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka state. The museum's mission is to take art and culture to the heart of the community by making the museum accessible to diverse audiences. It will achieve this by exhibiting, interpreting and preserving India's rich artistic heritage in a wide-ranging programme of events, exhibitions, and performances. The five-storey building will include art galleries, an auditorium, an art and research library, an education centre, a specialised research and conservation facility, as well as a cafe. The museum already has a strong online presence,

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MAP is South  
India's first  
major private  
art museum  
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and is custodian to a growing collection of over 18,000 works of art, predominantly from South Asia and dating from the 10th century to the present. It is one of the most diverse and important collections in India. A special highlight is its seminal collection of historical and contemporary photography and popular culture, which is rare for an Indian museum. MAP's collection can be categorised into six key genres: Pre-Modern Art, Modern & Contemporary, Photography, Folk & Tribal, Popular Culture, and Textiles, Craft & Design.

MAP Director, Kamini Sawhney, said of the promised gift, 'These unique pieces of jewellery in the Kipper Collection are significant because they represent cultures that, even at the time of collecting them, were fast disappearing due to social, economic, and political changes. MAP is honoured not only to receive this important gift, but to have Barbara Kipper join our group of Founding Circle members through her generous donation to the museum in addition to the gift of the jewellery.'

The Pre-Modern Art collection holds some of the most exemplary works of Indian art. Among its

highlights are manuscript paintings, including masterpieces from the Mughal, Jain, Rajput and Pahari school traditions; Chola bronzes; temple art from Southern India; as well as Mysore and Tanjore paintings. The collection also comprises art works that are generally considered beyond the canonical framework of Indian art history, such as *pichhavai* paintings (large Hindu devotional paintings normally on cloth) and *paithan* paintings (story-telling paintings often used by itinerant bards that are typical of the Andhra Pradesh/Karnataka border area), encouraging a broader definition of 'Indian Art' and serving to link historical art to contemporary practice.

The Modern and Contemporary Art showcase offers a wide cross-section of the most significant trends and movements in Pre- and Post-Independence Indian Art. Among the internationally respected artists represented in MAP's wide-ranging collection are Jamini Roy, Bhupen Khakhar, Jyoti Bhatt, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Ravinder Reddy, Ravi Varma, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Benode Behari Mukherjee, Ramkinkar Baij, MF Husain, J Swaminathan, VS

Gaitonde, KG Subramanian, Atul Dodiya, Jitish Kallat, Mithu Sen and Riyas Komu.

The most extensive is the Photography Collection, considered one of the finest in the country, which spans the history of the art to the present day, and includes works by 19th-century photographers such as Samuel Bourne, John Burke, Francis Frith, William Johnson, Colin Roderick Murray, John Edward Saché, Charles Shepherd, E Taurines and Raja Deen Dayal; to 20th-century prints by significant photographers, such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, Marc Riboud, Martine Franck, Raghu Rai and TS Satyan. Additionally, the inclusion of contemporary Indian photographers, such as Dayanita Singh, Vivek Vilasini and Gauri Gill, make this a comprehensive collection that is a valuable source for researchers and visitors to the museum alike.

The Folk and Tribal Art section of the museum displays a wide range of India's regional communal artistic practices. The showcase includes relatively under-appreciated traditions such as *patua* scrolls from Bengal, shadow puppets from southern India, Bhuta idols from Karnataka, and religious terracotta artefacts from Tamil Nadu. It also comprises works by some of India's best-known contemporary artists, such as Jangarh Singh Shyam, Warli paintings by Jivya Soma Mashe, and Mithila paintings by Baua Devi.

MAP's textiles, craft and design collection includes important examples of textile traditions of the subcontinent, such as *patolas*, chintz hangings, *kalamkaris*, *pabari rumaals*, *phulkaris* and *kanthas*, in addition to works representative of many other techniques and styles. It is also home to a variety of decorative arts such as furniture, design, and jewellery that demonstrate the extraordinary technical expertise of Indian artisans working in these fields.

For the last three years, the museum has been organising a variety of education and outreach programmes in the local community, whilst the construction of the museum has been in progress. Despite the postponement of the opening of the physical museum, MAP has been busy. It will officially launch digitally on 5 December, embarking on the challenges of the new environment and creating an opportunity to reach global audiences. To mark its launch, MAP will present a week-long virtual programme of events *Art (is) Life* and inaugurate their 'Museums without Borders' initiative with performances in music, dance, poetry and technology, by leading professionals, including art historian Dr B N Goswamy, filmmaker Nandita Das, and artist, Jitish Kallat. Each consequent day of the programme will celebrate one of the six departments of the museum's collection and be accompanied by a commissioned performance at 7pm IST/1.30pm GMT.

There is also a new addition to the Bengaluru cityscape – the façade of MAP on Kasturba Road has been transformed into a large, colourful mural by local artists during the construction of the museum, brought to life by the local Aravani Art Project and entitled *The Story of Bangalore*. The museum's online offerings including talks, collections, a blog, searchable database and a children's education area.

● Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru, map-india.org



The Story of Bangalore mural outside the Museum of Art &amp; Photography's building in Bengaluru

by Janet Baker

Since 1949 in China, scientifically controlled archaeological investigations have resulted in the discovery of many ancient tombs, offering a clearer understanding of burial practices and the lives of people throughout history. The vast majority of objects unearthed from such tombs are three-dimensional clay sculptures, which replicate humans, animals, and everyday objects for the use of the deceased in the afterlife. For about 1,000 years, these funerary sculptures were made, and they provide a wealth of information about the lives, hopes, dreams, possessions, and pursuits of a civilisation that flourished from the 2nd century BC to the 9th century. Armies of soldiers, sumptuous vehicles, beautifully dressed court ladies, entertainers, foreigners, and supernatural beings are all portrayed in rich detail.

The viewer is reminded that burials for rulers of Chinese society in ancient times originally included the interment of live servants, wives, livestock, and horses. A set of chariot ornaments survived the centuries in a tomb that had included a wooden chariot and horses, as evidenced by the skeletal equine remains found nearby. These beautiful abstract patterns would have originally added a lavish and shiny embellishment to the wooden chariot that no longer survives. A pair of clay equestrian figures provides evidence of the popularity and prestige of horses during the 1st through 2nd centuries. From the same era were found beautifully decorated vessels, such as a cocoon-shaped jar with swirling patterns that evoke the clouds and energy of heaven, part of the Daoist beliefs regarding the cosmos. Painted but not glazed, these designs have faded but have not disappeared after nearly two millennia underground.

Some ancient clay artefacts interred with the deceased imitated prestigious possessions that were used in everyday life and were made of more precious materials such as bronze. An example of a clay bell imitates actual examples of bronze musical bells found in very lavish tombs from the early centuries BC. Other artefacts made of bronze were round or geometrically shaped disks called mirrors, which usually had one side that was reflective and one side that was decorative, with motifs symbolising the concepts of heaven and earth or that represented the rich luxuries of this world such as grapes and lions, exotica from beyond China's borders.

One can understand the changes in fashions for women, for example, by comparing two figures in the collection of Phoenix Art Museum. A seated figure of a court lady dressed in a floral patterned dress shows the preference for young slender women as the ideal of beauty, dressed in styles that likely came from west of China. In this example, we can see the daring low cut and tightly fitted waist of her gown, enhanced by her creative upswept hairstyle. Created in the 7th century, she exemplified the kind of feminine ideals of beauty that would have been favoured for wives and concubines for the upper-class men of that time. The splashed 'three-colour' glaze of her dress includes touches of precious cobalt-blue pigment. In contrast, a pair of figures dating from a century later show voluptuously figured women wearing loosely fitting robes that draped across their curves. The preference for full-figured women in the 8th century is verified by a legend about the favourite concubine of a Tang-dynasty emperor, who fell

# Seeking Immortality

## ANCIENT ARTEFACTS



Set of officials and tomb guardians, Tang dynasty, painted earthenware. Collection of Phoenix Art Museum, gift of Carolyn Refsnes Kniazzeh. Photo: Ken Howie



Seated Court Lady, Tang dynasty. Three-color glazed pottery. Collection of Phoenix Art Museum, Gift of Dr. Victoria Chan-Palay, New York. Photo by Ken Howie

in love with such a woman. Eventually, she drove him to distraction, and the empire was beset by rebellion.

The trade of goods and ideas along the Silk Routes at this time is evidenced by the inclusion of foreign peoples and the animals they brought with them to China's cosmopolitan capital regions. Camels led by Central Asian grooms were the ideal transport for the arduous journey across thousands of miles of harsh terrain between places such as Persia and China. Figures of men with pointed caps, full beards, and large noses depict the clearly non-Chinese people who brought new forms of music, dance, and religious ideas such as Buddhism to the courts of imperial China in the 8th century.

A spectacular set of six painted clay figures of large scale exhibit the many ways that the world of the living anticipated the needs of the high-ranking aristocrats in the next world. Included in this set are two bureaucratic officials wearing the same attire but different hats, likely

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*Many tombs have been discovered in China from the 20th century onwards*  
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indicating their differing status. Closer examination reveals that one of the figures is Chinese, but the other appears to be non-Chinese. Such men would have been meant to take care of the business needs of the deceased. Security and protection would have been provided by the pair of figures wearing military garb, including armour characteristic of the Tang dynasty (618-907). Much of our understanding of military wear, weapons, and practices of ancient China can be gleaned from tomb figures, the most stunning example of which is the discovery of the 'terracotta army' of The First Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang Di, at Lintong, just outside the ancient capital of Changan, today known as Xi'an.

The outermost figures in this set clearly represent supernatural beings, as seen by the imaginative combination of human and animal characteristics accented by prominent horns, multiple wings, bared teeth, and fearsome expressions. The precise meaning of such figures, which go by several names in China, remains open to discussion. They may have served as protectors of the soul of the deceased or to fend off evil spirits from the environs of the tomb and its occupants. These fantastic creatures reflect some of the beliefs in ancient China about the afterlife and the human soul's journey from this world to the next. Textual evidence is scant, but essentially, the Chinese belief system maintained that upon death, the dual soul of the deceased required appeasement lest they might



Bactrian camel and groom, Tang dynasty, white pottery with pigment traces. Collection of Phoenix Art Museum, Asian Arts Council purchase with funds provided by Susan and Eliot Black

encounter malevolent spirits while occupying the tomb or travelling to the next world. Chinese religion prior to the arrival of Buddhism, a date which is not clearly fixed, was based on the Confucian concepts of filial piety and reverence for one's ancestors, as well as the Daoist beliefs in a cosmic world of unseen forces that enervated this world and the heavens beyond.

Korean artefacts in this exhibition provide evidence for early and strong influences from China in burial practices and goods. Tombs of similar or slightly later dates correlate with

those in China that included vessels for containing food or wine and bronze mirrors. The influence of Chinese Confucian social and ancestral beliefs and practices were a cornerstone of Korean social structure for at least two millennia. However, early pottery and tomb artefacts from Japan indicate that burial practices there likely differed, as evidenced in both design and content of tomb sites.

The long tradition of Jomon pottery vessels and figures seem to indicate that interment of tomb goods was not widely practised. Jomon, or 'rope-impressed' pottery, dates back to the Neolithic era in Japan and was originally made as utilitarian cooking vessels for the living. Jomon figures of humans and horses were sometimes placed on the outside perimeter of a tumulus mound in Japan. Thus, the role of geography in ancient times was significant, as Korea's and China's shared-continent proximity led to shared burial customs, while Japan's island location led to more distinctive practices outside of China's cultural sphere.

● Janet Baker, PhD, is Curator of Asian Art at the Phoenix Art Museum  
● Until 4 April, 2021, Seeking Immortality, at the Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona, phoenixart.org



Pair of painted terracotta 'fat ladies', Tang dynasty (618-906). Collection of Phoenix Art Museum, gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter



Interior of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology founded in 1958

# Gangtok

by Cleo Roberts

In a curious watercolour by Atul Dodiya, two men sit in front of the 'National Art Center Gangtok'. One is a colonial archetype with pursed lips and a stiff, tight collar. The other is an Indian elite with a more comfortable air, raising a wine glass in expectation of a toast. They make a peculiar pair, but more mystifying is the Modernist building in the background. A geometric hunk of steel and glass planted in Gangtok, the capital of India's smallest state Sikkim, looms as large as the mountain range behind it. In an area known for its ecotourism, the gleaming institution is certainly incongruous.

While Gangtok might be lacking the National Art Center envisaged by Dodiya, the city is home to a number of arts institutions that reflect Sikkim's past and preserve its majesty as an epicentre of Buddhist faith. The area has a turbulent political history. Before its succession to India in 1975, Sikkim was an independent Buddhist kingdom lauded as a site of pilgrimage since the 19th century. Shielded by the immense Great Himalaya range, Kanchendzonga rises over 8586 metres (over 28,000 feet) from the eastern Himalayas, an area which is thronged with monasteries and those who revere the mythological importance of the mountain. Visual culture was so inherent to Sikkim's identity and tied up with faith that the final monarch, Chogyal (king) Palden Thondup Namgyal (1923-1982), in 1957, inaugurated the Technical Institute for Training and Production of traditional arts and crafts. A proponent of Sikkimese autonomy, the institute promoted the region's unique character. Today, following Namgyal's forceful deposition, this vision has been blurred. The institute now stands as the Government of Sikkim's Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom.

Visiting the directorate does more than satiate a tourist's souvenir craving. Apart from a well-visited sales emporium housing shelves stacked with handwoven weave



View of Kanchendzonga from Gangtok

shawls made by indigenous Lepcha communities, reams of handmade paper and delicately painted masks and dolls, there is also a training college. Here, students can study a range of skills and crafts including wood carving and bamboo craft. In a city founded on Buddhist principles, where religious motifs crop up in doorways and are found painted on external walls, *thangka* painting is a popular choice of course. Over four years, students finesse the intricate Buddhist iconography that is central to the detailed religious scrolls produced in the region.

To visit the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) is to understand the importance of these paintings. The institute, nestled in the southern part of the city, up a winding hill running through a lush forest of birch, oak and magnolia, is a world leading centre for Buddhist scholarship and an example of Sikkimese architecture at its best. Conceived in the 1950s in response to China's invasion of Tibet, the Institute is the most significant custodian of Tibetan scholarship and arts outside the country itself. The NIT library holds one of the largest collections of Tibetan works in the world outside Tibet and a museum of Tibetan iconography and religious art. It has published the *Bulletin of Tibetology* since 1964. The entrance is glorious riot of ornate beams and

pillars that recede and frame an immense fresco. This features four celestial guardians positioned to face the four directions of Mount Meru, the sacred central world mountain associated with Buddhist, Hindu and Jain cosmology.

The museum inside is a low-lit trove of *thangkas*, statues, ritual objects and artworks. The rare collection includes a silver image of the Bodhisattva of Knowledge, Manjushri, an 11th-century, palm-leaf. Sanskrit manuscript and relics of two Asokan missionaries. The Tibetan library on the first floor is lined, wall to wall, with wooden cabinets filled with rows of ancient manuscripts in Sanskrit, Chinese and Lepcha (a Himalayan language used in Sikkim, India and parts of West Bengal, Nepal and Bhutan). Wrapped in bright silky fabric, alongside them are small hand-painted chests with soft spongy chairs, laid out pre-emptive of the scroll's unravelling. Within this collection of over 60,000 volumes is a translation of the original teachings of Lord Buddha and other highlights such as the collected works of the Bhutanese saint and *siddha* of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, Padma Lingpa, and the hagiography of Guru Padmasambhava.

The serenity felt in the library and museum is characteristic of Gangtok. The city is tranquil. Yet while the visual cultures associated with Buddhism have a large presence, there is also a nascent design industry making its mark. In a number of studios across the city, creative initiatives are building sustainable enterprises based on local skills and craft traditions. Behind a café found high on a verdant plain, is a modest wooden cabin, home to LA Design. Founded by Sonam Tashi Gyaltsen in 2016, *La*, meaning mountain pass in Sikkimese, is an ambitious collaborative project which works with craftspeople to produce commercial products like bamboo homeware and nettle woven textiles. LA's studio teems with a range of artists. In amongst pinboards filled



Procession during the Saga Dawa (Triple Blessed) festival in Gangtok



An old palace gate in Gangtok, Sikkim's capital

with swatches of fabric, animators mocking up storyboards and graphic designs laying out projects, there is a palpable buzz about the opportunities being created.

