

ASIAN ART

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ONLINE SALES ACHIEVE HIGH PRICES IN INDIA

India's auction market is defying coronavirus conservatism – if the results achieved at an online auction in Mumbai are anything to go by.

Last month, in an online auction in Mumbai, an untitled 1974 oil-on-canvas painting by VS Gaitonde became the most expensive work of art by an Indian artist sold at auction when it fetched Rs32 crore (US\$5 million). It was sold by Pundole's, an auction house and art gallery specialising in Indian art. The work, bought by an unnamed international buyer, was part of an auction entitled *Looking West: Works from the Collection of the Glenbarra Art Museum, Japan*. The Glenbarra Art Museum is owned by Japanese businessman and prominent art collector Masanori Fukuoka, who has one of the foremost collections of modern Indian art in the world today.

The museum's collection includes works by Akbar Padamsee, Frances Newton Souza, Ganesh Pyne, Krishen Khanna, Manjit Bawa, Ram Kumar, SH Raza, Tyeb Mehta – a gathering of all the most influential

modern Indian artists. In 1997, a travelling exhibition of the collection was seen in New Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Mumbai.

The untitled 1974 painting was also part of The Guggenheim's retrospective of Gaitonde's work in a 2015 exhibition held in New York and Venice, entitled *VS Gaitonde: Painting as Process, Painting as Life*.

The September sale breaks the record previously held by another work by Gaitonde that fetched Rs29.3 crore at a Christie's auction in Mumbai in 2015. *Saurashtra* by SH Raza, which fetched Rs 16.3 crore in 2010 and a self-portrait by Amrita Sher-Gil that fetched US\$3.2 million at a New York auction in 2015 have been among other works that have held the title of the most expensive work sold at auction by an Indian artist at different times over the last decade.

Another untitled work by the artist, an ink on paper from 1985, sold for Rs 3,800,000, against an estimate of Rs500-700,000 – with a third dating from 1987 selling for Rs4,000,000 (est Rs500-700,000). In the



Untitled (1974), oil on canvas by VS Gaitonde, 152.5 x 101.6 cm, achieved Rs32 crore (US\$5 million) at Pundole's auction on 3 September in Mumbai

Pundole's sale on 3 and 4 September, another artist, Jagdish Swaminathan, also performed well – his untitled 1993 work fetched over Rs10 crore (US\$1.5 million), setting a new record for the artist by selling for more than three times its upper estimate. The sale achieved a sell-through rate of 98%, impressive in the current turbulent economic times.

A week earlier, an online auction organised by AstaGuru, also in Mumbai, offered a sale devoted to the works of MF Husain. The top lot was *Horses*, 53 x 226 inches, an oil on canvas, from 1958, which sold for Rs16 crore (US\$2.2 million). It was the first time the work had been offered at auction and had created a lot of pre-sale interest amongst collectors.

Saffronart, Christie's, and Sotheby's all had sales at the end of September, this will test the market further to see if the current flurry of high bids will continue through the autumn. Results of these late September sales were unavailable at time of going to press.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

THE ART MUSEUM OPENS, CHINA

The He Art Museum is opening on 1 October, in Shunde, southern China, after a postponement earlier in the year. Designed by Pritzker Prize laureate Tadao Ando, the museum will be home to the He family's art collection, which comprises more than 500 works ranging from painting, calligraphy, photography, to sculpture, and mainly falls into three catalogues: International Contemporary Art, Chinese Modern Art, and Chinese Contemporary Art. The inaugural exhibition is *From the Mundane World*, which explores the relationship of mankind with nature. The museum also holds a collection of Lingnan-style ink art and items relating to Cantonese opera. More information on hem.org.

GANDHI'S GLASSES, LONDON

A pair of gold-plated glasses worn by Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi has sold in Britain for £260,000, more than 17 times the original estimate (£10-15,000). The glasses were found stuck in a letter box at East Bristol Auctions, in the southwest of England. When opened, an accompanying letter stated 'These belonged to Gandhi, and my uncle was given them'. The auctioneer said the owner told him the glasses had been handed down from generation to generation in the owner's family, after a relative met Gandhi on a visit to South Africa in the 1920s. The glasses were eventually traced to an elderly gentleman and were put up for sale at the end of August.

ISLAMIC COINS, ISRAEL

Two volunteers taking part in an archaeological dig have unearthed gold coins dating to the Abbasid Caliphate. The site, near Tel Aviv in central Israel, produced 425 gold coins. They were discovered in

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TAMINA AMADYAR

By Olivia Sand

Tamina Amadyar's paintings are a celebration of colour, light, and life. With her work primarily based on the use of colour, she creates paintings that although undeniably in the realm of the Colour Field Movement, go far beyond it. Where most of her fellow painters' works evolve around figurative painting, Tamina Amadyar has found a fantastic way to bring together islands of colour with bold and vigorous brushstrokes with lines that follow their own path.

After moving from Afghanistan to Germany as a child, Amadyar (b 1989) is firmly anchored in everyday life, whilst using her unlimited imagination to transpose her ideas onto canvas. With a clear vision of the possibilities offered by the medium of painting, Amadyar talks to Asian Art Newspaper about her latest exhibition.

Asian Art Newspaper:
You currently have an exhibition of new work in Berlin. How would you describe your latest work?

Tamina Amadyar: The show was originally supposed to take place in May in conjunction with the gallery weekend in Berlin. Due to



Tamina Amadyar. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin

coronavirus, both events were postponed to September. My present exhibition features the paintings I have been working on during last winter until this spring. Therefore, the exhibition has been ready for a few months now, allowing me to have more distance towards the work than when I usually prepare a show. This body of work is the development of my previous work, using colour as my main visual topic. In the beginning, my work dealt with architecture, but it has become more organic over the past few years. Now, it is increasingly spread out across the canvas again, with colours taking and creating a lot of space.

To me, this body of work is the most accomplished, especially in terms of what I am trying to achieve with colour – and how I spread colour across the canvas. In addition, at the beginning of the year, I have been exploring using watercolours – there are a few included in this exhibition. Somehow, watercolour is a very unusual way to work for me. I never used it before as it is so different from the other materials I have been using so far that dry very quickly, where the work evolves around the brushstroke and you can see the process of how I paint. Watercolours, however, are more fluid. They flow, and break out into colour fields. I felt it was a much freer experience not to have so many sharp forms where the colour faces no working limitations or boundaries. As a result, the work is more

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NEWS IN BRIEF

what was an industrial area during the Byzantine period, some may be over 1,200 years old. The coins, which weigh less than two pounds and are made of pure gold, date to the 9th century, when the Abbasid Caliphate ruled a vast empire stretching from Persia in the east to North Africa in the west.

SMITHSONIAN, WASHINGTON DC

The Freer and Sackler Galleries have joined the National Museum of Asian Art to produce a free online music festival featuring world-renowned musicians from India, France, Iran and Morocco.

Transcendence is a free, four-part series featuring artists who underline the regional richness of the Sufi musical tradition. Performances take place at noon every Wednesday until 7 October. The final performance is by The Andalusian Sama of Tetouan, in which Zainab Afailal performs Sufi-inspired Andalusian songs from southern Spain and Morocco. She sings devotional music based on two forms of Arabic poetry – the *muwashshah* and the *Zajal* – from 11th- and 12th-century Spain. Afailal performs in a mode for generations believed to be reserved only for male performers. For more information on *Transcendence: A Virtual Sufi Music Festival* and to register for a performance, visit asia.si.edu.

BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

The BFI London Film Festival has

announced *LFF Expanded*: the festival's new dedicated strand of XR and Immersive Art. Using cinema as a jumping off point, *LFF Expanded* will be an expansive space for programming, featuring Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality and including live immersive performance. *LFF Expanded* will feature bold, innovative creators from around the world who use a range of creative techniques to ensure audiences are not in front a work of art, a film or a performance, but in the middle of it. *LFF Expanded* will be open throughout the BFI London Film Festival from 7 to 18 October. More information on the international films on bfi.org.uk.

CHRISTIE'S EDUCATION ONLINE CONFERENCE

Christie's Education is holding its first global virtual conference between 26 and 27 November. The conference will be the third in the International Art & the Market series, which launched in 2016. This conference will explore the global impact of the Chinese art ecosystem from both historical and current perspectives. Over two days, the conference will cover a wide range of disciplines which consider China's contribution to the arts from a transnational and trans-historical perspective. The conference is bilingual – in English and Mandarin, with translation provided. More information on christies.edu.

FINE ART ASIA HONG KONG

In light of the continued unprecedented challenges of coronavirus, the fair originally scheduled for October has been postponed to 27 to 30 November, with the preview on 26 November, at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. Get up-to-date information on fineartasia.com.

NEW DIGITAL MUSEUM FOR JEDDAH

The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Culture is preparing to set up an interactive digital museum in Jeddah in cooperation with the international Japanese digital art group teamLab. The new museum is part of a 10-year agreement between the ministry and teamLab under which the museum will be established in Jeddah by the beginning of 2023. TeamLab is specialised in designing digital museums in which arts and technology intersect in innovative creative spaces and is also known for its innovations in museums and interactive exhibits that provide a different emotional experience to visitors, using modern technologies and accurate software.

ASIAN ART NEWSPAPER BACK IN PRINT

Due to problems relating to coronavirus and the unpredictability of international post, three issues of Asian Art Newspaper have been interactive digital only., May, June,

and September 2020. The good news is that for this edition, we are back in print as well as producing our interactive issue. However, as postal systems around the world are still suffering huge delays, please bear with us if your issue is a little late. We have brought our production schedule forward to help with the distribution and delivery of the print issue.

TRADE TARIFFS, US-CHINA

As of 1 September 2020, the temporary exemptions that were granted to antique dealers specialising in Asian art, in regard to the taxes levied on Chinese art and antiques, have expired. Now Chinese art and antiques, including drawings, paintings, prints and sculpture, will be subject to a 7.5 per cent tax upon entering the US.

UBUD WRITERS' FESTIVAL GOES DIGITAL

The Indonesian literary festival has cancelled its physical event and announced its digital line-up, starting 29 October. *Kembali 2020* will welcome over 100 authors, artists, activists, chefs, farmers and more in meaningful conversations, cooking demos, as well as live performances. From Singapore to Sydney, Denpasar to Dubai, the full lineup is testament to the festival's cultural diversity. More information on the full programme can be found on ubudwritersfestival.com.

figurative and concrete: it is based on scenes from my everyday life and is very personal and intimate. At the end of the day, it is also about capturing a mood, an atmosphere. I feel my paintings capture the light and atmosphere and using watercolours helps me to do that in a much more concrete way.

AAN: What prompted you to work with watercolour?

TA: I have been drawing for as long as I can remember and, besides my paintings, I have always completed works on paper, mainly very concrete figurative drawings. It is only since this year that I began working with watercolours, because initially I always thought of it as a very uncontainable medium and it did not suit me to be in a process that I could not control. Strangely enough, when I started it, what interested me is precisely this watery liquid texture that I was unable to control! In a way, it forced me to go, quite literally, with the flow.

AAN: As you have been living with the pieces, as the original show date was postponed, you now have more distance from the paintings.

Over these past few months, did you retouch any of the works, or were you perfectly happy with the way you left them in the spring?

TA: I did not re-work them. I never do, because once the work is completed, it is done. However, I had the pieces hanging in my studio and I had a chance to look at them for a while longer, which was a wonderful experience, as generally the work leaves the studio once it is finished. I enjoyed it and I had the opportunity to observe what was working and what was not. I could see the pieces grow apart from me, but still be strong and have a life of their own.

AAN: While describing your latest work, you mentioned the term 'colour field'. People often associate your work with the Colour Field Movement. Do you agree?

TA: Let us say, I do not disagree with it, because when you look at it there are similarities and it would be strange to say there is nothing to compare. In my opinion, the difference lies in the fact that my paintings come from personal and concrete things that I have seen and experienced. As a result, they are not just expressive, or process-oriented, even though they are also developed through the process of painting and are very painterly. However, the motives and the ideas behind them come from things I see in everyday life, while travelling, or simply images from memory, like interiors and landscapes.

AAN: You studied in Düsseldorf with Danish artist Tal R (Rozenzweig, b 1967). Was that your personal choice, or part of the curriculum?

TA: That was my choice. At the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, you can apply to work with a professor with your teacher, who then chooses their students.

AAN: What prompted you to choose this artist in particular?

TA: Back then, I was young and new at art school. In general, I did not have firm ideas on art or painting. I had just finished school and was uneducated when it came to the whole idea of contemporary art. I heard Tal R speak about his work during an exhibition he had had and this intrigued me. I liked the way he was talking about his art as it was



Bel Air (2020), pigment, glutin on canvas, 200 x 160 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin. Photo: Roman März



Blue World (2020) pigment, glutin on canvas, 170 x 230 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin. Photo: Roman März

“
My paintings come from concrete things I have experienced
”

something I had not experienced before, or got from the books, or the lectures one usually hears. It was much more pictorial and lively, and I truly enjoyed the fact that I could easily talk about my work with him. Besides, I personally also liked his work, but it was mainly the way he was talking and his teaching method that made the difference.

AAN: Retrospectively, what impact did studying with Tal R have on your work?

TA: When discussing my work with him, he always gave me a lot of space, never urging me to do this or discouraging me to do that. It was more about him helping me to find my way by myself. To me, the most interesting parts were the talks about other student's work, this was where I learned the most, it

encouraged me to assess, from a different angle and perspective, what painting could be and what art could be. It was more of a general idea, or even a metaphysical idea, to try to understand what maybe was already inside me.

AAN: You mentioned 'what painting could be'. In your opinion, if you were to summarise this, what would you say?

TA: That is a good question. First, of course, it could be anything and it should be free. As I am presently also teaching, discussion is something that I emphasise to my students at art school. I tell them they should not think of an idea, or what has been taught in the theoretical classes, or what they know about art, they should free-thinking. In my opinion, once you start painting or making work, you should be completely independent from any idea, from any expectation, be this your own or someone else's. This is the most important thing. In addition, I feel it is always good if something is honest. By doing something that comes from an honest place, you create a way to show the audience how you see the world without using too many effects, or trying to be interesting. I feel this honesty can help.

AAN: Within your own trajectory, were you somehow torn between abstraction and figuration, or has it been abstraction from the beginning?

TA: It has been abstraction from very early on, and it has always been coming from a place of reality. For me, it did not feel like something that was from within my head. It was always from the outside world. I see myself as 'in between' and I do not have to take sides. Now I feel very comfortable in this space.

AAN: You mentioned that you have always drawn figuratively, secondary to your main work. Presently, your drawings do not seem to overlap with your paintings.

TA: No, not really. They have not until now, but we will see what happens in the future. I feel that the viewers are my figures, because when I work on my paintings, I am rather locked in. Therefore, when you stand in front of them, it is like a whole room, almost like a stage setting and you fit in there with the scale of your body. Somehow the viewers are the figures that I am trying to reach out to.

AAN: You went to Germany as a child. Under what circumstances did you leave Afghanistan?

TA: We were indirectly forced to flee because of the war that was

taking place. We had to leave urgently since my father was also working in politics and was threatened. Our departure took place in a very dramatic way, at night over the Northern border to Uzbekistan, where we lived for two years until my parents realised that the situation in Afghanistan would not improve. We then went to Germany where we already had family and where my father had lived as a student.

AAN: Do you keep any vivid memories of Afghanistan?

TA: I was very young when we left. I mostly remember the time in Uzbekistan. Later, I did travel back to Kabul – on two occasions. Back then, my aunt was still living in Kabul and my mother wanted to check up on her. We therefore took the bus through the mountains from Uzbekistan to Kabul. Travelling through the mountains on those big buses is almost the one lasting memory I have. It was very cold, as it was winter, and we stayed in the apartment in Kabul where I lived as a child, where my aunt lived. Almost 20 years later, I travelled there again by myself and visited that same apartment, and while I was there, some memories related to the place – smells, lights, or the rooms – came back.

AAN: Are these memories something you have transposed into your work, or do they belong to a part of your life you want to leave behind?

