

# ASIAN ART

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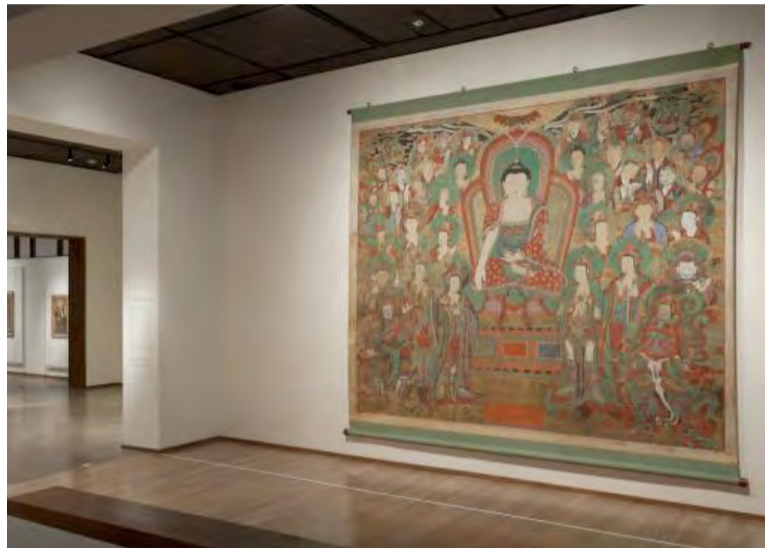
## BUDDHIST PAINTINGS RETURN TO KOREA FROM US

It used to be one of the largest traditional Korean paintings in the US, held in the Los Angeles County Museum of Arts (LACMA) collection, but now this painting, along with others, have returned home. The Joseon-dynasty (1392-1910) works recently restituted are *Yeongsanhoesangdo* (Preaching Shakyamuni Buddha), from 1755, and three portraits from *Siwangdo* (the Kings of Hell, 1798), which were originally housed in the Sinheung temple (Sinheungsa) in Sokcho, Gangwon Province, in northeastern South Korea. These works were believed to have been looted during the Korean War (1950-53) in the early 1950s.

The large *Yeongsanhoesangdo* painting, in ink and mineral colours on silk, depicts the historical Buddha Seokgamoni (Shakyamuni) preaching at the Vulture Peak in India and was acquired by LACMA in 1998, but was so damaged that it was not displayed to the public until 2012 after it had undergone conservation. When acquired, the painting had been cut into six irregular pieces and had suffered from extensive loss of

pigment; during the conservation effort the separated pieces were re-attached, losses patched, and missing areas of pigment inpainted. The painting presents a visionary scene of the Buddha surrounded by a host of enlightened beings, including bodhisattvas, as well as the Hindu gods Indra and Brahma and the Guardian Kings of the four cardinal directions, inspired by the *Lotus Sutra*, a pivotal text of Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhism.

In 2015, the Jogye Order in Korea initiated a request to look into the ownership of several Korean paintings in LACMA's collection. A letter received in the January 2015 to Director Michael Govan from the Jogye Order indicated that several Korean Buddhist paintings in LACMA's collection had been reported stolen from their temples in Korea. The first of these, *Jijang Siwangdo* (Ksitigarbha and the Kings of Hell), had been first reported in 1988 as stolen from the Yeombulan Hermitage, a Buddhist monastery, and the order requested any known



*Yeongsanhoesangdo* (Preaching Shakyamuni Buddha) in LACMA's Korean Art galleries in 2012

information regarding the work's provenance. In 2015, after research by head of the Chinese, Korean, and South and Southeast Asian Art department and Korean art associate curator Virginia Moon, it was

revealed that *Jijang Siwangdo* was acquired by LACMA in 1994. However, the painting had been widely published in the US from 1991 onwards. The painting was returned in 2017.

As to the recently returned paintings, subsequent research in 2016 and a site visit to Sinheungsa in 2017 by curators Stephen Little and Virginia Moon had confirmed that Sinheungsa was the temple for which the paintings were commissioned in the 18th century, and in which the paintings were hanging in early 1954. As a result of the accumulated evidence, the works were deaccessioned and returned to Korea.

In exchange for the return of these sacred works of art to Korea, and in recognition of LACMA's conservation of these works, the Jogye Order has agreed to collaborate with LACMA on various cultural initiatives, including loans of artwork from each institution to the other for short- and long-term special exhibitions, presentations of related educational programs, and exchanges of human resources.

➔ [Click here to read more about the history of the paintings and their journey home in curator Stephen Little's blog post](#)



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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### RYUKYU KINGDOM, UNESCO

During the summer UNESCO, Japanese authorities and experts discussed the response following the devastating fire of October 2019 at the Shuri-jo site, part of the World Heritage site Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu in Okinawa.

The large fire had a significant impact on the Shuri-jo site and affected a number of reconstructed buildings, including the Seiden (state hall), part of a symbolic construction of the site, as well as some underground remains. The ravaged buildings were replica structures, constructed after 1989 on the basis of detailed documentation, which assisted in the visual interpretation of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Immediately after the fire occurred, Japan expressed its intention to restore the property and devoted a great deal of energy and resources to carrying out emergency works. This included an exhaustive investigation and restoration of the damaged parts of the archaeological remains. A work schedule to rebuild the state hall was established at the end of March 2020, and its implementation began this summer.

#### SHIMAO STONE AGE SETTLEMENT, CHINA

Shimao is a Neolithic site situated in China's Loess Plateau. For decades villages believed the crumbling rock walls near their homes were part of the Great Wall, as parts of this ancient battlement zigzag through this arid region inside the northern loop of the Yellow River, marking the frontier of Chinese rule that stretches back more than 2,000 years. However, locals – and then looters – began finding jade artefacts amongst the rubble. Jade is not indigenous to this northernmost part of Shaanxi Province, the nearest source is almost a thousand

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# KARISHMA D'SOUZA

by Olivia Sand

**Karishma D'Souza's work can be seen as a visual diary blending the artist's memories with current world issues. Primarily working in painting and watercolour, Karishma D'Souza (b 1983) is a keen observer of her surroundings, whether on her extensive travels or in her native India. Aware of local and domestic problems, her work also echoes the voice of the less fortunate – a voice that she ingeniously brings into her pieces.**

**By building her paintings by using various layers, her work, which may seem peaceful and serene at first, actually addresses serious concerns about which the viewer can reflect. Her paintings are inspired by life, with the colours and subject-matter very much connected to the places in which she has lived.**

**Karishma D'Souza takes the viewer into her works to discover a rich narrative drawn from literary, political, and sociological references. A fascinating journey that the artist discusses with the Asian Art Newspaper.**

Karishma D'Souza.  
Courtesy Pedro Faria



**Asian Art Newspaper: You were born in Mumbai (Bombay), so how did you get from Mumbai to Goa?**

**Karishma D'Souza:** My family is Goan, but my grandparents migrated to Bombay when they were young. Bombay is the closest big city to Goa. As for my parents, they moved back to Goa in 1989, although they were born and

brought up in Bombay. They were fortunate to have flexibility with work as they did not need to be in a particular city and therefore they decided to try Goa for a month. They came, liked it, and then stayed. I am Goan in some way, but I was not born there. However, I was brought up and I did my entire schooling in Goa, including my

bachelor's degree. I am probably more attuned to the place than my parents are, because they are still basically Bombay people. Although, in my case, it is without the language. This is what many people ended up doing when they had left; they spoke to their children in English, consequently I do not speak Konkani that much. Language is a



CLICK HERE  
to see  
Karishma  
D'Souza  
working in her  
home studio  
in Goa

## NEWS IN BRIEF

miles away, so it was a mystery why so much jade was being found so close to the Ordos Desert. The site was first discovered in 1976, but archaeologists only conducted a detailed survey of the area in 2013.

As they started to unravel the puzzle, they discovered that the stones were not part of the Great Wall but were the ruins of an earlier fortress city. In 2014, a large altar, probably used for formal worship, was found just outside the ancient city's fortifications.

The dig has revealed more than six miles of protective walls surrounding a 230-foot-high pyramid and an inner sanctum with painted murals and jade artefacts, as well as evidence of possible human sacrifice.

Before excavations were suspended earlier this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, archaeologists uncovered 70 relief sculptures in stone – serpents, monsters, and half-human beasts that resemble later Bronze Age iconography in China.

Carbon-dating has determined that parts of Shimao, as the site is has been called, date back 4,300 years, nearly 2,000 years before the oldest section of the Great Wall – and 500 years before Chinese civilisation took root on the Central Plains, several hundred miles to the south.

Shimao flourished in this seemingly remote region for nearly half a millennium, from around 2300 to 1800 BC. Then the site was abandoned. The archaeological dig

had to be put on hold during the coronavirus pandemic, but has now resumed in order to continue their research at the site.

### THAI BIENNALE 2021

After the success of Thailand Biennale, Krabi 2018, the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture Ministry of Culture (OCAC) has decided to hold the international contemporary Art Biennale in Korat, Nakhon Ratchasima, the largest province in Thailand.

Korat is one of the most prosperous provinces of Thailand that has important historical sites and has the second largest population after Bangkok. In addition to serving as the entry point to the Isan region, Korat is also ideally located at the intersection of three cultural spheres: Thai, Khmer, and Lao. Thus, artists from many countries are invited to collaborate with local communities so that integration between history, art and culture are encouraged to create a new format of artworks and projects for the natural sites and public spaces around Korat City, Pak Chong and Pimai.

Yuko Hasegawa, the head curator and an artistic director of the biennale, says 'The theme for this particular biennale is a proposal and a practice, primarily focusing on the ecologies specific to this region, in an attempt to create autonomous micro-ecologies. These 'ecologies' do not refer only to natural environments: they also encompass

an entire array of elements that surround us, whether they are social, psychological, or informational.

### DOYLE, NEW YORK

Doyle Auctioneers & Appraisers has announced that Richard Cervantes has joined the New York-based firm as a Senior Vice President and Director of Asian Works of Art. Mr Cervantes has previously worked at Freeman's as well as being the director of Asian Arts at Heritage Auctions, overseeing their inaugural Asia Week New York auctions.

### PHILLIPS AND POLY AUCTIONS

The auction house Phillips has been expanding into Asia in recent years, a region of that is still experiencing growth in some sectors of the market. The firm began holding sales in Hong Kong in 2015 and has just announced that it will collaborate with Poly Auction, China's largest state-owned auction house, to jointly conduct sales of 20th century and contemporary art in Hong Kong this November. Specialist teams will work together to plan and execute the series of sales. Jonathan Crockett, chairman of Phillips Asia, said he expects that Phillips's clients will embrace this initiative as it presents an opportunity for consignors to benefit from the combined client base and marketing reach of the two auction houses.

### BEIRUT, UNESCO

The explosions at the port of Beirut

did not only claim hundreds of lives and leave thousands injured, they also inflicted severe damage to some of Beirut's most historic neighbourhoods, major museums, galleries and religious sites and came at a time when Lebanon was already reeling from a series of other crises, including the coronavirus pandemic. UNESCO, responding to the Directorate-General of Antiquities of Lebanon's call for support, is leading the international mobilisation for the recovery and reconstruction of Beirut's culture and heritage, based on the Directorate-General's technical needs assessment and the International Action Plan for Culture in Beirut, which UNESCO is currently developing with all its partners in Lebanon and abroad.

### CHRISTIE'S ONLINE

Christie's first Asia Week Online, from 7 to 24 July, totalled \$8,952,625, establishing the highest total achieved for Asian art online-only sales with global participation from 22 countries. The top lot of the week was an important painting by Tyeb Mehta (1925-2009), one of his earliest explorations of the Falling Figure, which realized \$975,000, achieving the highest price for a South Asian Modern + Contemporary work sold since lockdown and setting a new benchmark for the category in an online auction. The next Asian Art Week, in New York, starts on 22 September, see page 22 in this issue for more details.

big deal in Goa as an idea of belonging. I consider myself Goan, but without speaking the local language.