Lagstal, a design studio and shop set up by Chimi Ongmu Bhutia, is part of this new wave of socially conscious cultural entrepreneurs. In reviving craft techniques that have been dormant, like corn husk weaving, she has developed a female collective of over 70 artisans making elegant home decor and clothing. With this model comes not only financial independence and business built on environmentally sustainable materials but also an investment in Sikkimese traditions.

Lagtal and La's community ethos and focus on local resources chimes with Gangtok's independent bookshop, Rachna Books. Found in an unassuming two-storey building, Rachna is a social hub. In amongst the bookshelves, gatherings take place. It

might be a book launch, photographic workshop or live performance that attracts a crowd. The varied programme of events often forges connections with local businesses and provides a platform for the area's intellectual life and arts. Rachna's commitment to cultural activity and fashioning itself as a 'landmark', along with their excellent selection of books, has made the shop nationally renowned and recent recipient of the 2020 India Reading Olympiad Bookshop of the Year Award.

For cultural reasons alone, Gangtok deserves to be visited. Add to this its natural beauty, vast glassy lakes and the exalted peaks of Kanchendzonga and it is all the more compelling. In a place where rich visual traditions are being complemented by a burgeoning creative scene, soon, the city might well be in need of an arts centre. Just do not expect Dodiya's vision to be the blueprint.



Weaving and basket craft in Gangtok



CLICK HERE  
To view over 300 photographs of Sikkim from the 1960s and 70s, donated by Alice Kandell to the Library of Congress

Semi-arid, India's Shekhawati region may only be a relatively short distance from touristy Jaipur, but it could be a million miles away given the differences. At the heart of the area is the city of Alsisar, located in north Rajasthan and home to many of the painted havelis of the region. Shekhawati literally means Land of Shekha, and is named after the legendary 15th-century chieftain Rao Shekha (1433-88). Over hundreds of years, the region was known for its location on the crucial trade route that connected Delhi and Sind (now in Pakistan) with the docks and harbours of the Arabian Sea and the Ganges Valley. Later, of course, the cities of Bombay and Calcutta diverted the trans-Thar trade south and eastwards, but for many years feudal Shekhawati found itself at a crucial juncture of this commerce.

In the 19th century, the Shekhawati *thakurs* (noblemen) flourished, earning great wealth from their trading with the British East India Company. Around this time the foreign merchants forced some measures of order into Shekhawati and feudalism turned to capitalism. The British utilised the abilities of the local merchants, or Marwaris, fully in order to improve trade. The Marwaris (originally from the Jodhpur region), mainly settled in coastal areas and grew rich on trade and taxes. With this newly found wealth, Shekhawati's Marwari merchants and landowning Thakurs competed with one another to build grand, flamboyantly decorated *havelis*, which still line the streets of the region's dusty towns today.

The towns of Shekhawati seamlessly blend the architectural styles of Rajput and Islamic forms and the main characteristic of the region is still its abundance of lavishly painted havelis. They are typically formed of rooms around a central courtyard, a bit like a Moroccan *riad*, which works well to counteract the harsh heat and provides separation for male and female dwellers. The elaborate decoration of arches and frescoes, as well as the number of rooms and courtyards, increased over time in tandem with the wealth of the merchant.

The painted murals can be broadly put into 10 themes: purely decorative designs, scenes of daily life, religion, *ragamala* (sets of paintings depicting a range of musical melodies), local folk mythology, historical events or personalities, flora and fauna, erotica, maps or places – and an anomaly – the British and their vehicles. Most *chhatris* (domes) also include a *rasamandala* in the ceiling – a dancing circle in which Krishna miraculously replicates himself so each *gopi*



## The Painted Havelis of SHEKHAWATI



(milkmaid) finds him dancing next to her. Depictions of local folk lore also appear on the haveli walls, such as *Laila-Majnu* and *Heer-Ranjha*. Shekhawati's murals have a recurrent theme of a couple astride a camel which portrays one of Rajasthan's most popular romantic tales, *Dhola-Maru*. Married off as children, Dhola returns as an adolescent to fetch his wife. En route, they encounter bandits Umra-Sumra, and like a true Rajput wife, Maru repels the attackers while Dhola urges his camel onwards. Other paintings represent lesser-known folk tales, such as Binjo-Sorath. Binjo mesmerises his young aunt Sorath by playing a *veena* (lute) as she dances to his tunes. *Sassi-Punu* recounts the legend of Punu, a prince who weds Sassi, an abandoned princess raised

among the dhobi washermen. Tragically, the story has a sad end, Punu is kidnapped and Sassi dies in search of him in the desert.

Before the 19th century, artists used natural colours such as lamp-black, and red, green and yellow ochres. Lime was a substitute for white and was used for lightening other hues, while indigo (plant dye), ultramarine (ground lapis lazuli), vermilion (powdered mineral cinnabar), Verdigris (formed with acid on copper), gold and silver were reserved for prayer rooms and bedrooms. Indian Yellow, made from *gomutra*, or urine collected from cows fed on mango leaves, was used, albeit rarely. In 1860, German chemical pigments such as a synthetic, laboratory-made, ultramarine, chrome red and emerald green reached India and

Main image:  
The courtyard  
of Le Prince  
Haveli in  
Fatehpur

From left: The  
entrance to the  
Dr Ramnath A  
Podar Haveli  
Museum,  
Nawalgarh;  
traditional  
mural from  
Shekhawati;  
the Alsisar  
Mahal

remained popular till World War I, until supplies dried up. Maroon was popular from 1820 to 1865, red and blue held sway between 1860 and 1910, and multi-coloured paintings using cheap European paints dominated the years from 1900 to 1950s.

Among the most vivacious collection of architectural neighbourhoods in India, the Shekhawati towns like Ramgarh, Lachhmangarh, Fatehpur, Mandawa, Dhundlod and Churu all boast Shekhawati murals throughout the havelis, *joharas* (wells), *mandirs* (Hindu place of worship), *chhatris* (dome-shaped pavilions) and forts. A number of Shekhawati's havelis, particularly in Nawalgarh (the hometown of some highly successful business families of India such as the Birlas, the Mittals and the

Goenkas) have now been restored and have opened to the public as museums.

In Nawalgarh, Murarka Haveli, Bansidhar Bhagat Haveli, Chokhani Haveli, Seksaria Haveli, Bhagat Haveli and Poddar Haveli are also important sites to visit. In the past decade, many of these merchant houses have been preserved and have now been turned into heritage hotels. Painted heritage hotels in the region include Alsisar Mahal, Piramal Haveli, Roop Niwas Kothi, Ramgarh Fresco Hotel, Narain Niwas Castle, and Le Prince Haveli in Fatehpur, restored by the French artist Nadine Le Prince.

• For more information, read *Shekhawati: The Havelis of the Merchant Princes* published by Marg in 2013

# THE WORLD OF KHUBILAI KHAN

After the ground-breaking book by Sherman Lee published decades ago (*Chinese Art Under the Mongols: Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, in 1968), this exhibition from 2010, organised by the then Brooke Russell Astor Chairman of the Metropolitan Museum's department of Asian Art, James CY Watt, was the only major exploration since of the first of two foreign cultures that ever conquered and controlled the Celestial Empire. Both the Yuan and the Qing began as second-rate Asian cultures with first-rate military forces, and even though the Manchurian Qing preserved many of their own traditions, the Mongolian Yuan quickly became Sinicised and were responsible for the largest importation of non-Asian art, culture and technology that China would ever witness before the advent of the modern age. The time of the Yuan served as a transition between two Han Chinese dynasties, the Song and the Ming, injecting the society with radical changes and additions on almost every front. For that reason this major exhibition boldly attempts and successfully succeeds in exposing and explaining the major shifts, additions, expansions and permanent broadening of the multiple facets of China's cultural and societal infrastructure.

China, then the largest nation on earth, was only one of five parts of what has been called the 'Mongol World Empire', the largest empire the world had ever seen, covering at its greatest extent an area of almost 13,000,000 square miles/33,000,000 square kilometres, 22% of the Earth's total land area. Including the Empire of the Great Khan (China and north into Siberia), the Golden Horde (or Kipchak Khanate), the White Horde (or the Ilkhanate), and the Chaghadaï Khanate, it stretched south to Cambodia, west to the Danube River, north into Siberia and Russia and east to the Sea of Japan.

Mongol rule over China lasted only 89 years (1279-1368), but during that very brief period China became an integral part of a greater unit, like the European Union today, that served to facilitate a flood of new ideas and technologies beyond borders that could never have arrived through the normal international highways of commercial contacts. The Middle-Eastern territories served as the most important of the foreign sources, for it was the origin of sophisticated technologies, sciences and new ideas and philosophies, but also exotic artistic designs and styles. In the field of the arts, the most important was probably the use of cobalt blue ore as decoration for porcelains, accounting for its being called 'Mohammedan Blue' in England and Europe until the mid-20th century.

Because of the immensity of the exhibition, the richness of information and the lavish number of works of art on display, it has been divided into four sections: Daily Life, Painting and Calligraphy, Religious Arts and Decorative Arts.



WATCH  
a lecture given by James CY Watt, now Curator Emeritus of the Asian Art Department, on this exhibition

Khubilai Khan as the First Yuan Emperor, Shizu, Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368, album leaf, ink and colour on silk, 59.1 x 47.6 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei



Architectural relief depicting the Hindu legend of Gajaranya Kshetra, late 13th/early 14th century, from an unrecorded Hindu temple in Quanzhou, diabase granite, 50.2 x 70.5 cm, Quanzhou Maritime Museum, Fujian Province



Stem cup, Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368, gold, height 14.3 cm, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Museum, purchase from the J H Wade Fund



Mongol dancer, Jin or Yuan dynasty, 13th century, pottery, height 40 cm, Henan Province, 1973, Henan Museum

Daily life in the Yuan court, and amongst the aristocracy, was anything but 'daily' with its rich tradition of splendour – usually in the form of gold, or cloth of gold, *nasij*. An innovation from Central Asia, this technique attests to the mass movement of weavers from the eastern Iranian world to China during the Mongol period. Coming from a Central Asian tradition, the love of gold, like amongst the Liao, was unreserved and the Yuan adopted and adapted the gold styles of the Song, added their own particular tastes and produced it in quantities, as seen by several remarkable small pieces in the exhibition. *Nasij*, appears to have arrived through the filter of Sogdian craftsmen and the results are stunning – the cloth is often seen with repeated roundels, confronting beasts, and organised arabesques.

It is only because of travel that transmissions occurred and that aspect has been treated to its own subsection. The archaeology and history subsection explains in detail the importance of archaeological work over the last two decades and the remarkable works of art that have been uncovered, adding to our repository of knowledge and understanding of this fleeting period of creative brilliance. The exhibition was rich in archaic style ritual vessels in bronze and pottery in archaic style, stone carvings of animals, seals and foreign ceramics, including a fine Goryeo-period (918-1392) celadon water dropper in the form of a tortoise with a dragon's head, dating from the 12th/13th century, it appears to me as being a product of the Kangjin kilns near Pusan, the source of the finest early celadons.

The Painting, Woodblock Prints, and Calligraphy section is self-explanatory and dwells on the four Yuan Masters who continue the West Lake tradition and expand it in wondrous ways of their own, especially in the way they gave heightened emphasis to the calligraphic qualities that the brush can lend to a painting and the calligraphy subsection dwells on Zhao Mengfu, who mastered both styles of brushwork so well that he successfully blurred the line between them. One often thinks that paintings of horses are a Tang speciality, but it is the Yuan, from an equine-based society, who dominate

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*The Yuan served as a transition period between two Han Chinese dynasties*  
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the field and the exhibition was fortunately rich in the art form. Woodblock printing, originating in the 8th century, was normally the vehicle for religious texts and illustrations, but under the Yuan, its use as a vehicle for popular stories and history permanently expanded its use.

The Religious Art section is of particular importance, not just from the point of view that art works of religious intent are displayed and discussed, but rather because of the great number of different religions involved. It is common knowledge that Xi'an under the Tang was the home to a Nestorian church, a mosque, and a synagogue. The Yuan, however, served as hosts for resident practitioners and houses of worship for Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Nestorian Christianity, Persian Manichaeism, Hinduism and Islam and the sheer internationalism of Yuan society is evident in this particular section of this exhibition.

Whether one is captivated by the multifaceted aspects of Yuan painting, the brilliance of the golden works of art and textiles, the sculptured works, the daily items of the delicacy of the jewellery, this exhibition was a profound display of the synthesis of what had preceded this dynasty, what was imported by it and the resulting classifications and styles of art that served as what would forever be called traditional in the arts and culture of China

Martin Barnes Lorber

● The World of Khubilai Khan: Chinese Art in the Yuan Dynasty was held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2010. Catalogue available.

⊕ A Catalogue is available, or download the pdf here



Bowl with Daoist figures, Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), jade, height 6.4 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, anonymous gift, 1952

# BOOKS 2020

## China

### China Without Dragons:

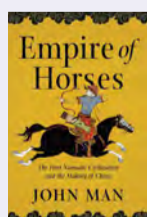
**Rare Pieces from Oriental Ceramic Society**  
by Regina Krahl. CA Book Publishing, Bilingual edition, ISBN 978-9888272181, £95  
This catalogue commemorates an exhibition of over 200 pieces of Chinese and related ceramics collected within the members of the Oriental Ceramic Society of London. The selection spans the complete range from Neolithic to contemporary ceramics, from minor kilns in many different regions to the major kilns working for the court, and from pieces of academic interest to world-famous masterpieces. The book looks at rarely seen pieces and avoids well known, repetitive designs such as that of the dragon, which is so firmly identified with China that it has become a cliché of Chinese art.

### Kinrande: Porcelain Dressed in Gold

Jorge Welsh Research and Publishing, ISBN 978-0993506895, £320  
Including 48 individual pieces from this most rare of Chinese porcelain groups, this book showcases a collection that has taken us over 22 years to assemble. Named after the Japanese word for 'gold brocade', Kinrande wares are one of the rarest and most exquisite types of Chinese porcelain produced in Jingdezhen. These wares are distinguished by the use of gold foil designs on monochrome, mainly iron-red, grounds. Kinrande porcelain was initially made in China during the Jiajing period (1522-1566), and appeared on international markets between the second half of the 16th and early 17th centuries.

### The Pottery Age:

**An Appreciation of Neolithic Ceramics from China circa 7000 BC to circa 1000 BC**  
by Ronald W Longsdorf. CA Book Publishing, ISBN 9789888272228, £250  
These 100 examples, from various Neolithic cultures throughout the region known today as China, are described in this catalogue by the collector himself, focusing on their design and engineering ingenuities and their artistic merits. After a 50-year career in consumer product design, author Ronald W Longsdorf applies the principles of that discipline to these Neolithic pots, including comparisons of pieces in museums. Text in English and Chinese.



### Empire of Horses: The First Nomadic Civilization and the Making of China

by John Man. Pegasus, ISBN 978-1643133270, £16.99  
The people of the first nomadic empire left no written records, but from 200 BC they dominated the heart of Asia for four centuries, and changed the world in the process. The Mongols, today's descendants of Genghis Khan, see these people as ancestors. Their rise cemented Chinese identity and inspired the first Great Wall. Their descendants helped destroy the Roman Empire under the leadership of Attila the Hun. We do not know what language they spoke, but they became known as Xiongnu, or Hunnu, a term passed down the centuries and surviving today as 'Hun', and Man uncovers new evidence that will transform our understanding of the profound mark they left on half the globe, from Europe to Central Asia and deep into China.



### China: The Bubble that Never Pops

by Thomas Orlik. OUP USA, ISBN 978-0190877408, £22.95  
The Chinese economy appears destined for failure, the financial bubble forever in peril of popping, the real estate sector doomed to collapse, the factories fated for bankruptcy. A banking system more than twice the size of the US and an economy still a third smaller. A looming trade war with the US that threatens to lock its factories out of the world's biggest market. An urban landscape littered with ghost towns of empty property. An industrial sector strewn with state-owned zombie firms. A 200 million strong migrant workforce treated as second-class citizens in the cities where they live and work. And yet, against the odds and against expectations, growth continues, wealth rises, global influence expands. The coming collapse of China is always coming, never arriving. Tom Orlik, a veteran of more than a decade on the ground in Beijing and Shanghai, turns the spotlight on China's fragile fundamentals, and resources for resilience. Drawing on discussions with the Communist cadres planning China's rise, the bankers providing the financing, and the labourers sweating the construction sites, Orlik pieces together a unique perspective on China's past, present, and possible futures.