TA: I worked with them after I came back to Germany in my early twenties. Back then, I was still studying and I did a lot of drawings when I was in Afghanistan. When I returned to Germany, some pieces for my graduation show featured a technique I am still using today – where I completed paintings based on the drawings of the rooms from the apartment, combined with other childhood memories. This was how I started as an artist after art school. Later on, I included other motifs, drawn from everyday life and travels amongst other memories. It was interesting for me because I used to feel this stigma about being an Afghani artist painting her childhood-memory rooms from Kabul. I felt a lot of people in the press and in the audience focused on this aspect too much. For me

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Living Room (2020) pigment, glutin on canvas, 170 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin. Photo: Roman März



Gym (2014), pigment, gluten on canvas, 170 x 200 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin. Photo: Roman März

personally, it was difficult because I was already getting over that experience and I did not want to become this interesting painter from Afghanistan who paints mountains and colourful interiors, because that was not the whole person or the whole artist I became or am now. It undeniably marked the beginning and it is something that is part of me and that still interests me. However, it is important not to be labelled by others, whether or not I am a migrant artist or just a German painter with a different background.

AAN: Do you find it challenging to reinvent abstract painting relying solely on the basic elements of painting: brush, colour, and line?

TA: Based on my experience, there is a lot of work that comes into it. It is easy in a way, in the sense that it is basically about colour: I just let the colour take the space and spread out across the canvas. Of course, there



Oostelijk Halfmond (2020), watercolour on paper, 48 x 36 cm, framed. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin. Photo: Roman März



August (2017), gluten on canvas, courtesy the artist & Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin. Photo: Roman März

are many attempts and errors in order to come up with the perfect balance for the painting to be exciting, yet not to collapse. Mostly, I feel the colours and the light lead the way and do the work by themselves, but getting there requires some work.

AAN: As colour is such an important component of your work, what does it mean to you?

TA: For me, colour is mainly about light, or in a way, about temperature. Especially when I use warm colours, I feel I can create a situation based on light that can trigger associations of parts or moments of the day, or even a special landscape. By setting the time and the day, I create an atmosphere or a certain situation.

AAN: How do you usually go about the juxtaposition of colours, generally two colours and, more rarely, three?

TA: It is mainly intuitive, but I do also try out new combinations. There are no limits – as everything that I feel like doing could be interesting.

AAN: Do you mix your own colours?

TA: Yes. I use pigments and mix them with glue made from rabbit skin and bones – gluten. This helps

create the brilliance and the intensity of the bright and strong colours because I use proper pigments. That way, I can optimise and decide on the level of brilliance.

AAN: One colour, yellow, seems to appear more often than the others. Do you associate it with a specific meaning, or is it sheer coincidence to bring out more light within the canvas?

TA: It is interesting that you say that as I just noticed it myself very recently. I think it is about trying to create a warmth and light. Yellow can be very bright and warm, yet at the same time, I feel it can be associated with heat and yet also something very dark and heavy.

AAN: You mentioned that to get to a certain level within abstraction, solely relying on colour and line, required a certain amount of work. In 2017, you had an exhibition entitled 10,000 Hours, referring to Malcolm Gladwell's findings that it took 10,000 hours of practice to achieve mastery. Do you actually share this approach?

TA: At that time it was more an ironic question. It was a metaphor for a young artist trying to understand how to proceed.

AAN: Compared to your present work, your earlier pieces appear more geometrical. What prompted the shift towards letting the form lead its own life on the canvas?

TA: It is a process with which I slowly and naturally came to terms. Being keen on the straight line, I was interested in freeing these boundaries and, over time, they got rounder and rounder. Also, when I look at what I have finished recently, the lines are getting a little more geometrical again, but not as much as then, as it was also slightly neurotic – it seems that now, I found a certain balance.

AAN: Each colour speaks for itself: the colours may touch each other, but they never overlap, remaining separate islands of colour. In the future, do you see the shapes overlapping?

TA: At the moment, I am very open, allowing everything to happen. I feel that at this moment in time, it is getting quite free, as there are no rules as such.

AAN: You mentioned that you are now teaching. Where and what are you teaching?

TA: I am teaching an art class in the South of Germany, at the Kunstakademie in Karlsruhe. In Germany, the students have their theoretical classes, but there is one designated teacher with whom students individually discuss their work, just like Tal R did with me. I am part of the faculty for one year and it is something I am currently doing on a temporary basis.

AAN: Some artists are very keen on residencies in order to experiment and try new things. What about you?

TA: I am not really looking into this at the moment. I did a long residency in Los Angeles, but that was almost five years ago. Time flies! It was nice to be in that setting as it had a very good influence on my work. Then, I moved to Berlin and, ever since, I feel I am very well-settled here and have a very nice studio. Therefore, I am not too eager to leave, but at the same time, I would of course love to go abroad again for a longer period of time. To be honest, this pandemic has also somehow resembled a residency. It may sound macabre, because it is such a horrible time for so many people around the world, but for me not so much has changed,

as I already spent a lot of time by myself in the studio, being quite isolated. Then, all the shows and the art fairs were postponed and I could truly focus on my work, being free, without any expectations from the outside, but also without any expectations from myself. I could do things I never had time to do before, and it felt almost like a residency. I realise that considering the context, I was very fortunate as I did not have any other everyday problems.

AAN: Do you paint with the canvas on the floor or on the wall?

TA: I paint on the floor because my colour is very liquid and it may drip down. I put the canvas on the floor and my body moves all around it to reach all the space on it. It is also a very important part of the work with regards to my body, because it decides on how I paint, how the brushstrokes are completed, how large the canvas is, and how I move around it. In a way, it is like a dance with me completing a blueprint of the dance on the canvas.

AAN: In general, is your work on canvas based on any preparatory drawings?

TA: It keeps changing. I draw a lot, but mostly, my drawings represent a work by themselves. I never use the word 'sketch', but in my head, sometimes, there is an image of what I want to do, maybe something I saw and that I try to reproduce. Sometimes, it is also only a colour that I want to paint and everything else comes afterwards. It is always different.

AAN: How do you see the art world in this post-coronavirus environment?

TA: Everything is much quieter than usually. I also think that people will come for the art *per se* and not just for the social event. I will be teaching for another half-year and I am really looking forward to it as it gives me a lot of input and things to think about when talking to the students. I am eager to develop my work without the usual art-world and art-market pressure. However, I am aware that I am on the more privileged side of life, as I can actually live from my art and I do not have to worry about paying the rent.

AAN: The new show in entitled Out of the Blue. Is there anything specific behind the title?

TA: It is based on a song which has been covered several times, but the original is by Neil Young. I used to listen to it a lot at the beginning of the year. It is a little sad, but I love the lyrics, all the more so as colours are featured in them. Words and language are very important to me. When I choose my titles, they are like an additional colour or finish that also bring an extra hint to a painting, pushing it into one last direction before I leave it alone in the room. My image vocabulary is formed by colours, but words are undeniably part of creating and evoking pictures in our minds.

AAN: If you had to describe who Tamina Amadyar is and what her work is about, what would you say?

TA: I would definitely say that part of the work is about light, but it is also about trying to find a balance and to resolve the contradiction between light, darkness, and tension. It is a very delicate process, essentially about controlling the colour and letting it go.

● Out of the Blue is on view at Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin, until 31 October, guidowbaudach.com



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6 Textiles

Perhaps one of the most recognisable symbols of Japan, the kimono has fascinated and influenced Western dressing and design for centuries. The Victoria & Albert Museum's (V&A) exhibition, *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* was sadly cut short when the museum had to temporarily close earlier this year. The museum – and this exhibition – are now open again, waiting for visitors to enjoy and explore.

The exhibition looks at the social significance of the kimono from the 1660s to the present day – both in Japan and the rest of the world. There are rare 17th- and 18th-century kimono on display in the UK for the first time alongside pieces from contemporary fashion designers, such as Japan's Living National Treasure Kunihiko Moriguchi.

The mid-17th century is the starting point for the show, a time when a vibrant fashion culture was beginning to emerge in Japan. The increasingly wealthy merchant classes demanded the latest styles to express their affluence, confidence and taste, while leading actors and famous courtesans were the trend-setters of the day. The simple structure of the kimono focussed attention on the surface, allowing for the creation of sumptuous patterns using sophisticated techniques. The first section of the exhibition will explore these designs and shine a light on a fashion-conscious society not dissimilar to today's, in which desire for the latest look was fed by a cult of celebrity and encouraged by makers, sellers and publishers.

Kimonos were first exported to Europe in the mid-17th century, where they had an immediate impact on clothing styles. Foreign fabrics were also brought to Japan and incorporated into kimono. From early times, carpets and textiles woven in Turkey, Egypt, Iran and India were brought to Europe not just as trade goods, but also as diplomatic gifts, and their technical and aesthetic excellence was widely acknowledged by the West. However, these textiles were not just admired in the West. In the East, Japan was another destination for these exotic goods. From the early 17th century, many Europeans and Japanese were fascinated by Indian textiles. While imitations of Indian printed and painted textiles were popular in Europe, in Japan people still preferred to obtain original Indian textiles which surpassed their imitations in both colour and design.

Yumiko Kamada, in her paper for the Textile Society of America, *The Use of Imported Persian and Indian Textiles in Early Modern Japan*, states that 'it is known that as early as in the late 16th century, a handful of people, such as war lords and high priests valued imported Persian textiles and carpets. In spite of Japan's seclusion policy in the Edo period, people admired imported Indian textiles to enjoy and to use. The Kodaiji-temple in Kyoto owns a coat made from a 16th-century Persian silk tapestry. This famous coat is said to have been used by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), a powerful general of the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1600) in Japan. The Japanese also valued imported Indian cotton and other textiles, similar to Europeans who were fascinated by them. Yamaga Soko (1622-1685), a famous Confucian scholar of the Edo period, was said to have worn a coat made of 17th-century Indian painted cotton textile. This type of Indian textile with zigzag design, which was a typical example made for the



Kimono for a young woman (furisode), crepe silk (chirimen), freehand paste-resist and stencil dyeing (yuzen and kata-yuzen) with embroidery in silk and gold-wrapped silk threads with applied gold and silver (surihaku), probably Kyoto, 1905–20 © Khalili Collection



Parading courtesan by Katsukawa Shunsen (1762-1830), woodblock print, circa 1804-18, Edo (Tokyo) © Victoria and Albert Museum

The Art Of THE KIMONO



Outer-kimono for a young woman, figured satin silk (rinzu), tie-dyeing (kanoko shibori), freehand paste-resist dyeing (yuzen) and embroidery in silk, probably Kyoto, 1800-1830, courtesy of the Joshibi University of Art and Design Museum



Kosode crepe silk (chirimen), freehand paste-resist dyeing (yuzen), stencil imitation tie-dyeing (surihitta) and embroidery in silk and gold-wrapped silk threads, probably Kyoto, 1710-1740, courtesy of the Joshibi University of Art and Design Museum

Southeast-Asian market, was popular in the early 17th century and occasionally depicted in Japanese screen paintings as a fabric used for kimono'. This coat is still preserved in the Matsura Historical Museum at Hirado in Nagasaki prefecture.

Gradually, Indian textiles became accessible to the wider population. From the late Edo period, the wealthy classes used Indian painted and printed textiles to decorate many of their personal belongings. Two tobacco pouches and pipe case can be seen in the exhibition, with the earliest covered in Indian cotton from the Coromandel Coast in India, circa 1700 to 1800. There is also an 18th-century under-kimono for a man (*juban*), made from Indian cottons imported from the Coromandel Coast. Rare survivors from this early period of cultural exchange, including garments made in Japan for the Dutch and kimono tailored from French brocade and Indian chintz, are displayed to reveal the fluid fashion relationship between East and West that resulted from the global trade network.

During the Edo period, from the late 18th century to the early 20th century, *geisha* were trend-setters. Their elegant clothes and manners exuded the avant-garde chic of the day (*iki*). They would compete with each other to have the most original and expensive kimono to become the primary arbiters of kimono fashion. The term kimono (from *mono* 'thing' and *kiru* 'to wear') came into use in the Meiji period (1868-1912), when the craze for all things Western led to a need to distinguish between Western and Japanese clothing.

The kimono is made from full widths of specially woven kimono fabric, which is about 35 cm wide and sewn with a simple running stitch to form the garment. The length of each kimono bolt is around 11 to 11.4 metres, which is enough to make one kimono. A half-length section is sewn to each side in the front to form



Kimono for export, satin silk (sushu), embroidery in silk threads, probably Kyoto, 1905-15, that was probably retailed in Europe or America © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

an overlap, left over right, and sleeves, each another width of the fabric, are attached to the sides of the body. Then a neckband, or collar, is attached to the neckline and extended about a third of the way down the front opening.

A popular design for kimono is the paste-resist dyeing technique of *yuzen*, named after the Kyoto artist-monk, Miyazaki Yuzen, (active late 17th/early 18th century). In the lengthy process, outlines of the designs are drawn on the fabric, then a line of starch paste, or glue, is applied to the drawing from a cloth tube with a metal tip, which prevents the bleeding of one colour into another. The fabric is then steamed to set the dyes and the starch paste washed away to reveal the design. The technique uses both natural dyes, such as indigo, and aniline, or synthetic dyes for more brightly coloured creations.

The late 19th century saw a worldwide craze for Japanese art and design. In the early Meiji period, circa 1860s to 1880s, the fascination for the West in Japan almost led to the abandonment in Japan by the elite of Japanese traditions, including Japanese clothing. However, the reaction in the 1890s against the abandonment of Japanese culture did save the kimono from vanishing into history, but it survived to be worn mainly by women. Early it had been worn by both sexes and by all classes and ages. The two major centres, Kyoto and Kanazawa, were famous for the art of *yuzen* dyeing. In the late 19th/early 20th century, in Japan, any women had their kimono made to order by Japan's famous department stores, such as Mitsukoshi in Tokyo, which catered to high-society customers. In the West, Kimono were also bought from exclusive department stores such as Liberty & Co in London and worn by those wishing to express their artistic flair. Japan responded by making boldly embroidered

'kimono for foreigners', while the domestic market was transformed by the use of European textile technology and chemical dyes. This craze became extremely popular—Ellen Terry, the famous Edwardian actress, dressed herself and her children in kimono.

The final section of the exhibition looks at the kimono in contemporary life. The kimono's biggest impact on Western fashion came in the early 20th century, when designers such as Paul Poiret, Mariano Fortuny and Madeleine Vionnet abandoned tightly corseted styles in favour of loose layers of fabric that draped the body. However, the garment continues to inspire fashion around the world today, with such designers as Thom Browne, Duro Olowu and Yohji Yamamoto, and the more casual styles of small, independent studios such as Rumi Rock and Modern Antenna.

● Until 25 October, Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk, at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, vam.ac.uk



Staircase, December by Kobayakawa Kiyoshi (1899-1948), from the series Pictures of the Months, ink and colours on paper, Tokyo 1935, The Levensen Collection

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A Walk through Chinese LANDSCAPE PAINTING

A new exhibition at The Rietberg Museum in Zurich introduces viewers to the world of Chinese landscape painting, exploring its many meanings, and revealing its hidden messages by juxtaposing historical masterpieces with landscape representations by internationally renowned modern and contemporary artists. The dialogue between past and present reveals surprising links, but also ruptures and conflicts, providing an insight into China's culture, philosophy, and literature, while at the same time addressing a highly topical issue that transcends national boundaries, namely the relationship between mankind and nature.

There are 90 works on show spanning six centuries, including paintings, installations, as well as some video works. In addition to highlights from the Drenowatz Collection of the Museum Rietberg, the exhibition also features important loans from leading European museums and rarely exhibited works from private holdings.

A growing enthusiasm for the natural world and the rise of landscape painting was seen to emerge in China from around the 10th century onwards. Realistic observations of mountain and river scenes, plants and animals, fishermen and travellers, the cycle of the seasons, changing weather and the shifting qualities of natural light were all subjects particularly favoured by artists from this period onwards.

Chinese landscape painting is considered one of the highest forms of painting alongside the art of calligraphy, out of which it emerged. One genre, *shanshui hua*, literally 'painting of mountains and water,' is deeply imprinted with images of the natural world and the ideologies of a nation, as well as the thoughts and nuances of the individual painter. Chinese literati painters had released painting from its descriptive purpose of serving political and religious functions as early as the 10th century, thereby encouraging expressiveness and freeing creativity from having to resemble reality, and fostering the idea that painting landscapes could be for self-amusement and self-cultivation. Such subject-matter was favoured by the scholar-artists, a



Blue Bridge, dated 2004, Hai Bo (b 1962), digital print © the artist, courtesy Fondation INK



Magnificent Views of Xuancheng, Qing dynasty, dated 1679/80, Mei Qing (1624-1697), album, 24 leaves, ink and colour on paper, 27 x 54.5 cm, gift of Charles A Drenowatz © Museum Rietberg., Photo: Rainer Wolfsberger

group drawn from the educated elite, many of whom were retired government officials. They themselves were collectors of paintings, but in the quietness of their lives, they expressed themselves as highly accomplished artists. One of these artists, Gong Xian (1619-1689), is represented in this exhibition.