**AAN:** As an artist, did you ever consider going back to Bombay?

**KDS:** There was this understanding of completing your bachelor's in the home state. Looking back, I find it was extremely helpful, because whatever the education was at college, it formed a community for you. In my opinion, having an art community to be part of in Goa also served as a protection, as all the students knew each other. After completing a five-year curriculum, I went on to study at the University of Baroda, where they were very good at putting you in touch with a lot of people all over India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and South Korea. Then, I did my residency in Amsterdam which was an even broader education. It was important I followed my curriculum in that order, as I could always return to a place besides Bombay that felt like home and where I was connected. This was a great advantage. The disadvantage, of course, was that the standard of education was not that open and somehow you were on your own. Being on your own also meant and implied that there was a kind of anarchy in being part of an art college. The students who graduated and then went on to make their post-graduate studies had created their own worlds. It led to strong and unique creative minds amongst students as they were not reading the same books, nor looking at the same things, or had the same interests. In addition, there was an anarchy amongst the staff as well. The hierarchy of the college had been completely shattered because of the politics and teachers were part of the anarchy. In my opinion, it was the best training – you had training in a way, but the strange atmosphere of people fighting for themselves toughened you up. Coming from the Goa College of Art was not as big a deal because the institution itself was not really institutionalised. Therefore, it was a very interesting and constructive time.

**AAN:** Your work frequently draws from earlier memories. Can you be more specific?

**KDS:** In my previous works, I was trying to keep memories of times where there were moments of peace which then disappeared. As a result, you often felt anxious, looking at what was happening in the world, realising you were not in control. Also, for my masters, I moved to



Landscape witness (2019), watercolour on paper, papier 36,2 x 51 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Xippas

“  
The paintings  
have a sense of  
space and a  
strong sense of  
observation  
”

Gujarat, to Baroda, two years after the genocide had taken place in 2002 – I had followed these events closely. Then, while I was in Gujarat, there were riots every now and then in the old city of Baroda. In addition, buildings in the old part of town were being pulled down, shopping malls were coming up and environmental laws were being completely ignored. During that time, a campaign with very witty political slogans like 'India Shining' and 'Vibrant Gujarat' was launched as a propaganda tool for tourism.

Instead of Vibrant Gujarat and India Shining, I witnessed something quite different: people working longer and longer hours to go from Baroda to Bombay where the factories are, and people affected by the diamond crash which also



Rooting-1 (2018), oil on canvas 150 x 120 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Xippas

happened while I was there. Gujarat is a huge diamond-processing area so people were out of a job in a day, especially those who did not have any other skill. On the other hand, the government was indicating a 9% GDP, which was clearly just fake. There was this symbol of brightly lit and air-conditioned malls, yet the streets were in complete darkness. I think my paintings of that time reflected this darkness. You could not look at a bright light and then look at the work, as you would not be able to see anything. Therefore, you had to have a different scale of lighting in the retina to see the work which reflected how the city really was. Some of the works of that time were of the city and some of them were of memories that held the notion of peace, these were generally particular spaces within Goa or Gujarat, but unlike the ones I have just described. It had more to do with quiet times, spaces without this noise. It could also go beyond my personal experience, taken from a book, or from a memory of a song. It

came from all the places I had been: in Goa, the gardens in Baroda, the outskirts of the city and the ship I had travelled on as a child.

**AAN:** You just mentioned memories from the ship. As a child, you travelled extensively with your parents.

**KDS:** My father worked for a shipping company that traded mostly to China, Australia, and Liberia and therefore I travelled quite a bit at sea. Things are different now and I do not think it is possible to travel the same way today. When I was young, the cargo ships were allowed to come directly into port with the shipping company paying each day that the ship was in port. It would take four to five days to discharge a cargo. Back then, the crew actually had time to see the places where the ship docked and if the family was on board, they could go and visit the city.

I ended up spending four years at sea with periods of up to seven months on the ship at a time, when sailing to Japan, Australia, China,

Liberia, South Africa and Egypt. It was an interesting childhood. As a child, you think everybody's life is the same, you do not think so much about it. It was home. It was helpful in some ways, even though your schooling was unlike other children's. I was the only child on board. I did not go to kindergarten, or attend any of the primary levels. The learning of social skills with other children had to be done later, but I did learn many other useful things instead, for example, how to get close to people very fast because you want to keep a sense of closeness even if you are away from home. You keep being pulled out of school for six months and then put back into the same class. Consequently, you have to devise a way to not forget your friends. It led you to becoming intense with those relationships in your mind. I think this experience has given me the ability to have friends who are not in my city yet I can still maintain very close relationships with them. On the ship, there were safety drills every month, such as fire drills, so from a very young age you learnt to wear a life vest, where to report to, and to know the basic rules you should follow. Not following rules meant you could die, because there was a strong understanding from a very young age that if you fell overboard, with the ship moving so fast, you were gone. You had to deal with the idea of discipline from quite young. I also think being in these wide open spaces brought a sense of safety within wilderness. It also meant you had a great respect for the sea.

**AAN:** How did the sea impact your work in terms of colours and perspective?

**KDS:** What I would point out is the impact in terms of space. I never really thought about certain ideas which in art school are called 'composition'. Besides space, I would probably also mention a strong sense of observation and the ability to record it. There were times when you were at sea for a month, this was when you could watch the subtle changes every day with the sea being a different colour. Yet, there would be some uniformity about the horizon with the clouds above and the sea below. And then, suddenly, things would be visually completely new in each port. In addition, I feel it can also generate the need for a strong sense of belonging and because of this travel, quite early on, I came to have the understanding that I was from a particular place, and therefore, I needed to know other countries, too. I knew I was moving to a place which was another country and had another flag, with people who looked different to me.

**AAN:** I know you are an enthusiastic reader, be this poetry or novels in general. To what type of works are you mainly drawn?

**KDS:** It is a mix from autobiographies to novels. Autobiographies let you enjoy other people's worlds by reading about their lives. Then, I also read poetry, especially Sufi poetry. My interests go from autobiographies to fiction from many countries, basically anything from folk stories to history.

**AAN:** Do you see a link between your readings and your work?

**KDS:** Right now, my work is more anchored in the present. Before, however, I would use the works to remember writing: I look at a painting from 10 years ago and I  
Continued on page 4



Land Conversations (2016). Courtesy of the artist

## 4 Profile

recall exactly the text the painting is referring to. I find it to be an excellent way to remind me about certain writing. The places that you remember in a painting, for example, that recall a life experience, can also be linked to a specific text and I would often use these works to remember specific writings. Each painting would have around four texts that were linked to it.

**AAN:** It is a very interesting way of bringing figurative elements together with abstract ones.

**It is rare to have both universes within one single piece. How would you describe your work: figurative, abstract, or both?**

**KDS:** Storytelling is a huge part of my work and very representative of what I do. Later, my work moved to include symbols, but before it used to be very precise, with a depiction of a specific street, of this house on that street. If you walked down that street you would recognise the work as a painting of that particular street. My work is about storytelling and, for now, I think it is figurative. I do not know where my work will go in the future. I may return to explore the human figure after a two or three year gap.

**AAN:** Some of your earlier works were drawings. Do you usually complete preparatory drawings before starting a painting?

**KDS:** I do. I complete drawings as I am moving through the work.

**AAN:** Looking back on your work over the past 10 years, there is a major change in terms of palette, as the works have become much brighter. Do you agree?

**KDS:** Indeed, there were some very dark paintings in Baroda, and they were completed in a conscious way. I started bringing some light into the works during the last years in Baroda. Looking back, I feel that I have brought into my paintings what interested me and, basically, I could almost say that I work from life. Then, in Amsterdam, the colours of the Netherlands began to appear. Coming back to Goa, the place has changed the colours again. In Goa, with the monsoon, there were softer tones, more fluid, and even these kept changing. In Portugal, there was a lot of red and blue reacting to each other. When I returned to Goa, green came back. In my present works, the portraits are depicting loved ones in nature – in the garden or in backgrounds of nature – but not in indoor scenes. In my opinion, the colour palette has to do with the place and the light, and over time, it has also become extremely symbolic.

**AAN:** When you say symbolic, can you be more specific?

**KDS:** Colours were odes to various objects or beings and the colour blue, for example, was an homage to the Dalit movement (rejecting Hinduism and challenging the caste system), as there are parts of history that are not spoken about. In India, although everybody goes through school, there are certain stories that you have to learn on your own. In my case, I had started my education about these things quite late, when I was in my early thirties.

Symbolism came up in my work when I visited a friend in Myanmar, where I visited many pagodas and saw lots of Buddhist imagery. Therefore, the work *Burmese Buddha* was one of the first paintings using the colour symbolism of blue on the Buddha's face, the symbol of the sky



The Nationalist, the Patriot, Plant Person, Water and New Things (2017), oil on canvas, 75.5 x 114 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Xippas

and the sea, which was a memory of me on the ship. So I merged the dream of peace and my childhood peace with everything in Myanmar.

After that, I began to discover certain aspects of Indian life previously unknown to me: tradition, castes, and colour. From what I understand, in India, there are particular colours that certain castes cannot use. There is a symbolism in colour, where certain colours place you in a particular community. I also began to observe from the outside (my family is



Burma Buddha (2016). Courtesy of the artist



Memory holder (2018), oil on canvas, 30 x 32 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Xippas



Ocean Words (2018), oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Xippas

Catholic) the various festivals in India in regard to gods and demons, where some people's god is another person's demon. Some festivals have festive colours that use bright pink and orange as celebratory colours. In addition, a festival is often placed in the context of an epic story of a battle and the vanquishing of a demon that is somebody else's god. It is always political, even the spiritual stories are quite political.

I started using a red border in my work, which in India can be found in many manuscripts and miniature paintings and traditionally is often based on the connecting narratives. I began using this in a very simple way – using a black border. I took on devices found in manuscript paintings that feature bright and beautiful colours. However, sometimes, the subject-matter is actually not so celebratory. So my use also plays with that. It seem to happen quite often in art all over the world, for example, paintings like Piero della Francesca's *The Flagellation of Christ* (circa 1455-60) is one I keep coming back to, because it is such a peaceful image when you first look at it: everything is extremely balanced, but it is quite a gruesome scene with three people chatting while somebody is being flayed. It is a strange painting and many works of art are like this – they play with the visual scene – this can also apply to colour, tone, or the overall visual beauty of the painting.

One of my paintings has a blood bath at the base of the trees with a red kind of spillage that moves out of the forest. The painting looks peaceful and there are peaceful parts in it, like a medieval *mapa mundi*, but in the background there could be another thing actually happening with a pool of red moving out of a batch of green trees. In the use of symbols, there are the ones that anyone can understand, such as fire, basically a common experience for everyone.

If the painting can speak to me about these feelings of peace in parts of the canvas, I feel it would convey this to everyone in the same way, because it is based on common emotions with the text echoing that emotion. The painting is readable without knowing all the texts that are behind it. In some of the works, I have also used references to political issues in India today. They are not direct references, however, a figure eating something from skulls is quite direct in terms of symbolism. You look at that and you realise there is a kind of demon devouring people. It is quite straightforward in terms of imagery.

**AAN:** For the viewer, besides the work per se, the other important part seems to be the title of the piece.

**How do you choose it?**

**KDS:** Some of the titles from earlier works were addressing different senses. Otherwise, it was more like a comment on the work, something one could do and look at within the painting. Also, for some works, the title lets the viewer know what the work is about, like something I would write to a friend. Basically, many of the works were letters to friends from 2014 onwards, because I was relating to so many people who were not in the same city as me. Therefore, particular paintings are works to certain friends. The title is like a sentence and in these last few years, it would be something that you could say after a long conversation. It relates to an understanding between two people, like the gesture of what the two friends are feeling. In a way, the titles are conversations.

**AAN:** Looking closer at your work, there is an amazing attention to detail. Have you studied or been taught miniature painting?

**KDS:** No, but I have seen a lot of it when travelling in India and abroad. In all traditional painting, from temple frieze to miniatures, there is a lot of detailing in these works and this has to do with telling stories. It could be decorative, but mostly, the details are important with a tiny object in the corner of a temple unfolding in a whole story.

**AAN:** Earlier, you mentioned your residency in the Netherlands.

**The various residencies seem to have played a very important role in the development of your work.**

**Which residencies were essential?**

**KDS:** The key residencies were the ones in the Netherlands, and a short period in Maine, in the US. The residency in Maine was quite a social experiment as well, as during that month and a half, there were close to 80 artists you would like to talk to while also wanting to create a body of work. Portugal was not that much of a residency, it was more trying to understand how today's Portugal relates to Goa, trying to understand Goa, and also reading much more about the region because so far my understanding of the place has come from just being there rather than through reading about it. Right now, I am catching up on that, and my stay in Portugal, where I completed the work for the show in Paris this spring, was an excellent time to think about Goa from Portugal. I feel it would be helpful for me and for my work to move back and forth between these two places.

The Dutch residency lasted two years and it was the first time I had left India as an adult for work. Also, it was the first time I met with such a variety of artists from all over the world. These residencies involved important conversations with other fellow artists, as well as some travels together. These are the friendships that sustain you as you move forward. In order to practise, you need to have people who believe in your work and mostly, the support that keeps you going comes from other artists who are friends. These residencies are important as they build a lasting community.