### Sunken Treasures: Discoveries in shipwrecks from the Maritime Silk Road 800-1900

edited by Eline van den Berg and Karin Gaillard Waanders & de Kunst Publishers, ISBN 9789462622579, £29.95  
The book presents and describes the treasures hidden away in centuries-old shipwrecks: visible treasures like Chinese porcelain, as well as invisible treasures in the form of new knowledge revealed by the ships and their cargos. The stories of seven shipwrecks not only paint a picture of the Maritime Silk Road but also of the development of maritime archaeology in the Netherlands and in Asia. Text in English and Dutch.

### Eulogy for Burying a Crane

by Lei Xue  
University of Washington Press, ISBN 978-0295746364, £54  
Eulogy for Burying a Crane (*Yi he ming*) is perhaps the most eccentric piece in China's calligraphic canon. Apparently marking the burial of a crane, the large inscription, datable to 514, was once carved into a cliff on Jiaoshan Island in the Yangzi River. Since the discovery of its ruins in the early 11th century, it has fascinated generations of scholars and calligraphers and been enshrined as a calligraphic masterpiece. Nonetheless, sceptics have questioned the quality of the calligraphy and complained that its fragmentary state and worn characters make assessment of its artistic value impossible. Moreover, historians have trouble fitting it into

the story line of Chinese calligraphy. In this volume, Lei Xue examines previous epigraphic studies and recent archaeological finds to consider the origin of the work in the 6th century and then trace its history after the 11th century.

### Furnishing the Gracious Home

by Philip Mak  
CA Book Publishing, ISBN 9789887440857, £95  
Chinese furniture design had been improved through the centuries, maturing during the 14th century. The Qing furniture developed from Ming-style furniture; it was attractive with ornate novel decorative elements. In the past, those who had resources could afford to live in a gracious residence such as the four-closed courtyard house (*siheyuan*). The four-closed courtyard house is the Chinese art of enclosing space to create an ideal environment for habitation. The multifunctional Chinese classical furniture facilitates the indoor and outdoor activities of its inhabitants. Siheyuan is divided into chambers such as the hall, female chamber, etc. The book provides details on which pieces of furniture should be displayed in each chamber, as well as full-colour illustrations and diagrams of how each piece was made and assembled. The author guides the readers through, narrating the placement of furniture with inherent social implications.

### Midnight Tweedle

by Zhang Lijie  
Steidl, ISBN 978-3958293144, £30  
Midnight Tweedle is Zhang Lijie's personal portrait of China's complex cultural and political history. Juxtaposing diverse and seemingly unrelated images with a collage technique, Lijie explores the depths of Chinese collective memory in a process she describes as 'whispering to herself... to understand where we come from and where we are going'. This book combines materials as varied as found and original photos, posters, illustrations and even a meal ticket from the planned economy time which Lijie either collected from antique markets, newspapers and the internet, or created herself.

Here smiling families and uniformed civilians during the Cultural Revolution mingle with key historical figures such as the Empress Dowager Cixi and Mao Zedong, all interspersed by recent landscapes and photos as unexpected as a still life of mangoes.

### The Story of China:

**A portrait of a civilisation and its people**  
by Michael Wood. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 978-1471176012, £30  
Michael Wood, one of the UK's best-known historians, has written a major new one-volume history of China exploring the country's burgeoning role in our world today. The narrative, which mingles the grand sweep with local and personal stories, woven together with the author's own travel journals, is an account of China's 4,000-year-old tradition, taking in life stationed on the Great Wall or inside the Forbidden City. The story is enriched with the latest archaeological and documentary discoveries. In the modern era, the book looks at manifestos of the feminist revolutionaries Qiu Jin and He Zhen, eye-witness accounts of the Japanese invasion, the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao, as well as newly published sources for the great turning points in China's modern history, including the Tiananmen Square crisis of 1989, and the new order of President Xi Jinping.

### Three Tigers, One Mountain

by Michael Booth  
Jonathan Cape, ISBN 978-1910702956, £14.99  
The Chinese, Koreans and Japanese are more than neighbours, they are siblings from a Confucian family. They share so much culturally, from this ancient philosophy with its hierarchical, bureaucratic legacy, to rice-growing, art, architecture, chopsticks, noodles and much more which has been passed down from China over millennia. In turn, China has modelled much of its recent industrial and economic strategy on Japan's post-war manufacturing miracle, and adores contemporary Korean popular culture. In this new book, which blends popular anthropology, history, politics and travel, the subjects are these Asian tigers that have endured occupation, war and

devastation to become among the richest, most developed and powerful societies on earth. The author sets off on a journey by car, boat, train and plane through all three countries, ending up in a fourth, Taiwan.

### Kings of Shanghai

by Jonathan Kaufman  
Little Brown, ISBN 978-1408710043, £30  
Shanghai, 1936. The Cathay Hotel, located on the city's famous waterfront, is one of the most glamorous in the world. Built by Victor Sassoon – billionaire playboy and scion of the Sassoon dynasty – the hotel hosts a who's who of global celebrities: Noel Coward has written a draft of *Private Lives* in his suite, Charlie Chaplin entertained his wife-to-be, and the American socialite Wallis Simpson reportedly posed for 'glamour' photographs. A few miles away, Mao and the nascent Communist party have been plotting revolution before being forced to flee the city. By the 1930s, the Sassoons had been doing business in China for a century, rivalled in wealth and influence by only one other dynasty – the Kadoories. These two Jewish families, both originally from Baghdad, stood astride Chinese business and politics for more than one 175 years, profiting from the Opium Wars; surviving Japanese occupation; courting Chiang Kai-shek; and nearly losing everything as the Communists swept into power. In a story stretching from Baghdad to Hong Kong to Shanghai to London, Kaufman enters the lives and minds of these ambitious men and women to forge a tale of opium smuggling, family rivalry, political intrigue and survival.

### Hsiao Chin and Punto: Mapping Post-War Avant-Garde

by Joshua Gong  
Unicorn Publishing, ISBN 9781912690831, £30  
Artist Hsiao Chin spent his formative years in Europe experiencing the Western Modern Art movement and has contributed hugely to the development of avant-garde art and established himself as a pioneer of modern abstract art. Hsiao, as co-founder of Punto Movement, is the first and

Continued on page 14



### Imperial China: The Definitive Visual History

DK, ISBN 978-0241388327, £30  
Covering more than 5,000 years of history and featuring images of artefacts not previously seen outside of China, this definitive visual guide will captivate readers with the key events that shaped Chinese history and laid the foundations of the modern nation. Starting with prehistory and early humans, Imperial China sets the scene for the arrival of China's first dynasty, and reveals how the warring states of early China gave birth to the emperor-led dynasties – and China's long imperial age. With illuminating features on important historical figures, cultural achievements, and philosophy – such as the rise of Confucianism and the silk and tea trades – Imperial China explores how the Chinese empire flourished and declined over the course of two millennia – from the unifying 'first emperor' of the Qin and the golden ages of Tang and Song, to the final fall of the Manchu Qing dynasty.



### Moon Rabbit: The Chinese Journey

by Rosemarie Zens. Kehrer Verlag, ISBN 978-3868289725, £37  
At the beginning of her trip to China in 1998, Rosemarie Zens found a predominantly agricultural multinational state and photographed landscapes and everyday scenes that reminded her of pre-modern times in our Western world. In a time window of 20 years, ground-breaking developments such as the technical transition from analogue to digital photography and a rapid structural change within Chinese society took place. The memorable photographs show how China is increasingly oriented towards Western culture and how homogenising forces such as science, technology and the global market influence individual life.

only post-war Chinese artist to convey Eastern philosophical ideas and the concepts of mindfulness and self-contemplation in the Western pictorial language of abstraction.

### The Colour of the Sky After Rain

by Tessa Keswick. Head of Zeus, ISBN 978-1789545036, £30  
Tessa Keswick first travelled to China in 1982 and immediately fell in love with its history, culture and landscape. Over the next 30 years, she travelled extensively in China, visiting its temples and landmarks, the sites of its most famous battles, and the birthplaces of its best-known poets and philosophers. She also witnessed China's transformation, as hundreds of millions were lifted out of poverty and the country emerged as an economic superpower in waiting. Keswick's observations of life in China are perceptive and full of insight. By presenting a colourfully woven tapestry of contrasting experiences and localities, she allows the reader to glimpse the sheer diversity of China and its vast population.

### Once Upon a Time in Shanghai

by Michael Berry and Mark Parascandola  
China, poised to become the world's largest film market, is home to an expansive state-supported film and television industry. On an unparalleled scale, entire towns have been built around making movies. Given film censorship codes in China, period films provide a safe and familiar format to tell stories based around 'official' narratives. The film sets, rivalling real-world cities and monuments in their scale, have themselves become destinations for domestic and international tourists. Despite the fiction, they bear witness to a dynamic and changing China.

### The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier

by Benno Weiner. Cornell University Press, ISBN 978-1501749391, £39  
Benno Weiner's book provides the first in-depth study of an ethnic minority region during the first decade of the People's Republic of China: the Amdo region in the Sino-Tibetan borderland. Employing previously inaccessible

local archives as well as other rare primary sources, he demonstrates that the Communist Party's goal in 1950s Amdo was not just state-building, but also nation-building. Such an objective required the construction of narratives and policies capable of convincing Tibetans of their membership in a wider political community. As Weiner shows, however, early efforts to gradually and organically transform a vast multi-ethnic empire into a singular nation-state lost out to a revolutionary impatience. This led in 1958 to communication, then to large-scale rebellion and its brutal pacification. Rather than joining voluntarily, Amdo was integrated through the widespread, often indiscriminate use of violence, a violence that lingers in the living memory of Amdo Tibetans and others.

### Spies and Scholars: Chinese Secrets and Imperial Russia's Quest for World Power

by Gregory Afinogenov. Belknap Press, ISBN 978-0674241855, £36.95  
The untold story of how Russian espionage in imperial China shaped the emergence of the Russian Empire as a global power. From the 17th to the 19th century, the Russian Empire made concerted efforts to collect information about China. It bribed Chinese porcelain-makers to give up trade secrets, sent Buddhist monks to Mongolia on intelligence-gathering missions, and trained students at its Orthodox mission in Beijing to spy on their hosts. From diplomatic offices to guard posts on the Chinese frontier, Russians were producing knowledge everywhere, not only at elite institutions like the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg. But that information was secret, not destined for wide circulation. In the 17th century, Russian bureaucrats were focused on China and the forbidding Siberian frontier. They relied more on spies, including Jesuit scholars stationed in China. In the early 19th century, the geopolitical challenge shifted to Europe: rivalry with Britain drove the Russians to stake their prestige on public-facing intellectual work, and knowledge of the East was embedded in the academy. Knowledge filtered through Russian espionage and

publication found its way to Europe, informing the encounter between China and Western empires. The author breaks down long-accepted assumptions about the connection between knowledge regimes and imperial power and excavates an intellectual legacy largely neglected by historians.

### Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World

by Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg. Oneworld, ISBN 978-1786077837, £20  
The Chinese Communist Party wants to show the world its might. Through its enormous economic power and covert influence operations, China is now weakening global institutions, targeting individual corporations, and challenging the freedom of expression from the arts to academia. At the same time, Western security services are increasingly worried about incursions into communications infrastructure.

### The Emperor's New Road: China and the Project of the Century

by Jonathan Hillman. Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0300244588, £20  
China's Belt and Road Initiative is the world's most ambitious and misunderstood geo-economic vision. To carry out President Xi Jinping's flagship foreign-policy effort, China promises to spend over one trillion dollars for new ports, railways, fibre-optic cables, power plants, and other connections. The plan touches more than one hundred and thirty countries and has expanded into the Arctic, cyberspace, and even outer space. Beijing says that it is promoting global development, but Washington warns that it is charting a path to global dominance. Taking readers on a journey to China's projects in Asia, Europe, and Africa, the author reveals how this grand vision is unfolding. As China pushes beyond its borders and deep into dangerous territory, it is repeating the mistakes of the great powers that came before it, Hillman argues.

### China Bound

by Robert Bickers. Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-1472949943, £30  
From its origins in Liverpool in 1816, one British firm has threaded a way through two centuries that have seen tumultuous events and epochal transformations in technologies and societies. John Swire & Sons, a small trading company that began by importing dyes, cotton and apples from the Americas, now directs a highly diversified group of interests operating across the globe but with a core focus on Asia. From 1866, its fate was intertwined with developments in China, with the story of steam, and later of flight, and with the movements of people and of goods that made the modern world. The book charts the story of the firm, its family owners and staff, its operations, its successes and its disasters, as it endured wars, uprisings and revolutions, the rise and fall of empires – China's, Britain's, Japan's and the twists and turns of the global economy.

## Japan & Korea

### The Japanese: A History in Twenty Lives

by Christopher Harding. Allen Lane, ISBN 978-0241434505, £25  
This is a history of Japan, distilled into the stories of 20 remarkable individuals. The vivid and entertaining portraits take the reader



### Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk

by Anna Jackson. V&A Publishing, ISBN 978-1851779925, £40  
The *kimono* is the ultimate symbol of Japan, revered within the country as the embodiment of national culture and regarded internationally as an exotic fascination. The iconic garment is often viewed as traditional, unchanging and timeless, but this book counters that conception, presenting the kimono as highly dynamic and fashionable dress. The cultural and sartorial significance of the kimono is explored in historical and contemporary contexts, both in Japan and the West, where its impact on clothing styles has been felt since the 17th century. The book features over 250 kimono and kimono-inspired garments from the V&A and collections around the world.

from the earliest written accounts of Japan right through to the life of the current empress, Masako. We encounter shamans and warlords, poets and revolutionaries, scientists, artists and adventurers – each offering insights of their own into this land's history.

### The Art of Impermanence: Japanese Works from the John C Weber Collection and Mr & Mrs John D Rockefeller

by Adriana Proser and Melinda Takeuchi. Officina Libraria, ISBN 978-8833670836, £50  
This catalogue presents masterpieces of calligraphy, painting, sculpture, ceramics, lacquers, and textiles from two of America's greatest Japanese art collections, which are featured in a landmark exhibition at the Asia Society in New York in 2020. Impermanence is a pervasive subject in Japanese philosophy and art, and recognising the role of ephemerality is key to appreciating much of Japan's artistic production. The range of art and objects in the catalogue show the broad, yet nuanced, ways that the notion of the ephemeral manifests itself in the arts of Japan throughout history. Contributions from noted scholars explore the aesthetics of impermanence in religion, literature, artefacts, the tea ceremony, and popular culture in objects dating from the late Jomon period (circa 1000-300 BC) to the 20th century.

### Breaking out of Tradition: Japanese Lacquer 1890 - 1950

by Jan Dees and Munster Museum for Lackkunst. Hirmer, ISBN 978-3777435060,  
Breaking out of Tradition traces the pioneering developments in lacquer art at the beginning of the 20th century in Japan. The lacquer artists of that time adopted a critical and creative approach to the centuries-old traditions, experimenting with innovative techniques and new materials, thereby also providing new stimuli for Western art. The publication examines the revolution in Japanese lacquer art from the end of the 19th until the middle of the 20th century.



### Painting Edo Selections from the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art

by Rachel Saunders and Yukio Lippit. Harvard Art Museums, ISBN 9780300250893, £25  
Japan's Edo period (1615-1868) witnessed the arrival of peace after centuries of warfare, together with economic prosperity, population growth, and increased urbanisation. The arts of the period flourished, reflecting and inflecting these fertile conditions. Painting Edo: Selections from the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art explores this rich visual culture, highlighting works from an unparalleled collection to showcase the masters of various Edo schools and lineages. Beautiful illustrations punctuate the catalogue's essays: Yukio Lippit situates the works within a broad cultural history of early modern Japan, and Rachel Saunders focuses on a single artist, offering fresh perspectives on the late 'bird-and-flower paintings' of Sakai Hoitsu. Together, these essays unpack the literary, artistic, and cultural histories that form the basis for how these masterful works would have been received in their time – and for how we can best understand them today. A complete catalogue of the Feinberg Collection was published in July 2020.