Mountains and streams, trees and clouds have been at the heart of Chinese painting for centuries. They have become the epitome of Chinese art and culture and inspire artists to reproduce classical landscapes to this day. Early depictions of Chinese landscape paintings had become a recognisable genre by the late Tang dynasty (618-907), perhaps growing from didactic art.

“
Landscape painting is considered one of the highest art forms
”

Landscape painting had become part of cultivated society's longing to commune with nature. A freer style began to emerge, and in the Song dynasty (960-1279), scholar-officials created a new style of painting that took some of the skills and discipline of calligraphy, forming a new style of painting that employed calligraphic brushwork to create freer, more expressive works. The ink images of old trees, bamboo, rocks and hermitage began to become more widely depicted. The Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) also brought a burgeoning of creative spirit that became interested in painting a cultivated landscape. During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), court artists produced work to show the that the state functioned in an orderly manner for its conservative audience, while literati painters subjectively explored the world around them producing personal depictions of the world, rather than the official paintings that reflected the world according to the ruling elite.

An early landscape painting in the exhibition is by the famed Chinese landscape painter, calligrapher, and poet during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties – Xiao Yuncong (1596-1673). Between 1636 and 1642 Xiao and his two younger brothers prepared for the provincial-level civil service examinations in Nanjing, where they also became political activists, joining the Fushu 'Revival Society,' which sought to revive antique moral standards as a remedy for government factionalism and corruption. The fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 ended Xiao's government ambitions, and, unwilling to serve under the Manchus, Xiao supported himself as a painter.

Another early painting, a hanging scroll, in the exhibition is *A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines* by Gong Xian (1619-1689), painted circa 1670. Gong Xian was part of a group called 'The Eight Nanjing Masters,' who were active during the second half of the 17th century, spanning the turbulent period between the Ming and the Qing dynasties. Gong Xian is usually cited as the leader of these artists. His work is unlike his contemporaries as his work during the 1660s was heavily inked, often including gloomy scenes of forested crags and misty ravines, densely textured and monumental in style.

Another artist featured in the exhibition, who also lived through turbulent times, in the modern era, is Li Keran (1907-89). He studied at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Art and in 1929 went to study oil painting and drawing at the National Academy of Art in Hangzhou, where he studied Chinese painting and art theory and became one of the leading traditional-style artists during this period and developed a personal style of landscape painting that was based upon the emulation of both ancient and contemporary masters. Li Keran went on to become a professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and after the Cultural Revolution became the first president of the China National Academy of Painting in 1979. Painting in the *guohua* (native or national) style, his work synthesises his training in Western oil painting and traditional Chinese ink wash painting in highly sophisticated and nuanced compositions.

The painter and writer Liu Guosong (b 1932) is considered one of the pioneers of modernist Chinese painting and in 1956 was a founder of the Fifth Moon Group, a modern painting society in Taiwan (where he had moved from China in 1949). The group, which incorporated concepts from the Abstract Expressionism movement, evolved in New York City a decade before, members of the Fifth Moon group sought a sharp break from tradition. However, after viewing an exhibition of Song-dynasty paintings in the early 1960s, Liu Guosong reached a turning point and thereafter sought to bring the traditional into the modern. This fusion of traditional and the modern would be a hallmark of the artist's style for years thereafter.

A contemporary interpretation of classical Chinese landscapes is also explored in the exhibition with works from such artists as Hai Bo (b 1962), Huang Yan (b 1966), and Yang Yongliang (b 1980) on display. Hai Bo graduated from the Printmaking Department of the Fine Art Institute of Jilin in 1984. His artistic ideals involve the restoration of the past through photography. His work is less about what changes through time and more about what endures. Hai Bo has adopted many photographic formats, from panorama, serial, to the square, and often depicts people shown in various stages of life, the cyclical passage of time, and sweeping landscapes.

Many contemporary Chinese photographers have created social-documentary photography and experiment with new, digital photographic processes to explore



Phantom Landscape, Yang Yongliang (b 1980), dated 2010, video, colour, audio, 3:23 min, DSL Collection, Paris © Yang Yongliang, courtesy Yang Yongliang Studio

common concerns such as the alteration of the natural environment, or the erosion of cultural heritage in an increasingly globalised society. In 1999, when Huang Yan began a series of paintings-photographs entitled *Chinese Landscapes* – landscapes painted on the skin of a human body – his work was immediately noticed by curators at leading institutions around the world. Huang Yan's work makes reference to a Chinese cultural heritage that is innate to every Chinese person. Since the earliest paintings of the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) and the apotheosis of the theorisation of landscape painting during the Song dynasty, landscape paintings have become the quintessence of Chinese art. In this series, *Chinese Shan-shui Tattoo* (1999) Huang Yan evokes traditional Chinese landscape painting with a contemporary twist by photographing faces, backs, and entire bodies tattooed with landscape motifs. He has explained his work: 'Landscape is an abode in which my mortal body can reside, landscape is my rejection of worldly wrangling, landscape is a release for my Buddhist ideas'.

Yang Yongliang uses images of architecture as brushstrokes; heavy mountain rocks with enriched details draw a faithful reference to Song-dynasty landscape painting. From a

young age, Yang studied traditional Chinese ink painting (*shui mo hua*). He studied visual communication at the Shanghai Arts and Crafts Vocational College in 1995, and then at the Shanghai Institute of Design, China Academy of Fine Arts in 1999. In 2004, he set up his own studio and in 2005, started experimenting with ink painting, photography, short films and videos. In 2006, he started his series of *Phantom Landscape*, where urban development makes life in the city flourish, but it also imprisons these lives; centuries-old cultural tradition in China is profound, but it has also remained stagnant. Ancient Chinese people painted landscapes to praise the greatness of nature; Yang's works, on the other hand, lead towards a critical re-thinking of contemporary reality.

With its tradition of more than 1,000 years, the Rietberg has charted the major movements in the genre in this wide-ranging exhibition, allowing the viewer to gain fascinating insights into the history, changing styles, and evolution of Chinese landscape painting.

● Until 17 January, 2021, *Longing for Nature: Reading Landscapes in Chinese Art*, is at the Rietberg Museum, Zurich, rietberg.ch. A catalogue is available, Euro 42

A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines, Gong Xian (1619-1689), Qing dynasty, circa 1670, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 62 x 102 cm, donation Charles A Drenowatz © Museum Rietberg Photo: Rainer Wolfsberger

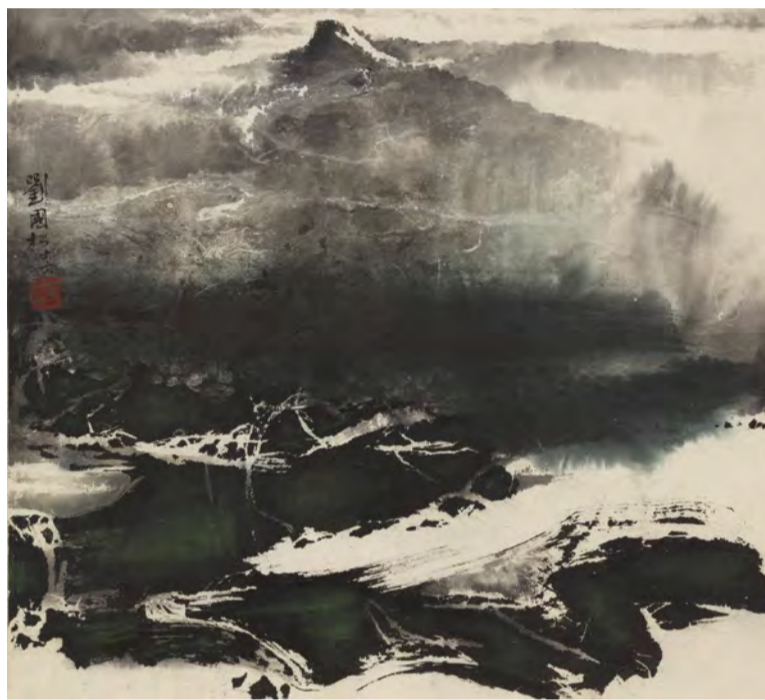
Snow, Liu Guosong (b 1932), dated 1967, hanging scroll, ink and colours on paper, gift of Charles A Drenowatz, Museum Rietberg



Chinese Landscape – Tattoo, No. 7, Huang Yan (b 1966), dated 1999, C-Print, 80 x 100 cm © the artist, courtesy Fondation INK



On Perilous Peaks Dwells Beauty in Her Infinite Variety, by Li Keran (1907-1989), circa 1961, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 70 x 46 cm, gift of Charles A Drenowatz © Museum Rietberg. Photo: Rainer Wolfsberger



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AL-SABAH COLLECTION

The Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Houston has opened their latest exhibition in conjunction with the al Sabah Collection from Kuwait, *Arts from Islamic Lands*. The Al-Sabah collection began to take form in 1975 when Sheikh Nasser Sabah al Ahmed al-Sabah purchased the collection's first object. It was a mid-14th-century enamelled glass bottle he found in a London art gallery. At that time, the collection started out as a hobby he and his wife Sheikhha Hussah Sabah al Salem al-Sabah were pursuing – it soon grew to a fully fledged collection worthy of a place in a museum. In 1983, as the collection was growing, it had made its way from Sheikh Nasser's private residence to its new location at the Kuwait National Museum. The collection has now grown to more than 20,000 objects representing different chronological and geographical points from the Islamic world. It has continued to grow since its inception, increasing its strengths in all categories: arms and armour, calligraphy, carpets and textiles, coins, glass, jade, ivory, jewellery, manuscripts and miniatures, metalwork, stone and stucco, and woodwork.

The new exhibition presents a selection of these objects, illustrating the diversity and splendour of the al-Sabah collection, which includes manuscripts, ceramics, metalwork, glass, rock crystals, jades, jewellery, stonework, woodwork, as well as textiles and rugs. The collaboration with the MFA, was first established in 2012, which led to a 2013 exhibition of 67 objects ranging from carpets and architectural fragments to ceramics, metalwork, jewellery, scientific instruments, and manuscripts. Now, in 2020, this new and expanded installation more than triples the display, increasing the art on view to some 250 works that, together, present a comprehensive spectrum of Islamic art. Including objects from the 8th to 18th century, made in North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, India, the Iberian Peninsula, and Central Asia, the exhibition demonstrates the development of techniques, craftsmanship and aesthetics in Islamic visual culture.

Among the highlights on show are a 16th-century Ottoman Turkish prayer carpet; a glass mosque lamp from 14th-century Cairo; an earthenware bowl from 9th-century Iraq and early gold jewellery from Afghanistan and Syria and opulent Mughal jewellery crafted in the refined *kundan* technique, including a brilliant bird pendant fabricated in late 16th-century India from gold, rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and rock crystals.



Tile, Iranian world, 17th century, glazed fritware, The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait

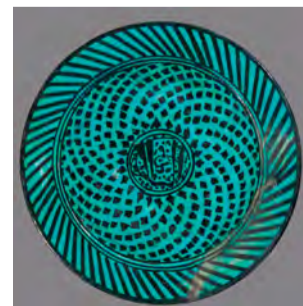


EXPLORE Islamic Art

Mosque lamp, circa 1319, enamel and gilded glass, Egypt, The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait



Sufi watching the Poet Sadi in Ecstasy (illustration from the Subjat al-Abarr of Jami), 2nd quarter of 16th century, opaque watercolours, gold, and ink on paper, Uzbekistan, The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait



Bowl, 13th century, underglaze painted fritware, Syria, The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait

The al-Sabah Collection spans over 10 centuries of artistic achievement and spanning geographical boundaries from Spain to India that explores the remarkable development of artistic patronage within the Islamic world and the development of the artistic traditions in the Islamic world. The collection can be broken down into four main periods: early Islam (622-1050), when characteristic motifs and decorative concepts were formulated; classical Islam (1250-1500), when the arts achieved unprecedented heights; post-classical Islam (1250-1500), when established traditions were refined and the arts of the book reached their epitome; and late Islam (1500-1800s), when splendid items were produced in the courts of the great emperors: Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal.

While Islam has a wide geographic spread, common themes and principles of design unite the art produced; and patterns from nature or geometry are found throughout the Islamic world. This diversity can be clearly seen in the range of objects held in the al-Sabah Collection.

● Arts of Islamic Lands: Selections from the al-Sabah Collection, until 27 December, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, mfa.org

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Housewives with Steak-Knives (1985)
by Sutapa Biswas, oil, acrylics, pencil,
collage, white tape on paper on canvas,
245 x 222 cm © Sutapa Biswas.
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Insights

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TANTRA

In Tantra, philosophy, ritual, symbolism and iconography are very closely connected. Tantric art is a means to spiritual development and realisation. It comprises tranquil renderings of abstract forms like the universe, *Yantras* (mystical diagrams) on one hand – and violent, emotional iconographic images portraying the terrifying aspects of Prakriti on the other.

The Tantric method affected every major Indian religion during the early medieval period (circa 500 to 1200); the Hindu sects of Shaivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and also Buddhism and Jainism developed a well-documented body of Tantric practices and doctrines, and Islam in India was also influenced by Tantra.

Tantric ideas and practices spread from India to Tibet, Nepal, China, Japan, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia. Tibetan Buddhism and some forms of Hinduism show the strongest Tantric influence, as do the postural Yoga movement and most forms of Western 'New Age' spirituality. The Tantra exhibition at the British Museum explores Tantra's early medieval transformation of Hinduism and Buddhism, along with its links to the Indian fight for independence and the rise of 1960s counterculture in the West.

Dr Imma Ramos, curator of the exhibition explained: 'that Tantra should be understood as part of a broader philosophy of transgression. The exhibition explores Tantra's early medieval transformation of Hinduism and Buddhism, along with its links to the Indian fight for

independence and the rise of 1960s counterculture in the West'. Over 100 objects are on show, including masterpieces of sculpture, painting, prints and ritual objects.

Tantric Buddhism is an extremely complex system of thought with multiple sects and sub-sects, each with a different ideology. The three major schools under Buddhism are Hinayana (also identified with Theravada), Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The theological constructs also differ from country to country, for example, Tantric Buddhism in India varies from Tantric Buddhism in Tibet, Japan, or China.

Tantra is a philosophy rooted in sacred instructional texts called *Tantras*. They take their name from the Sanskrit word *tan*, meaning 'to weave' or 'compose', and are often written in the form of a conversation between a god and goddess. The exhibition features four examples of some of the earliest surviving Tantra texts in the world, on loan from Cambridge University Library. Made in Nepal from around the 12th century, these texts outline a variety of rituals for invoking one of the many all-powerful Tantric deities, including through visualisations (imaginatively identifying with a deity) and yoga. Tantra texts often also described rituals that transgressed existing social and religious boundaries, such as sexual rites and engagement with intoxicants and the traditionally taboo. Such rituals affirmed all aspects of existence as sacred, including the body and the sensual, in order to achieve liberation and

generate power.

Centring on the power of divine feminine energy, Tantra also inspired the dramatic rise of goddess worship in medieval India and continues to influence contemporary feminist thought and artistic practice today, as can be seen in Sutapa Biswas' paintings, *Housewives With Steak Knives*, which is also on show. The exhibition explores Tantra's radical challenge to gender norms. The Tantric worldview sees all material reality as animated by *shakti* – unlimited, divine feminine power. This inspired the dramatic rise of goddess worship in India and confronted traditional gender roles. Several representations of the goddesses Kali, Durga and Chakrasamvara are also included in the exhibition. The female principle is central to Tantric practice as it places the divine feminine on a seemingly higher place than the male aspect, with a vast body of Tantric texts dedicated to female deities.

The exhibition closes with a focus on Tantra in the 20th century, showing Tantra's modern re-imaginings in Asia as well as the West. In the 1960s and 1970s, Tantric ideas and imagery inspired global counter-cultural movements, and had an important impact on the period's radical politics. As Tantra has adapted and changed over the centuries, it has managed to retain its influence and relevance to the modern world.