**AAN:** Did seeing first-hand the works of art in Europe have a strong impact?

**KDS:** There were many conceptual artists from art history that I saw for the very first time. Those were the most striking for me, especially German artist Hanne Darboven's work (1941-2009). With colour

reproductions of such good quality, I had immersed myself in these reproductions of paintings. Ultimately, it was wonderful to see them in person, but over the years, I have tried to get as much as I could from the reproductions. Therefore, what really impacted me were not particular paintings, but rather the conceptual side of artists. For example, I looked more carefully at the obsessiveness, the quality of obsession of certain works. As I actually saw Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-1943), I realised that it was not a flat painting as the reproductions would lead you to believe. Mondrian reworked it so much that he began to use thick tape stuck on tape. In a way, the work was driven by a certain obsessiveness, with the artist trying to get to exactly what he wanted. Mondrian was a cliché, but seeing the work had an impact. I ended up learning a lot from these conceptual artists.

**AAN:** Do you feel you integrated any of that conceptual thinking in your work, or is it something that is still being processed?

**KDS:** I think the conceptual thinking was already there. During the residency, I did not do anything else other than paint. In some ways, it has been more about what the works were about. There were conversations about how one thinks about history in relation to image-making, how one talks about images that are violent, or create a sensation of disgust, or fear. There were conversations that were related to certain ideas and it all depended on to whom I was talking: in Goa it had to do with changing demographics and what people were talking about in terms of immigration. These things all come into the work, but the conceptual aspect keeps moving, depending on where I am and what the local concerns are.

**AAN:** You followed several programmes focusing on printmaking.

**Have you completed any large bodies of work involving print?**

**KDS:** I have, but mostly in college. What I enjoyed most was serigraphy (silk screen printing), so I did a lot of that. Every now and then, I work with print. Next time I am in Portugal, I would like to do another set of serigraphy that brings in photographs, found objects and paper clippings. Furthermore, I want to look at ways to work in printmaking again in other places in India.

**AAN:** Do you feel it is as medium that is meeting your expectations?

**KDS:** Serigraphy silkscreen seems more fruitful for me. I think serigraphy comes closest to painting, in regard to how many layers you can use in terms of tonalities, colour variations and it is also collage-like.

**AAN:** What projects would you like to undertake in the near future?

**KDS:** What I feel I need right now is to focus on my own research, as I want to read about a great deal of social and political movements from a wide period. Besides that, I have been talking to a few friends about having dual shows. I would like to collaborate and have an exhibition with a friend where we have similarities in what we are addressing.

I would like to explore the idea of how we can work together for a period of several months and then, have an exhibition together.



Xu Zhen in his studio in Shanghai

# The Enigma at the Heart of Xu Zhen

by Michael Young

Xu Zhen is arguably one of the most fascinating artists to emerge from China in recent years with a multi-disciplinary practice that ranges across sculpture, installation, painting and collage, much of which is produced by assistants who beaver away in his immense Shanghai studio, which also functions as a factory-like, art-manufacturing facility, while Xu Zhen seems more entrepreneur and CEO than an artist.

In 2009, he formed the art business MadeIn Company – the name riffing off the ubiquitous manufacturing tag, Made In China – which in 2013 morphed into MadeIn the Xu Zhen® brand, in a direct response to the art

market's tendency to want to commodified artists. Xu Zhen the brand went on to explore the nexus between art and commerce and the clash of cultures in an increasingly globalised world. More pragmatically, the brand, he told me when we talked in his studio in the mid-2000s, was created in response to the fact that people are more comfortable dealing with a person they can focus on, rather than a group.

Now Xu Zhen the brand is the subject of a tightly curated exhibition – *Xu Zhen® Eternity vs Evolution*, at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra, with work from 1998 – when he was little more than a student – to the present day and marks Xu Zhen's first major solo

*Calm* (2009) on show in *Eternity vs Evolution* in Canberra

Continued on page 6



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## 6 Contemporary Art



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XU ZHEN@:  
ETERNITY VS  
EVOLUTION  
installation view  
featuring European  
Thousand-Armed  
Classical Sculpture  
(2014)



Hello (2018-2019) by XU ZHEN@ robotic mechanisms, styrofoam, polyurethane foam, silicone paint, sensors, electronic controls, White Rabbit Collection, Sydney. Image courtesy the artist and White Rabbit Collection, Sydney © the artist

telephone conversation, are a symbol of power and prestige in the west, but in China they are more often found as decorative, almost frivolous, additions to bath houses and *karaoke* bars.

This friction between European classicism and eastern iconoclasm is nowhere more obvious than in the larger-than-life *European Thousand-Armed Classical Sculpture* (2014), where 19 replicas of classical sculptures - such as Michelangelo's *David*, the statue of Liberty and a figure of the crucified Christ - form a paused absurdist parade on an elevated walkway, not unlike the mannered progressions one sees displayed in fashion shows. This syncretic classical mob is headed by Athena the ancient Greek goddess, who is associated with wisdom and warfare - two mutually incompatible handmaidens. When viewed side-on, the progression seems paused in mid-conga line. However, things are very different when viewed from the front and the line transforms into the Asian thousand-armed Guanyin, the Buddhist bodhisattva associated with compassion. A simple shift of perspective is all that is needed to experience the ease with which Xu Zhen can conflate antithetical global cultures.

*Eternity*, which weighs in at several tonnes, is composed of replicas of marble figures from the east frieze of the Parthenon - the originals are now held (controversially) in the British Museum. On top of the writhing headless Greek statues Xu Zhen has inverted, headless Buddha statues (*At Rest*) - the originals sourced from temples and museums across China, in what is a literal cultural clash. But in *Eternity* Xu Zhen refuses to assign superiority to either Western or Eastern cultures, preferring to steer clear of any culturally hierarchal conclusion.

Things are different in Xu Zhen's paintings where rich veins of humour and provocation underlie their surface lushness. His series *Under Heaven* may seem little more than assembly-line products, made by gallery assistants, but they allow the artist to have fun at the art world's expense. Their surface allure is breath-taking; thousands of colourful globs of thick *impasto* oil paint - sometimes as much as 70 kilos - cling precariously to the surface of boards applied by his production team using chef's icing bags, cling to various sized boards that have to be regularly turned as they dry so that the paint does not

slurp off. The deliciously enticing *Under Heaven* (2012-18) is an intentionally seductive object, designed to appeal to the hubris of high-end collectors. Xu Zhen is always happy to mock the art world's brash materialism and its susceptibility to manipulation even while sharing in the spoils of that world.

But Xu Zhen does also have a social conscience and it is shown in his installation *Calm* (2009), a pile of drab grey rubble spread out like across the gallery floor, like a carpet. The rubble could have been collected from any building site in China, a country where rampant commercial development, that sees homes arbitrarily razed and communities dispersed, equates with progress. The central section of *Calm* rises and falls in reverential silence, as though breathing and one can chillingly sense the ghosts of the people who once lived and loved among the remnants of these buildings.

*Calm* is a benign and peculiarly mundane work yet for me, it possesses a magisterial pared-down simplicity and an intellectual ferocity that screams of the unfairness and enforced dispossession from which much of the modern world suffers. It may not possess the aesthetic grandiloquent gestures of Xu Zhen's other sculptures, but makes up for this in its poignant emotional engagement and in doing so somehow make everything else seem like superficial, theatrical, one-liners.

Xu Zhen's work is full of provocation and contradiction. He mocks art-world values while happy to enjoy the rewards of brash materialism, as he struggles to reconcile the irreconcilable. Ultimately he sees himself as an entrepreneurial artist, businessman and the CEO of an art manufacturing company where such multiplicity of roles could easily lead to a formulaic approach and yet it does not. Xu Zhen remains firmly in control. Creative decisions are his and his alone. 'I am both boss and CEO,' he said rather mischievously. But he is more than that. He is an artist with an astonishing creative imagination, which marks him out as one of the most intriguing artists on the world stage today, and one well deserving of this extraordinary concise solo show at Australia's leading institutional gallery.

● Until March 2021, Xu Zhen@ Eternity vs Evolution, at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, nga.gov.au

show in Australia. Given his increasing prominence on the global art stage, *Eternity & Evolution* is long overdue.

I was pondering all this in March when I bumped into Australian billionaire art collector Judith Neilson on a street in Sydney. Neilson is said to have the largest private collection of contemporary Chinese art in the world, with 3,000 pieces by 700 plus artists, numbers that grow annually, fed by her frequent buying trips to China. We were equidistant between her concrete bunker of a home - the enigmatically named Indigo Slam - and her philanthropic gallery, White Rabbit, where she exhibits the extensive and diverse collection of paintings, installations, moving-image, sculpture and much more. Many of her larger installations have not been assembled since she acquired them and as we talked Neilson could barely contain her excitement at the thought of going to Canberra later that week to see Xu Zhen's exhibition where several of the 19 works on show were on loan from her collection. But plans went awry as Covid19 restrictions shuttered galleries and exhibitions globally and *Eternity VS Evolution* was no exception with its forced closure, just a few days after opening. Now the NGA has reopened and the exhibition's original mid-September closing date has been pushed back to March 2021.

Neilson obviously has a penchant for Xu Zhen's work and the 12 pieces from her collection form the core of

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*Xu Zhen's work is full of provocation and contradiction*  
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this tightly curated exhibition, supplemented by several smaller pieces from the artist's studio plus two videos - *Shouting* (1998) a rather naive work where the artist shouted among a crowd of unsuspecting passers-by whose startled reactions he filmed and *Rainbow* (1998), a 3-minute 23 second video of a man's naked back gradually turning red as it is slapped by unseen hands. Both videos were included in the 2001 Venice Biennale when Xu Zhen was just 24 years old, making him the youngest Chinese artist to be in the premier event.

Xu Zhen is an artist whose work lives and breathes through grand and provocative gestures. He likes to make big 'in-your-face' fusions where culture - ostensibly that of the Western art canon and Eastern spiritualism - rub up against one another like vast irreconcilable, tectonic plates. Sculptural installations weigh in at several tonnes, abstract paintings contain

kilos of oil paint, and large collages - of which there are many in his studio - are sourced from mountains of collected materials that reminded me, when I saw them in 2014, of mismatched garments acquired from jumble sales.

The eye-popping star of the show is *Hello* (2018-2019), a monumental animatronic sculptural installation which was Neilson's most recent Xu Zhen acquisition. *Hello*, for all its benign immediacy is a creepy, sinister, kinetic work that alludes to pervasive surveillance and its concomitant threat. *Hello* is perhaps Xu Zhen's most ambitious work to date bringing together high-end technical wizardry and art in a cultural mash-up which represents - according to Xu Zhen when I talked to him by phone earlier this year - 'finding conflicts and oppositions, and at the same time resolving conflicts into a new thing or cognition'. *Hello* was commissioned by Neilson and premiered last November at the artist's Shanghai gallery and received its international debut at the NGA. Two years in the making, it is a replica of a full-size but supine Corinthian column and cleverly imitates the real thing, but here it curls around upon itself, like a snake at rest. It is sensitive to visitor's movements and will lift its head with gravity defying ease while the Cyclopean-black void, set in the capital's head, tracks visitors silently and mischievously through the gallery space, in what is a sinister and unsettling interrogation. Such columns, Xu Zhen said in our

# EASTERN ENCOUNTER

A selection of Indian paintings and other works curated by the Royal Collection is currently on show at Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh. *Encounters: Four Centuries of Paintings and Manuscripts from the Indian Subcontinent* reopened in July, after the temporary closure caused by the global pandemic.

The Royal Collection has a rich and varied assemblage of works in their South Asian holdings, an area encompassing modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. It is home to some of the richest manuscript and painting traditions in the world. The works of art on show in Scotland reflect the region's diverse cultures and compelling histories. They are typically small in scale and written or painted by hand. Unlike in Europe, the manuscript craft endured well into the 19th century in India. Later Indian printed books and photographs also included elements of earlier manuscript and painting traditions. Many of the finest examples in the Royal Collection were diplomatic gifts presented by Indian rulers to British sovereigns. These manuscripts and paintings are part of a shared history between Britain and the Indian Subcontinent which is explored throughout the exhibition.

The exhibition is divided into five main areas: Early Encounters; Spiritual Encounters; Political Encounters; Victorian Encounters; and Encountering The Raj. In the first section, works of show explore the art of the Mughals. Their magnificent courts at Delhi, Agra and Lahore were international centres of art where Indian, Iranian, Central Asian, Chinese and European cultures converged. British royal ambassadors were awed by the splendours they encountered.