### Craftland Japan

by Uwe Röttgen and Katharina Zettl. Thames & Hudson, ISBN 978-0500295342, £24.95  
In Japanese life and culture, there has never been a clear distinction between art, craft and design. Generations of artisans have for centuries forged and refined their crafts, which have become the envy of the modern world. Regions of Japan are renowned for specific traditions, many of which are born of local materials and the natural settings in which they are produced. Spurred by an awareness of the unseen treasures produced by these crafts people, designer-authors Uwe Röttgen and Katharina Zettl set out across the country to find the finest examples, to document the makers and their workshops and the



### Japan: Courts and Culture

edited by Rachel Peat. Royal Collection Trust, ISBN 978-1909741683, £49.95  
This

catalogue accompanies a proposed exhibition of the same name that tells the story of British royal contact with Japan between 1603 and 1937, when the exchange of works of arts was central to both diplomatic relations and cultural contact. As a result, the Royal Collection has one of the most significant holdings of Japanese works of art in the Western world. Featuring new research on previously unpublished works, the book showcases the unparalleled craftsmanship behind rare examples of porcelain, lacquer, armour, embroidery, metalwork and works on paper, and explores the local materials, techniques and traditions involved in their creation. The exhibition has been rescheduled for 2022.



### The 'Other' Shangri-La

by Shivaji Das. Konark Publisher, ISBN 978-8194201861, £12.99  
The 'Other' Shangri-La is a work of narrative non-fiction based on Shivaji Das and his wife's journey through the Sino-Tibetan frontier land of western Sichuan. It describes the rugged landscape of this region that comprises 7,000-metre-high mountains, deep gorges, vast grasslands and the world's most dangerous roads. It also explores the region's history and the peculiarities of its scattered settlements: Litang – the world's highest town that is also the birthplace of important lamas; Larung – the world's largest monastery and highest slum; Danba, 'Beauty Valley' famed since antiquity for its good-looking and strong-minded women; Yading, a pilgrim circuit once terrorised by bandit monks; and Kangding, a small town that gave birth to China's favourite love song.



### The Bells of Old Tokyo: Travels in Japanese Time

by Anna Sherman. Picador, ISBN 978-1529000498, £9.99

For over 300 years, Japan closed itself to outsiders, developing a remarkable and unique culture. During its period of isolation, the inhabitants of the city of Edo, later known as Tokyo, relied on its public bells to tell the time. Anna Sherman tells of her search for the bells of Edo, exploring the city of Tokyo and its inhabitants and the individual and particular relationship of Japanese culture – and the Japanese language – to time, tradition, memory, impermanence and history. Through Sherman's journeys around the city and her friendship with the owner of a small, exquisite cafe, who elevates the making and drinking of coffee to an art-form, the book presents a series of hauntingly memorable voices in the labyrinth that is the metropolis of the Japanese capital: An aristocrat plays in the sea of ashes left by the Allied firebombing of 1945. A scientist builds the most accurate clock in the world, a clock that will not lose a second in five billion years. A sculptor eats his father's ashes while the head of the house of Tokugawa reflects on the destruction of his grandfather's city ('A lost thing is lost. To chase it leads to darkness').

rural landscapes that surround them. The authors portray 25 artisans, who work with natural materials to produce objects that are intended for everyday life but are worthy of museum display.

### Zaido

by Yukari Chikura. Steidl, ISBN 978-3958293137, £75

This book is Yukari Chikura's preservation of the 1,300-year-old Japanese ritual festival called Zaido. Following a series of tragedies including her father's sudden death, her own critical accident and the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, she set off on a restorative pilgrimage to northeast Japan (the first of numerous journeys), which resulted in this book. Chikura arrived at the village, surreally silver in the snow and mist, and there discovered Zaido, where inhabitants from different villages gather on the second day of each new year and conduct a ritual dance to induce good fortune. Combining photos of snowscapes that border on abstraction with images of the intricate masks and costumes of Zaido, Chikura depicts the cultural diversity of the participants as well as their common bond in creating collective memory and ensuring the survival of this ritual.

### Korean Art from 1953

editors: Yeon Shim Chung, Sunjung Kim, Kimberly Chung, and Keith B Wagner

Phaidon Press, ISBN 978-0714878331, £59.95  
Starting with the armistice that divided the Korean Peninsula in 1953, this one-of-a-kind book spotlights the artistic movements and collectives that have flourished and evolved throughout Korean culture over the past seven decades – from the 1950s avant-garde through to the feminist scene in the 1970s, the birth of the Gwangju Biennale in the 1990s, the lesser-



### Stranger in the Shogun's City:

#### A Woman's Life in Nineteenth-Century Japan

by Amy Stanley. Chatto & Windus, ISBN 978-1784742300, £16.99

The daughter of a Buddhist priest, Tsuneno was born in 1804 in a rural Japanese village and was expected to live a life much like her mother's. But after three divorces – and with a temperament much too strong-willed for her family's approval – she ran away

to make a life for herself in one of the largest cities in the world: Edo, a bustling metropolis at its peak. With Tsuneno as our guide, we experience the drama and excitement of Edo just before the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry's fleet, which would open Japan up to trade and diplomacy with the West for the first time. During this pivotal moment in Japanese history, Tsuneno bounces from tenement to tenement, marries a masterless *samurai* and eventually ends up in the service of a famous city magistrate. An extraordinary woman at an extraordinary time, Tsuneno's life provides a window into 19th-century Japanese culture – and a rare view of a woman who sacrificed her family and her reputation to make a new life for herself, despite social conventions.

known North Korean art scene, and all the artists who have emerged to secure a place in the international art world.

## South Asia

### Royals and Rebels:

#### The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire

by Priya Atwal

C Hurst & Co, ISBN 978-1787383081, £20

In late 18th-century India, the glory of the Mughal emperors was fading, and ambitious newcomers seized power, changing the political map forever. Enter the legendary Maharajah Ranjit Singh, whose Sikh Empire stretched throughout northwestern India into Afghanistan and Tibet. Priya Atwal shines fresh light on this long-lost kingdom, looking beyond its founding father to restore the queens and princes to the story of this empire's spectacular rise and fall. She brings to life a self-made ruling family, inventively fusing Sikh, Mughal and European ideas of power, but eventually succumbing to gendered family politics, as the Sikh Empire fell to its great rival in the new India: the British.

### Ellora

by Christophe Hioco. Continents Editions, ISBN 9788874398720, £55

Thirty-four places of worship (temples, monasteries, and shrines) were carved out of the rock between the 5th and 10th centuries over an area of around two square kilometres. All the sculpture at the site is testimony to the superb skill and sheer determination of the workforce involved, as well as being evidence of the religious harmony of the time. The monuments include all sorts of architectural and decorative features that display the utmost splendour and inventiveness: columns, staircases, reliefs, stuccos,

and even surviving patches of painted decoration. In the past, the extraordinary work at the site has unfortunately been eclipsed by the exceptional nature of its surroundings. The architecture and sculpture are often immersed in darkness and this has made it impossible to create the kind of photographic record that would give their stunning quality the visibility it deserves. But now Iago Corazza, with his ultra-sensitive photographic equipment, is able at last to give lovers of Indian art and enthusiasts the chance to fully appreciate this wonderful, indeed unique, group of rock-cut temples.

### The Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek World

editor Rachel Mairs. Routledge Worlds, ISBN 978-1138090699, £190

This volume provides a thorough conspectus of the field of Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek studies, mixing theoretical and historical surveys with critical and thought-provoking case studies in archaeology, history, literature and art. The chapters from this international group of experts showcase innovative methodologies, such as archaeological GIS, as well as providing accessible explanations of specialist techniques such as die studies of coins, and important theoretical perspectives, including postcolonial approaches to the Greeks in India. Chapters cover the region's archaeology, written and numismatic sources, and a history of scholarship of the subject, as well as culture, identity and interactions with neighbouring empires, including India and China.

### Bullocks, Grain, and Good Madeira:

#### The Maratha and Jat Campaigns, 1803-1806 and the emergence of an Indian Army

by Joshua Proven. Helion and Company, ISBN 978-1913336547, £20

On the last day of the year 1802, the Maratha Peshwa Bajirao II signed the treaty of Bassein which sparked the Second Anglo Maratha War. What began as a seemingly straightforward operation to restore the Peshwa and complete Lord Wellesley's expansionist policy turned into a full-scale conflict for political hegemony which spread across central and northern India and was to establish the East India Company as the foremost power in South Asia. In military terms it was the event which a little-known general named Arthur Wellesley came to prominence and it also established the supremacy of the EIC's Native Army over the regular armies of the 'country powers'. It was during these testing campaigns that Europeans began to view what was already being called the 'Indian Army' with respect.

Despite a series of crushing defeats, the Marathas stunned their enemies with their bravery and professionalism, exacting a heavy toll on the British despite great handicaps in command and control. Although successful, the conclusion of the war was much less glorious than the biographies of the Duke of Wellington care to admit. Few conflicts from this time convey in such detail the challenges faced by field commanders conducting operations in India and fewer books continue the story of the Second Maratha War to its ultimate conclusion in the Punjab where the last Maratha prince surrendered, this after the British 'siege lords' under General Lake had been humbled before the mighty mud walls of the impregnable Jat fortress of Bharatpur.



### Forgotten Masters: Indian Painting for the East India Company

by William Dalrymple, et al. Philip Wilson Publishers, ISBN 978-1781300978, £28

As the East India Company extended its sway across India in the late 18th century, many remarkable artworks were commissioned by Company officials from Indian painters who had previously worked for the Mughals. The book celebrates the work of a series of extraordinary Indian artists, each with their own style and tastes and agency, all of whom worked for British patrons between the 1770s and the bloody end of the Mughal rule in 1857. The works shed light on a forgotten moment in Anglo-Indian history during which Indian artists responded to European influences while keeping intact their own artistic visions and styles. These artists represent the last phase of Indian artistic genius before the onset of the twin assaults – photography and the influence of Western colonial art schools – ended an unbroken tradition of painting going back two thousand years.



### Tantra: Enlightenment to Revolution

by Imma Ramos. Thames & Hudson, ISBN 978-0500480625, £30

Published to complement the exhibition of the same name at the British Museum, the catalogue explores the radical force that transformed the religious, cultural and political landscape of India and beyond. A philosophy originating in medieval India, Tantra has been linked to successive waves of revolutionary thought – from its 6th-century transformation of Hinduism and Buddhism, to the Indian fight for independence and the rise of 1960s counterculture. Centring on the power of divine feminine energy, Tantra inspired the dramatic rise of goddess worship in medieval India and continues to influence contemporary feminist thought and artistic practice.

### Cloth that Changed the World:

#### The Art and Fashion of Indian Chintz

by Sarah Fee. Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0300246797, £35

The story of India's exuberantly coloured textiles that made their mark on design, technology, and trade around the world Chintz, a type of multi-coloured printed or painted cotton cloth, originated in India yet exerted influence far beyond its home shores: it became a driving force of the spice trade in the East Indies, and it attracted European merchants, who by the 17th century were importing millions of pieces. In the 18th century, Indian chintz became so coveted globally that Europeans attempted to imitate its uniquely vibrant dyes and design—a quest that

eventually sparked the mechanical and business innovations that ushered in the Industrial Revolution, with its far-reaching societal impacts. The book showcases the genius of Indian chintz makers and the dazzling variety of works they have created for specialized markets: religious and court banners for India, monumental gilded wall hangings for elite homes in Europe and Thailand, luxury women's dress for England, sacred hangings for ancestral ceremonies in Indonesia, and today's runways of Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai.

### The Indian Empire At War:

#### From Jihad to Victory, The Untold Story of the Indian Army in the First World War

by George Morton-Jack. Abacus, ISBN 978-0349141848, £12.99

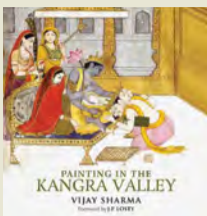
A history of the First World War, re-tracing the footsteps of the Indian Army's 1.5 million men, who in 1914-18, served about the globe from Europe to Africa, Asia and the Indian Ocean. After years of neglect, The Indian Empire at War raises the curtain on the Indian soldiers' personal experiences fighting for the Allies against the Central Powers, and returning home to play their part in the Indian Independence movement.

### Sri Lanka: Paradise Lost; Paradise Regained

by Michael Naseby. Unicorn, ISBN 978-1912690749, £20

Marco Polo in 1298 described 'Seyllan' as the most beautiful island of its size in the world. The Greeks and Romans praised 'Taprobane' and 18th-century travellers praised 'Serendip' from which name comes the word serendipity – the luck of the unexpected. So it was for Lord Naseby, then plain Michael Morris working in challenging Calcutta, was told in May 1963 that he must go urgently to Colombo, Ceylon to handle a crisis. This book is a celebration of Lord Naseby's subsequent unique involvement with Sri Lanka, its people and its politics over the last 50 years.

Continued on page 16



### Painting in the Kangra Valley

by Vijay Sharma. Niyogi Books, ISBN 978-9389136654, £58

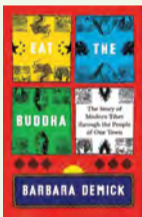
This is an attempt to survey the painting styles of Guler and Kangra, which flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries. The painting activity began with Kashmiri painters, who started receiving royal patronage during the reign of Raja Dalip Singh (1695-1741) of Guler. But it attained culmination during the long reign of Maharaja Sansar Chand (1776-1823) of Kangra. The royal atelier of Kangra produced a large number of paintings covering diverse subjects. The advent of the Bhakti movement in north India had a tremendous impact, resulting in a preference for Krishna themes for the artists of Guler and Kangra. The sentiment of love is the main subject of Guler-Kangra paintings. They illustrate the finest specimens of various kinds of nayika described by the Hindi poets of the *riti* genre. Vijay Sharma's analytical approach gives new insights into the origin and development of the Guler school and the marked influence of later Mughal painting on the styles of Manaku and Nainsukh.



### Sarnath: A Critical History of the Place Where Buddhism Began

by Frederick M Asher. Getty Publications, ISBN 9781606066164, £30

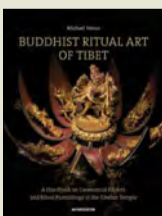
Sarnath has long been regarded as the place where the Buddha preached his first sermon and established the Buddhist monastic order. Excavations at Sarnath have yielded the foundations of temples and monastic dwellings, two Buddhist reliquary mounds (stupas), and some of the most important sculptures in the history of Indian art. This volume offers the first critical examination of the historic site. Frederick M Asher provides a *longue durée* (long-term) analysis of Sarnath-including the plunder, excavation, and display of antiquities and the Archaeological Survey of India's presentation-and considers what lies beyond the fenced-in excavated area. His analytical history of Sarnath's architectural and sculptural remains contains a significant study of the site's sculptures, their uneven production, and their global distribution.



### Eat the Buddha

by Barbara Demick. Granta Publications, ISBN 978-1783785704, £18.99

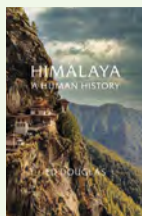
In *Eat the Buddha*, Barbara Demick chronicles the Tibetan tragedy from Ngaba, a defiant town on the eastern edge of the Tibetan plateau where dozens of Tibetans have shocked the world since 2009 by immolating themselves. Following the stories of the last princess of the region, of Tibetans who experienced the struggle sessions of Mao's Cultural Revolution, of the recent generations of monks and townsfolk experiencing renewed repression, Demick paints a riveting portrait of recent Tibetan history, opening a window onto Tibetan life today, and onto the challenges Tibetans face while locked in a struggle for identity against one of the most powerful countries in the world.



### Buddhist Ritual Art of Tibet: A Handbook on Ceremonial Objects and Ritual Furnishings in the Tibetan Temple

by Michael Henss. Arnoldsche Art Publishing, ISBN 978-3897905672, £85

Tibetan Buddhist art is not only rich in figural icons but also extremely diverse in its symbols and ritual objects. This first systematic review is an abundantly illustrated reference book on Tibetan ritual art that aids our understanding of its different types and forms, its sacred meanings and ceremonial functions. Covering 18 chapters, several hundred different implements are documented in detail, in many cases for the first time and often in their various styles and iconographic forms: altar utensils and amulets, masks and mirrors, magic daggers and *mandalas*, *torma* sculptures and prayer objects, *vajras* and votive tablets, sacrificial vessels and oracle crowns, stupas and spirit traps, ritual vases, textiles, furniture, and symbolic emblems. These are accompanied by many historical and modern text sources, as well as rare recorded oral material from high-ranking Tibetan masters.