• Tantra Enlightenment to Revolution, until 24 January 2021 at The British Museum, London, britishmuseum.org

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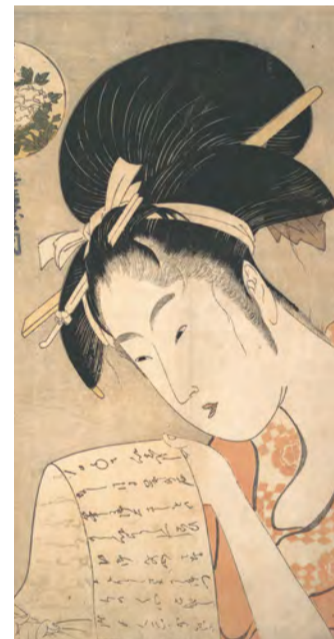
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Asian Art Newspaper

“
The paintings
are all deeply
rooted in
the vibrant local
culture
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The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco has been temporarily closed and is scheduled to reopen in October. However, the museum has organised a number of public programmes, exhibitions, as well as expanded their collections online during this time. One particular colourful online collection currently on view is Art from India's Mithila Region, which stems from the museum's earlier exhibition of these contemporary paintings in 2018. The original exhibition organiser, Qamar Adamjee, explained the paintings as a collection that 'explores how art in provincial India can be a vehicle for personal empowerment and a way of keeping local expressive traditions relevant and mirror the changes in the practice of painting in the Mithila region'. Yet the paintings still remain deeply rooted in ancient iconographic systems with a coherent aesthetic.

Mithila is in Bihar State in the northeast of the country, where it shares a border with Nepal. The style used in the Mithila (or also called Madhubani Painting, named after the district in the state), comes from an age-old tradition of women's domestic decoration in the region and which since the 1960s has become a vibrant arts movement with a surprising social impact. For centuries, women have painted gods and goddesses, richly ornamented icons of fertility and protection on the walls and floors of their homes that were traditionally painted onto the freshly plastered mud walls and floors of homes. Located within family compounds, these exuberant artworks created dramatic backdrops for religious rituals, social events, and helped bless family relations. However, a devastating earthquake in 1934 destroyed many homes and this colourful world was then revealed – British colonial officials from the Crown-rule government in charge, who were captivated by these paintings began documenting what had once been hidden from public view, creating an interest in the paintings beyond Mithila for the first time.

Some of the earliest references to the Madhubani painting can be found in the Hindu epic *The Ramayana*, when King Janaka, Sita's father, asks his painters to create Madhubani paintings for his daughter's wedding. Now this skill has been passed down from generation to generation and the paintings have adorned the houses of the region for generations. The paintings created by the village women often illustrate their thoughts, hopes, and dreams. The works are characterised by a density of line and texture, bold aesthetics based on strong figurative outlines of brush and ink, fine detailing and often include elaborate borders.

However, a drought in 1966 prompted a government-led initiative to encourage women to paint more on paper in order to sell their work



Daughters Are for Others, 2006, by Shalinee Kumari (b 1985), Mithila region, ink and colours on paper. Asian Art Museum purchase © Shalinee Kumari



An auspicious diagram (kohbar), 1983, by Mahasundari Devi (Indian, b approx 1935). India, Bihar state, Mithila region, ink and colours on paper. Asian Art Museum purchase © Gopal Saha

CONTEMPORARY PAINTINGS FROM BIHAR



Tree of life with Krishna, 2015, by Ranjan Paswan (b 1989), Mithila region, ink and colours on paper. Asian Art Museum, purchase, Mortimer-Harvey Fund © Ranjan Paswan

commercially, resulting in a life-and-community-changing source of female-generated income. The traditional base of plastered mud wall was soon replaced by the use of handmade paper, cloth, and canvas. Since the paintings have been confined to a limited geographical range, the themes as well as the style are more or less, the same. Over the years, vocational and training systems have also taken root. These initiatives are often led by women, giving such opportunities allowed new generations of artists — and now including some men — to express their creative voices through painting, and in the process, find paths to financial independence.

Mithila painting expert David Szanton, University of California, Berkeley Professor Emeritus and president of the Ethnic Arts Foundation, explains 'Compressing a wall painting onto a much smaller sheet of paper takes considerable imagination and skill. Yet for all this, the paintings remain deeply rooted in ancient iconographic systems with a coherent aesthetic. A painting from Mithila is instantly recognisable almost no matter the subject — even abstract compositions with which some of the younger artists are experimenting'.

Mithila's artistic conventions

derive from different sources: traditional high-caste Brahmin designs that employ multiple colours, including vibrant blues and yellows, or clerical-caste Kayastha linework, characterised by black-and-white and occasionally red pigmentation. Dusadh (a sub-caste of the Dalit low caste) painters have integrated patterns from their small protective tattoos, often seen on arms and legs and typically consisting of geometric arrangements of floral and other motifs, as well as stories of their own heroes and deities. However, today, as artists from across the region have begun to work alongside each other, and the strict rules relating to which caste could depict which subject matter, there has been a mixing of artistic styles and renewed creativity.

Originally, the paintings were categorised into five different styles: Tantric, Kohbar, Bharni, Godna and Katchni. Tantric paintings included depictions of such deities as Maha Kali, Maha Durga, Maha Saraswati, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Ganesh. In the Kohbar style, the *kohbar ghar*, or the nuptial chamber, was the room in which this style of painting were traditionally done and traditionally featured an assembly of symbolic images, including the lotus plant, a bamboo grove, fishes, birds and snakes in



Testing the royal couple's Devotion to Vishnu, 2015, by Vinita Jha, Mithila region, ink and colours on paper. Asian Art Museum, acquisition made possible by the George Hopper Fitch Bequest © Vinita Jha



WATCH
Rani Jha talk
about her
approach to
Mithila Painting



Radha and Krishna under
a kadamba tree, 1985,
by Karpoori Devi,
Bihar state, Mithila region,
ink and colours on paper.
Asian Art Museum
purchase
© Karpoori Devi



SEE
More of this
collection



Prime Minister Modi arriving in a village via helicopter, 2015, by Dulari Devi, Mithila region, ink and colours on paper. Asian Art Museum, acquisition made possible by the George Hopper Fitch Bequest © Dulari Devi



Snakes Praying [to] the Sun, 1983, by Gopal Saha (b approx 1940), Mithila region, ink and colours on paper. Asian Art Museum purchase © Gopal Saha. All photographs © Asian Art Museum

The Hindu deity Ganesha, 1983, by Jogmaya Devi, Mithila region, ink and colours on paper. Asian Art Museum, purchase © Jogmaya Devi. Photo: Asian Art Museum

union – all images representing fertility and proliferation of life. Bharni-style paintings were the exclusive realm of the Brahmin female painters and included work featuring Hindu gods and goddesses. *Godna*, which means tattoo, is a simple style which a German anthropologist, Erika Moser, helped create in the 1970s. She encouraged many Dusadh women to start painting from 1972 to 1978, the style derived from the tattoos that many women traditionally had on their arms and legs. Moser, also a filmmaker and social activist, persuaded the impoverished Dusadh community to paint to earn a living. The result was the Dusadhs started to visually capture their oral history, for example, illustrating scenes from the folk tale *The Adventures of Raja Salbesa*, as well as painting their primary deity, Rahu. All painted in bold compositions with the figures based on traditional tattoo patterns, locally called Godna. This added another distinctive new style to the region's flourishing art scene. The evolution of this tattoo-influenced art can be traced back by studying the rituals and habits of the Nat community. Natins, the women-folk of this community, have been master tattooers for generations. Dalit women from Bihar have used godna

as an idiom for Dalit emancipation, which they explain in terms of annihilation of caste and the restoration of *manuski* (dignity to themselves). The early designs of tattoo paintings were simple black-and-white figures, and mostly revolved around auspicious images and icons thought to be lucky in the Nat community. The main subject themes for religious paintings featured Hindu deities such as Krishna, Rama, Lakshmi, Shiva, Durga and Saraswati. Before the 1960s, the Bharni, Kachni and Tantric styles were only created by Brahman and Kayastha women, 'upper caste' women in India and Nepal. The themes they painted were mainly religious featuring gods and goddesses or stories about the deities. As mentioned earlier, the women from the lower castes usually focused on non-religious art, more worldly topics such as folk myths, aspects of their daily life, every day symbols, as well as folk tales. Heavenly bodies, such as the sun and the moon, are also popular symbols in the paintings, often forming the centrepiece of the work. Now that contemporary Madhubani art has become a globalised art form, appealing to tourists and collectors alike, there is

now no difference in the work produced on the basis of the caste system. As techniques and styles once associated with specific castes and by artists from historically marginalised backgrounds faded away over the years, it has seen a growth in the range of new subjects for the paintings allowing them to expand and evolve. Images of gods and goddesses, everyday village life and ceremonies continue to feature in the artistic repertoire, alongside expressions of deeply personal experiences — dreams, the death of a child, or travel abroad — and comments on broader social and political issues — such as the election campaign of Prime Minister Narendra Modi (illustrated in this article), domestic violence, or the environment. Today, there are paintings based on historical scenes from the royal courts as well as contemporary social events like weddings. Geometrical patterns are sometimes found in the paintings, using complex mathematical patterns to create vivid, striking work. However, on the whole, the paintings are known for their simplicity, for the strong brush strokes and striking colours that are often derived from natural sources. While the paintings are largely made using powdered

rice, colours derived from turmeric, pollen, pigments, indigo, various flowers, sandalwood, and leaves of various plants and trees, are all in common usage. Many other natural materials are also combined with the pigments and processed to obtain the desired colours. The artists often prepare the colours for their works themselves. If an artist comes across empty spaces in the work, even after completing the painting, they usually fill the empty space with the motifs of flowers, animals, birds and geometrical patterns to create a cohesive and pleasing pattern. To finish the work,

a double line is usually drawn as the border. With their skill and artistic vision, the paintings offer us a glimpse of life in an economically challenged region of provincial India, traditional in several respects yet engaged with modern viewpoints. Through painting, artists express ideas and themes that are at once local and global, personal and universal. Today, these works are available in India's major cities and beyond, and are also held in private and public collections. The voices of these artists ring out well beyond the boundaries of their rural villages.



Lychee box, carved red lacquer, late Ming dynasty, 16th-17th century, height 1.5 in, diam. 3.75 in



Toiletry box, dark brown lacquer with pewter, Yuan dynasty, 14th century, height 7 in, diam. 8.75 in



Double-dragon plate, polychrome lacquer, Ming dynasty, Wanli mark and period, dated 1592, height 1 in, diam. 6.25 in



MASTERPIECES OF CHINESE LACQUER

Lacquer is one of the oldest Chinese decorative art forms, and appeared on some Neolithic objects. It was already being used during the Warring States period (475-221 BC) and by Han (202BC-AD220) times and attained remarkable levels of artistry on domestic objects, such as surfaces for cosmetic boxes, platters, bowls, cups and even musical instruments.

The lac tree, *qishu* or *Rhus verniciflua*, native to China, is found in Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan in the southwest. The tree is tapped during the high summer, from June to August, when humidity is extremely high, by making deep scratches on its bark. Its sap contains urushiol, a hydrocarbon named after *urushi*, the Japanese term for lacquer. Lacquer thrives in a moist and humid atmosphere. These conditions are essential during its manufacture for it to dry out and harden and to prevent it cracking. They are also critical to its long-term preservation. Lacquer sustains no impairment when completely inundated by water. Its water-resisting qualities suggest it was probably the earliest substance bearing some resemblance to modern-day plastic. It became a protective envelope, when applied in thin layers, on bamboo, wood as well

as other materials including leather and hemp. Some lacquer objects have been discovered almost intact in subterranean tombs. On others, while the core had disintegrated, the lacquer coating managed to survive unscathed. Significant archaeological finds in Hunan and Hubei, have been credited to the moist earth of central China.

Indigenous to China, lacquer art was also practised in neighbouring Japan and Korea. However it is less well-known outside of this region. Apart from rare exceptions, Asian lacquer has not been collected with the same intensity as ceramics or painting. For the first time in Europe, the exhibition, *Masterpieces of Chinese*

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*Lacquer is one
of the oldest
Chinese
decorative
art forms*
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Lacquer from the Mike Healy Collection, was on show at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, (Museum of Asian Art), in Berlin. The Healy collection is an important American holding, broadly representative of Chinese lacquer art, stretching from the Han to the Yuan (1279-1368) and the Ming (1368-1644). A constructive narrative charts the evolution of its principal forms, from Han lacquer painting, *huaqi*, to the virtuosity of Ming inlaid and carved lacquer. Some Ming lacquers are of imperial provenance, with reign marks from the emperors Jiajing (r 1522-66) and Wanli (r 1573-1620). Ironically, many of the finest lacquers in the Healy collection were found not in China, but in Japan. Early Japanese connoisseurship of Chinese objects was linked to the tea culture, initiated in the 9th century, and revived again in the 12th, with the arrival of Zen. Thereafter the collecting of Chinese artefacts advanced in earnest, focused first on tea wares, and spread rapidly to other mediums including lacquer. Later, official exchanges encouraged connoisseurship at a high level. In 1403, the Ming emperor Yongle (r 1403-24) sent an imperial gift of 58 exquisitely carved red lacquers to the Ashikaga shogun, Yoshimitsu (1358-1408). An important and complete document to this effect, listing their styles and dimensions, is still kept in the Myochi-in temple of Kyoto. That such objects were preserved in Japan in almost pristine condition is testament to the immense value placed upon them.

In China, lacquer had reached a high level of technical and artistic achievement already by the Han. According to the debate found in *Yantie Lun*, 'Discourses on Salt and Iron', circa 80 BC, Han state monopolies had been introduced in salt and iron to curb excessive spending. By comparison, the cost of lacquer, a labour-intensive industry demanding several specialisations in manufacture, was disproportionately high. Lacquer appeared in two basic pigments, red derived from cinnabar and black, from lamp-black. A standard application required a coating of up to 30 fine layers on a core object. Each coat, measuring as little as 0.03 millimetre, was allowed to dry, which could take several days.

Eventually the layers hardened to form a dense surface. Whether painted, or in succeeding centuries, carved, the topmost layer was critical, its texture determining the quality of the finished product. Although lacquer can be as hard as ivory, it is believed to evaporate and weighs less with the passing of time.

These criteria made lacquer a luxury product and an article of imperial connoisseurship. Because of its durability, Han-period painted lacquer provides valuable evidence of early Chinese painting, as well as insight into existing pictorial convention. Han lacquer imitated its bronze counterparts and surface ornament was subordinate to form. An early Western Han (206 BC-AD 9) *erbei*, 'ear cup' or *yubei*, 'winged cup' is a red ovoid form modelled after a bronze prototype. Its sides, and projections used as handles, have red and black swirling patterns from ancient bronze ornament.

Han lacquer painting, often complemented by gold or silver inlay, was reserved for the most luxurious objects. A black cosmetic box, *lian*, is of established Western Han style. Meandering motifs freely executed in red, are derived from bronze decorative schemes. Silver fittings also feature. A quatrefoil medallion, the lozenge, is the focus on the box's cover. A familiar Han motif appearing on mirrors and textiles, it was a key pattern on Chinese silks reaching Roman Syria. Han ornamentation took inspiration from natural phenomena, a vital part of a universal cosmic order. Silver tiger cubs, birds and other animals on the box refer possibly, to the Han classification of 'four supernatural beings', the dragon, phoenix, tiger and tortoise. They corresponded to the four elements, wood, fire, metal and water and represented spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Following a hiatus, lacquer attained an unprecedented level of refinement during the Song (960-1279). Elegant objects with no decoration, produced in imitation of metalwork, directly influenced ceramic and lacquer shapes. Yuan lacquer flourished as a modification of Song simplicity and restraint. A toiletry box in dark brown lacquer has 30 lobed sections, and is divided

into two at the belly. A pewter liner has been designed to protect it, starting at the lid with a scheme of 10 foliated edges. The liner continues down its sides, and is reinforced at the belly. The effect is mirrored on the box's remaining half. The idea of a liner was borrowed from Song ceramic convention, when gold and silver liners had been used to reinforce ceramic edges. Pewter, an alloy essentially of tin, with copper and antimony, was popular during the Yuan. Considerably cheaper, tin was also mined in the lacquer producing areas. The box's understated elegance and the liner's complex design, suggest it was probably commissioned and crafted by a skilled craftsman for somebody of high rank. A matching low oval box, 14.5 inches long, is also supported by a pewter liner. Its design follows the box's contour of 12 lobes on its cover, lining its belly and its base. When open, the box's interior is red, conforming to established lacquer practice where black on the outside contrasts with red on the inside.