The Mughal court commissioned artists to paint portraits, court ceremonies, hunts and battles. Using precious pigments, such as lapis lazuli, malachite and gold, artists produced some of the world's most beautiful and delicate miniature masterpieces. Mughal paintings, which combine influences from Persia, Central Asia and India, form the core of this section. The works are painted in exquisite detail using brilliantly coloured pigments to depict their subjects and are among the artistic highlights of the Mughal period providing the viewer with an impression of what must have been the great splendour of the Mughal court. Included in the exhibition are pages from the *Padshahama* (Book of Emperors), which was commissioned by Shah Jahan as a celebration of his reign. This manuscript in the Royal Collection is unique, being the only contemporary illustrated imperial *Padshahnama* volume to survive. Its 44 illustrations include some of the finest Mughal paintings ever produced. They were executed by 14 of Shah Jahan's court painters between 1630 and 1657 and include identifiable portrait likenesses of all the key figures at the imperial court.

Also on show is a 17th-century drawing of a chameleon by Mansur. Ustad Mansur was the leading



Chameleon (1612) by Ustad Mansur, Mughal, circa 1595-1600, brush and ink with green body colour on discoloured paper, 11 x 13.7 cm, Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020

animal painter at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r 1605-27), who bestowed upon him the honorific Nadir-al-'Asr 'Wonder of the Epoch'. Jahangir was a great patron of miniature painting, taking artists on his travels and priding himself on his attributional skills. He was also fascinated by the exotic, and commissioned his servant Muqarrab Khan to buy rarities from the Portuguese, who had established a colony in Goa on the west coast of India in the early 16th century. In 1612 a consignment of animals and birds arrived at Jahangir's court from Goa, and he ordered his artists to include 'portraits' of these beasts in his illuminated biography. This chameleon may have been one of the animals acquired in 1612.

The second section looks at Hindu paintings from Northern India. In the 18th and 19th centuries, dynasties of Hindu *rajyas* ruled a large area of northern India called Rajasthan. They commissioned their artists and scribes to create paintings and manuscripts for *bhakti* (personal devotion). On display here are intimate images of earthly encounters with Hindu gods intended to connect the soul with the Divine. The same figures may appear multiple times in

a painting because the paintings do not depict any fixed time or human realm. Paintings on paper traditionally echoed the heavily contoured and colourful imagery of wall paintings. Rajput artists developed distinct styles and techniques which evolved into regional styles, some bold and bright, others more delicate and muted.

The third to fifth sections deal with the British in India, including works commissioned by the East India Company officers who went on to present Indian paintings and manuscripts to George III (r 1760-1820) and George IV (r 1820-30), as symbols of victory and control. Indian rulers also sent gifts to the British monarchs as appeals for favour and protection. The show ends with works created and presented during British Crown Rule in India (1858-1947).

• Until 31 January 2021 at The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, rct.uk. A catalogue accompanies the exhibition, *Eastern Encounters: Four Centuries of Paintings and Manuscripts from the Indian Subcontinent*, £29.95



LEARN MORE about the *Padshahama* here

A Mughal lady (possibly Farzana Begum), circa 1650  
Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020

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# JAVANESE SHADOW THEATRE



**Cekel Endralaya (Arjuna)**, Java, early 19th century, Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich. Cekel Endralaya is no other than Arjuna dressed as a monk; the narrative that goes with the figure is a so-called branch story. During his absence, his principal consort is abducted by the Korawas since one of the brothers has set his eyes on her. The story receives an added twist because Baladewa, Sembrada's elder brother, gave the Korawa in question his consent to marry her.

The *wayang kulit* shadow play is one of the oldest existing theatre traditions in Asia, where stories about life and the world are still enacted for audiences in Java, Bali and Lombok. It is a form of *wayang* theatre found across Indonesia with performances often continuing throughout the night. This exhibition, in Switzerland, presents for the first time the significant wayang kulit collection of Tina and Paul Stohler,

featuring precious and striking figures of gods, spirits, and ancestors. The exhibition focuses on the stories the figures have to tell about heroes and demons, morals and virtues, and the deeper meaning of life.

The term wayang incorporates the words *yang*, *eyang*, or *hyang* which can all mean ancestor, or deity. Kulit means 'skin', the material the figures are made out of. Thus, a literal translation of the term wayang kulit

would be the theatre in which the immortalised ancestors and deities appear in the shape of figures made of skin.

The origins of wayang kulit remain unknown to this day; it was first mentioned in a Javanese poem from the 12th century, but it is presumably older than that and emerged in connection with other similar Asian forms of theatre. We are dealing with a tradition which is of great significance in Java even today. The intent and purpose of each and every play is to provide the audience with entertaining, spiritual-moral, historical-political insight and education – at the same time, the emphasis is clearly on entertainment.

With the exception of the major Angkor exhibition in 2007, the art of Southeast Asia has not featured prominently at the Rietberg Museum in recent years. This was to change in 2016, when the wife of the late collector Paul Stohler, Tina Stohler, donated the significant collection of Javanese shadow play figures her husband had assembled to the museum. The figures are now presented to the general public for the first time in this exhibition, along with selected pieces from the ethnographic museums in Zurich and Burgdorf.

Every performance opens to the sound of a *gamelan* orchestra which can be heard from afar and attracts the audience. The orchestra consists of roughly 25 musicians playing a variety of gongs, metallophones, and

**Pragalba**, Java, 1850–1900 and **Patih Sangkuni**, Java, 1850–1950, gift of Paul and Tina Stohler, Museum Rietberg. From the Mahabharata epic, Sangkuni possesses the worst of all character traits: he is a liar and interested only in his own benefit. He is the matrilateral uncle of the Korawas and despises the Pandawas, so he plots against them all the time. Politicians who, for instance, exploit religion for their own purposes, are likened to Sangkuni to this day.



Children's competition among budding shadow puppeteers, Scene from the adventures of the hero **Bima** (shadow on the right in the picture), Yogyakarta, central Java, April 2019 © Martha Setyowati



**Shadow puppeteer Ki Catur (Benyek) Kuncoro**, with figures of his own on the left, and figures created by the famous shadow puppeteer Ki Enthus Susmono on the right, Yogyakarta, central Java, April 2019, © Martha Setyowati

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Performances  
start in the  
evening and  
continue through  
the night  
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xylophones. The old Javanese melodies are accompanied by the voices of a number of female singers. As soon as the story begins, the choice and pace of songs is orchestrated by the puppeteer; he is seconded by an assistant who successively hands him the figures. The shadows they throw are projected by a light located above the puppeteer's head on to a white screen.

The performance commences in the evening and continues through the night until the early morning hours. The venue is either a covered pavilion or a large, free-standing marquee; the physical well-being of

all participants is provided for. Depending on a puppeteer's popularity, performances are quite expensive; they are often sponsored either by a company, the respective town, an institution, or a wealthy private individual. Private performances are very rare, since the plays are primarily meant for a large audience.

Traditionally, the spectators were seated on the shadow side of the projection screen – where only the figures' outlines and the intricate designs of the puppets can be seen – representing a timeless, mystical space. However, today, audiences prefer to gather at the side of the puppeteer, where they can marvel at the stunning variety of shiny golden figures.

The stories tell of the ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil. They deal with life and death, self-knowledge and the becoming of self, but also about love and the inevitability of fate. In the end, they are about the search for the secret of life and ultimate wisdom. The heroes are faced with unsolvable challenges; danger awaits them in form of mean, aggressive giants, while false friends and advisers attempt to deceive them. But the stories also deal with the fact that every 'good' person has to conquer his own weaknesses and that many 'bad' people also carry in them a trace of goodness. The battle scenes are especially popular because they offer the puppeteer the chance to display all his skills. The figures are whirled through the air and crash against the screen while drum beats and special light effects add to the drama.

Apart from foundation myths and sagas about regional heroes, the *Mahabharata* provides an almost endless source of stories, and is therefore highly popular. The *Mahabharata* is an originally Indian epic story that found its way to Java along trade routes roughly 2,000



**Bisma**, Java, 19th century, Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich. Bisma was actually the cause of the conflict around the succession to the throne because he renounced to marry and fathered no heir. This is why he is shown in the guise of a begawan (dignitary). He is of noble character; his appearance is age and timeless. Strictly speaking, he is the great-uncle of both the Pandawas and the Korawas.



**Adipati Karna**, Java, 1850–1900, **Prabu Kresna**, Java, 1750–1850, and **Arjuna**, Java, 1800–1850, gift of Paul and Tina Stohler, Museum Rietberg. Karna is a noble warrior. He is the first son of Kunti and thus a half-brother of the Pandawas. No one, not even he himself, knows anything about his origins. The Pandawas disown him upon which the Korawas, recognizing his skills as a warrior, take him in. Despite meeting all the criteria of a good character, he is much pitied because he gave his loyalty to the wrong side, and for this he is killed by Arjuna (figure 8)



**Semar**, Java, 1800–1900, gift of Paul and Tina Stohler, Museum Rietberg. Semar is the most popular figure of all: he represents the personification of the god Yang Hyang Ismaya, in other words, a primordial ancestor as well as Java's supreme deity. Semar creates for the audience the link to the present; he is wise, witty, and unconditionally empathetic which makes him especially popular. The figure itself is formless – neither man, woman, nor human.

wayang kulit workshop where the figures are punched, painted, and gilded. The punching and painting are done according to traditional methods that vary in detail from region to region. The painting is identical on both sides. The colours of the face and body provide clues as to the figure's character. Many figures are also gilded; the gold enhances a figure's durability and value, but says nothing about its character. The main rod and hand sticks made of horn, wood, or plastic are produced by a different artisan and fastened to the figure afterwards.

During the 1990s, the composition of the paints changed. Instead of colours based on fish glue with pigments and extenders, artisans began using acrylic paints. The fish glue-based paints create a slightly thicker layer which is why older figures tend to have a smoother surface. In Java, many of the really old figures have no colour at all, since all the paints have flaked off through use. The figures held in European collections bear evidence of this ancient painting technique.

The puppeteer, or puppet master, is called *dalang*. Colloquially he is often also referred to as 'Mastermind' owing to the tremendously wide range of knowledge he has to command. In total there are around 500 characters whose traits and features he must be familiar with in order to convey to the audience the wisdom of Javanese ethics and moral, while recounting each figure's fate. Thus, the *dalang* is a performer, poet, and philosopher in one. He knows all the stories by heart and needs no script. And since every performance is an event to itself, no story is ever

**Prabu Kresna**, Java, 1750–1850, gift of Paul and Tina Stohler, Museum Rietberg. Kresna is a deity in human form and therefore enjoys special status. His features, including a narrow waist, parallel legs, and pointed eyes and nose, suggest that he possesses exceptional spiritual power. However, the protruding forehead also reveals that he is not a model of modesty. Nor does he consistently tell the truth, but always with the aim of achieving the good.

years ago. In the process, the story was adapted to its new cultural environment, in the sense that some of the spelling changed, the main protagonists were given Javanese names, and that all the locations and events refer exclusively to the local landscape and history. The Mahabharata tells of the family feud between the Korawas and their cousins, the Pandawas.

In the story tradition, a distinction is made between so-called stem stories and branch stories. The stem stories provide details concerning the characters' social standing and fate. These are unchangeable. The branch stories, on the other hand, are freely fabricated. They explain how or why something came to pass

as it did. The fates of the individual figures are the subject of lively discussions, not least because every puppeteer has his own version and interpretation of the story.

In every story, two sides, the left and the right, fight against each other. The good-natured characters are positioned on the right, the mean-spirited on the left. The mean-spirited include figures who only think and act for their own benefit and do not shy away from lies and intrigues, while the good-natured always consider their fellow men, practise mindfulness, and act in a way that reflects their affinity with the universe.

There are several features that reveal the nature of heroes: fine and noble characters are indicated by almond shaped eyes, a narrow, closed mouth, an elongated forehead, a pointed nose, a narrow waist, and legs held parallel. A black-hued face or body is a sign of high self-control. The smaller the figure, the more exalted its state of consciousness. In contrast, there are large, mighty figures which are prone to excessive violence. These characters are often ill-behaved in the classical sense, they have loud voices and act rashly and impudently. Self-control and focused concentration are beyond them. They tend to have round, protruding eyes and noses, a knobby forehead, and a large open mouth with conspicuous lips. The red colouring of the body or face is a sign of their unrestrained impulsiveness, often expressed in fits of rage.