### Himalaya: A Human History

by Ed Douglas. Bodley Head, ISBN 978-1847924131, £25

Spanning millennia, from its earliest inhabitants to the present conflicts over Tibet and Everest, Himalaya is an account of resilience and conquest, discovery and plunder, oppression and enlightenment at the 'roof of the world'. From all around the globe, the unique and astonishing geography of the Himalaya has attracted those in search of spiritual and literal elevation: pilgrims, adventurers and mountaineers seeking to test themselves among the world's most spectacular and challenging peaks. But far from being wild and barren, the Himalaya has throughout the ages been home to an astonishing diversity of indigenous and local cultures, as well as a crossroads for trade, and a meeting point and conflict zone for the world's superpowers. Here, Jesuit missionaries exchanged technologies with Tibetan Lamas, Mongol Khans employed Nepali craftsmen, Armenian merchants exchanged musk and gold with Mughals. Here, too, the East India Company grappled for dominance with China's emperors, independent India has been locked in conflict with Mao's Communists and their successors, and the ideological confrontation of the Cold War is now being buried beneath mass tourism and ecological transformation. Featuring scholars and tyrants, bandits and CIA agents, go-betweens and revolutionaries, Himalaya is a panoramic, character-driven history on the grandest but also the most human scale.

The arrival of Chinese army cars in 1959 changed everything. In the wake of the deadly Tibetan Uprising, he escaped to India through the Himalayas as a refugee. One of only 13 survivors out of 300 travellers, he spent the next few years in the US, experiencing the excesses of the Woodstock generation before reforming in Europe. Now in his seventies and a leading monk at the Samye Ling monastery in Scotland – the first Buddhist centre in the West – Lama Yeshe casts a hopeful look back at his momentous life. From his learnings on self-compassion and discipline to his trials and tribulations with loss and failure, his poignant story mirrors our own struggles.

## Southeast Asia

### The Hidden History of Burma: A Crisis of Race and Capitalism

by Thant Myint-U. Atlantic Books, ISBN 978-1786497871, £18.99

Precariously positioned between China and India, Burma's population has suffered dictatorship, natural disaster and the dark legacies of colonial rule. But when decades of military dictatorship finally ended and internationally beloved Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi emerged from long years of house arrest, hopes soared. As historian, former diplomat, and presidential advisor, Thant Myint-U saw the cracks forming. In this insider's diagnosis of a country at a breaking point, he dissects how a singularly predatory economic system, fast-rising inequality, disintegrating state institutions, the impact of new social media, the rise of China next door, climate change and deep-seated feelings around race, religion and national identity all came together to challenge the incipient democracy. Interracial violence soared and a horrific exodus of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees fixed international

attention. The author explains how and why this happened, and details an unsettling prognosis for the future. Are democracy and an economy that genuinely serves all its people possible in Burma? Thant Myint-U explores this question – a concern not just for the Burmese but for the rest of the world – warning of the possible collapse of this nation of 55 million while suggesting a fresh agenda for change.

### A Royal Treasure: The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam

by Dale Carolyn Gluckma, Saritrat Mudding and Judi Achjadi. River Books, ISBN 978-6168044056, £75

On each of his three visits to Indonesia, the Thai monarch King Chulalongkorn returned home to Siam with pieces of handmade batik. Preserved by the Bureau of the Royal Household at the Grand palace since 1910, the year the king passed away, the collection totals over 300 pieces and today provides key documentation of the *batik* made in West and Central Java during the second half of the 19th century, with many rare and beautiful pieces from famous ateliers of the day. This collection was presented to the public for the first time at the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles in Bangkok in October 2018. Published to coincide with the exhibition, the book contains a detailed catalogue of the collection and is enhanced by rare archival photographs of the king's travels, the original signature notes indicating the name of the pattern and who was allowed to wear it, and the palace inventory tags.

### Thread and Fire: Textiles and Jewellery from the Isles of Indonesia and Timor

by Linda S McIntosh. River Books, ISBN 978-6164510357, £40

This is a journey through the centuries-old trade networks that developed across a group of archipelagos along the equator. Of the 18,000 islands, more than 900 are permanently settled by over 360



### Return to Sri Lanka: Travels in a Paradoxical Land

by Razeen Sally. Juggernaut, ISBN 978-9353450601, £17.99

Sri Lanka seemed like a version of paradise to Razeen Sally as a child, but conflict was soon to follow, tearing the family apart and severing their bond with Sri Lanka. Return to Sri Lanka is the story of a 21st-century reconciliation between Sally, now an academic and political adviser, and the land of his birth. A travel memoir with deep political concerns, Return to Sri Lanka is a book full of insight, from a writer who is a native, a tourist, both and neither.



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ethnic groups, speaking 700 languages and dialects. For centuries this vast and rich environment favoured local and regional exchanges, and it was only later that people visited from afar. New connections integrated these archipelagos with the distant civilisations of continental Asia: first India, later China and from the 13th century onwards, the Islamic world. Finally, with the arrival of Europeans in the early 16th century, global trade and connections grew rapidly. Spices, forest, and sea products were the focus of foreign interests, and textiles were the currency for their acquisition. These imported textiles, complemented with ornaments and jewellery, soon became part of the region's social fabric, indispensable items of gift and exchange, essential markers for the enactment of ceremonies, rites of passage and signifiers of rank and prestige.

### Seven Hundred Years: A History of Singapore

by Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Peter Borschberg and Tan Tai Yong.

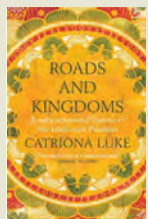
Marshall Cavendish International, ISBN 978-9814828109, £20

Assessments of Singapore's history invariably revolve around Sir Stamford Raffles' arrival in 1819. Before this date we have been told 'nothing very much appears to have happened in Singapore'. Pre-1819 Singapore was a sleepy, historically insignificant fishing village, little more than the 'occasional resort of pirates'. This book, co-written by four of Singapore's foremost historians, offers an assertive re-evaluation of that view, firmly situating Singapore's starting point seven hundred years ago. Drawing on a multi-disciplinary range of archival, textual and cartographical records, as well as the latest archaeological discoveries, the authors cast a singular historical trajectory for Singapore over the past seven centuries, animating its history like never before.

### In the Dragon's Shadow: Southeast Asia in the Chinese Century

by Sebastian Strangio. Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0300234039, £20

A timely look at the impact of China's booming emergence on the countries of Southeast Asia. Today, Southeast Asia stands uniquely exposed to the waxing power of the new China. Three of its nations border China and five are directly impacted by its claims over the South China Sea. All dwell in the lengthening shadow of its influence: economic, political, military, and cultural. As China seeks to restore its former status as Asia's preeminent power, the countries of Southeast Asia face an increasingly stark choice: flourish within Beijing's orbit or languish outside of it. Meanwhile, as rival powers including the US take concerted action to curb Chinese ambitions, the region has emerged as an arena of heated strategic competition. Drawing on more than a decade of on-the-ground experience, Strangio explores the impacts of China's rise on Southeast Asia, the varied ways in which the countries of the region are responding, and what it might mean for the future balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.



#### Roads and Kingdoms:

##### A subcontinental history of the lands now Pakistan

by Catriona Luke, ISBN 978-1474617284, £20

The region now known as Pakistan has been a source of fascination for invading emperors and armies, traders and travellers and ambassadors for centuries. This is where some of the most sophisticated concepts of life were refined – metaphysics and the tradition of individual liberty of the soul – and where the ancient Greeks formulated their notions of *'apatheia'*, or scepticism. Today this land is known as Pakistan, but it is a shape-shifting land and has had many aliases. The history of the region comes into focus through different numbers of *peerhi* – the Urdu word for ancestors, lineage, generation. The past has a secret. It will always mirror the present. Roads and Kingdoms also breaks the conventional way of narrating history chronologically, and as different times of the region's history are accessed, it builds like brushstrokes of an impressionist painting – to form a composite picture of a very old land with a distinguished history. As the narrative unfolds, the boundaries of time, and how we think we understand the past, dissolve. What is left is a subtle and intricate portrait of a currently little explored region and its people.



#### India in the Persianate Age: 1000-1765

by Richard M. Eaton, Penguin, ISBN 978-0141985398, £12.99

The Indian subcontinent might seem a self-contained world. Protected by vast mountains and seas, it has created its own religions, philosophies and social systems. And yet this ancient land experienced prolonged and intense interaction with the peoples and cultures of East and Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa and, especially, Central Asia and the Iranian plateau between the 11th and 18th centuries. The author's latest new book tells this extraordinary story with relish and originality. His major theme is the rise of 'Persianate' culture – a many-faceted trans-regional world informed by a canon of texts that circulated through ever-widening networks across much of Asia. Introduced to India in the 11th century by dynasties based in eastern Afghanistan, this culture would become thoroughly indigenised by the time of the great Mughals in the 16th to 18th centuries. This long-term process of cultural interaction and assimilation is reflected in India's language, literature, cuisine, attire, religion, styles of rulership and warfare, science, art, music, architecture, and more. The book elaborates the complex encounter between India's Sanskrit culture, which continued to flourish and grow throughout this period, and Persian culture, which helped shape the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire and a host of regional states, and made India what it is today.

## Islamic World

#### Bestowing Beauty:

##### Masterpieces from Persian Lands:

##### Selections from the Hossein Afshar Collection

by Aimee Froom, Walter Denny, Melanie Gibson et al. Museum of Fine Arts Houston, ISBN 9780300247022, £65

This catalogue showcases an assortment of stunning works from one of the world's most distinguished private collections of Persian art. Featuring more than 100 objects spanning many centuries, from the eve of the Islamic period in the 6th century to the end of the 19th century, this wide range of treasures demonstrates the remarkable depth and diversity of the Hossein Afshar Collection. Illustrated and accompanied by essays from a group of internationally recognised scholars, the book's selection includes an array of ceramic works,

*Qur'an* pages written in gold, precious inlaid metal wares,

miniature paintings from Firdausi's *Shahnama*, sumptuous silk brocades and velvet embroideries, and monumental silk carpets from the apex of Safavid carpet production. These rarely seen works bring into focus the remarkable variety of techniques and innovations employed by Persian artists and artisans through the ages.

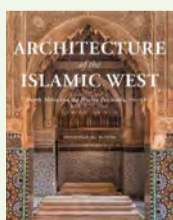
#### Sufi Institutions: Handbook of Sufi Studies

edited by Alexandra Papas

Brill, ISBN 9789004389076, Euro 249

This volume describes the social and practical aspects of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) across centuries and geographical regions. Its authors seek to transcend ethereal, essentialist and 'spiritualising' approaches to Sufism, on the one hand, and purely pragmatic and materialistic explanations of its origins and history, on the other. Covering five topics (Sufism's economy, social role of Sufis, Sufi

Continued on page 18



#### Architecture of the Islamic northwest Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, 700-1800

by Jonathan M. Bloom, Yale University Press, ISBN 9780300218701, £50

Some of the most outstanding examples of world architecture, such as the Mosque of Cordoba, the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, the Giralda tower in Seville, and the Alhambra Palace in Granada, belong to the Western Islamic tradition. This architectural style flourished for over a thousand years along the southern and western shores of the Mediterranean, between Tunisia and Spain, from the 8th century through the 19th, blending new ideas with local building practices from across the region. The book introduces readers to the full scope of this vibrant tradition, presenting both famous and little-known buildings in six countries in North Africa and southern Europe.



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### Ceramics of Iran Islamic Pottery in the Sarikhani Collection

by Oliver Watson. Yale University Press, ISBN 9780300254280, £50

Featuring a broad selection of objects from one of the most distinguished collections of Iranian art, this volume brings together over 1,000 years of Persian Islamic pottery. With more than 500 illustrations, authoritative technical treatises, and insightful commentary, the book assembles a collection of rarely seen treasures from the Persian world and presents a collective history of its renowned ceramic tradition. Included among its comprehensive catalogue entries are numerous translations of the object's inscriptions, providing readers with a richer and more detailed understanding of the cultural heritage from which these items are derived. In addition, the book contains new research and material from previously unknown sites.

spaces, politics, and organisation), the volume shows that mystics have been active socio-religious agents who could skilfully adjust to the conditions of their time and place, while also managing to forge an alternative way of living, worshipping and thinking.

### Stealing from the Saracens:

#### How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe

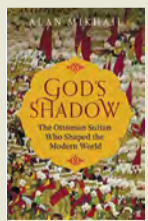
by Diana Darke. C Hurst Co, ISBN 978-1787383050, £25

Against a backdrop of Islamophobia, Europeans are increasingly airbrushing from history their cultural debt to the Muslim world. But this legacy lives on in some of Europe's most recognisable buildings, from Notre-Dame Cathedral to the Houses of Parliament. This book reveals the Arab and Islamic roots of Europe's architectural heritage. The author traces ideas and styles from vibrant Middle Eastern centres like Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo, via Muslim Spain, Venice and Sicily into Europe. She describes how medieval crusaders, pilgrims and merchants encountered Arab Muslim culture on their way to the Holy Land; and explores more recent artistic interaction between Ottoman and Western cultures, including Sir Christopher Wren's inspirations in the 'Saracen' style of Gothic architecture.

### Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Rivalry that Unravelling the Middle East

by Kim Ghattas. Wildfire/Henry Holt and Co, ISBN 978-1472271136, £10.99

For decades, the question has haunted the Arab and Muslim world, heard across Iran and Syria, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and in the author's home country of Lebanon. When did the extremism, intolerance and bloodletting of today displace the region's cultural promise and diversity? In the book, Kim Ghattas argues that the turning point in the modern history of the Middle East can be located in the toxic confluence of three major events in 1979: the Iranian revolution; the siege of the Holy



### God's Shadow: The Ottoman Sultan Who Shaped the Modern World: The Untold Story of Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire and the Making of the Modern World

by Alan Mikhail. Faber & Faber, ISBN 978-0571331932, £14.99

The Ottoman Empire was a hub of flourishing intellectual fervour, geopolitical power, and enlightened pluralistic rule. At the helm of its ascent was the omnipotent Sultan Selim I (1470-1520), who,

with the aid of his extraordinarily gifted mother, Gulbahar, hugely expanded the empire, propelling it onto the world stage. Aware of centuries of European suppression of Islamic history, Alan Mikhail centres Selim's Ottoman Empire and Islam as the very pivots of global history, redefining such world-changing events as Christopher Columbus's voyages, which originated, in fact, as a Catholic 'jihad' that would come to view Native Americans as somehow 'Moorish', the Protestant Reformation, the transatlantic slave trade, and the dramatic Ottoman seizure of the Middle East and North Africa. Drawing on previously unexamined sources and written in gripping detail, Mikhail's ground-breaking account vividly recaptures Selim's life and world.

Mosque in Mecca; and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Before this year, Saudi Arabia and Iran had been working allies and twin pillars of US strategy in the region, but the radical legacy of these events made them mortal enemies, unleashing a process that transformed culture, society, religion and geopolitics across the region for decades to come. Crossing seven countries over 40 years, Ghattas demonstrates how this rivalry for religious and cultural supremacy has fed intolerance, suppressed cultural expression, encouraged sectarian violence, birthed groups like Hezbollah and ISIS and, ultimately, upended the lives of millions.

### The Nine Lives of Pakistan: Dispatches from a Divided Nation

by Declan Walsh. Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-1408868461, £20

The demise of Pakistan – a country with a reputation for volatility, brutality and radical Islam – is regularly predicted. But things rarely turn out as expected, as renowned journalist Declan Walsh knows well. Over a decade covering the country, his travels took him from the raucous port of Karachi to the gilded salons of Lahore to the lawless frontier of Waziristan, encountering Pakistanis whose lives offer a compelling portrait of this land of contradictions.

He meets a crusading lawyer who risks her life to fight for society's most marginalised, taking on everyone including the powerful military establishment; an imperious chieftain spouting poetry at his desert fort; a roguish politician waging a mini-war against the Taliban; and a charismatic business tycoon who moves into politics and seems to be riding high – till he takes up the wrong cause. Lastly, Walsh meets a spy whose orders once involved following him, and who might finally be able to answer the question that haunts him: why the Pakistanis suddenly expelled him from their country.

## Fiction

### People from My Neighbourhood

by Hiromi Kawakami. Granta, ISBN 978-1846276989, £12.99

In Kawakami's super short 'palm of the hand' stories the world is never quite as it should be: a small child lives under a sheet near his neighbour's house for thirty years; an apartment block leaves its visitors with strange afflictions, from fast-growing beards to an ability to channel the voices of the dead; an old man has two shadows, one docile, the other rebellious; two girls named Yoko are locked in a bitter rivalry to the death.