The lacquer technique of mother-of-pearl inlay called *luodian*, using clam or mussel shells, might be traced to the Shang dynasty (circa 1500-1050 BC). During the Yuan, a 'soft-shell' alternative was developed. Shells were immersed in water to soften them after which they were ground into fine thin sheets and carved into desired patterns. Black lacquer was fashioned to depict complex landscapes and *renwu gushi*, 'scenic narrative stories', in mother-of-pearl. An exquisite black octagonal box, formerly in the Figgess Collection, has a detailed narrative of rural agrarian life crafted from tiny pieces of mother-of-pearl. The scene is encased by a curving shoulder band profuse with floral scrolls. In his seminal work *Chinese Lacquer*, the renowned scholar, Sir Harry Garner, once described the box as of 'exceptionally high craftsmanship, hardly surpassed in any of the decorative arts of China'.

The Ming was the first fully Chinese dynasty ruling the country since the Song. The third Ming ruler Yongle, had Dadu, the former Mongol capital, completely redesigned to become Beijing in 1421. A return to a fully Chinese



Octagonal inlaid box, black lacquer inlaid with mother-of-pearl, Yuan dynasty (1260-1368), height 4.75 in, width 10.25 in, length 10.25 in



Covered box, carved red and black lacquer (tixi), Ming dynasty, 15th century, height 5.2 in, diam. 8.8 in



Wine cup with two handles, 'eared cup' (erbei), black and red lacquer, Western Han dynasty, 2nd century BC, height 1.5 in, length 5.5 in, width 4.25 in

idiom was evident in the decorative arts. Ming ornamentation was founded on complexity and technical achievement, showcasing *gong*, 'workmanship'. The subject of a long black lacquer tray with mother-of-pearl inlay is a narrative featuring a leisurely garden scene where gentrified scholars are viewing paintings, among other activities. That the tray for scholars' accoutrements was intended for a personage of high rank, is hinted at by the presence of a figure holding a *bu*, a tablet used by Ming officials at court. A complex border designed with flowers of the four seasons and vine scrollery adds further distinction.

Around the 13th century, up to 200 coats of lacquer began to be applied on wood or bamboo cores. The resulting surface was worked in manifold ways, exploiting its capacity for design to the full. Lacquer

emerged almost totally the bearer of Yuan and Ming ornament. The carved lacquer convention identified with the Song imperial court gave way to highly decorative Yuan and Ming styles. Echoing Song ceramic form, a red Yuan octagonal plate has a petalled border. It is outlined by peony scrolls, symbolising affluence and has a yellow lacquer background. The bird and flower ideal, *huaniao*, has been transplanted from Song painting onto its surface. Complete with boulder and bamboo, a pair of long-tailed birds are carved in relief on an 'air diaper' ground, a technique where repeated motifs create depth. Inscribed on the plate's base is the name Zhang Cheng, one of the finest Yuan lacquer artists known, who died before he could be appointed to Yongle's court.

Carved lacquer was also used to fulfil form. Paying homage to Song prototypes is a red Ming cupstand

with Yongle reignmark and period. Its foliate edges are derivative of Song porcelain, but its thick surface is repeatedly carved with peonies surrounding the chrysanthemum, symbol of longevity, on a yellow-brown ground. The cup, lacquered black inside, was designed to carry a porcelain teabowl, like a ceramic specimen, for the tea ceremony.

One variety of Song lacquer called *tixi*, 'layered and carved' was carried further. Using alternating red and black lacquer pigments, the technique called *guri* in Japanese, carved them in deep relief so that the finished surface appeared as sword pommel forms. A 15th-century, Ming box with a central swirl has five pommel shapes radiating outwards accompanied by three pommel scroll bands. *Tixi* or *guri* pommel scrolls were subsequently modified to create a 'marbled' effect. When white lacquer from white lead, and yellow

and green from chromium compounds were added to the original red and black, a rainbow effect was seen on the sword pommels. The possibilities of colour combined with design introduced a method called *tiangqi*, 'filling lacquer'. A 'double dragon' plate, dated 1595 with Wanli reignmark and period, is a riot of colour. Two red and black dragons chasing a flaming pearl are superimposed on a yellow grid background where the Buddhist reverse swastika for infinity, has been faithfully impressed. A border of plum, peony and chrysanthemum flowers with brown scrolling leaves completes the plate. Colourful lacquer also paved the way for a method called *tixai*, 'adding colour'. Complex narrative landscapes, the bird and flower convention and floral compositions were carved on varied lacquer pigments and made to imperial commission, as large cosmetic or jewellery boxes. One in red, brown and black lacquer from the Jiajing reign is an exercise in consummate skill. On a background of dense cloud scrolls, eight cranes in flight, symbols of longevity, are oriented towards the Chinese ideogram, *shou*, meaning longevity.

By the time Wanli, effectively the last Ming emperor, ascended the throne, lacquer ornamentation conveyed three-dimensional techniques. Wanli was also partial to a deeper lacquer shade of red with a hint of blue. A small compact box carved with continuous and precise composition, features the lychee fruit on one half, and pomegranate flowers on the other. These motifs had been executed on a geometrically patterned ground in deep relief. Its complexity suggests the object was probably used for jewellery and other valuables. In

Japan, similar boxes contained incense. It was due in no small part to Japanese *doboshu*, 'cultural advisers' acting in concert, that Chinese antiquities reaching the archipelago after the 15th century were catalogued. Compiled specifically for the eighth Ashikaga shogun, Yoshimasa (1436-1490), was the *Kundaikan Soboki*, Manual of Interior Decoration for the Tea Room, of 1476. A listing of Chinese artists and the decorative arts with reference to the tea ceremony, it is perhaps the earliest work of art criticism in Japan. Classification established the foundations for Japanese connoisseurship and in the long run, helped to ensure the survival of masterpieces of Chinese lacquer.

YVONNE TAN

• The exhibition comprised 31 pieces of Chinese lacquerware spanning a period of over 1,500 years, typifying numerous lacquer techniques in their highest form of perfection. Among the highlights were the black lacquers with nacre inlays from the Yuan dynasty (13th/14th centuries) and the intricately carved lacquer pieces from the early 15th century. The collection was formed by the collector Mike Healy from Hawaii. The exhibition was organised in co-operation with the Honolulu Academy of Arts, where it was first shown from Dec 2002 to April 2003 and then went on to other US destinations. The first showing in Europe, in 2007-8, was at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin.

• Masterpieces of Chinese Lacquer from the Mike Healy Collection by Julia M White and Yanli Bao, published by Honolulu Academy of Art, 2005, ISBN 978-0937426661



ASIAN ART IN LONDON 22 October - 7 November

Indian & Islamic Art:
22 October - 31 October

East Asian Art:
29 October - 7 November



asianartinlondon.com



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for more information

ASIAN ART IN LONDON 2020

This year Asian Art in London (AAL), now in its 23rd edition, has decided to split the event into two weeks to reflect the auctions and events in the Indian, Islamic, and East-Asian art worlds. Due to the coronavirus pandemic and the uncertainty that this brings to public events, Asian Art in London has also redesigned their website and are using online events, such as masterclasses and panel discussions, to enhance the event. On the website, you will be able to download participants' catalogues, as well as visit the viewing room specially created for the dealers.

The Indian and Islamic art event is the first to open, from 22 to 31 October, to complement the Indian and Islamic sales that are traditional held in London at this time of year. East Asian Art, encompassing the arts of China, Japan, Korea, as well as Southeast Asian art, follows on, from 29 October to 7 November. This year, dealers and galleries from the UK and the US are showcasing a range of works of art from South, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, China, Japan, Korea, the Himalayas and the Islamic world, dating from antiquity to the contemporary, along with sales and previews of Asian and Islamic art at local and international auction houses.

Full information can be found in the dedicated guidebook produced by Asian Art in London.

Late night openings start with Kensington Church Street on 31 October, from 5-9pm. St. James's on 1 November, and Mayfair on 2 November. Not all galleries participate in these late openings, so refer to the AAL website listings for individual gallery's details, or check directly with the galleries for up-to-date information nearer the event. In some instances, visits may need to be booked as a timed appointment. The AAL directory

includes maps and an events calendar and can be found in members' galleries, or can be downloaded from their website. Below is a sample of what's on offer this year.

The museums are open, but are adhering to coronavirus safety advice along with social distancing. You may also need to book a timed slot in advance. Information and help are available on the museums' websites. Two main museums in London to reopen are the British Museum and

the V&A. *Tantra: Enlightenment to Revolution* (until 24 January, 2021), is at the British Museum and explores the philosophy centred on the power of divine feminine energy. The main Asian and Islamic galleries are also open and visitors have to follow a prescribed route through the building. At the V&A *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk*, one of the museum's major temporary exhibitions is now open again and runs until 25 October. The exhibition presents the kimono as a dynamic and constantly evolving fashion icon, from the 1660s to the present day. Other displays, open at the V&A are *Blanc-de-chine* (until 18 October) and *Cairo Streets* (until 31 January 2021). At the V&A, you can book a timed slot using the on-screen calendar on their website found alongside the relevant exhibition/display information.

KENSINGTON CHURCH STREET

Marchant, Jorge Welsh Works of Art, JAN Fine Art

Three dealers are taking part from the Kensington area this year. Marchant are presenting *The Lobl Collection of Chinese Jades*. This is Marchant's 7th jade show, which also celebrates the gallery's 95th anniversary. The exhibition comprises 36 jade pieces from the private collection of Mr & Mrs Herbert Lobl, amassed over 60 years, predominantly buying from London dealer Louis Joseph and also from Bluett, William Clayton, and Marchant. The collector also bought at Sotheby's and Christie's. The catalogue is produced chronologically and where possible Marchant have published the provenance of the pieces.

Highlights include the exhibition cover piece, a nine-dragon brush-washer – an exemplary piece of jade carving. It is both intricate and sophisticated with varied sized dragons writhing and curling through high-relief clouds in pursuit of flaming pearls, above swirling waves. It came from the collection of



Dish with the arms of the Pelgrom Family, porcelain decorated in underglaze cobalt blue, circa 1700-1710, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662-1722), diam. 38.5 cm, Jorge Welsh Works of Art

The use of these symbols was widespread in Europe by the time Westerners initiated direct trade with China in the 16th century and, as soon as Europeans were able to commission Chinese porcelain with tailored designs, they became an important feature of privately ordered porcelain. Armorial designs – including coats-of-arms, shields, crests, and mottoes – were easily recognisable by their contemporary countrymen, demonstrating allegiance to a leader or a faith, or embodying a very personal connection with landed gentry, political and military leaders.

Jan Fine Art, a participant for the first time this year, is participating in both weeks and is showing *Safavid Textiles* alongside *Oriental Works of Art*. The gallery has collected objects from China, Japan, and Korea for their East Asian exhibition and highlights of this show include a Qing-dynasty, 18th-century, Blanc-de-Chine, crane brush-pot from the Dehua kilns in Fujian Province. Also on offer is a Central-Asian silk fragment from the 8th century. The textile has a red, blue, gold and green repeated pattern with green and blue pepper-shaped roundels. Inside the roundels are confronting ceremonial ducks with protruding curled wings on a yellow ground, the birds holding a ribbon with linked pearls in their beak. These floating palmettes are on gold silk ground, against the red background of the main design.

Sir Desmond Cochrane, Bt and was purchased in London in 1976. The inspiration for this piece is certainly drawn from the massive Yuan-dynasty jade wine vessel at the Round Fort in Beijing.

Another piece, elegant in its simplicity, is a curved pear-shaped ewer with a scroll handle and slightly recessed base. The attractive stone has not been overworked or over-designed in appreciation of the material. The scroll handle indicates use for water or wine and the shape would have probably been inspired by leather water vessels used on the Silk Road – depicted in Tang-dynasty pottery. A catalogue is available.

At Jorge Welsh Works of Art, this year's show explores *Chinese Armorial Porcelain from the West*. Armorial symbols visually identify either a particular family or a religious, military or national organisation.



Jade brush washer, jade, circa 1720, early Qing, Kangxi period, 12.3 x 7.5 cm, Marchant



Central Asian Silk Fragment, 8th century, silk, Central Asia, 58.5 x 40 cm, JAN Fine Art

ST JAMES

Joost van den Bergh, Rob Dean Art, Malcolm Fairley, Peter Finer, Oliver Forge & Brendan Lynch, Michael Goedhuis, Grosvenor Gallery, Hanga Ten, Kapoor Galleries, Littleton & Hennessy, Lam & Co UK, Susan Ollemans, Simon Pilling, Priestley & Ferraro, Jacqueline Simcox, Runjeet Singh, Steve Sly Japanese Art, Grace Tsumugi Fine Art

At **Joost van den Bergh**, there is the first solo presentation of works by Kalu Ram. This forgotten master painter from Jaipur was active from the early 1960s until his death in 2010. The exhibition comprises later works – complex colour studies of intertwining animals and human figures, as well as fantasy paintings without philosophical or religious meaning, but which reflect the artist's long-standing experience of painting Tantric and Jain-inspired work.

Kalu Ram (Kaluram Pancial) was born in Jaipur, the 'Pink City' of Rajasthan. Not uncommonly, the actual year of his birth is uncertain, but it is believed to have been in the mid- to late-1940s. His father was a Brahmin, who painted mystical diagrams for religious rites, as well as depictions of intertwining serpents (*naga*) for sale on the open market. Kalu Ram's brother was also a professional artist – his three children currently work as painters in Jaipur. The profession of painter has therefore been handed down from father to son for three generations, as is usually the case in India. The majority of paintings shown in this exhibition come from late in Kalu Ram's career, produced in the years leading up to his death in Jaipur in October 2010.

Alongside this solo presentation,



Brass shrine depicting Umamahesvara, Western India, circa 18th century, height 16 cm, Joost van den Bergh, St James



Inlaid silver koro and cover, circa 1890, Meiji period, with two panels inlaid in silver, copper, gold, shakudo and shibuichi, signed on a gilt plaque Setsuho Hiedetomo Malcolm Fairley



Raja Jagrup Singh of Jaswan, circa 1770, Kangra, India, opaque pigment on paper, Rob Dean Art

the gallery is also showing a select group of classical objects, highlights being an impressive stone Shiva *linga* and a brass shrine depicting Umamahesvara.

Rob Dean's Indian art exhibition focuses on *Gods, Kings and Courtiers*, a particular highlight is the 18th-century painting *Raja Jagrup Singh of Jaswan*, from Kangra, India. **Malcolm Fairley**, who specialises in Japanese art, has a selection of Meiji-period works of art, including a *koro* with cover made by Setsuho Hiedetomo. And **Peter Finer**, a dealer in arms and armour, is offering a selection a pieces from Tibet, China, Japan and India.

Oliver Forge & Brendan Lynch's exhibition is *Court Art From India, Persia, and Turkey*, and comprises 40 miniature paintings and works of art,

to give a taste of court life and are offered in different media. Paintings in the show range from the late 16th century to the mid-19th century with highlights including *Sher Shah's Capture of Rohtasgarh Fort in 1538*, from the 'Third' *Akbarnama*. Other works of art on offer include Iznik tiles, circa 1575, 17th-century Safavid blue and white pottery, and 18th-century metalwork from India.

Michael Goedhuis is introducing new ink paintings by the Chinese artist Li Chevalier. Brought up during the Cultural Revolution in China, the artist was recruited by the elite Chinese Army Opera Orchestra on account of her musical gifts. This represented a sanctuary on the one hand and a springboard for some



Quantum Dream (2019) by Li Chevalier, ink and mixed media on canvas, 150 x 150 cm, Michael Goedhuis



Sher Khan Sur's capture of Rohtasgarh Fort in 1538, ascribed to the artists La'l, Dhanu and Khem Karan, Mughal India, 1595-1600, opaque pigments and gold on paper, laid down on card, folio 36 x 23.5 cm, Brendan Forge & Oliver Lynch

freedom on the other – and it enabled her to meet and subsequently marry her husband who was a French diplomat at the embassy in China. Her paintings and installations express, in the use of the brush and Chinese ink, her perception – a very Chinese one – of the impermanence, fluidity and mystery of life's experience.