In Java, the model of a noble

**Gatotkaca**, Java, 1850–1900, gift of Paul and Tina Stohler, Museum Rietberg. Gatotkaca is the son of Bima and Arimbi. He entered the world as an adult and possesses special skills: he is without fear, has a skin as hard as steel, and can fly. He uses his powers to fight injustice and evildoers and is, consequently, very popular among the audience, a bit like Superman. Like his father, he is honest and unflinchingly faithful.



told in the same way, instead it is always reinterpreted and adapted to the specific occasion.

Famous *dalang* usually come from old *dalang* families. Javanese values and beliefs are imparted to them from childhood on and they begin to practise the voices and movements of the various figures from early on. Since the mid-20th century, the art of puppeteering is also taught at colleges of art in central Java, but until now the schools have failed to produce any really famous *dalang*. Every *dalang* has to be officially registered; at present there are roughly 5,000 practising *dalang* in Java. Each generation yields a handful of famous and three to four super *dalang*. Owing to their popularity, they, at times, are asked to put on a show just about every evening, certainly every weekend. In central Java shadow plays are scheduled every weekend, at times with several plays being performed on the same night.

Shadow theatre continues to develop characters and stories and a number of *dalang* have succeeded in expanding the classical art tradition by advancing new stories and figures. An impressive example of this development is *Dalang Ki Entus Susmono* (1966–2018), who gained international acclaim with his *Wayang Rai Wong* figures (*rai* - face, *wong* - human). With the aim of reaching a younger audience, he had figures made whose faces looked more human-like. In addition to the old narratives, he created new stories, for example, about the futility of war, featuring figures such as Osama bin Laden and George W Bush. But he also did things such as replace famous traditional advisers with *Teletubbies* or *Gatotkaca* with Superman – to name but two examples. You can watch some of these new stories in the Asia Society performance from 2012.

Another modern puppeteer is *Dalang Ki Sukasman* (1943–2009), who studied Decorative Art and Graphic Design at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. After attaining his degree, he lived in Rotterdam for many years where he worked as a stage designer where he found inspiration in European art forms. In his opinion, the design of the figures was not meant to go unchanged forever, so he began producing his own figures with an individual, avant garde touch to the puppets.

● Until 29 November, Javanese Shadow Theatre, at Museum Rietberg, Zurich, rietberg.ch



# Restoration of Pha That Luang in Vientiane

by Denise Heywood

Shimmering at sunset, Pha That Luang in Vientiane, Laos, is the most revered Buddhist temple in Laos and has undergone a much-needed restoration. It is visible from afar, as it is situated at the top of a hill three kilometres north-east of the city, and is an iconic image featuring on bank notes, stamps, tourism brochures, pamphlets, books and the National Seal used to endorse all official documents.

But the awe-inspiring aspect of its appearance was from a distance only. The sacred monument, dating from 1566 (although its origins are reputedly 3rd century) is a concrete reproduction. The gold that shone proved to be faded yellow paint when viewed close up. But in 2016, a lavish project to renovate it began which included the application of 10 kilograms of real gold leaf to the culminating point of the lotus bud crown of the central tower. Later a further 16 kilograms of gold leaf was added, along with a new coating of bright gold paint to embellish the rest of the entire monument. Following a gold melting ceremony attended by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, the Vientiane Mayor Dr Sinlavong Khoutphaythoun, senior officials and the renovation committee and blessed by Buddhist monks, the Venerable Khamma Panyavichit of Hongkhar village Buddhist temple in the Chanthabouly district of Vientiane, a member of the That Luang Restoration Project Committee, said he was delighted to be part of the committee, commenting that the *stupa* is Laos' most important religious symbol and the pinnacle of Lao culture and architecture and it was therefore very important to have it renovated. He considered the stupa a focal point in people's minds, representing the unity and solidarity of Lao people nationwide, adding that anyone may enter the temple, either to worship or just to visit and to feel at peace within its sacred space.

That Luang, which means Great Stupa, has always been a focus for Lao New Year celebrations and the That Luang Festival, a seven-day national event held during the full moon of the 12th lunar month (31 October in 2020), the most important of the year, with religious, artistic and musical presentations, drawing pilgrims from all over the country to its hallowed precincts. It faltered only during the darker days of Laos' 'Secret War' during the Vietnam War and the subsequent victory of the Pathet Lao (Communist movement) but gradually sacred traditions, an inherent part of the country's Buddhist way of life, returned. Today, all young Lao men spend a period of time as novice monks in a temple and, in their



That Luang Temple external wall. Photo: Denise Heywood



Print from a sketch by Louis Delaporte published in *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine* by Francis Garnier

distinctive orange robes, are a familiar sight everywhere, especially at the early morning almsgiving, *tak bat*, ceremony.

The That Luang temple is designed as a square shape at ground level, a symbol of the absolute in sacred architecture, and a sinuously formed central spire like an elongated lotus bud, rising 45 metres high from the centre, the lotus being a recurring image in Lao art with its origins in Hindu mythology which holds the lotus as sacred. The design suggests the influence of Khmer sacred architecture, which stretched north from the early kingdoms of Angkor. The second level is surrounded by a wall, 69 metres in length, of stylised lotus petals and 30 small stupas. They symbolise the 30 Buddhist perfections, *paramitas* in Sanskrit, the noble qualities associated with bodhisattvas according to Theravada Buddhism, which is practised in Laos, the more conservative of Buddhism's two major traditions, of which the other is Mahayana. A stupa was built here, according to legend, in the 3rd century, to house a relic of the Buddha, a piece of his breast bone, reputedly brought by emissaries of the Emperor Asoka (circa 273-232 BC) of Maurya, India, who had converted to Buddhism.

According to an inscription, King Setthathirath (1534-1571) constructed a temple on the holy site in 1566

“  
That Luang  
means Great  
Stupa and is the  
focus for  
Lao New Year  
”

when he moved the capital here from the royal capital of Luang Prabang. Theravada Buddhism was the state religion, adopted in Luang Prabang in the 13th century and first declared a state religion in the 14th century by King Fa Ngum (1316-1393).

The art of Laos is entirely religious, expressed in the proliferation of Buddhist temples both in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, the fundamental structure of religious life and central to its concepts, incorporating symbols of the sacred mountain, orientation to the four cardinal points and a demarcated area for rituals, festivals and sacred traditions. A statue of King Setthathirath holding a ritual sword across his lap, dressed in an elaborate regal costume of ornate fitted jacket and trousers, pointed



The annual That Luang Festival

shoes and a pointed hat with a wide brim turned up on the left side, sits in front, and glitters in the sun along with the spire.

The temple was destroyed by the Siamese in an attack in 1827. Although the Lao King Anouvong (1805-1828) restored it, adding a cloister and pavilion, it was then ransacked by Chinese Ho bandits in 1873. In 1900, and again in the 1930s, during the French colonial regime, it was reconstructed by scholars of the French School of the Far East, *Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*, founded in 1900 in Indochina. When the French officer Francis Garnier arrived in 1867 with the Mekong Exploration Team, led by Doudart de Lagrée, among the earliest explorers in the region, he found only the dusty ruins of a deserted temple and a city overgrown by tropical vegetation. During the French colonial period, from 1893, when Laos became part of Indochina with Vietnam and Cambodia, the city became the capital of the French protectorate of Laos.

Vientiane, located on a bend in the Mekong River, overlooking Thailand, was originally called Vieng Chan, City of the Moon. It dates back to the 10th century and may have been a Khmer settlement during the expansion of the Angkor empire between the 9th and 15th centuries. In 1353, King Fa Ngum (r 1353-72) founded the kingdom of Lane Xang, making Vientiane an administrative centre. Under King Phoththisarat (r 1520-48), it became a religious centre and a focus for trade as well. King Setthathirath (1534-71), officially established it as the capital of Lane Xang, Land of a Million Elephants, in 1563 and many other Buddhist temples were built. It became subsumed by Siam in 1778 during the reign of King Inthavong. When King Anou Vong succeeded his brother Inthavong to the throne in 1805 he built Wat Sisaket, now the only remaining original religious

structure in Vientiane. He invaded Siam and captured Korat but the Siamese, under General Sing Singhaseni, defeated him after his army was pursued back to Vientiane. King Rama III of Siam then ordered the sacking of Vientiane in 1827 which, apart from Wat Sisaket, was completely destroyed. King Anou Vong was captured and imprisoned by the Siamese until his death in 1828.

During the French protectorate Vientiane was restored to become their new capital in Laos, a project that included the temples of Pha That Luang, Wat Si Saket, and Haw Phra Kaew. As the dusty ruins of the deserted temple were brought back to life, the initial form of the stupa was reshaped, which the Lao people found unattractive. But a further reconstruction, in which the delicate lotus bud form was reinstated, was aided by the early drawings by Louis Delaporte (1824-1925), the artist and explorer who accompanied the Mekong Exploration Team and whose images were published in the 1870 account of that perilous river journey. Delaporte became captivated by the temples of Angkor during the voyage of exploration that included a stop in Laos. Thanks to further archaeological expeditions he organised, he brought the glories of Khmer civilisation to France with plaster cast mouldings of the monuments. His drawings and paintings of Laos were equally evocative and his images of Indochina revealed a new world of artistic expression to architects back in France. In the Vientiane restoration, other temples such as Wat Si Muang and Wat Ong Teu were also rebuilt and the Patuxai monument, known as the Lao Arc de Triomphe, was constructed in concrete. Governor-General Paul Doumer signed a decree in 1900 dividing the province into four muang, states, Vientiane, Borikan, Patchoum, Tourakom. French town planners, some of whom had been responsible for the



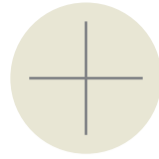
for its bars and opium dens. But all this faded after the Communist Pathet Lao victory in 1975 as it came under Soviet rule.

Unlike Luang Prabang, the historic and colonial buildings of the city are not protected as cultural heritage by UNESCO. Some have survived, such as the elegant villas that now comprise the French Embassy, while others have not. Extensive modern building is now under way. However, the Pha That Luang has remained the most venerated temple in the capital and the whole country.

The first phase of its restoration, according to the then deputy director of the Vientiane Information, Culture and Tourism Department, Khochone Keomanivong, was to renovate the main structure, repaint and repair the many damaged parts that included innumerable cracks and considerable disintegration and peeling paint. The four entrance gates, each with two wooden doors and images of nagas, the mythical serpent of Hindu mythology, were dilapidated and in need of attention. The second phase was to improve landscaping around the site to include a wall encircling it with gates, together with an update of electrical and drainage systems around the site. The highlight of the project was the placing of 10 kilograms of gold leaf on top of the stupa to mark the 450th anniversary of the sacred structure's original construction in 1566. Later, a further 16 kilograms of gold leaf was added, financed from private donations. The final cost was estimated to be in the region of two billion Lao kip (almost £175,000).

In addition, a collection of bronze Buddhist sculptures from Wat Sisaket, dating from 18th and 19th centuries, have been brought to Pha That Luang and placed in the cloisters of the temple together with fragments of images found on excavation beneath the monument. Many had been brought to Wat Sisaket for safekeeping, both before and after the war years, rescued from temples in Laos that had been either destroyed or were desecrated. They are predominantly in the *bhumisparsa mudra*, a gesture of meditation with the right hand touching the ground, with a few in the standing 'Calling For Rain' mudra with arms by their side. One is a copy of the famous Phra Bang Buddha, the golden Buddha image in Luang Prabang, the palladium of the former royal kingdom, in *abhaya mudra*, with both hands raised in a gesture of peace. Lining the cloister, they radiate serenity and the special beauty of Lao sacred art. As yet they have not been labelled. Hitherto the cloisters contained only a few remnants of statues, including one seated in the *dhyana mudra* position of meditation, thought to be an image of the Khmer King Jayavarman VII (1181-1220). Adjacent to the temple there is a large reclining Buddha, also recently gilded.

The restoration of Pha That Luang enhances the city of Vientiane, the capital of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and gives it the same stature as many of Southeast Asia's capitals which have a major temple at their centre. While Luang Prabang, the former royal capital and a UNESCO World Heritage site, filled with 35 historic Buddhist temples, is a focus for tourism, Vientiane is an increasingly significant centre for politics, business and commerce. Now Pha That Luang has become worthy of its role in this small, landlocked country's most iconic temple as it shimmers not only at sunset but from dawn to dusk.