### The Honjin Murders and The Inugami Curse

by Seishi Yokomizo. Pushkin Vertigo, ISBN 978-1782275008

and 978-1782275039, £8.99 each

Two novels by Seishi Yokomizo, the Agatha Christie of Japan, have been published in English for the first time almost four decades after his death in 1981. Yokomizo's work reflects the traditions of the 'Golden Age' of Western crime fiction from the 1930s which also incorporate many aspects of Japanese culture.

In *The Honjin Murders*, the book opens in the winter of 1937, and the village of Okamura is abuzz with excitement over the forthcoming wedding of a son of the grand Ichiyangi family. On the night of the wedding, the Ichiyangi household are woken by a terrible scream, followed by the sound of eerie music. Death has come to Okamura, leaving no trace but a bloody samurai sword, thrust into the pristine snow outside the house. Soon, amateur detective Kosuke Kindaichi is on the scene to investigate what will become a legendary murder case. The second novel is set a decade later, when the wealthy head of the Inugami Clan dies, and his family eagerly await the reading of the will. But no sooner are its strange details revealed than a series of bizarre, gruesome murders begins. Detective Kindaichi must unravel the clan's terrible secrets of forbidden liaisons, monstrous cruelty, and hidden identities to find the murderer, and lift the curse wreaking its bloody revenge on the Inugamis.

### Breasts and Eggs

by Mieko Kawakami

Picador, ISBN 978-1509898206, £14.99

On a hot summer's day in a poor suburb of Tokyo we meet three women: thirty-year-old Natsu, her older sister Makiko, and Makiko's teenage daughter Midoriko. Makiko, an ageing hostess despairing the loss of her looks, has travelled to Tokyo in search of breast enhancement surgery. She is accompanied by Midoriko, who has recently stopped speaking, finding herself unable to deal with her own changing body and her mother's self-obsession. Her silence dominates Natsu's rundown apartment, providing a catalyst for each woman to grapple with their own anxieties and their relationships with one another. Eight years later, we meet Natsu again. She is now a writer and finds herself on a journey back to her native city, returning to memories of that summer and her family's past as she faces her own uncertain future.

### The Phone Box at the Edge of the World

by Laura Imai Messina

Manilla Press, ISBN 978-1786580399, £12.99

On a windy hill in Japan, in a garden overlooking the sea stands a



### The Devil and the Dark Water

by Stuart Turton

Raven Books, ISBN 978-1408889640, £16.99

It is 1634 and Samuel PIPPS, the world's greatest detective, is being transported from the Dutch East Indies to Amsterdam, where he is facing trial and execution for a crime he may, or may not, have committed. Travelling with him is his loyal bodyguard, Arent Hayes, who is determined to prove his friend innocent, while also on board are Sara Wessel, a noble woman with a secret, and her husband, the governor general of Batavia. But no sooner is their ship out to sea than devilry begins to blight the voyage. A strange symbol appears on the sail. A dead leper stalks the decks. Livestock are slaughtered in the night. And then the passengers hear a terrible voice whispering to them in the darkness, promising them three unholy miracles. First: an impossible pursuit. Second: an impossible theft. Third: an impossible murder. Could a demon be responsible for their misfortunes?

disused phone box. For years, people have travelled to visit the phone box, to pick up the receiver and speak into the wind: to pass their messages to loved ones no longer with us. When Yui loses her mother and daughter in the *tsunami*, she is plunged into despair and wonders how she will ever carry on. One day she hears of the phone box, and decides to make her own pilgrimage there, to speak once more to the people she loved the most. But when you have lost everything, the right words can be the hardest thing to find. Then she meets Takeshi, a bereaved husband whose own daughter has stopped talking in the wake of their loss.

### The Message

by Mai Jia

Apollo, ISBN 978-1789543032, £8.99

At the height of the Second World War, Japan rules over China. In Hangzhou, a puppet government propped up by the Japanese wages an underground war against the Communist resistance. Late one night, five intelligence officers, employed as code breakers by the regime, are escorted to an isolated mansion outside the city. The secret police are certain that one of them is a communist spy. None of them is leaving until the traitor is unmasked. It should be a straightforward case of sifting truth from lies. But as each codebreaker spins a story that proves their innocence, what really happened is called into question again and again.

### Three Brothers: Memories of My Family

by Yan Lianke. Chatto & Windus,

ISBN 978-1784743154, £12.99

It is a hard but loving childhood. Yan's family carve out a modest existence, though food is often so scarce they have to find edible bark and clay for sustenance. Working 16-hour shifts in a quarry, Yan's

hands become as crooked as twigs, but the satisfaction of hard physical labour and earning money to support his family proves intoxicating. Reading novels is an escape for Yan, and he yearns to become a writer after hearing about a woman who was allowed to remain in the city of Harbin after publishing her first novel. Caught between his obligations as a son and a brother, and his longing for a new life, Yan eventually joins the army. Chronicling the extraordinary lives of his father and two uncles, as well as his own, the novel is a celebration of the power of one family to hold together in the most punishing of circumstances.

### Aria

by Nazanine Hozar

Penguin, ISBN 978-0241987667, £8.99

In Iran, 1953, a driver named Behrouz discovers an abandoned baby in an alleyway. When he adopts her, naming her Aria, he has no idea how profoundly this fiery, blue-eyed orphan will shape his future. As she grows, Aria is torn between the three women fated to mother her: the wife of Behrouz, who beats her; the wealthy widow Fereshteh, who offers her refuge but cannot offer her love, and the impoverished Mehri, whose secrets will shatter everything Aria thought she knew about her life. Meanwhile, the winds of change are stirring in Tehran. Rumours are spreading of a passionate religious exile in Paris called Khomeini, who seems to offer a new future for the country. In the midst of this tumult, Aria falls in love with an Armenian boy caught on the wrong side of the revolution.

### Seven Years of Darkness

by You-Jeong Jeong

Little Brown, ISBN 978-1408712061, £14.99

A girl is found dead in Seryong Lake, a reservoir in a remote South Korean village. The police immediately begin their investigation. At the same time, three men – Yongje, the girl's father, and two security guards at the nearby dam, each of whom has something to hide about the night of her death – find



### The Stationery Shop

by Marjan Kamali. Gallery Books, ISBN 978-1982107499, £12.99

Roya, a dreamy, idealistic teenager living amid the political upheaval of 1953 Tehran, finds a literary oasis in kindly Mr Fakhri's neighbourhood stationery shop, stocked with books and pens and bottles of jewel-coloured ink. Then Mr Fakhri, with a keen instinct for a budding romance, introduces Roya to his other

favourite customer, handsome Bahman, who has a burning passion for justice and a love for Rumi's poetry – and she loses her heart at once. Their romance blossoms, and the little stationery shop remains their favourite place in all of Tehran. A few short months later, on the eve of their marriage, Roya agrees to meet Bahman at the town square when violence erupts, a result of the coup d'état that forever changes their country's future. In the chaos, Bahman never shows. For weeks, Roya tries desperately to contact him, but her efforts are fruitless. With a sorrowful heart, she moves on – to college in California, to another man, to a life in New England – until, more than 60 years later, an accident of fate leads her back to Bahman and offers her a chance to ask him the questions that have haunted her for more than half a century: Why did you leave? Where did you go? How is it that you were able to forget me?



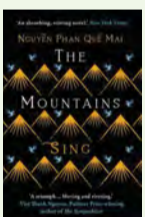
### Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line

by Deepa Anappara. Chatto, ISBN 978-1784743093, £12/99  
 Nine-year-old Jai watches too many reality cop shows, thinks he is smarter than his friend Pari (even though she always gets top marks) and considers himself to be a better boss than Faiz (even though Faiz is the one with a job). When a boy at school goes missing, Jai decides to use the crime-solving skills he has picked up from episodes of Police Patrol to find him. With Pari and Faiz by his side, Jai ventures into some of the most dangerous parts of the sprawling Indian city; the bazaar at night, and even the railway station at the end of the Purple Line.

themselves in an elaborate game of cat and mouse as they race to uncover what happened to her, without revealing their own closely guarded secrets. When a final showdown at the dam results in a mass tragedy, one of the guards is convicted of murder and sent to prison. For seven years, his son, Sowon, lives in the shadow of his father's shocking and inexplicable crime. When Sowon receives a package that promises to reveal at last what really happened at Seryong Lake, he must confront a present danger he never knew existed.

### Untold Night and Day

by Bae Suah  
 Jonathan Cape, ISBN 978-1787331600, £12.99  
 For two years, twenty-eight-year-old Kim Ayami has worked at Seoul's only audio theatre for the blind. But now the theatre is shutting down and Ayami's future is uncertain. Her last shift completed and the theatre closed for good, Ayami walks the streets of the city with her former boss late into the night. Together they search for a mutual friend who has disappeared. The following day, at the request of that same friend, Ayami acts as a guide for a detective novelist visiting from abroad. But in the inescapable, all-consuming heat of Seoul at the height of the summer, order gives way to chaos, the edges of reality start to fray, and the past intrudes on the present in increasingly disruptive ways.



### The Mountains Sing

by Ngyuen Phan Que Mai. One World, ISBN 978-1786079503, £12.99  
 Ha Noi, 1972.

Hung and her grandmother, Tran Dieu Lan, cling to one another in their improvised shelter as American bombs fall around them. Her father and mother have already left to fight in a war that is tearing not just her country but her family apart. For Tran Dieu Lan, forced to flee the family farm with her six children decades earlier as the Communist government rose to power in the North, this experience is horribly familiar.



### The Mission House

by Carys Davies. Granta, ISBN 978-1783784301, £12.99  
 Fleeing the dark undercurrents of contemporary life in Britain, Hilary Byrd takes refuge in Ooty, the hill station in South India. There he finds solace in life's simple pleasures, travelling by rickshaw around the small town with his driver Jamshed and staying in a mission house beside the local presbytery where the

Padre and his adoptive daughter Priscilla have taken Hilary under their wing. The Padre is concerned for Priscilla's future, and as Hilary's friendship with the young woman grows, he begins to wonder whether his purpose lies in this new relationship. But religious tensions are brewing and the mission house may not be the safe haven it seems.

### Winter in Sochko

by Elisa Shua Dusapin, Daunt Books, ISBN 978-1911547549, £9.99  
 It is winter in Sokcho, a tourist town on the border between South and North Korea. The cold slows everything down. Bodies are red and raw, the fish turn venomous, beyond the beach guns point out from the North's watchtowers. A young French Korean woman works as a receptionist in a tired guesthouse. One evening, an unexpected guest arrives: a French cartoonist determined to find inspiration in this desolate landscape. The two form an uneasy relationship. When she agrees to accompany him on trips to discover an authentic Korea, they visit snowy mountaintops and dramatic waterfalls, and cross into North Korea. As she's pulled into his vision and taken in by his drawings, she strikes upon a way to finally be seen.

### Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982

by Choo Nam-Joo  
 Scribner, ISBN 978-1471184284, £12.99  
 This best-seller helped launch Korea's new feminist movement and follows one woman's psychic deterioration in the face of the rigid misogyny she finds herself experiencing.

### Suncatcher

by Romesh Gunsekera  
 Bloomsbury, ISBN 9781526610386, £8.99  
 It is 1964. Ceylon is on the brink of change. But Kairo is at a loose end. School is closed, the government is in disarray, the press is under threat and the religious right are flexing their muscles. Kairo's hard-working mother blows off steam at her cha-cha-cha classes; his Trotskyite father grumbles over the state of the nation between his secret flutters on horseraces in faraway England. All Kairo wants to do is hide in his room and flick over second-hand westerns and superhero comics, or escape on his bicycle and daydream. Then he meets the magnetic teenage Jay, and his whole world is turned inside out. A budding naturalist and a born rebel, Jay keeps fish and traps birds for an aviary he is building in the garden of his grand home. But his Uncle Elvin, suave and worldly, is his encourager. As Jay guides him from the realm of make believe into one of hunting-guns and fast cars and introduces him to a girl, Niromi, Kairo begins to understand the price

Continued on page 20



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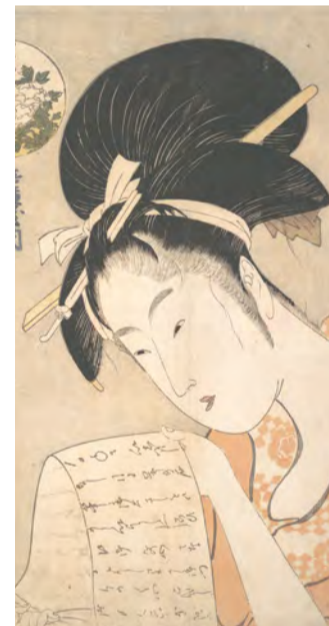
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of privilege and embarks on a journey of devastating consequence.

#### Low

by Jeet Thayil

Faber, ISBN 978-0571356416, £14.99

Following the death of his wife, Dominic Ullis escapes to Bombay in search of oblivion and a dangerous new drug, Meow Meow. So begins a glorious weekend of misadventure as he tours the teeming, kaleidoscopic city from its sleek cyries of high-capital to the urine-stained streets, encountering a cast with their own stories to tell, but none of whom Ullis – his faculties ever distorted – is quite sure he can trust.

#### Amnesty

by Aravind Adiga

Picador, ISBN 978-1509879052, £8.99

Danny, Dhananjaya Rajaratnam, is an undocumented immigrant in Sydney, denied refugee status after he has fled from his native Sri Lanka. Working as a cleaner, living out of a grocery storeroom, for three years he has been trying to create a new identity for himself. And now, with his beloved vegan girlfriend, Sonja, with his hidden accent and highlights in his hair, he is as close as he has ever come to living a normal Australian life. But then one morning, Danny learns a female client of his has been murdered. When Danny recognises a jacket left at the murder scene, he believes it belongs to another of his clients, a doctor with whom he knows the woman was having an affair. Suddenly Danny is confronted with a choice: come forward with his knowledge about the crime and risk being deported, or say nothing, and let justice go undone? Over the course of a single day, evaluating the weight of his past, his dreams for the future, and the unpredictable, often absurd reality of living invisibly and undocumented, he must wrestle with his conscience and decide if a person without rights still has responsibilities.

#### Burnt Sugar

by Avni Doshi. Hamish Hamilton,

ISBN 978-0241441510, £14.99

In her youth, Tara was wild. She abandoned her arranged marriage to join an ashram, took a hapless artist for a lover, rebelled against every social expectation of a good Indian woman – all with her young child in tow. Years on, she is an old woman with a fading memory, mixing up her maid's wages and leaving the gas on all night, and her grown-up daughter is faced with the task of caring for a mother who never seemed to care for her. This is a poisoned love story. But not between lovers – between mother and daughter. Sharp as a blade and laced with caustic wit, Burnt Sugar



#### Tokachi Millennium Forest: Pioneering a New Way of Gardening with Nature

by Dan Pearson. Filbert Press, ISBN 978-1999734541, £40

Twenty years ago, Dan Pearson was invited to make a garden at the 240-hectare Tokachi Millennium Forest in Hokkaido, Japan. Part of the intention was to entice city dwellers to reconnect with nature and improve land that had been lost to intensive agriculture and this was achieved along with much more. By tuning into the physical and cultural essence of the place and applying a light touch in terms of cultivation, this world-class designer created a remarkable place which has its heart in Japan's long-held respect for nature and its head in contemporary ecological planting design. The bold, uplifting sweep of the Meadow Garden mixes garden plants with natives while the undulating landforms of the Earth Garden bring sculptural connection with the mountains beyond. Under the skilful custodianship of Midori Shintani, the garden has evolved beautifully to reflect principles that lie at the heart of Japanese culture: observation of seasonal changes, practical tasks carried out with care and an awareness of the inter-connectedness of all living things. This book allows us all to experience something of the Tokachi effect, gain expert insights into how to plant gardens that feel right for their location, and reconnect with the land and wildlife that surround us.

gradually untangles the knot of memory and myth that bind two women together, revealing the truth that lies beneath.

#### Small Days and Nights

by Tishani Doshi

Bloomsbury ISBN 978-1526603739, £8.99

Escaping her failing marriage, Grace has returned to Pondicherry to cremate her mother. Once there, she finds herself heir to an unexpected inheritance. First, there is the strange pink house, blue-shuttered, out on a spit of the wild beach, haunted by the rattle of fishermen in their catamarans. And then there is the

sister she never knew she had: Lucia, who has spent her life in a residential facility. Soon Grace sets up a new and precarious life in this lush, melancholy wilderness, with Lucia, the village housekeeper Mallika, the drily witty Auntie Kavitha and an ever-multiplying litter of puppies. Here in Paramankeni, with its vacant bus stops colonised by flying foxes, its temples and step-wells shielded by canopies of teak and tamarind, where every dusk the fishermen line the beach smoking and mending their nets, Grace feels that she has come to the very end of the world.