At the **Grosvenor Gallery**, there are new paintings by Bhutanese artist Zimbiri (b 1991), on show in the UK for the first time. Zimbiri is a native of Thimphu, the capital of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. Her works start with the traditional materials and techniques used in Bhutanese art: *sa-tschen* (earth paint) and *rhay-shing* (hand-woven canvas). These impart a ghostly presence to the images that she paints, communicating a sense of fragility, as if these traditions themselves might soon disappear.

Continued on page 18



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18 Gallery Shows



Turbulence (2020) by Daniel Kelly, woodblock on handmade Nepalese paper, 51 x 76 cm, Hanga Ten



Boxed 5 (2020) by Zimbiri (b 1991), Saa-tshen on Rhay-shing (earth paint on canvas), 147.3 x 147.3 cm, Grosvenor Gallery



Silver figure of Vajrapani, Tibet, 13th-14th century, height 10.8 cm, Kapoor Galleries

Many of her works also employ the technique of *tsapa*, this is a template of perforations which follow the lines of a drawing and enable it to be replicated and painted. Although Zimbiri's works start from this traditional Bhutanese foundation, her approach is informed by schools of Western art in the 20th century, namely Minimalism and Colour Field painting. Her paintings are the perfect amalgamation of post-modern and contemporary; combining the local with the global, and the current with the traditional. The body of paintings that have been selected for the show are from Zimbiri's *Tiger* series.

Hanga Ten, a gallery that specialises in Japanese prints, is having an exhibition entitled *Beauty in Turbulence – Works during Lockdown*. During this turbulent time, the gallery's artists in Japan have continued to produce some of the most beautiful and imaginative works. Hanga Ten's exhibition focuses on these artists' newest works created during 2020 year and include works by Daniel Kelly, Katsunori Hamanishi, Nana Shiomi, Kazutoshi Ohtsu and Ray Moirmiura.

The only international participant this year is the **Kapoor Galleries** from New York, who are presenting

God/Goddess for Asian Art in London. The exhibition features a selection of Indian miniature paintings and small sculptures from India, Nepal, Tibet and Southeast Asia. Highlights from the catalogue (which features their full New York exhibition from March 2020), include an important Indian painting of Chinnamasta, signed by master artist Nainsukh of Guler; a South Indian bronze figure of Parvati from the Vijayanagara period; a 13th/14th-century Pala-style figure of Vajrapani forged in silver; and large Western Tibetan painting of Buddha Shakyamuni and the Thirty-Five Buddhas of Confession from the 15th century.

Littleton & Hennessy and Lam & Co UK both specialise in Chinese works of art, the former are showing *Later Chinese Bronzes* (catalogue available) and the latter, a new participant for the event, is offering *Chinese Works of Art*, including early Chinese ceramics.

Susan Ollemans is offering *Asian Jewels and Jades, from the 9th to 19th Century*, including works from China, India, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia. Highlights are a group of Indian jades and Mughal jewellery, along with early rings from Central Java and other areas of Southeast Asia.

The Japanese dealer **Simon Pilling's** show is called *Solace in Nature*. The Japanese have long reflected on the relationship between humanity and nature – the fragility of human survival in a country beset by natural disaster. For more than 1,000 years, subjects drawn from nature have



Double-gourd vase by Yamamoto Ichiyo (b 1944), Imari ware, porcelain with platinum, gold and coloured enamels, diam. 10 cm, height 24 cm, Simon Pilling

been a central design theme in Japanese art. Whether in the highly controlled painstaking medium of natural lacquer, or the unpredictable crucible of the potter's kiln, artists have harnessed the power of nature to delight and satisfy us.

The artworks in this exhibition invite us to reflect on our own relationship with nature – to experience how human activity can capture nature's beauty, but also how our actions can distort and diminish nature. Each work results from its artist's desire to interrogate the natural world and create a moment of profound insight.

Highlights include two lacquer



Gold, ruby, and diamond ring, Bali, Indonesia, early 19th century, diam. 3.5 cm, weight 9 grams, Sue Ollemans



Set of black lacquer bundai (writing table) and suzuribako (writing box) by Zohiko VII, decorated with the design of evening primroses, the reverse with morning glories, Taisho 5 (1916), writing table 12.5 x 60.5 x 36.3 cm, Grace Tsumugi Fine Art

pieces – a circular writing box by Hiiraishi Takashi and a contemporary ornamental box by Arai Etsuko – both epitomise the timeless ability of this technique to capture the essence of natural forms using no colour, delighting our imagination through tons of gold and silver, and shell inlays. In ceramics, two contemporary pieces address nature through vastly contrasting techniques. The first – a delicately executed double-gourd by Yamamoto Ichiyo – celebrates nature through a meticulous process of platinum glaze and coloured enamels. The second – a striking, large vase by Murakoshi Takuma – exploits the natural power of the kiln to create a striking piece. A painting on offer is a collaborative work by 18, early 20th-century, *manga* artists that records the impact of Japan's modernisation on the famous Tokaido Highway, which connects Tokyo to Kyoto, creating handscrolls of 55 original images. Catalogue available.

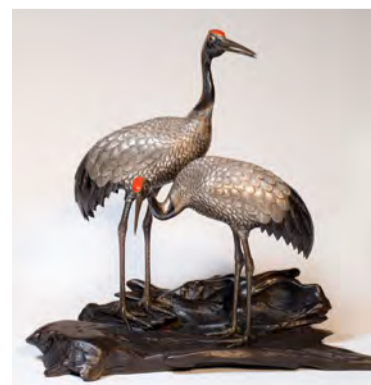
Priestley & Ferraro are showing *Chinese and Korean Ceramics and Works of Art* in their gallery in St James, a highlight is a Chinese black-glazed stoneware phoenix-pattern pilgrim flask from the Sui dynasty (581-618) or early Tang dynasty (618-906). **Jacqueline Simcox**, as usual, is showing a select offering of Chinese textiles and has produced an online catalogue for the event.

Runjeet Singh is featuring a broad selection of Asian arms and armour for the London event this year, bringing over 40 new items to the market along with existing pieces.

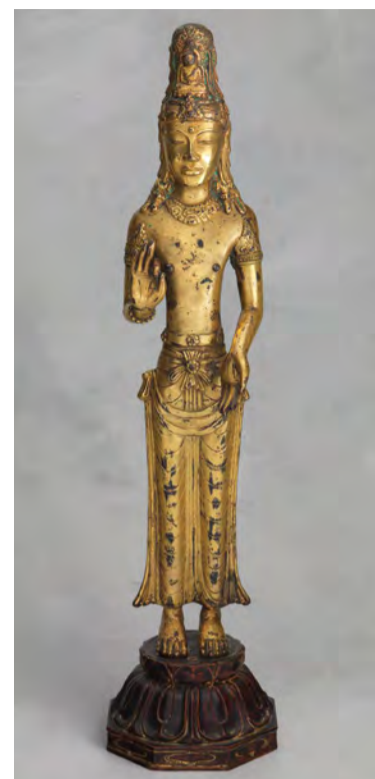
Steve Sly Japanese Art, another newcomer to the event, is having an exhibition entitled *2020 Vision of an Enlightened Ruler*, featuring Japanese works of art from the Meiji period. Catalogue available. Also showing Japanese work of art is **Grace Tsumugi Fine Art**, who is focusing on recent acquisitions, including metalwork, lacquer, *inro*, *cloisonné* enamel, ceramics, paintings, plus a selection of textiles.



Enamelled shamshir, Lucknow, India, 19th century, steel, silver, gold, enamel, rock crystal and gems, Runjeet Singh



Silver and mixed metal Manchurian Crane okimono, signed by the artist Hasegawa Issei, Steve Sly Japanese Art



Gilt-bronze standing figure of an Acuoeye, Guanyin, Yunnan, Dali Kingdom, 12th century, Eskenazi Ltd

MAYFAIR

Berwald Oriental Art, Eskenazi Ltd is not holding a themed exhibition this year, instead the gallery is showing a variety of Chinese works of art from different periods, ranging from Shang-dynasty bone carvings to Imperial Qing-dynasty porcelains. A highlight is a gilt-bronze figure of a 12th-century Guanyin, from the Dali Kingdom.

Berwald, also a specialist in Chinese works of art, is holding an exhibition of recent acquisitions at the permanent gallery in Mayfair.

BY APPOINTMENT

John Eskenazi, is participating again in Asian Art in London by appointment only. Showing a selection of sculptures from India, Gandhara, Southeast Asia and the Himalayas. This year's highlights include a Vishnu torso, showing a combination of royal magnificence and divine authority from what must have been a truly magnificent statue of Vishnu. It emanates from the Gandharan region, previously better known for its Buddhist sculptures, and dates from a period of Hindu rule from which few works of art survive.

Other works include a frieze depicting events following the Buddha's Parinirvana, Gandhara, late 1st/early 2nd century. Following the Buddha's Parinirvana, his body was entrusted to the local inhabitants of Kushinagara. They honoured it with their own funeral rites prior to cremation. This rare and early frieze is a depiction of the event. And a stele depicting Avalokitesvara, Eastern India, Bihar, from the early 11th century.



Vishnu torso, kingdom of Kapisa (Pakistan or Afghanistan) 9th/10th century, marble, height 72 cm, John Eskenazi

AUCTIONS

LONDON

INDIAN AND ISLAMIC WEEK AUCTIONS

Bonhams, Christie's, and Sotheby's are all having sales in London for this week.

On **22 October**, Rosebery's are holding a sale of Islamic & Indian Arts, at their premises in south London.

On **26 October**, Bonhams has Islamic and Indian Art.

On **27 October**, Sotheby's are holding Arts of the Islamic Worlds & India.

On **28 October**, Christie's are holding Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds, including Oriental Rugs and Carpets.

Nagel in Stuttgart are holding a special sales of Collectors' Rugs and Carpets, Islamic and Tribal art on **23 October**.



Important Mamluk gilded and enamelled glass flask, Syria, 14th century (est £300-500,000), Sotheby's London



Actor Arashi Ryuzo as The Moneylender Ishibe Kinkichi by Toshusai Sharaku (active 1794-1795), Edo period, late 18th century, woodblock print (okubi-e), ink, colour and mica on paper, signed Toshusai Sharaku ga, published by Tsutaya Juzaburo (Koshodo), 1794, 36.5 x 24.5 cm (est £150-200,000), Sotheby's London



Namikawa cloisonné enamel vase and cover signed Kyoto Namikawa (Namikawa Yasuyuki 1845-1927), Meiji period, late 19th century, height 10.5 cm (est £100-150,000), Sotheby's London



Large blue and white 'dragon' dish, Qianlong seal, mark, and period (est £70-90,000), Sotheby's London



Scenery of Huangshan by Li Keran (1907-1989) (est £150-250,000), Sotheby's London



Mughal gem-set and enamelled gold flask (surahi), North India, circa 17th century (est. £500-800,000), Sotheby's London



Parcel-gilt bronze figure of Ushnishavijaya, 18th century, height 35.8 cm (est £80-120,000), Christie's London



Pair of wucai 'dragon and phoenix' bowls, Kangxi six-character marks in underglaze blue with double circles and of the period (1622-1722), diam. 10.4 cm, with hardwood stands (est £22-40,000), Christie's London



Imperial doucai 'pheasant' bowl, Kangxi six-character mark in underglaze blue with double circles and of the period (1622-1722), diam. 16.8 cm, with carved hongmu stand (est £30-50,000), Christie's London



ASIA WEEK AUCTIONS

Bonhams East Asian sales include **Fine Netsuke from a French Private Collection** on 4 November, **Fine Chinese Art** on 5 November, and a second Japanese sale, **Fine Japanese Art** on 5 November in New Bond Street. At Bonhams Knightsbridge, there are two sales: **Asian Art Part I** and **II** on 2 and 3 November.

Sotheby's are having two sales during the week: **Fine Japanese Art** on 3 November and **Important Chinese Art** on 4 November. The Chinese works of art sale brings

together a selection of Chinese works of art and paintings across the disciplines of imperial porcelain, jade, furniture and scholar's objects. Highlights include a pair of large *huanghuali* continuous yokeback armchairs from the late Ming dynasty, from an European private collection, a large blue and white 'dragon' dish from the Qianlong period, formerly in a German private collection, and a large *ge*-type moonflask made during the Yongzheng period

of the Qing dynasty, from an Irish private collection.

Christie's sale for this week is **Important Chinese Art**, to be held on 3 November. A highlight, from a private English collection, is a Kangxi-period 'pheasant' bowl that has been passed down through five generations of the Cox family. Another highlight, from the same period, is a pair of small *wucai* bowls, of 'dragon and phoenix' design.

Lyon & Turnbull's sale is **Fine Asian Works of Art** on 5 November and Rosebery's

sale of **Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian Art**, to include the van Daalen Collection of Chinese Art, is on 11 November.

Sworders sale, **Asian Art** is on 6 November.

Other sales out of London include, Dukes in Dorchester, **Fine Asian Art** on 9 November.

In December, in Germany, Nagel, are holding **Fine Asian Art**, including the Collection of Dr Ruth Boss on 8 and 9 December. Finally, Lempertz are offering **Fine Asian Art I** and **II** on 11 and 12 December.

HONG KONG



Gilt-copper alloy figure of Shakyamuni Buddha, Tibet, 16th century (est HK\$650-850,000), Images of Devotion, Bonhams Hong Kong

On 5 October, **Bonhams**, in Hong Kong, is holding **Images of Devotion** with more than 60 lots of Himalayan, Indian and Southeast Asian art. A highlight is a gilt copper alloy figure of Shakyamuni Buddha, Tibet, 16th century (est HK\$650,000-850,000).

Also in Hong Kong, **Sotheby's** is holding **The First Avant-Garde: Masterworks from the Johnson Chang Collection**. The selection of 14 Chinese Contemporary artworks hail from the private collection of Johnson Chang, the eminent Hong Kong curator, critic and connoisseur, who is widely regarded for his groundbreaking efforts in placing the Chinese Contemporary art genre onto the international stage. The selection is led by Zhang Xiaogang's monumental triptych *The Dark Trilogy: Fear, Meditation, Sorrow*, which is presented and offered in its entirety for the first time since the early 1990s. Other highlights include early works by iconic Chinese Contemporary masters Zeng Fanzhi, Liu Wei, Fang Lijun, and Yu Youhan, all of which have been kept in Chang's private collection since their creation.



The Dark Trilogy: Fear, Meditation, Sorrow (1989-1990), by Zhang Xiaogang, oil and collage on canvas, in three panels, overall: 179 x 342.3 cm (est HK\$25-45,000,000 / US\$3,226,000/5,806,000), The Johnson Chang Collection, Sotheby's Hong Kong

GALLERY SHOWS & EXHIBITIONS



Conjunction 17-58 (2017) by Ha Chong-Hyun, oil on hemp cloth, 162 x 130 cm © Ha Chong-Hyun. Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech

HA CHONG-HYUN

Ha Chong-Hyun (b 1935), part of the Danseakhwa movement, commenting on his *Conjunction* series, said that he 'tried to destroy the existing order, including the concept of painting on canvas'. As is the case with anything revolutionary, the *Conjunction* paintings, the first of which was begun in 1973 and made public in 1974, represent a paradoxical (and simultaneous) process of assertion and denial.

In these works, Ha rendered painting, as far as possible, no more than a material fact, simultaneously diminishing the trace of human agency in its creation.

Subsequently Ha would move on to more forceful means of creating these works: pressing thick paint

laboriously through stretched out burlap – and later hemp – in a process he calls *baeapbub* (back-pressure method). If his first *Conjunction* painting relied on a support, in these later works the support has been denied, and even made permeable. During working on this series, Ha also denied connections to any Western aesthetics, as he was searching for a more Korean form of abstract art. Ha's works are an ongoing process that tests whether or not anyone or anything can truly be free: free from manipulation, free from the laws of nature, or free from control.

● 6 October to 14 November, Almine Rech, London, alminerech.com. Catalogue available

A SUN YELLOW WITH ANGER

The Sfeir-Semler gallery, with spaces in Beirut and Hamburg, has been instrumental in establishing the careers of numerous artists from the Arab world. Sadly, following the devastating explosion that took place in the Lebanese capital in early August, their space in Beirut has been destroyed – it was located less than a kilometre from the explosion site. The gallery is nevertheless carrying on with its activities from its Hamburg space, promoting Lebanon's cultural scene, with a group show featuring three Lebanese artists: Walid Raad (b 1967), Etel Adnan (b 1925), and Rayyane Tabet (b 1983). The title of the show, *A Sun Yellow with Anger*, is drawn from the *Arab Apocalypse* written by Etel Adnan during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The manuscript, based on 51 chapters that address the Arab dislocation, is read in German and English in the gallery, and is also accompanied by a sound work.