WATCH the celebrations at the That Luang Festival



King Sayasetthathirath Statue in the front of Pha That Luang Stupa in Vientiane, Laos. Photo: Jakub Hafun <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



Pha That Luang door detail <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

building of Paris, laid out several wide boulevards in a geometrical street plan, lined with handsome colonial villas and shady tropical trees, parallel to the Mekong river, adding a governor's residence, as well as a colonial-style Ecole de Medicine (Medical School) and a Catholic Church, the Sacré-Coeur, completed in 1928. Later, during the turbulent war years of 1960s and 1970s, Vientiane became a refuge for journalists, secret agents and American soldiers from the Vietnam-American War. It became notorious

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# SAMURAI



Samurai armour, with breastplate depicting Fudo Myoo and inscribed 'A Fortuitous Day, the 8th month of the 12th year of Genroku (1699), Myochin Munesuke', circa 1699, Edo (Tokyo), iron, gilded, silvered and patinated copper, gold leaf, wood, silk, cotton, leather, animal fur. Gift of Max Carter AO, Susan Cocks, John Crosby, Dr Peter Dobson, Sandra Dobson, Frances Gerard, Arata Gwinnett, Sam Hill-Smith, Shane Le Plastrier, Mark Livesey QC, Joan Lyons, Dr Leo Mahar, Skye McGregor, Diana McLaurin, John Thornton, Zena Winsor and David C. Urry through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation Collectors Club 2016, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide



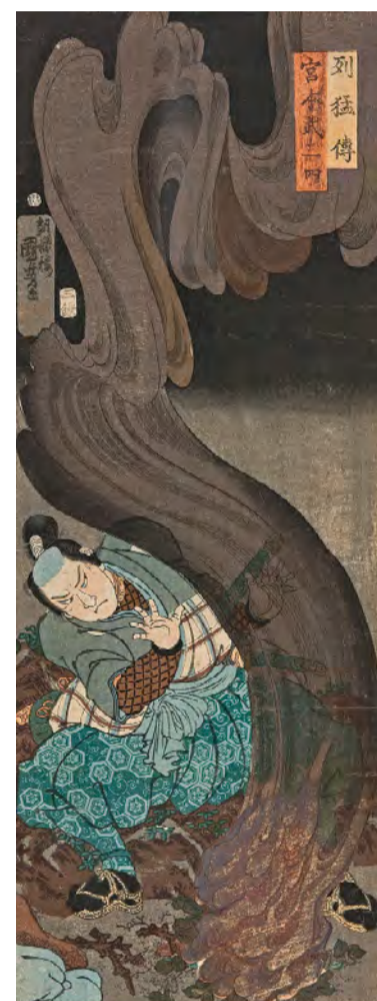
LISTEN TO Russell Kelty talking about the suit of Japanese armour on show for the first time in the exhibition, as well as the enduring culture of the samurai



The kabuki actor Nakamura Utaemon IV as Kumagaya Jiro Naozane, Gosotei Hirosada (d 1865), album of colour woodblock actor prints, 25 x 19 cm, Elizabeth and Tom Hunter Fund 2008, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide



Zao Gongen, 1704, Jakugen, Japan, active early 18th century, Edo (Tokyo), wood, inlaid glass, traces of colour, 136 x 70.8 x 50.5 cm. Gift of Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2007, Art Gallery of South Australia



For Japan's *samurai* (warriors), prowess on the battlefield was matched by an acute aesthetic sensibility. In this major new exhibition, *Samurai* presents the art and ethos of this warrior culture, from the austerity of lacquer and tea bowls to the opulence of golden screens and armour to explore how the ethos and tastes of this warrior class permeated every aspect of Japanese art and culture from the 13th to the 19th centuries.

As Russell Kelty, curator of Samurai and Associate Curator, Asian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA), comments in his opening chapter of the accompanying online catalogue, 'The culture and identity of the samurai are often understood in one particular context: as ferocious and loyal warriors who lived by a strict moral code'. He goes on to explain that samurai means 'to wait upon or to serve' and it is this, above all other roles, that defines their place in society. As the hereditary military class, which includes the *shogun*, *daimyo* and various classifications of their retainers, the samurai were entrusted with the service and safeguarding of the emperor, as well as the administration of the archipelago.

A warrior culture is evidenced in the form of iron body armour, helmet and straight swords, created from the 3rd century BC. Armour and helmets

were made from pieces of iron, bound together with leather fixings and rivets, creating a durability and flexibility suited to warfare on horseback with bow and arrow. Innovations of the preceding centuries resulted in curved swords, which were the envy of East Asia, together with flexible lightweight armour and accoutrements of exceptional quality.

The birth of the samurai occurred during the Heian period (795-1185), as the aristocracy of Kyoto indulged in the intrigues of the court and presided over a spectacular blossoming of art and culture. Imperial armies were disbanded and the conscription system abolished, leaving the security of the provincial estates to the clan chieftains and governors appointed from the middle ranks of the aristocracy. The governors were often provided with clan names such as Minamoto and Taira, members of which in the following centuries would vie for dominion over the archipelago.

It was these regional warriors who



Portable storage chest, hasamibako, 18th century, Japan, wood, lacquer, gold leaf, metal, embossed paper. Gift of Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2011 in recognition of Dick Richards as the first Curator of Asian Art (1968-2000), Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide



Pair of sword guards, tsuba, two quail and peonies, Masachika, Japan, born/active mid-19th century, circa 1830, iron, gold, 8.2 x 7.8 cm. Bequest of Sir Samuel Way 1916, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide



Tea bowl, chawan, named Morning Light (Akebono), Japan, 17th century, Shigaraki, Shiga prefecture, earthenware, ash glaze, gold, silver mends, 8 x 13 cm diam. MJM Carter AO Collection through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2019, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

struggle between the Taira clan and Minamoto clan for control of Japan at the end of the 12th century during the Genpei War (1180-85). Kelty explains that these calamitous events ushered in the era of the samurai and the decline of the influence of the aristocracy in Kyoto. The victorious leader, Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199), established Japan's first warrior government (*bakufu*) in Kamakura on the east coast of Japan where he assumed the title of shogun – the emperor's military commander. For the next 600 years the archipelago saw a succession of hereditary military governments that also recognised the legitimacy of the emperor.

Over time, the bakufu in Kamakura established offices in Kyoto and wielded such considerable influence that they were able to select emperors, control imperial appointments and maintain control over the regional provinces. The first code of the samurai was written to deal with the disputes over land and religious and criminal disputes (*joei shikimoku*) and recognised the separate function of the imperial court.

The new military ethos, described as 'violent and masculine' (*masuaoburi*), contrasted with the 'gentle and feminine' (*taouameburi*) culture of the Kyoto aristocracy. However, the military elite indulged in the pursuits of the court and were 'more likely to compose poetry on the beauty of falling cherry blossoms than on the joys of victory in battle'. The literature of the period reflected the interests of the samurai and was infused with a sense of pessimism and recognition of impermanence, encapsulated in the widespread belief that Japanese society had entered an age where Buddhist *dharmas* had degenerated or ended (*mappo*) and they had narrowly escaped the Mongol hordes who were turned away by divine winds (*kamikaze*).

The aesthetic vocabulary established by the aristocracy to describe courtliness and refinement (*miyabi*), the beauty of sharpness, intensified and darkened. The term *yugen* is often translated as 'deep mystery' and can be used to describe art forms that evoke the stirring emotions, which cannot be fully expressed in words. Of all art forms, it was the subtle beauty of *Noh* theatre that captured the ethos of *yugen*. To achieve *yugen* works of art were required to be stripped of colour and glitter and achieve a stillness. Other terms such as *sabi*, appear in the earliest compilations of poetry, as well as in *The Tale of the Heike*, and refer to objects that had acquired the patina of age or rusticity. These terms were influenced by new forms of Buddhism.

The ascension of the samurai as the de facto rulers of Japan coincided with the emergence of new Buddhist lineages and schools, which advocated a more direct path to salvation and



Fudo Myoo, 14th/15th century, Japan, wood, traces of colour and gilding, brass, cotton, height including base 60 cm. MJM Carter AO Collection through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

of the inner 'Buddha' within oneself over the worship of Buddhist icons. An emphasis was placed on the teacher-pupil relationship, which paralleled the loyalty of samurai to their lords. Zen also offered the opportunity for instantaneous enlightenment (*satori*), which required a type of discipline familiar to the samurai and their daily pursuit of martial perfection.

Zen temples acted as a window for the reception of prominent trends in poetry and painting from China and served as repositories for a wealth of art and culture. The arts of the brush (poetry, painting, and calligraphy) merged into one format: hanging and hand scrolls. The patriarchs of Zen Buddhism, Daoist immortals, and seasonal landscapes were prominent themes among artist monks. The most evocative are the complementary pair of dragon and tiger, which appear widely in the interior decoration of temples.

Tea, in the form of powder, was introduced for the second time to Japan from China as an aid to meditation among Buddhist monks. The elevation of tea from a drink to an artistic pursuit and ritual was influenced by monastic rules, leading to the saying 'tea and Zen have the same flavour'. The way of tea (*chado* or *chanoyu*) was literally shaped by the architecture of the 15th-century Silver Pavilion (now Ginkakuji Temple), built by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa as a retirement villa in the eastern hills of Kyoto.

Although the ritual of the tea ceremony originally featured Chinese ceramics and utensils, the influential tea master, Murata Juko (d 1502), who transformed the tea ceremony in the late 15th century, initiated a taste for the imperfection of Japanese utensils that evoked a simple, unpretentious beauty (*wabi*). Murata believed that upon entering his small and austere appointed tearoom, the trappings of daily life, particularly one's status, must be discarded, as each participant was considered equal. He also imbued his tea ritual with performative elements from *Noh* theatre and the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, which placed an emphasis on the communal nature of life. The most striking element of the ceremony was that participants were often required to use the same tea bowl. These were authentic rustic wares from Japanese or Korean kilns rather than luxurious porcelains from China. As a result, tea bowls became the most prominent utensils of Murata's *wabi-cha*, with the most spectacular examples coveted by the wealthy merchants of Sakai and powerful daimyo seeking to express their own prestige and power. For the samurai, 'the way of tea' would become essential to their lifestyle and essential for cultivating their own aesthetic sensibilities.

During the flourishing culture of the town during the Edo period, the floating world emerged – fuelled by economic growth, political stability, and urban expansion that led to the rise of the pleasure quarters in Kyoto and elsewhere, with the increasingly wealthy *chonin* (townspeople) participating in this social world reflected in the *ukiyo-e* of the time. *Kabuki* theatres and pleasure districts appeared throughout Tokugawa Japan as described in *Tales of the Floating World (Ukiyo monogatari)* by Asai Ryoi (1612-1691). *Kabuki* featured actors striking poses with dramatic facial expressions on stage – complemented by sumptuous costumes and set designs. Theatres were established in the three urban centres of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Depictions of well-known actors playing popular samurai roles on stage, particularly in Osaka, were complemented by designs of historical warriors and samurai showing typical virtues related to the warriors: courage, perseverance, and loyalty. As the Tokugawa shogunate slowly collapsed, the population of Edo yearned for the feats of heroism and valour and destruction retelling the tales of the struggle during the late 16th century.

Tales of warriors and samurai fighting the oppression imposed by the established authority were continuously popular amongst the Edo crowds, producing such tales as the heroes of the *Water Margin*, the *47 Ronin*, and Ishikawa Goemon. The success of warrior prints to illustrate these tales by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) and their pupils preceded the rise of Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861), the considered master of the warrior print, who transformed these late 16th-century heroes into popular prints.

The cultural influence of the Samurai has continued through the 20th century up to the present, as can be seen through *manga*, comics, and tv series. In the mid-1950s, a new genre of comics emerged in Japan: *gekiga* (dramatic pictures), which was enthusiastically embraced by magazine readers, which became a central genre of mainstream manga by the late 1960s that is still being published today in the form of samurai manga and related films such as the international hit *Blade of the Immortal (Mugen no juunin)*, which starred a cursed ronin who must kill a 1,000 evil men to regain his mortality and banish the 'bloodworms' in his body.

From Zen tea ceremonies, bushido, *kabuki* prints and manga, the samurai continue to fascinate the contemporary world as they have become a global phenomenon.

• Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, [agsa.sa.gov.au](http://agsa.sa.gov.au)

➤ READ the exhibition catalogue

“  
Samurai culture  
influenced  
literature, as  
well as the  
decorative arts  
”

enlightenment. Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism became increasingly popular. Zen, which was transmitted from India to China and then on to Japan, found favour with the new military government. Vast temple complexes were established in both Kamakura and Kyoto. From the beginning, Zen Buddhism was influenced by existing esoteric practices, featuring wrathful protectors such as Fudo Myoo. Zen practice elevates the discovery

were tasked with guarding the provincial estates of the aristocracy and were based in Kyoto. Their ascension marked a distinct transition in Japan and for centuries the samurai class dominated the country. Their patronage of the arts and cultural pursuits remain inextricably woven into the fabric of Japanese art and society.