#### Midnight at Malabar House

By Vaseem Khan

Hodder, ISBN 978-1473685468, £16.99

As India celebrates the arrival of a momentous new decade, Inspector Persis Wadia stands vigil in the basement of Malabar House, home to the city's most unwanted unit of police officers. Six months after joining the force she remains India's first female police detective, mistrusted, side-lined and now consigned to the midnight shift. And so, when the phone rings to report the murder of prominent English diplomat Sir James Herriot, the country's most sensational case falls into her lap. As 1950 dawns and India prepares to become the world's largest republic, Persis, accompanied by Scotland Yard criminalist Archie Blackfinch, finds herself investigating a case that is becoming more political by the second. Navigating a country and society in turmoil, Persis must find a way to solve the murder – whatever the cost.

#### The Case of the Reincarnated Client

by Tarquin Hall. Severn House Publishers, ISBN 978-0727888785, £25

When a young woman comes forward claiming to be the reincarnation of Riya Kaur, a wife and mother who vanished during the bloody 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Puri is dismissive. He is busy enough dealing with an irate matrimonial client whose daughter is complaining about her groom's thunderous snoring. Puri's indomitable Mummy-ji, however, is adamant the client is genuine. How else could she so accurately describe under hypnosis Riya Kaur's life and final hours? Forced into an alliance with his mother that tests his beliefs and high blood pressure as never before, it is only by delving into the past the help of his reincarnated client that Puri can hope to unlock the truth.

## Miscellaneous

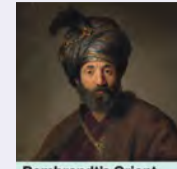
#### Waves Across the South:

#### A New History of Revolution and Empire

by Sujit Sivasundaram

William Collins, ISBN 978-0007575541, £25

After revolutions in America and France, a wave of tumult coursed the globe from 1790 to 1850. It was a moment of unprecedented change and violence especially for indigenous peoples. By 1850, vibrant public debate between colonised communities had exploded in port cities. Yet in the midst of all of this, Britain struck out by sea and established its supremacy over the Indian and Pacific Oceans, overtaking the French and Dutch as well as other rivals. Cambridge historian Sujit Sivasundaram brings together his work in far-flung archives across the world and the best new academic research in this remarkably creative book. This book traces the origins of our times from the perspective of indigenous and non-European people in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. From Aboriginal Australians to Parsis and from Mauritians to Malays, people asserted their place and their future as the



#### Rembrandt's Orient:

#### West Meets East in Dutch Art of the 17th Century

edited by Ortrud Westheider, Josef Helfenstein, Bodo Brinkman and Michael Philipp. Prestel, ISBN 978-791359632, £39.99

In the 17th century, Amsterdam was a vibrant hub of the burgeoning European trade with Asia, Africa, and the Levant, importing copious amounts of foreign items that powerfully stimulated the imagination of numerous Dutch artists. This was notably the case with Rembrandt, whose curiosity and voraciousness as a collector were legendary in his time. Throughout his prolific career, he drew on Eastern influences in genres as diverse as history painting and portraiture, including depictions in which he himself adopted Oriental styled attire. The book explores the inventive ways in which Rembrandt and his contemporaries accommodated Eastern imagery into their own repertoire, set within the wider context of Holland's rapidly expanding commercial and cultural exchange with its non-European trading partners.

British empire drove unexpected change. The book insists on the significance of the environment; the waves of the Bay of Bengal or the Tasman Sea were the context for this story. Sivasundaram tells how revolution, empire and counter-revolt crashed in the global South. Naval war, imperial rivalry and oceanic trade had their parts to play, but so did hope, false promise, rebellion, knowledge and the pursuit of being modern.

#### Walking in Circles: Finding Happiness in Lost Japan

by Todd Wassel

Jizo Press, ISBN 978-1735311609, £11.95

Todd Wassel fled a normal life just after university. Over half a decade later he is lost in Japan. Convinced there was more to life, he returns to the one place he found answers years before: the ancient Shikoku Henro pilgrimage. Between the 88 Buddhist temples, he finds help from a wandering ascetic hiding from the Freemasons; naked Yakuza trying to shake him down; a scam artist pilgrim; and a vengeful monk. He draws on over 20 years in Japan to retell his epic journey through the contradictions of contemporary Japan while overcoming the forces that keep us from living a truly happy life.



#### Mapping the Great Game:

#### Explorers, Spies and Maps in 19th-century Asia

by Riaz Dean. Casemate Publishers, ISBN 978-1612008141, £20

Although the ultimate prize of the Great Game played out between Great Britain and Imperial Russia in the 19th century was India, most of the intrigue and action took place along its northern frontier in Afghanistan, Turkestan and Tibet. Maps and

knowledge of the enemy were crucial elements in Britain's struggle to defend the 'jewel in the crown.' The Great Trigonometrical Survey of India had been founded in the 18th century with the aim of creating a detailed map of the country. While most people today are readily able to identify the world's highest mountain, few know of the man, George Everest, after whom it was named, or the accomplishment that earned him this singular honour. Under his leadership, the Survey of India mapped the Great Arc, which was then lauded as 'one of the greatest works in the whole history of science,' though it cost more in monetary terms and human lives than many contemporary Indian wars.

Much of the work of the Survey was undertaken by native Indians, known as Pundits, who were trained to explore, spy out and map Central Asia and Tibet. They did this at great personal risk and with meagre resources, while travelling entirely on foot. They would be the first to reveal the mysteries of the forbidden city of Lhasa, and discover the true course of Tibet's mighty Tsangpo River. They were the greatest group of explorers the world has seen in recent history – yet they remain the classic unsung heroes of the British Raj. The story of these extraordinary pioneers who explored much of Asia during the 19th century to fill in large portions of its map, and spy out the region for military reasons is often forgotten, but Riaz Dean's vivid account of their exploits, their adventurous spirit and their tenacity in the face of great adversity, all set within the context of the Great Game and the Survey of India, will finally bring them the attention they deserve.

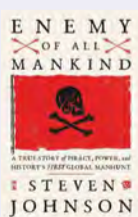


#### Underground Asia:

#### Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire

by Tim Harper. Allen Lane, ISBN 978-1846145629, £35

The end of Europe's empires has so often been seen as a story of high politics and warfare. In Tim Harper's new book the narrative is very different: it shows how empires were fundamentally undermined from below. Using the new technology of cheap printing presses, global travel and the widespread use of French and English, young radicals from across Asia were able to communicate in ways simply not available before. These clandestine networks stretched to the heart of the imperial metropolises: to London, to Paris, to the Americas, but also increasingly to Moscow. They created a secret global network which was for decades engaged in bitter fighting with imperial police forces. They gathered in the great hubs of Asia – Calcutta, Singapore, Batavia, Hanoi, Tokyo, Shanghai, Canton and Hong Kong – and plotted with ceaseless ingenuity, both through persuasion and terrorism, the end of the colonial regimes. Many were caught and killed or imprisoned, but others would go on to rule their newly independent countries. Drawing on an array of new sources, the turns upside-down our understanding of 20th-century empire.



#### Enemy of All Mankind: A True Story of Piracy, Power, and History's First Global Manhunt

by Steven Johnson. Riverhead, ISBN 978-0593187616, £14.99

Henry Avery was the 17th century's most notorious pirate. The press published wildly popular – and wildly inaccurate – reports of his nefarious adventures. The British government offered enormous bounties for his capture, alive or (preferably) dead. But Steven Johnson argues that Avery's most lasting legacy was his inadvertent triggering of a new model for the global economy. It focuses on one key event – the attack of an Indian treasure ship by Avery and his crew – and the surprising repercussions across time and space. Johnson uses the extraordinary story of Henry Avery and his crimes to explore the emergence of the modern global marketplace: a densely interconnected planet ruled by nations and corporations. The book crosses disciplinary boundaries to recount its history: the chemistry behind the invention of gunpowder; the innovations in navigation that enabled the age of exploration; the cultural history of pirates; the biographical history of Avery and his crew; the rise of the Mughal dynasty; and the commercial ambition of the East India Company.



The artist with Prosperous Descendants (2016) © Wu Ching

## TREASURES IN GOLD & JADE

This exhibition highlights the work of two of Taiwan's premier artists: Wu Ching, a sculptor who creates intricate carvings which he translates to pure gold using a classic lost wax technique; and Huang Fu-shou, whose skill for jade carving allows him to create impossibly delicate forms. The gold that Wu Ching works is a malleable, brilliant yellow that is associated with enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition; Huang Fu-shou carves in both jadeite and nephrite.

On show are 27 jade carvings by Huang Fu-Shou in a surprising range of colours. The focus is on nature, often carved from a single stone, with fish springing from water, insects weightlessly clinging to blades of grass, and stone bending with litheness of fabric each push the boundaries of what is possible with the rigid medium. Poems by the artist accompany each artwork.



A Tribute to Autumn, series 1 © Huang Fu-shou

Alongside these works are 17 gold sculptures by Wu Ching – in *Reminiscences of Rustic Pleasures*, a work which took over three years to complete, where over 500 ants and various insects swarm in a flurry of activity. In *Prosperous Descendants*, Wu Ching recalls his childhood memories playing under the melon vines. They grow along bamboo scaffolds made from bronze, with an array of bugs on top. This piece consists of

thousands of components in all sizes, which is made by using the 'oxyhydrogen welding' technique at a high temperature before being assembled.

- From 12 December until 30 May 2021, Treasures in Gold & Jade: Masterworks from Taiwan is presented by the Bowers Museum and the Taiwan Academy in Los Angeles, Bowers Museum, Santa Anna, California, bowers.org

## REMBRANDT'S ORIENT

For someone who, for all we know, never left his native country, Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn had a strikingly broad horizon. As an artist, collector, and citizen, he came into contact with artefacts, objects of utility, and humans from all parts of the known world. Rembrandt's curiosity about everything foreign and his insatiable collector's appetite were legendary even in his lifetime and part and parcel of his singular creative genius. Amsterdam, the centre of his life, was the perfect place for a man of such boundless interests: the Dutch East and West India Companies had their headquarters and home port here, as did other trading partnerships. In the 17th century, the city was a true cultural melting pot. Legates and merchants from far-flung places were a daily sight in the streets of the young Dutch Republic.

The exhibition focuses on



Portrait of a Man in Oriental Clothing (1635) by Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo: Julian Salinas

one of the most consequential strands in this constellation: the Orient – an umbrella term for diverse Eastern non-European cultures rather than a well-defined geographic designation—fired Rembrandt's imagination throughout his career. It inspired the painter as he envisioned the

settings of biblical histories, one of his favourite genres. Several self-portraits show the artist in exotic costumes. His copies of miniatures created at the court of the Great Mughals were a tribute to Asian creativity and taste without precedent in Dutch art. Last but not least, he was an eager consumer of Japanese paper, which he liked to use for his etchings.

The exhibition is not limited to Rembrandt's oeuvre, in addition to works by his colleagues and students, the show includes publications and other sources that illustrate the contemporary vision of the Orient. Placing Rembrandt's work in this broader context reveals both the ways in which his take on the East was typical of his time and what set his perspective on its cultures apart from those of his contemporaries.

- Until 14 February, 2021, Kunstmuseum Basel, kunstmuseumbasel.ch



## THE CONJUROR'S TRICK

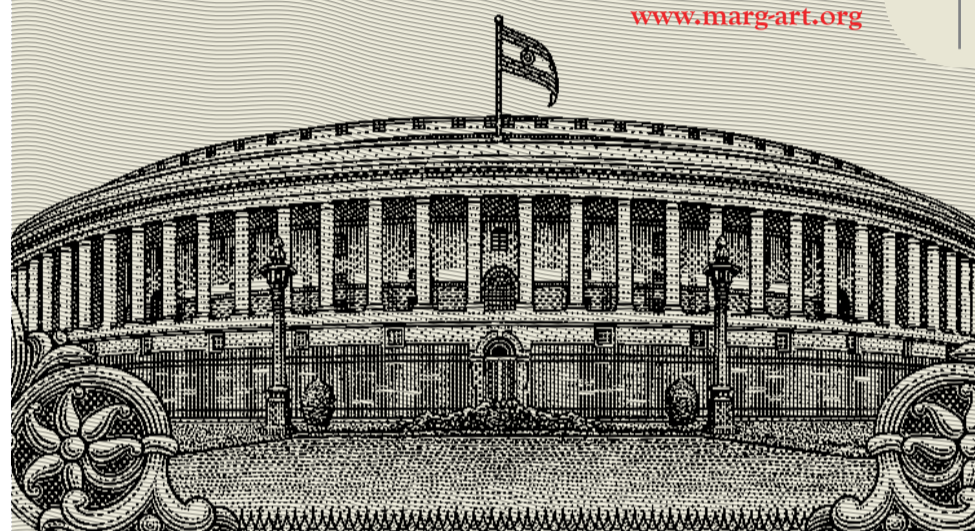
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Olivia Sand

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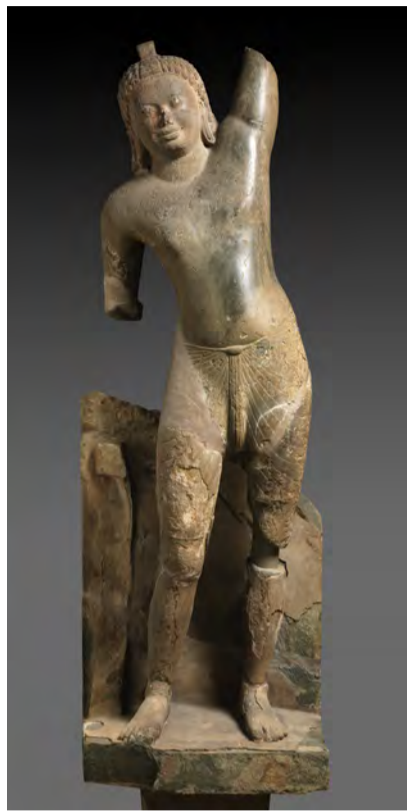


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# REVEALING KRISHNA

## Journey to Cambodia's Sacred Mountain

At Cleveland, this is the first exhibition dedicated to the art of one of the earliest major Hindu sites in Southeast Asia, Phnom Da (Stone Mountain), established around 1,500 years ago. Through a series of refined and immersive digital experiences, the exhibition presents the Cleveland Museum of Art's monumental sandstone sculpture, Krishna Lifting Mount Govardhan, in the context of the landscape and sacred space from which it came. In honour of its most recent transformation, the newly restored Cleveland Krishna is shown alongside nine related masterworks of stone sculpture on loan from Cambodia and France. The significance of the mountain-raising episode from India's myth of the superhuman child-god Krishna reached a high point between 5th and



Krishna Lifting Mount Govardhan, circa 600, southern Cambodia, Takeo Province, Phnom Da, pre-Angkorian period (600–802). sandstone; height 244 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund



**LISTEN** to the history of this sculpture narrated by Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art, along with videos on Krishna and early Cambodian art

7th century. At the same time, Southeast Asian people were beginning to adopt religious art, texts, and ritual practices from India, reconceived for their own purposes. In the Mekong River delta of southern Cambodia, which was a centre of political power until the 700s, control of floodwaters meant economic success. The powerful image of Krishna holding up Mount Govardhan to shield his followers from destructive deluge held special relevance to the population of this region. In the exhibition, cinematic projections of 360-degree video with surround sound transport visitors to the canal ways of the Mekong delta to see how pilgrims journeyed by boat to the site where Krishna and his counterparts were worshiped. ● Until 30 January, 2021, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, [clevelandart.org](http://clevelandart.org)



Rama's wedding with Sita, folio from a Ramayana series, unknown artist in Lakhnau, India, Uttar Pradesh, circa 1775, Collection Alice Boner, Museum Rietberg