Sweet Talk Commissions (Solidere: 1994-1997) by Walid Raad, 2019, still from the exhibition view, Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg, 2020

Walid Raad has completed numerous works related to the political situation in Lebanon and the chaotic consequences of the war. Looking at these issues on a more global scale, the artist reflects on violence and on how it affects the world. His film *Sweet Talk Commissions* (Solidere) echoes these

concerns. Rayyane Tabet, the youngest of the featured artists, underlines with his installation how the hardships faced by the people in Lebanon force them to leave their country and rebuild a life away from their homeland.

For the gallery, this exhibition is a way to show

that Lebanon's artistic scene is carrying on regardless of the present extreme difficulties, with the hope of reopening the Beirut space in the near future.

Olivia Sand

● Until 24 October, Sfeir Semler Gallery, Hamburg, Germany www.sfeir-semler.com

NALINI MALANI

Can You Hear Me?

As part of its annual programme of artist commission, Whitechapel Gallery has commissioned a major new work from Nalini Malani. Embodying the role of the artist as social activist, Malani gives voice to the marginalised through visual stories, which often take the form of multi-layered, immersive installations, exploring themes of violence, feminism, politics, racial tensions and social inequality. Widely considered the pioneer of video art in India, Malani has a 50-year multimedia practice that includes film,

photography, painting, wall drawing, erasure performance, theatre, animation and video.

Can You Hear Me?, the artist's first UK commission, comprises 84 animations projected on the walls of the Whitechapel Gallery's historic interior. Made between 2017 and 2020, they feature overlapping hand-drawn images and notes, as well as fragments of quoted text. In this installation Malani once more fills the former central reading room of the Whitechapel Public Library with books, transcribing quotes by influential writers



Can You Hear Me? (2020) by Nalini Malani, animation chamber, 9-channel installation with 88 single-channel, stop motion animations, sound. Photo: Ranabir Das © Nalini Malani

such as Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, Bertolt Brecht, Veena Das, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Milan Kundera, George Orwell and Wislawa Szymborska. This 21st-century form of the artist

notebook is projected directly onto the gallery's brick walls with text and image taking the form of moving graffiti.

● Through May 2021, Whitechapel Gallery, London, whitechapelgallery.org

GARDEN

Chen Ping has a deep interest in people, which can be seen throughout his work and is reflective of both his optimism and shared humanity.

From his earliest to most recent pieces, Ping highlights the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment around us. This is not an individualised relationship, but one that seeks to represent how we are all connected in this world. This shared experience is of a cosmopolitan nature – something we must embrace if we are to overcome the crises that confront us.

Ping's flow of colours has no sharp lines – the images are intertwined with people, mountains, and trees blurring into each other – and often



difficult to distinguish. He does not see a separation between people and nature, rather the endless contours that overlap and influence each other. It is a circular

relationship that sets out to challenge our desire for linearity.

● Until 13 October, Informality Gallery, Henley-on-Thames, UK, informality.co

Ladbird's Garden 1 (2018) by Chen Ping, from the Garden series, oil on canvas, 122.8 x 182.8 cm

Istanbul Fair

ARTCONTACT

November sees a new contemporary art fair with a location in the heart of Istanbul. For the first edition over 120 galleries are participating from six countries. As well as commercial galleries, Turkish museums and universities will also be participating. Alongside the fair, Istanbul Greater Municipality has organised an international project with the Turkish Ceramic Federation

entitled *Antropause* – as a platform for ceramic artists to show their work. The municipality has also created a special exhibition, *From Ottoman Era to Present*, to complement the fair and the various art- and music-related projects organised for the event.

● From 11 to 15 November, ArtContact, Avrasya/Eurasia Show and Art Centre, Fatih, Istanbul, atifuar.com

BLOOM

The Museum's *Bloom* rotation showcases flora-inspired objects in the Permanent Collection. Planted throughout the main-floor gallery will be pieces adorned with flowers, trees, vines, and other greenery to create the beauty of a garden path in springtime.

Bloom offers visitors a window into Islamic art's centuries-long fascination with floral imagery, explained Aga Khan Museum Assistant Curator Bitia Pourvash, she continued 'The beauty of the natural world is one of the most enduring themes in Islamic art, poetry, and literature. With Bloom, we wanted to highlight the pervasive presence of floral representations across artistic mediums, historical periods, and diverse cultures.'

Highlights include a 16th-century illustration, *Firdausi and the Three Poets of Ghazna*, that once belonged to one of the most exquisite and famous copies of the

Shahnameh ever produced, known as the 'Shah Tahmasp' *Shahnameh* after its patron, who ruled Iran from 1524 to 1576. It depicts the epic's compiler, Firdausi, engaging in a poetic competition with two of his contemporaries, the court poets Unsuri and Farrukhi. Such contests of wit, perspicacity, and erudition were often situated in flourishing gardens and were a characteristic activity of Persian courtly life. Also on show is an 18th-century watercolour, *Entertainment in a Palace from India*, Faizullah, by Faizullah. The dynamic panorama depicts the courtyards and gardens of a large and complex palace. The central scene shows a princess with attendants and musicians watching a dancer skilfully balancing flasks. In the distant background, tiny vignettes of daily life contrast with this peek into the private royal quarters: boats ply the river, a horseman is attacked by a crocodile, two oxen work an irrigation well, and a princely figure on an elephant enters a



Panel of Four Tiles, Iznik, Turkey, circa 1580-90, fritware, underglaze-painted



Dish, Kerman, Iran, circa 1640, stonepaste, underglaze-painted



Entertainment in a Palace by Faizullah, India, Faizabad, circa 1765-1770, opaque watercolour and gold on paper

tiger-filled enclosure ready for the hunt. Along with the architecture of the palace, the rectangular beds and pools of the painting's numerous walled gardens comprise its strongest visual elements. They are filled with flowers, including lotuses, daffodils, and marigolds, which are pleasing to the eye and to the nose. Flowers also decorate the rugs and brocades furnishing the palace.

Ceramics on show include a

17th-century Persian dish featuring a central design of a lotus bouquet tied with a ribbon. It closely follows the design of a Chinese blue-and-white porcelain model of 200 years earlier. The mark on the glazed base resembles the Chinese reignmark that was often painted by Ming potters. Starting from the 9th century, Muslim potters drew inspiration from exported Chinese ceramics and strove

to replicate these objects' the fine white body and colourful glazed decorations. At the same time, the export of cobalt from Iran to China resulted in the rapid expansion of blue-and-white ceramic production during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). A panel of four tiles, from Iznik, Turkey dating to the 16th century is also on show. The small city of Iznik, near Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), was famous for its ceramics with fritware based bodies. The most brilliant examples from the 15th century have blue and white decorations of delicate arabesques, graceful branches in bloom, *rumis* (split-leaf forms), and palmettes on a white slip. During the 16th century, other colours and motifs were added, especially red and bold emerald green as well as naturalistic flowers such as tulips, carnations, peonies, violets, and hyacinths. Serrated leaves (*saz*), such as those symmetrically arranged here in brilliant turquoise, were also commonly featured.

As they meander through the gallery, the curator hopes that visitors will gaze upon nature-inspired designs on paintings, delicate ceramics, and fine metalwork. Other objects, including scientific manuscripts and works of



Firdausi and the Three Poets of Ghazna, folio from the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, attributed to Aqa Mirak Tabriz, Iran, circa 1532, opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper. All images courtesy of the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto

Persian poetry, reflect the countless ways plants have been used to understand, enhance, and express the human experience. This rotation encourages viewers to consider the wide-ranging power of plants – to decorate, to heal, to teach, to convey vivid human emotion, to prompt spiritual reflection. By investigating the beauty and versatility of flowers, we can deepen our understanding of our own complex relationships with plants and the rest of the natural world.

● 20 October until 9 May 2021, Khan Museum, Toronto, agakhanmuseum.org

IN THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS

Why do we collect things? What do these things say about us? In China, there was a long tradition of collectors known as scholar-officials. The arts played a central role in the life of scholars as ways to cultivate one's self, but they also created communities of like-minded friends. As social leaders, they set examples of what others could aspire to: living a life of thoughtful understanding, beauty, and friendship.

In a similar way, Virginia W Kettering and Jefferson Patterson were leaders of the Dayton community who were

also collectors of Asian art, and through their generosity these collections formed the basis of the Dayton Art Institute's extensive collection. This 'Focus' exhibition explores the contributions of Kettering and Patterson through the lens of the Chinese scholar-collector, presenting a variety of artworks that may have been part of a scholar's life, and raising the broader question of just what it means to collect.

● Until 25 October, Dayton Art Institute, Ohio, daytonartinstitute.org



Round Table (1995) by Chen Zhen, installation view, Palace of Nations, Geneva. Centre national des arts plastiques, entrusted to Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de Création industrielle, 2003. Courtesy Gallerie Continua © ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Chen Zhen

SHORT-CIRCUITS

One of the most significant artists of his generation, the late Chen Zhen (1955-2000) left China in 1986 for Paris, where he gained international recognition. Leaving his country behind encouraged the artist – who up until then was focusing on painting – to radically change his approach towards art, and work with installation.

Chen Zhen coined various terms and created different theories during his working life that have survived him. Most of them are closely

linked to his own trajectory, as well as his personal experiences. Diagnosed with haemolytic anaemia at the age of twenty-five, Chen Zhen further examined medicine and the concept of healing through his art. Similarly, he coined the word 'transexperiences' to point to the experiences of leaving one's native country and go from one place to another. It comes therefore as no surprise that he drew from both his Eastern background as well as the West, which had now become his home.

The exhibition brings together more than 20 large-scale installations the artist completed during the last 10 years of his life, with some of them being shown together for the very first time.

Some pieces, such as *Round Table* (1995), created for the United Nations building in Geneva, have become iconic in their symbolic meaning referring to the international world of diplomacy. The exhibition, entitled *Short-circuits*, is a reference also drawn from the artist

himself, referring to the hidden meaning of a work of art when taken from the place for which it was created towards a different setting. By also addressing themes like globalisation, consumerism, the hegemony of the Western values, Chen Zhen's concerns remain even more vivid today, with these issues having become essential within any larger political party.

Olivia Sand

● Until 21 February 2021, Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan, pirellihangarbicocca.org



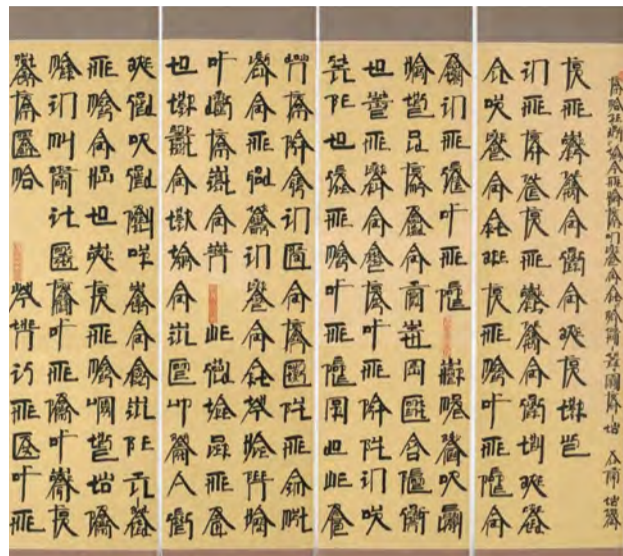
Bowl, Jun ware, glazed stoneware, China, circa 12th century, Northern Song, 960-1126/Jin, 1115-1234. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Honourable Jefferson Patterson

SPOTLIGHT ON A NEW GENERATION Contemporary Chinese Artists

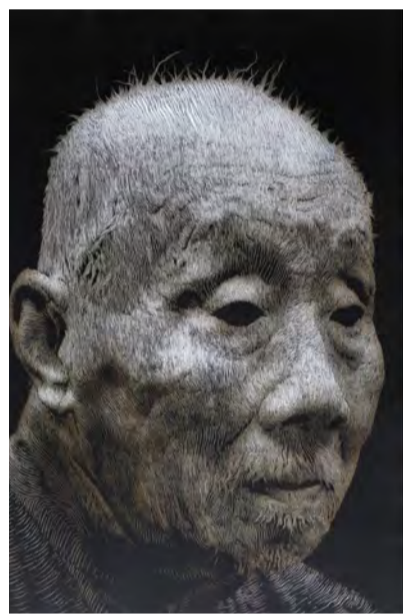
In the last 100 years, China has undergone dramatic changes, including the emperor's abdication in 1912, the establishment of the Republic of China (1912–49), the Communist takeover under Mao Zedong in 1949, the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), and the establishment of reforms after Mao's death in 1976. Today China is among the world's fastest growing economies, becoming a global leader in renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and green technology. Its relevance in the art world also grows as Chinese contemporary artists have gained international recognition.

The works presented in the exhibition are produced by artists living in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the US, who all reference traditional media and artistic practices – like working with ink on paper or silk – but breach historical boundaries by using new formats, techniques, and subject matter. Artists in the exhibition include Liu Dan (b 1953), Ai Weiwei (b 1957), Liu Jing (b 1983), Yan Wenliang (1893–1988), Xu Bing (b 1955), and Peng Wei (b 1974).

The printmaker Liu Jing is the youngest artist in the show. Liu conceived *Master Series*, which features cultural leaders who contributed to China's reformation and modernisation during the Republican period (1912–49) and the Mao era (1949–76); all came under attack during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Yan Wenliang was one of the fathers of Chinese



Square Word Calligraphy – Quotations from Chairman Mao (2000) by Xu Bing, set of four hanging scroll, ink on paper; each panel 248 x 69.2 cm. Collection of the artist © Xu Bing



Portrait of Yan Wenliang (1893–1988), by Liu Jing, 2017, from the series Master Series, Four Portraits of Masters of Modern Art, oil-based ink woodblock prints, 90 x 60 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Trust © Liu Jing



WATCH
Clarissa von Spee
talk about this
exhibition

oil painting and an important educator and art academy director. Qi Baishi (1864–1957), remains one of China's best-known modern ink artists, who excelled in simple,

witty ink sketches of everyday subjects.

• Until 1 November, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, clevelandart.org



Jewyo Rhii. Installation view of the Pallet in Love Your Depot at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul. Works by Minouk Lim (left), Woojin Jeon (top-centre), Seunghye Hong (right)

LOVE YOUR DEPOT

This solo exhibition, *Love Your Depot*, by Seoul-based artist Jewyo Rhii (b 1971), is the first after being nominated 2020 Artist of the Year by the Korean Cultural Centre UK (KCCUK) through their major annual award programme. Part of an ongoing project which awarded Rhii the 2019 Korea Artist Prize for her show at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Seoul, the exhibition at KCCUK is reconstituted as a multi-purpose, multi-dimensional presentation. At once a physical storage space for artworks and a workspace for creative activities – including a gallery for other artists – Rhii also brings the show to the digital realm, creating an accompanying online platform.

A towering, modular steel structure occupies the central exhibition space, boasting an array of paintings and drawings which hang from adjustable racks, and fragmented sculptures

judiciously positioned on tiered shelving. Designed as a prototype storage space for the artist's work, the structure acts as an experimental system which belies the conventional norms of an archive by both housing and exhibiting artworks. Here, Rhii disrupts the traditional art world cycle by proposing a new lifespan for works of art beyond museum cabinets and archives. Foregrounding intersections between public and private spaces and those liminal spaces which lie between the two, Rhii's work exposes what often remains hidden behind gallery walls.

Presenting a selection of her artworks previously archived in London, Rhii negates the practical, and potentially costly, issue many artists face when choosing whether to keep or dispose of their new works following an exhibition – a question particularly pertinent for younger artists whose exhibitions may span just days. By inviting a group of emerging artists to exhibit their works at the KCCUK,

Love Your Depot unfolds as a collaborative and participatory project – eschewing the notion of the exhibition as the climax of the life of an artwork. A programme of events throughout the show's run further explores this idea, transforming the exhibition space into a working hub of creative activity.