The exhibition examines the influence of the important samurai classes on the art and culture of Japan, from their ascension in the 12th century to the present day, seeking to explore the complexity of the samurai, including their philosophical motivations and aesthetics, which continue to both fascinate and delight modern audiences today. For the centuries that the samurai class ruled the archipelago of Japan the country was transformed with the socio-political and artistic landscapes emerging at the time.

As warriors, their devastating conflicts and heroic deeds provided a wealth of material not only for the great military epics of Japanese literature, but also their culture was reflected in works of art. As patrons of the arts, they fostered a cultural renaissance, which still underpins and defines the most recognisable forms of Japanese art and culture today. As a class, their idealised code of ethics and their cultural pursuits continue to resonate with the global community. As symbolic personae, they were essential in presenting Japan to the world and are now a distinctive fixture in global culture. Objects chosen for the exhibition to explore these themes include textiles, lacquer ware, ceramics, metalware, screens, scrolls, prints and swords, all from AGSA's collection, with some of the exhibits on public display for the first time.

In his second essay, Russell Kelty explores the aesthetics of samurai culture and their passion for the arts. The epic novel, *The Tale of the Heike*, compiled circa 1330, retells the

# THE DRAGON'S GIFT

## THE SACRED ARTS OF BHUTAN



Yab Yum Vajrasattva, 18th century, gilt copper alloy with cold gold, pigments, and turquoise, Norbugang Zimpong Lhakhang, Punakha



Maitreya Buddha, 17th century, gilt copper, cold gold, pigments, and turquoise, Phajoding Gonpa, Thimphu



Drukpa Kunley (1455-1529), 18th century, gilded cast copper, cold gold, and pigments, height 13 cm, Phajoding Gonpa, Thimphu

In 2008, The Honolulu Academy of Arts (now called Honolulu Museum of Art) organised a ground-breaking exhibition on Bhutan, focusing on religious Buddhist art with a special emphasis on the ancient ritual Buddhist dances that continue to be practised in the country today.

Bhutan is the only country in the world to adopt Vajrayana, or Tantric Buddhism, as its official religion, and the particular form of Buddhism found in Bhutan permeates all aspects of culture and the arts. Bhutan is remarkable for the antiquity and continuity of its Buddhist teachings, with the first temples in the region established during the 7th century. The arts of the two main branches of Vajrayana Buddhism in Bhutan, the Drukpa Kagyu and the Nyingma schools, were represented in the exhibition.

The exhibition showed 117 works of art, including two dimensional thangkhas painted in mineral pigments and appliquéd in silk, gilt

bronze sculptures, and ritual objects ranging in date from the 8th to the 20th centuries, with especially strong examples from the 17th through the 19th centuries. Most of the art works came from active temples, where they still serve as consecrated objects of veneration. Due to the sacred nature of the art, monks accompanied *The Dragon's Gift* to each venue, and remained in residence, performing the necessary ritual observances. The majority of these items had never been on display outside Bhutan.

As a key part of the project, the Academy's Asian Paintings Conservation Studio undertook a three-year project to train Bhutanese monks in advanced techniques of Himalayan painting conservation. This involved both workshops and on-site conservation at temples in Bhutan and the training of Bhutanese monks in Honolulu. Consequently, the *thangka* paintings in the exhibition had been conserved before display and preserved for future generations,

as the monks trained by the museum took the techniques they had acquired to continue conservation work in their home monasteries.

An important aspect of the exhibition was the documentation of ritual dance forms, or cham, by the Honolulu Academy of Arts in conjunction with Core of Culture, a Chicago-based non-profit dance preservation foundation. For the

exhibition, an extensive digital database with more than 300 hours of video documentation, including the performances of numerous rare, nearly extinct cham rituals, had been prepared. This unique dance research played a key role in the exhibition's conceptual and interpretive structure. Cham was featured through video installations throughout the exhibition, since there is often an intimate connection between dance and the arts in Bhutanese rituals. A copy of the cham database is held at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, New York, the largest dance archive in the world.

As Terese Tse Bartholomew explains in the exhibition catalogue, 'Buddhist art came into Bhutan with the introduction of Buddhism to the region, which is traditionally attributed to Padmasambhava in the 7th century., and from Tibetan centres of Buddhism. Depictions of the vast array of Buddhist deities accord with the

descriptions stated in the sacred texts, which give strict instructions for the deities' body proportions, colours, attributes, mounts, clothing, ornaments, and the positions of hands and feet. The artists, painters, and sculptors follow these rules firmly, including specific measurements (such as the distances between facial features, measured in finger widths). Only in the background of paintings could artists exercise some degree of flexibility and creativity.

The metal images of Bhutan employ two methods: smaller images are cast in the lost wax technique and larger images are hammered out in the repoussé method, in which metal sheets are riveted together. Newar craftsmen of Nepal's Kathmandu Valley are masters of these two methods and are generally credited with introducing these techniques to Bhutan, as well as to Tibet, China, and Mongolia. Newar craftsmen prefer to work with copper alloy, and nearly all metal images in Bhutan are

“  
*Tantric  
Buddhism has  
been adopted  
as Bhutan's  
official religion*  
”



The monk Hwashang with the Guardians Virupaksa and Vaisravana, 19th century, Thimphu



Mt Meru and Buddhist Universe, 19th century, ink and colours on cotton, Trongsa Dzong



Guru Dragpo Marchen, 19th century, ink and colours on cotton, Phajoding Gongpa, Thimphu



Guru Pema Jungney, late 17th century, ink and minerals on cotton, Trashicho Dzong, Thimphu



Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, 18th/19th century, wood with lacquer, gold paint and pigments, Wangdu Phodrang Dzong

composed of this material.

As the Venerable Lopon Pemela commented in the catalogue, 'In the Buddhist arts, there is a common thread that runs through each discipline: compassionate aspiration for the enlightenment of sentient beings. Whether it is an artist who is a Buddha emanation, a sacred *ringse* from the cremated body of a high lama, or a thangka painting of an enlightened being, the Buddhist principle of liberation for all is the prominent theme. The art both represents and embodies Buddha nature. These embodiments offer all beings a chance to recognise their own inner Buddha. These arts help point the way toward the true essence and process of revealing this Buddha nature – the real blessing of Buddhist art'. In deciding on an object's origin, one relies on knowledge of specific characteristics that distinguish the origin of one work of art from another. In the case of Himalayan bronze images, those characteristics can determine whether it is Nepalese, Tibetan (central, eastern or western), Sino-Tibetan, Kashmir, Swat Valley, Pala, etc.

Two outstanding images in the exhibition have characteristics that cannot be attributed specifically to any of the above – a 19th century gilt bronze image of Vajrasattva in *yab-yum* position and an 18th century gilt

bronze Maitreya. The *mudra* and *asana* of each are iconographically orthodox, but the details are puzzling. The base of the Vajrasattva, normally of double lotus petal form, is a single band of open flowers, possibly peonies. The Maitreya is seated on a dais, again iconographically orthodox, but the four corners of the base are raised on triangular cloud-form feet. It would appear that these design components are indeed Bhutanese.

The exhibition, in its first location in Honolulu, was divided into a number of sections, organised according to conceptual aspects of Buddhism in Bhutan to provide a structure to understand the richly symbolic content of Tantric Buddhist art.

**Buddhas:** Shakyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism in the 5th century BC, was the first image encountered in the exhibition. Paintings depicting his life and previous incarnations complement sculptural representations. Depictions of the five cosmic Buddha Families, such as an elaborate sculpture of Aksobhya, provide a broader definition of Buddhahood.

**Bodhisattvas:** Bodhisattvas, beings who defer their own attainment of complete Buddhahood to assist others on the path to enlightenment, are highly venerated in the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. This section also introduced such popular and revered

Bodhisattvas as Manjushri, shown in multiple forms including a sumptuous painted thangka of the White Manjushri, Vajrapani, and Avalokitesvara.

**Padmasambhava and the Treasure Revealers:** Padmasambhava (also popularly known as Guru Rimpoche), who spread Buddhism to parts of Bhutan in the 8th century, is an important figure in all forms of Bhutanese Buddhism. Bhutan has many important pilgrimage places associated with Padmasambhava. The most famous is Paro Taktsang or Tiger's Nest monastery which is built on a sheer cliff wall about 900m above the floor of Paro valley. It was built around the Taktsang Senge Samdup (*stag tshang seng ge bsam grub*) cave where he is said to have meditated in the 8th century. Later he travelled to Bumthang district to subdue a powerful deity offended by a local king. According to legend, Padmasambhava's body imprint can be found in the wall of a cave at nearby Kurje Lhakhang temple.

This section illustrated multiple manifestations of Padmasambhava in both peaceful and wrathful forms. It also included narrative paintings of Padmasambhava's life story, a variety of sculptures reflecting regional styles, and dance content to illustrate his importance in Bhutan.



Dancers at Nimalung Tsechu, Bumthang province



CLICK HERE to watch video of Bhutanese dance



Padmasambhava is closely associated with the 'Treasure Revealers' of the Nyingma School, particularly in Eastern Bhutan.

The Treasure Revealers discovered texts and other religious treasures previously hidden by Padmasambhava centuries after his death. Portraits of the Treasure Revealers were also on show in the exhibition.

**Arhats and Mahasiddhas:** This section introduced extraordinary adepts who attained high levels of spiritual insight. The 16 Arhats were represented by an outstanding and complete set of paintings from the 18th century. The Mahasiddhas, Indian sages who employ unconventional means to achieve enlightenment, also were represented in painted thangkas.

**Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel:** Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1651), a charismatic historical figure, was the founder of modern Bhutan. A revered lama, Zhabdrung came to Bhutan from Southern Tibet in 1616. He soon unified the country, established a unique system of governance, and built a series of local fortress-monasteries (dzongs) that still function as centres of political and religious administration. Zhabdrung figures prominently in almost every Buddhist temple in Bhutan, and was seen in the exhibition in both paintings and sculptures.

**Deity Yoga:** A wide variety of spiritual figures comprise the Buddhist pantheon in Bhutan. Many of these deities are the focus of Buddhist ritual practices such as visualisations and mantra chanting. This section introduced these figures, the concepts they represent, and associated practices. Examples included a powerful yab-yum sculpture of Vajrasattva and his consort, representing the feminine wisdom and masculine 'skillful means' (*upaya*) that lead from ignorance to enlightenment.

**Guru Yoga:** The teacher-disciple relationship is very important in Vajrayana Buddhism. Teachers are regarded as Living Buddhas and impart secret teachings and initiations to their students. Lineages of Buddhist teachers figure prominently in both texts and works of art. Historical figures from both the Drukpa Kagyu and Nyingma traditions, many unique to Bhutan, were on show with examples in

painting, sculpture, including a remarkable embroidered thangka of the important master Je Thrinley Gyaltsen.

**Mandala:** Perhaps no visual expression of Buddhist thought is as mysterious and attractive to the Western viewer as the mandala. Intricate spiritual diagrams that are considered maps leading to wisdom and spiritual knowledge, mandalas are powerful tools employed in the quest for enlightenment. A variety of painted mandalas were presented along with references to associated ritual practices.

**Ritual Dance (Cham):** Buddhist ritual dances, or cham, were illustrated – both on a series of high-resolution video screens and in works of art. The Academy's dance documentation team, under the direction of the Core of Culture Foundation, had spent several years in Bhutan creating a digital archive that documents many previously unknown Buddhist dances. Buddhist dance in Bhutan is both a spiritual practice in itself and a means of communicating Buddhist teachings.

**Altar:** A gilt *repoussé* Buddhist altar was installed in a dedicated gallery as a key adjunct to the exhibition. This altar was based on an example from Trashigang Goempa, an important monastery near Thimphu. The altar was furnished with a variety of sacred objects as a site for pujas (rituals) conducted by the monks who accompanied the exhibition and to give the viewer a sense of temple interiors in Bhutan.

The exhibition was a rare opportunity to be exposed to and challenged by hitherto understudied aspects of the Buddhist arts in this area of the Himalayas.