## PERSPECTIVES

Between the 15th and 19th centuries, space and architecture in Indian miniature painting shifted from providing a mere backdrop to incorporating a unique combination of multiple perspectives. This kind of multi experience of perspective allowed viewers to immerse themselves in the scenes and get a grasp of objects and aspects that would not be visible from a one-point perspective. In the art of the Indian sub-continent, the history of perspective took a different turn. In the 12th century, bodies were represented in perspective space and granted pronounced plasticity by using fine colour gradations, but this kind of spatiality went out of fashion

again in the course of the following centuries. Through the increased encounter with and knowledge of European art, different kinds of perspective gradually found their way into the repertoire of Indian miniature painters. Parallel perspective, important above all in architecture, and central perspective began being used in Indian miniature painting to capture spatiality from the mid-17th century onwards, but often in a highly creative mode which, on the one hand, took into account local habits of viewing, while, on the other, maintaining conventional artistic practices and existing traditions. ● Until 14 March, 2021, Museum Rietberg, Zurich, [rietberg.ch](http://rietberg.ch)

## FIONA TAN

### With The Other Hand



Gray Glass (2020) by Fiona Tan, three-channel ultra-high-definition video installation. Video (black and white, stereo sound), still. Commissioned by the Museum der Moderne Salzburg. With support from Mondrian Fund, NL, Museum der Moderne Salzburg. Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, Peter Freeman Inc., New York, Wako Works of Art, Tokyo

In co-operation with the Austrian Museum der Moderne Salzburg, the Kunsthalle Krems is showing a mid-career retrospective of the multi-media artist Fiona Tan (b 1966). Internationally known for her films, videos and installations, her work brings together aesthetic features through a sociological lens. Indeed, over the years, Fiona Tan has kept questioning decisions, investigating relevant issues, highlighting aspects that have remained hidden. Exploring issues such as memory, time, and history, she encourages the audience to consider alternative points of view

than the commonly acknowledged ones. Through her work, and on a broader scale, she is hoping to trigger an individual as well as a collective reflection. Besides showcasing earlier works, both exhibitions display recent projects such as *Archive* (2019) at the Kunsthalle Krems, as well as the specially commissioned piece *Grey Glass* (2020) at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg. **Olivia Sand** ● Until 14 February, 2021, at Kunsthalle Krems, [kunsthalle.at](http://kunsthalle.at); and until 21 February, 2021, at Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria, [museumdermoderne.at](http://museumdermoderne.at)



Mari Katayama Bystander #016 (2016) by Mari Katayama © Mari Katayama

## MARI KATAYAMA

### Home Again

Japanese artist Mari Katayama (b 1987, Japan) came to attention during the last Biennale in Venice where a series of her photographs was shown at the Arsenale. Working in the form of self-portraits, the artist does not shy away from including her full body in her pieces, turning into an advantage an illness that strongly impacted her life. Suffering from a rare congenital illness, Mari Katayama had to have some of her limbs amputated when she was still a child. As a result, her photographs are based on a sophisticated mise-en-scène, where she is endorsing numerous personalities, with her body blurring into the background through outfits she has created. With simple means, Mari Katayama is making a clear statement, questioning our standards when it comes to beauty and challenging the notion of handicap. With a lot of will power and imagination, she has created a striking body of work that cannot be overlooked by the viewer. **Olivia Sand** ● From 8 January to 28 February, 2021, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, [mep-fr.org](http://mep-fr.org)

## ALI BANISADR / MATRIX 185



Red (2020) by Ali Banisadr, oil on linen. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York

In order to provide an insight not only into the work of Ali Banisadr (b 1976), but also into his creative process, the museum is relying on a most interesting approach: presenting Ali Banisadr's paintings, with the artist also curating the museum's Matrix Gallery, bringing together pieces that have caught his artistic interest. His selection illustrates his openness towards other cultures, other centuries, and other artists. In addition, the museum has also set up a playlist compiled by the artist in order to show how sounds from the music he listens to while painting translate into

his work. Born in Iran in 1968 and based in New York, Ali Banisadr's work provides a bird's-eye view of our present world, echoing the sounds, events, energies that surround us. Receptive to what is happening in the outside world, he is trying to put a certain distance between the events and himself, attempting to translate them in an objective way. A testimonial of the various circumstances of our time, for better and for worse. **Olivia Sand** ● Until 14 February, 2021, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, [thewadsworth.org](http://thewadsworth.org)

## STRANGE ATTRACTORS

Tate St Ives presents *Strange Attractors*, the UK's largest exhibition to date by South Korean artist Haegue Yang. Yang is renowned for creating immersive environments from a diverse range of materials. Her sculptures and installations often use industrially made objects, interwoven with labour-intensive and craft-based processes. These processes reflect pagan cultures and their deep connection with various seasonal rituals in relation to natural phenomena. The exhibition's title is a concept taken from mathematics and relates to complex patterns of behaviour in chaotic natural systems. Taking this theory as a starting point, Yang's exhibition creates an environment in which uncanny and seemingly disparate ideas, cultures, relations and time periods coexist. ● Until 3 May, 2021 at Tate St Ives, Cornwall, [tate.org](http://tate.org)



**WATCH** a preview of *Strange Attractors*

Sonic Intermediates (2020) by Haegue Yang. Photo: Nick Ash

# Islamic Arts Diary

By Lucien de Guise

## BUY, SELL, OR HOLD?

Last month's star attraction in this column was a sale that ended up not happening when it was supposed to. This was not the fault of Covid-19, but meddling politicians instead. Sotheby's announced the auction was to be moved from October to November but at the time of writing it was unclear whether the selected works from the LA Mayer Institute for Islamic Art would be on the block at all. It seems that the President of Israel took exception to these mostly duplicate works being sold. Although the museum needs the money to stay afloat, it is not known whether the Israeli government will do anything to help. It is, of course, Muslim heritage that is up for sale. For once, the authorities have taken an interest in this although the museum is a private institution. The purpose of raising the funds was to foster cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Are these perhaps not of much concern to the government?

Meanwhile, many other institutions have been de-accessioning due to the current visitor-unfriendly climate. The Brooklyn Museum got away with it while Baltimore did not. None of these involved Islamic works, which the public tends to be less



One of JF Lewis' most important works, *The Bezestein Bazaar of El Khan Khalil, Cairo*, recently came up for sale at Christie's, London

sentimental about than Monet and Matisse. Brooklyn still managed to sell these big names to ward off financial collapse while the Baltimore Museum was prevented from selling what is, in America at least, the hottest property of all: 20th-century American masters. Clyfford Still and Brice Marden were withdrawn.

One category that museum trustees get even less worked up about than Islamic art is Orientalist paintings. Only in France are works by the likes of J-L Gerome seen as essential heritage. Christie's, London, this month is selling a part of British heritage that will arouse no interest from the local authorities because they have probably never heard of the artist and care little about the subject matter. *The Bezestein Bazaar of El Khan Khalil, Cairo* by John Frederick Lewis was an important painting in its day, back in the 1870s. There is an admirable amount of detail about it in the catalogue essay written by Briony Llewellyn, the supreme authority on Lewis. So popular was this work when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874, the newspapers were full of reviews lauding Lewis' abilities. The *Illustrated London News* described it as, 'wonderful as illustrations of Cairene life, manners, habits, costumes, and architecture in a thousand minutiae'. One has to



Will the Israeli government show mercy towards the LA Mayer Museum of Islamic Art?

wonder how many art lovers would be bothered now with the minutiae of any city in the Muslim world. At the time, their fascination was immense. The painting was pre-sold to a prosperous wool merchant, who in turn was offered the astonishing sum of £10,000 for it. He declined, as he loved the work so much.

In November 2020, it also had an impressive estimate attached. From £3-5 million is a large sum for a Victorian work. It is certain it will not be an art-loving northern mill owner or wool trader who buys it this time around. Whilst interest in Middle Eastern daily life is negligible in the West, it is building up in the region that inspired works such as this. Lewis' paintings provide a remarkable view of lives that are often humble and unglamorous. This bazaar is no harem filled with odalisques. It is almost entirely men, without even a donkey to give it some sentimental interest. It is still a relatively faithful record, from a time before colour photography, by an artist who lived the life. Lewis immersed himself so much in local ways, it's likely that he also inserted his own portrait in this painting.

## MORE THAN THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE MID WEST

Many of the great museum collections of Islamic art were formed in the 19th century. Those supposedly staid Victorians were more forward looking than many of their modern counterparts. America could be going through a creative renaissance with a more artistically aware administration on the way, but it would be hard to rival the days of the Robber Barons. A city such as Minneapolis ended up with the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MiA), which is still trying harder than most to engage with these diverse forms of art. Its latest exhibition is *Khatt Islami: Sacred Scripts from Islamic Africa*.

This combines two of the least understood – to Western audiences – cultural phenomena in existence. The Sub-Saharan form of Islam is especially neglected,

including those societies in the Islamic heartlands that look down on manifestations from regions such as Southeast Asia and the less-Arab parts of Africa. This is one of those rare exhibitions to put things right. Showing how multicultural the city of Minneapolis has become, the MiA has enlisted the help of the Somali Museum of Minnesota. I wonder how many cities outside Somalia have any such institutions. In this case, the two museums have come together to use a smallish number of objects from the MiA collection to demonstrate the marvels of calligraphy.

There are textiles, blades and a vase by a contemporary ceramicist. For me, the most glorious items from Islamic Africa are the writing boards that are still used for children to practise the written form of



White Vase, 2016, by Khaled Ben Slimane. Glazed ceramic. Gift of funds from Tamara and Michael Root and the Norman Gabrick Endowment for African Art

the *Qur'an*. There was a time, before the arrival of paper, when the whole Islamic world would have used these wooden boards. They can be wiped clean after use, until the day the students get the writing absolutely correct. The boards are then kept in that state. Needless to say, they go beyond the obvious needs of education; they work as protective amulets too. Just in case all of this seems a bit too visual, the MiA has also brought in Sufi singing so there is something for everyone who visits with an open mind.

● Exhibition ends 1 August 2021

## RISD FACTOR

Another US institution that is bringing Islamic culture to the fore is the Rhode Island School of Design. This is a revered place of learning that has been around since 1877. Like so many other locations in America, it has a long interest in the Muslim world. This is apparent in the latest exhibition, *It Comes in Many Forms: Islamic Art from the Collection*. From the school's vast archives comes a huge variety of objects to show that Islam is far from being a monolithic culture. Most exciting for lovers of fashion is that there will be a number of clothing items on display. These go back as far as the 12th century, in



Front and back of a sweater by Azzedine Alaïa, 2005, at the Rhode Island School of Design

the case of an Egyptian textile fragment, wonderfully preserved in the low humidity of that region. At the more contemporary end of the spectrum is a women's jacket by Azzedine Alaïa. Although I have to confess to knowing almost nothing of this Tunisian prodigy, he was a huge phenomenon in fashion before dying three years ago. Victoria Beckham cited him

as her favourite designer, so he must have been remarkable. The Islamic element is not so clear, but Azzedine's work does fit in with the diversity that is on show. There is lots of information about migration, diasporas and cross-cultural exchange.

● *It Comes in Many Forms: Islamic Art from the Collection* ends 6 June 2021

## DORIS' DAY CONTINUES

About as far from Rhode Island as you can get, while still being in the US, is Hawaii. This is where one of the most remarkable collections of Islamic art has been housed for decades.

The ocean-side home of the late Doris Duke is the idyllic setting for Shangri La, which has been closed for many months due to Covid-19. This does not mean that Shangri La has given up on exhibitions though. At the Honolulu Museum of Art there is currently one project created by Shangri La. There is another online. The concern of both institutions before the recent election was expressed clearly: 'A global pandemic. An economic crisis. A national reckoning with racism. Where do we go from here? What is America's future?'



Kamran Samimi, artist-in-residence at Doris Duke's Shangri La

The answer is *Kamran Samimi: In Stillness and American Muslim Futures*. The latter is actually an online exhibition of work that pairs the creativity of visual and performing artists with the conviction of civil rights advocates to realise new civic futures where all Americans live free from hate and discrimination.

Let us see whether this has suddenly become achievable. Probably not before the exhibition ends, which is 31 December 2020.

The Kamran Samimi exhibition is a more conventional show, being a solo by Shangri La artist-in-residence Kamran Samimi. He explores instances of change, transformation, and the passage of time. His works silently present the question: 'What may happen in and during apparent emptiness?' The artist explores how in-between spaces are full of meaning, expanses of hidden possibility, and moments to see connections between things. He has been given more time for this exploration as the exhibition doesn't end till August next year.



The admirable simplicity of the Sacred Scripts exhibition in Minneapolis, with writing boards prominently displayed

# ASIAN ART

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## AUCTION RECORD FOR HOKUSAI'S GREAT WAVE

The iconic Japanese print *The Great Wave* ruled the waves in Christie's New York September sale of Japanese and Korean Art. The work achieved \$1,110,000 against a low estimate of \$150,000 and set a world auction record for a print by the artist. Two other famous prints by the artist, commonly known as the *Red Fuji*, or *Fine Wind, Clear Skies* (*Gaifu kaisei*), sold for \$337,500 (est \$100-200,000), and *Storm Below the Summit* (*Shirane bakari*), from the same series, published late 1831, realized \$137,500, against an estimate of \$60-80,000. Two other Hokusai lots sold on or over \$100,000, *New Year's Day in the Yoshinoya* achieved \$125,000 (est \$100-200,000) and *Namabiki* (*Flowers above Hizen*), a set of 12 prints, sold for \$100,000 (est \$80-120,000).

This series revived Hokusai's career after personal challenges of the late 1820s. The Great Wave, with its use of deep perspective and imported Prussian blue pigment, reflects how Hokusai adapted and experimented with European artistic style. On this famous print, whose official title is *Under the Wall of the Great Wave at Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa-oki nami-ura*), Hokusai used less than 10 colours; he was ingenious in the use of lines and in the construction of an effective composition similar to a contemporary commercial poster, moreover, he exploited the newly imported brilliant Prussian blue (*Berlin ai*) to capture and surprise the public.

Other lots that performed well in this Christie's sale included a pair of six-panel folding screens (*byōbu*) by Kano Tsumenobu (1636-1713), *Chrysanthemum Blooming in a Garden*, ink, colour, *gōgan*, gold and gold leaf on paper that sold for \$175,000. Several paintings by Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891) also performed well, including the hanging scroll *Long-*



Under the wall of the Great Wave off Kanagawa by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), woodblock print from the series Thirty-Six Views of Mt Fuji, 25.7 x 38.1 cm, sold for \$1,100,000 at Christie's New York on 22 September, 2020, achieving a world auction record for the artist

*tailed Rooster*, ink, lacquer and gold on paper (1854-1936), which sold for US\$4,000 (est US\$15-25,000) and *Waterfall*, a hanging scroll, ink and light colour on paper, which

(*Kanbara yoru no yuki*), circa 1834, from the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*.

Additionally, modern and contemporary works performed with strong results including Choo (*Chōshūanzen*), from 1969, by Morita Shiryū (1912-1998) that realized \$137,500, against an estimate of \$50-70,000. *Jigen* (*Manifestation*) by Kato Giran (b 1968), a carved wooden sculpture of just over 110 cm was also popular and sold for \$312,500, against an estimate of \$30-40,000.

Featured Korean works included a blue and white porcelain jar with three worthies playing *suigi*, Joseon dynasty that sold for \$750,000, and an eight-panel screen from the circle of Kim Hongdo (1745-1806), *Hunting Scene*, that achieved \$930,000 against a low estimate of \$100,000.

The sale totalled \$8,475,000 with 82% sold by lot and 84% sold by value. For more news from the New York September sales, see the auction pages in this issue.



### RONIN GALLERY

The Largest Collection of Japanese Prints in the U.S., Asian Contemporary Art

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### ARTES MUNDI PRIZE

Artes Mundi 9 will take place from 13 February 2021 to 6 June 2021 in Wales, across three venues, National Museum Cardiff, Chapter and g39. For this edition the winner of the Artes Mundi 9 Prize will be announced ahead of the exhibition opening on 11 February, instead of towards the end of the exhibition as in previous years. Artes Mundi presents the UK's leading international contemporary art prize and is an important arbiter of cultural exchange between the UK and the international visual arts community. The Artes Mundi 9 Shortlist includes: Tizki Batez (Dominican Republic), Dineo Sebehe Bopape (South Africa), Meizo Kojirumi (Japan), Beatriz Santiago (India)

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The image shows a laptop and a smartphone displaying the magazine's content. The laptop screen shows the '2 Profile' section featuring Izumi Kato, with her name in large letters and a photograph of her. Below her name is a 'NEWS IN BRIEF' section with several short articles. The smartphone screen shows the magazine's masthead 'ASIAN ART' and a 'Our October Issue' section with a list of articles and small images of artworks.

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