Beyond KCCUK's gallery space, Love Your Depot is also presented by way of an online platform. Reflecting upon the tradition of artistic practice to rely on the physicality of an artwork, Rhii challenges this concept by expanding the exhibition to the digital sphere. Creating both a physical and virtual exhibition which is all-encompassing – a place for establishing new collaborations and reigniting older relationships, as well as artwork storage and creative activity.

• From 28 October to 23 January 2021, Korean Cultural Centre UK, London, kccuk.org.uk

MAKE ME A SUMMARY OF THE WORLD

This is the first major survey of Rina Banerjee's work in the US, which includes large-scale installations, sculptures, and paintings produced over two decades. Altogether, the 33 works in the exhibition show Banerjee's ongoing desire to summarise the complexity, beauty, and sense of disequilibrium that can arise in a world undergoing constant fragmentation and renewal.

Born in Kolkata, India, in 1963, Banerjee now works in the US. She is renowned for works about the splintering of identity, tradition, and culture often prevalent in diasporic communities. In a single assemblage, one can find materials sourced from around the world, including African tribal jewellery, Murano glass, and South Asian antiques. 'While the works can be enjoyed as vividly coloured and sensuously layered sculptures, they also address themes of

multiple identities, feminism, the impact of colonialism, cultural appropriation, and globalisation,' said Frist Art Museum Chief Curator Mark Scala.

Banerjee's works often reflect her South Asian ancestry, but are not limited by biography, ethnicity, race, or class. 'You see an elasticity of boundaries in her hybrid characters, which contain associations with the feminine but avoid socially constructed expectations of gender,' continued Scala. 'Banerjee seeks to transcend labels and reject fixed definitions and by doing so frames identity as an ongoing process of negotiation and personal choice.'

Humanity's interactions with the natural environment are another major theme in Banerjee's work. Juxtaposing organic objects such as oyster and cowrie shells with synthetic products, she shows this relationship to be both interdependent and destructive.

Learn of their discovery . . . (2013) by Rina Banerjee, acrylic on watercolour paper, 30 x 44 in. Private collection, Miami © Rina Banerjee. Image courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



The exhibition is organised thematically and begins with In breathless confinement, an updated version of *Infectious Migrations*, a work included in the 2000 Whitney Biennial that links metaphors of disease with immigration. Also on view will be a selection of sculptures that were featured in the

2017 Venice Biennale. The titles of Banerjee's works, often more than 50 words long and filled with idiosyncratic spelling and free association, represent her rebellion against the worldwide dominance of the English language. These titles, Banerjee says, are 'my attempt to massage [the English

language] to speak for a vast number of people who use it sparingly, awkwardly, creatively under the pressures of globalisation, colonisation, and the commercialisation of English culture'.

• From 9 October to 10 January 2020?, Frist Art Museum, Nashville, fristartmuseum.org

• On 9 October there is Artist's Perspective: Conversation with Rina Banerjee and Mark Scala, at noon. Free, but registration is required to watch. Rina Banerjee joins Chief Curator Mark Scala in conversation about the exhibition. Learn more about Banerjee's artistic practice and how exhibiting at the Frist Art Museum, which occupies Nashville's former main post office, symbolises the ideal of egalitarian communication that is at the core of her work. The programme will be presented on Zoom.



CLICK HERE
to register for
the event

Islamic Arts Diary



The Islamic Museum of Australia is a beacon of multiculturalism in Australia

By Lucien de Guise

TAKING ROOT DOWN UNDER

One of the less well-known Islamic-art museums is also one of the newest. The Islamic Museum of Australia is 10 years old and very much in its own world. Its work is cut out for it convincing the Australian public that Muslims are not quite the threat that they were once thought to be. Every year there is an exhibition with the same inward-looking focus. The principal award at this year's 'Australian Muslim Artists' show was, to my surprise and delight, an artist of part-Malaysian descent. Having seen how unappreciated most Malaysian artists are outside that

small country, it is marvellous to see recognition given in the huge nation of Australia – although Malaysia actually has a larger population despite being one-twentieth the land size.

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah is from the biggest state of all – Western Australia – and his work is a tribute to his Malaysian mother. It is her love of horticulture that inspired him to create the painted-wood sculpture that won the recent prize. *Transplants* (Euphorbia, Monstera, Sansevieria) reflects her ability to allow the natural world to thrive in her care. Anyone who has spent any time in Malaysian Muslim homes will know that they are usually filled with silk or plastic flowers that hardly do justice to the verdant

world outside. It seems that Abdul-Rahman's mother has a gift for handling the real thing. Her son is, in a way, continuing that other tradition of facsimile nature brought into the home. The wooden version is definitely less fussy looking and is a worthy subject for a multi-disciplinary artist whose sculptural practice explores the intersection of politics, cultural identity and the natural world.

When you examine the other participants in the exhibition, you realise what a multicultural environment Australia has become. Their origins lie all over the world, but each one has brought something distinctive to their new home. One of the most intriguing is by Amber Hammad, born in Pakistan. It has the entertaining title of *3 Disgraces, after Rubens* and consists of an appropriation of Rubens' renowned painting in which the artist juxtaposes three nudes with three variations of modest contemporary Pakistani attire, simultaneously veiling and unveiling the female body. Amber describes the anxieties that have been present in almost all cultures and religions.

This year's exhibition is hosted by the Islamic Museum of Australia in partnership with La Trobe University and saw a record number of entries from artists across the country. The museum's general manager Maryum Chaudhry said they had moved ahead with the flagship exhibition despite being in the midst of a global pandemic – one

which is still affecting Melbourne in particular. 'Cultural institutions have had to reimagine how to engage with audiences and the IMA is no exception'.

In addition to the excitement of seeing a Malaysian element in the show, it was a treat to see that the panel of judges included Dr Stefano Carboni. Before he became a part of the art-management establishment, Carboni was known as the greatest living authority on Islamic glass. If ever there was a globalised form of creativity, this would be the one. Beads from the Muslim world, as



Detail from *Disgraces after Rubens* (2020) by Amber Hammad, acrylics and inks on printed canvas 53.5 x 66 cm



Transplants (Euphorbia, Monstera, Sansevieria), 2019 by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, painted wood, 103 x 70 x 70 cm

with Venice, ended up in every corner of the planet. Is it possible that some ended up as heirlooms among Australia's aboriginal population? Perhaps this is something that the IMA could investigate. Otherwise, the earliest contact with Muslims that is widely acknowledged in Australia was the so-called 'Ghans'. These camel drivers from India and Afghanistan helped open up the continent in the 19th century and have been held in some esteem ever since.

● Australian Muslim Artists at the Islamic Museum of Australia ends 20 November

MAKING A PRICE POINT

The situation is reversed at World Art Dubai, where artists from all over the planet converge on the heart of the Islamic world. Not many art fairs have the courage to continue at the moment, but things are different in the Gulf. Defying the conventional image of unrestrained ostentation, this event promotes itself as 'bringing affordable art to the Middle East'. This shows real maturity in the market. Not a word about exclusivity or VIP enclosures. This is a no-holds-barred arena for those who don't necessarily have three large homes to fill with the latest fads. Prices for the art seem to start at US\$100, which would barely buy a meal at some of the more sumptuous fairs anywhere in the world.

World Art Dubai promises

more than 3,000 works from around the globe. There is also a local emphasis with emerging Emirati artists on display. Now that the Gulf has shed much of its ultra-traditional reputation, visitors can also look forward to pop-art icons and fashion art disrupters as well as experimental expressionists. Fortunately there is still a place for fine-art and photography practitioners in the midst of what is described as an 'eclectic melting pot of artistic style'. Keeping prices low is an essential part of the programme. Although there are artists whose work will not be found in the hundred-dollar bargain bin, it is a relief to find that there are not any in the six-figure range.

Continuing the angle of art and glass, I was pleased to see glass being listed as the single

largest medium at this fair. We are not talking trade beads here. There are pieces over two metres tall, along with some fascinating cross-cultural endeavours. One that raised a smile was a decanter, presumably yet is made of Bohemian-style crystal and ornamented with an East Asian peony. The artist is from Japan.

It has to be said that there is not a glut of artists from the Gulf, unless they are in the 'emerging' category. This is probably just facing up to reality. That region's history is more about a trade than visual statements – and least of all about anything that might be deemed idolatrous. At the moment, it's reassuring to see anything happening at all.

● World Art Dubai, 8-10 October

EYE'S RIGHT

Easily the most famous collector from the Gulf is commemorated in an exhibition titled *The Falcon's Eye* at the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar. For a while, Sheikh Saoud Al-Thani was the most famous collector from anywhere. Dying tragically young in 2014, in his day he had perhaps spent more than any art lover in the whole history of collecting. Few of his acquisitions were for himself, or so it seemed. Almost all were for the numerous museums that the royal family of Qatar had been planning to open. Some of them did open, most notably the Museum of Islamic Art, bringing IM Pei out of retirement to ensure that the building was as eye-catching as the collection.

Although there were times when the relationship between Sheikh Saoud and the rest of the royal family was tense, Qatar is certainly paying tribute to him now. 'Eclectic' is a word that comes up often, and why not when his interests ranged from parrots to photography and bicycles. A visionary in his way, he collected everything, but with a discerning eye and almost unlimited funds. According to his daughter, Sara, 'the cultural significance and contextual



The breadth of Sheikh Saoud's vision is made in this Qatari exhibition

meaning behind each piece he collected was just as important as the aesthetic value of the object. He very much wanted to know more about and deeply appreciated the historical and socio-political significance of each item. It was not always acceptable to disseminate the intriguing stories, beliefs and traditions of foreign cultures but things have come a very long way. The arts have gone from being almost non-existent here to act as the main attraction for both locals and tourists. Making Qatar, in particular, a leading hub in the cultural scene.

I am very proud of my

father for his contributions in doing so'.

Sheikh Saoud was probably the most remarkable aesthete to come out of the Gulf. Fortunately, his legacy is still very much on view. It is good to remind visitors to the Museum of Islamic Art that there is more to the place than a stellar architect. The collection is a celestial testimony to the man who assembled it. Some of the acquisitions may have been controversial, but all are a delight to look at.

● *A Falcon's Eye: Tribute to Sheikh Saoud Al Thani* at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, until April 2021

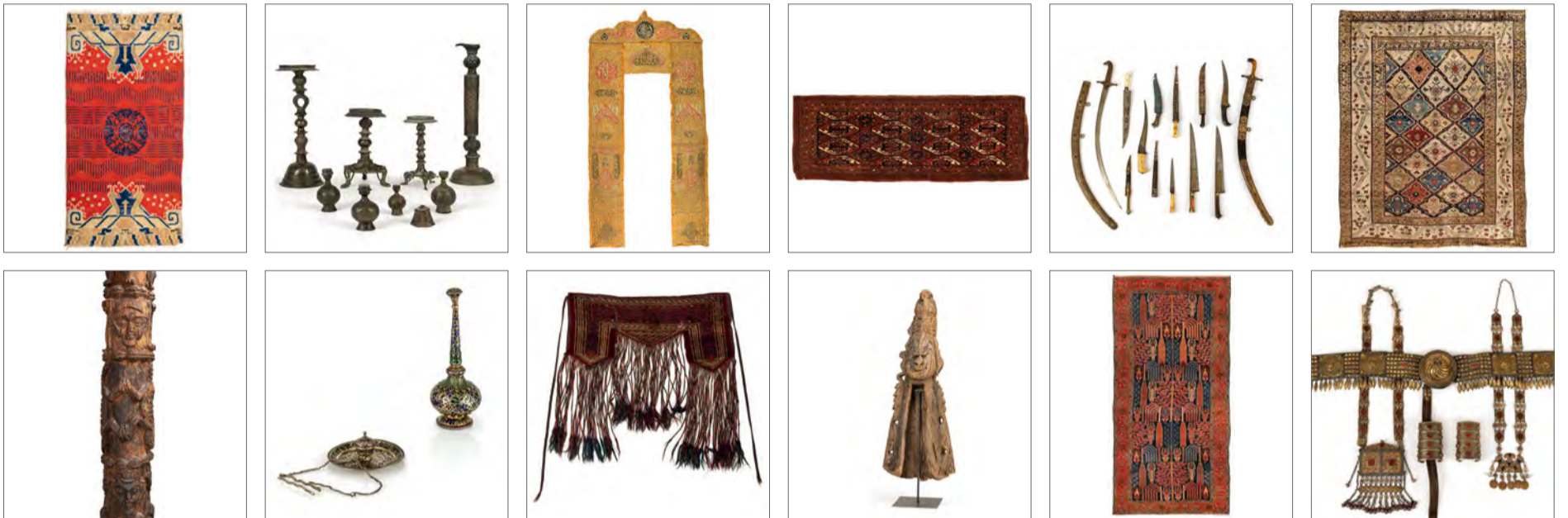


The lure of East Asia is very much alive in Dubai... and so is the influence of street art



793 | COLLECTOR'S RUGS & CARPETS, TRIBAL & ORIENTAL ART

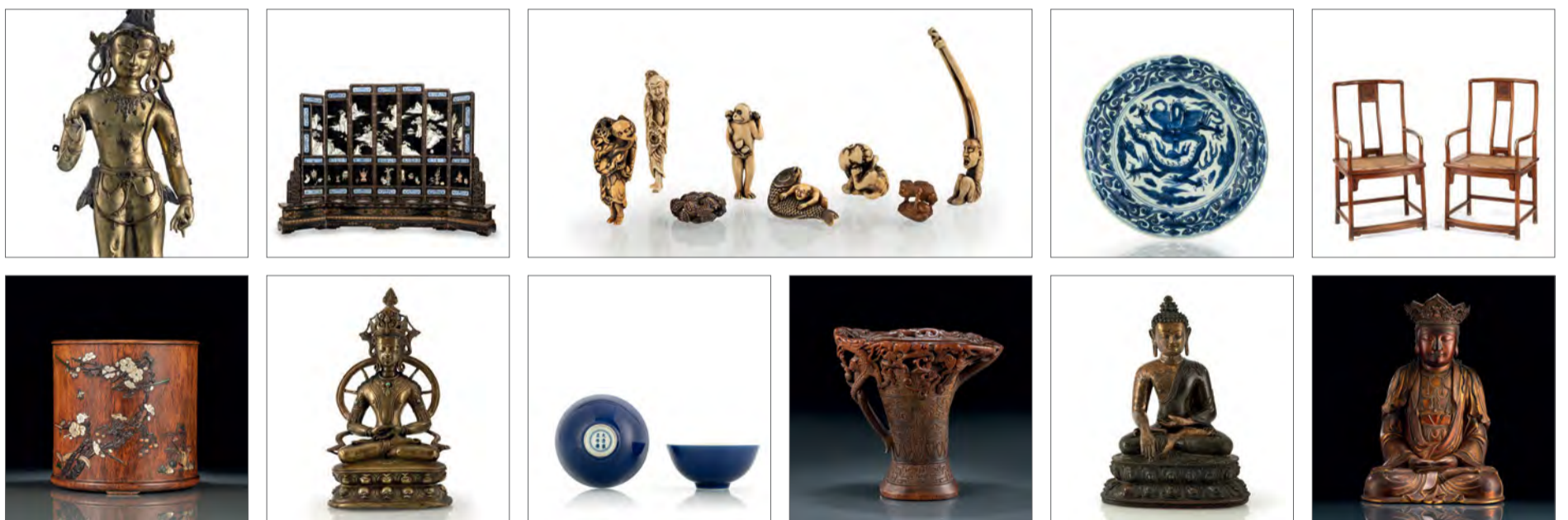
23rd October 2020 | Viewing: 20th - 22nd Oktober 2020



Part I of a collection of tribal jewellery and artworks, assembled between 1960 and 1972 by a South German couple who travelled extensively through India, Tibet, Afghanistan, and Persia. Islamic and tribal art and carpets from an important South German private collection | Collector's rugs, carpets, and textiles from a South German private collection

108 | FINE ASIAN ART

8th - 9th December 2020 | Viewing: 4th - 8th December 2020



Part I of an extensive private collection of Tibetan and Chinese Art, assembled prior to 1930 | The collection of Friedrich and Dr. Ruth Boss, personal physician of the last Chinese empress Wanrong, assembled in China between 1912 and 1938 | Chinese furniture and imperial porcelain from an old European diplomat's collection, assembled in China between 1923 and 1928 | Tibetan bronzes, works of art and paintings from the estate of the collection of Prof. Dr. Hermann Schroeder (1902-1991) and his family

Consignments for this sale are requested by October 23rd 2020

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