- A catalogue including all works of art in the exhibition and new photography of many important works of art in situ in Bhutanese monasteries was published by Serindia Press, with chapters mirroring the sections of the exhibition as outlined above, ISBN 978932476361

- A CD of Cham dances also accompanies the catalogue
- The Dragon's Gift, The Sacred Arts of Bhutan was first shown at the Honolulu Museum of Arts in 2008

➤ Read Bhutan's Sacred Songs and Lute Dance by Elaine Dobson

## FUJI, LAND OF SNOW

Mount Fuji has inspired artists in Japan and abroad for centuries and dominates the landscape around Tokyo. Its shape is instantly recognisable – a magical cone, capped year-round with snow that towers over central Honshu. It rises to 3,776 metres, it is the highest mountain in Japan and visible from the Tokaido Road, the great thoroughfare across Japan, often translated as the 'eastern sea route'. It was considered the most important of the Five Routes of the Edo period in Japan, connecting Kyoto to Edo.

Fuji's perfect symmetry and triangular, almost geometric, shape also holds great cultural and religious significance in Japan. In 2013, Mount Fuji was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a sacred place and a source of artistic inspiration. At the crossroads of nature and culture, this '*kami*' (a spirit in Shintoism) as Mt Fuji is defined, reigns over the spirits and the landscape of



The Blue Fuji (detail) by Katsushika Hokusai, circa 1832-1835, nishiki-e print © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Ollivier

Japan, as well as over its arts.

The Guimet has taken 70 prints and photographs from its collection to explore their holdings connected to Mt Fuji to explore how print artists treat the idea of snow in their work as well as how

photographs create the character of Fuji in print.

The volcano's distinct personality has made it a source of inspiration for many Japanese artists, as can be seen in the series *The Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (1830-32),

which the artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) created when he was in his seventies. Hokusai's prints are included in the exhibition, along with other iconic prints. Print artists in the exhibition include, Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige

(1797-1858), Yashima Gakutei (circa 1786-1868), Kobiyashi Kiyochika (1847-1915), and Kawase Hasui (1883-1957).

As Mt Fuji is also one of the most photographed sites in the country, old and contemporary photographs

are also on show alongside the 19th- and 20th-century prints, as well as a selection of other objects.

● Until 12 October, Guimet Museum Paris, guimet.fr. A catalogue accompanies the exhibition, Euro 13.50



Pilgrim in front of Mt Fuji by Yashima Gakutei, surimono, circa 1823 © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Ollivier



WATCH  
an animation  
of the prints in  
the Paris  
exhibition

## THE MONOCHROME MODE IN EAST ASIAN ART

A new installation of monochromatic art from China, Korea, and Japan is curated by Philip Hu, curator of Asian Art at St Louis Art Museum. Drawn from the museum's collection, the works on view range from approximately 900-year-old ceramics to 20th-century paintings.

In East Asian art, the brushing of ink on paper or silk is used for both calligraphy and painting, which naturally led to ink monochrome as a major mode of visual expression. In ceramics, single colours were often used for glazing or decorating stoneware and porcelain objects.

The oldest objects on view are the two prunus vases, one made in the 11th or early 12th century during the Northern Song dynasty and the other made in the 13th to 14th century during the Southern Song dynasty or Yuan dynasty. The dark-glazed vessel has biscuit-reserved decoration and dark brown glaze, while the other vase has white slip and black glaze with incised decoration.

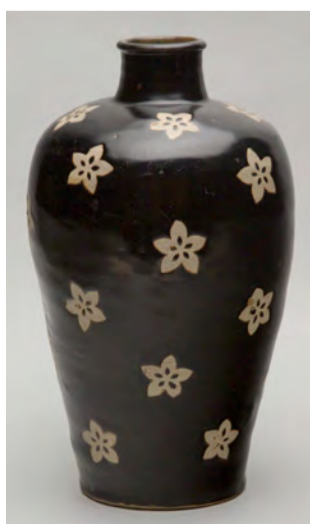
A small landscape by the celebrated Chinese artist Wen Zhengming (1470-1559) exemplifies the subtlety of ink monochrome paintings of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Chinese literati paintings, particularly those in ink monochrome, had a strong influence on Korean art of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). This may be seen in the recently acquired late 17th- or 18th-century hanging scroll *Two Scholars, Attendant, and Donkey in a Landscape*, the first Korean painting to enter the museum's collection.

Chinese ink monochrome paintings of the Ming and Qing dynasties also exerted considerable influence on Japanese painting. The large, wide hanging scroll by Hine Taizan (1813-1869) has a strong Chinese flavour in a landscape with verdant trees. A set of four paintings by Minol Araki (1928-2010), entitled *Distant Morning II*, demonstrates the gestural qualities of ink on paper. Born in Dalian (then part of Japanese-occupied Manchuria) Araki acknowledged his interest in, and debt to, modern Chinese painting by masters such as Zhang Daqian (1899-1983).

● Until 14 February 2021, St Louis Art Museum, slam.org



Prunus Vase (meiping) with design of lotus blossoms and leaves, 11th-early 12th century, Chinese, Northern Song dynasty; Cizhou ware; stoneware with white slip and black glaze with sgraffiato decoration, height 12 5/16 inches, Saint Louis Art Museum, Bequest of Samuel C Davis



Prunus Vase (meiping) with design of scattered peach, 13th-14th century, Southern Song dynasty, or Yuan dynasty, Jizhou ware, stoneware with biscuit-reserved decoration and dark brown glaze, height 10 7/8 x 6 inches, Saint Louis Art Museum, Bequest of Samuel C Davis

## TEACHERS OF ENLIGHTENMENT Traditions in Tibetan Buddhism

The Nelson-Atkins Museum explores the traditions of teaching in Tibetan Buddhism in this exhibition. Beginning with the historical Buddha who founded the tradition of Buddhism over 2,500 years ago, the teacher has occupied a central role within Buddhism. Teachers (*gurus*) serve as instructors for their students and are venerated by practitioners. Within Vajrayana Buddhism, an esoteric form of Buddhism practised in Tibet, the teacher is essential to guiding a student's path to enlightenment. Specialised teachings, rituals, and practices are taught that can only be passed directly from a spiritually advanced teacher to an individual practitioner.

Works of art are key to disseminating the Buddhist tradition and actively used by students and teachers for worship. Sculptures and paintings (*thangkas*) depicting individual teachers serve as a focus for prayer and contemplation in Buddhist monasteries. Ritual objects are used by teachers and their initiates, and portable amulet boxes allow practitioners to take images of religious figures and protective charms with them.

● Reopens 12 September, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, nelson-atkins.org

Padmasambhava, 15th century, Tibet, brass inlaid with silver and copper, with traces of black paint, 5 7/8 inches x 4 1/4 inches x 2 3/8 inches. Bequest of Joseph H Heil



Shakyamuni Buddha with Transcendent Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Manifestations of Padmasambhava, 18th century, thangka, Tibet, colours on cotton, brocade border, cotton backing, Image: 26 inches x 11 11/16 inches. Bequest of Joseph H Heil



# CHINTZ India's Painted and Printed Cottons



Palampore (wall or bed hanging), coastal Southeast India, for the Western market, circa 1740-50, depicting animals alongside Western figures, 275.3 x 220.8, Harry Wearne Collection, gift of Mrs Harry Wearne



*The Cloth that Changed the World: India's Painted and Printed Cottons* celebrates the technical mastery, creativity, and far-reaching influence of India's vividly painted and printed textiles, from the origins of dyeing and weaving millennia ago, to the artisans working today. The exhibition presents 20 recognised masterworks alongside 10 new acquisitions, as well as loans from international collections. Originally set to open in April 2020, *The Cloth that Changed the World* was put on hold in response to COVID-19. In March 2020, Asian Art Newspaper ran a feature on the exhibition, which can be found in *From the Archive* on [asianartnewspaper.com/Indian-chintz](http://asianartnewspaper.com/Indian-chintz).

On show are Indian textiles from the 13th to 21st centuries that explore the consequences of the global consumer desire for these textiles, not only as coveted luxury items over the centuries, but also by looking at their role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade to present-day environmental concerns.

Exploring the phenomenon in global trade through trade routes, encounters, and exchange, the exhibition shows how this highly coveted cloth connected cultures – and quite literally changed the world. With a focus on costumes and home furnishings, the exhibition features 80 objects spanning 10 centuries and four continents. Religious and court banners from India, gilded wall hangings for the homes of the nobility in Europe and Thailand, and luxurious female clothing all demonstrate the versatility and global desire for Indian chintz.

● Re-opens 12 September and runs through autumn 2021, at Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, [rom.on.ca](http://rom.on.ca)  
 ⊕ Read Asian Art Newspaper's feature on this exhibition

Man's military shirt or tunic (su'a senakut), assembled from a single piece of cloth, coastal southeast India, for the Thai market, circa late 18th century, Royal Ontario Museum



WATCH  
 The Met's *The Art of Making Chintz* from 2013  
 And a talk by Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West* from 2017

# JUN KANEKO SCULPTURE

The Albright-Knox Public Art Initiative has partnered with Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House to present an installation featuring artist Jun Kaneko's monumental ceramic sculptures on view through early October 2021. Entitled *The Space Between: Frank Lloyd Wright | Jun Kaneko*, the installation comprises seven of the artist's enormous, freestanding ceramic works for outdoor display on the newly restored grounds of the Martin House estate, as well as a series of smaller works on view inside the visitor centre.

Born in Nagoya in 1942, Kaneko is an internationally renowned artist primarily known for his pioneering work in ceramic materials. His large pieces, called *dangos*, are the result of a complex traditional Japanese *raku* firing and glazing process that produces unique geometric shapes and vibrant colour combinations. He is considered one of the world's pre-eminent ceramic artists working today. Through the late 1950s and early 1960s, Kaneko studied painting in Japan under Satoshi Ogawa. With Ogawa's counsel,

Kaneko, who had never been to the United States and spoke no English, arrived for the first time in August 1963, at age 21.

Lloyd Wright and Kaneko were both pioneers in their fields, and Lloyd Wright had an enduring interest in Japanese arts and culture and a reverence for nature, all of which are beautifully captured in Kaneko's work. Many of Kaneko's creations represent years of production time due to their immense scale, which takes months to slowly build up to avoid the works being crushed under their own weight. The tallest works in the exhibition are more than 10 feet tall with walls in excess of three inches thick and weigh close to 3,000 pounds. Their fired slip-surfaces create a glass-like coating suitable for outdoor public display in the extreme weather conditions that will occur during the 16-month installation.

Kaneko became connected to Los Angeles-based collectors and patrons who invited him to stay at their home and helped acquaint him with American culture. Coincidentally, they were enthusiasts of contemporary



Installation view of *The Space Between: Frank Lloyd Wright | Jun Kaneko*, at Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House

ceramics, so Kaneko spent three weeks among extraordinary works by avant-garde California ceramic artists who inspired him to take up the medium of clay in his own work.

A 1982 part-time residency at the Alternative Worksite

(now the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts) in Omaha, Nebraska, and the concurrent opportunity to use one of the enormous beehive kilns at the Omaha Brickworks, provided Kaneko the means to experiment with a radical jump in scale. The

chance to pursue even more ambitiously scaled works arose ten years later when he was granted access to the out-of-service beehive kilns at Mission Clay Products in Fremont, California. Accompanied by three assistants, Kaneko brought

the necessary equipment from Omaha and proceeded to mix a ton of clay every other day for nearly three months. From these opportunities and experiments, the signature forms of his monumental *dangos* emerged.

● [abrightknox.org](http://abrightknox.org)

## RAMIN HAERIZADEH, ROKNI HAERIZADEH & HESAM RAHMANIAN

For their first solo exhibition in Germany, Iranian artists Ramin (b 1975) and Rokni Haerizadeh (b 1978) with Hesam Rahmadian (b 1980) have brought together a variety of pieces, with works ranging from the past years to the present, including a monumental floor painting especially created for the Schirn Kunsthalle. All three artists not only pursue their own individual practice, but have also been working together since 2009.

Originally from Iran, they fled the country in order to set up their studio in Dubai where they have been based for the last decade.

Their practice is an ongoing work in progress articulated around the issues of exile and migration. Whether dealing with installation, painting or sculpture, their work evolves around numerous allusions, also relying on humour and wit. Depending on their interests, their residencies or their encounters, the artists are

eager to collaborate with other artists or friends in order to raise awareness towards present political and social issues while also challenging the present status of the art world.

### Olivia Sand

- From 3 September to 12 December, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, schirn.de
- The Schirn's first online opening takes place for this exhibition on 2 September, livestream at 7pm on their website



O You People! (2020), detail, Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Hesam Rahmadian, acrylic, plaster and epoxy on waterproof MDF boards, 1600 x 1700 cm, Courtesy die Künstler und Galerie Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai

## ANILA QUAYYUM AGHA All the Flowers Are for Me

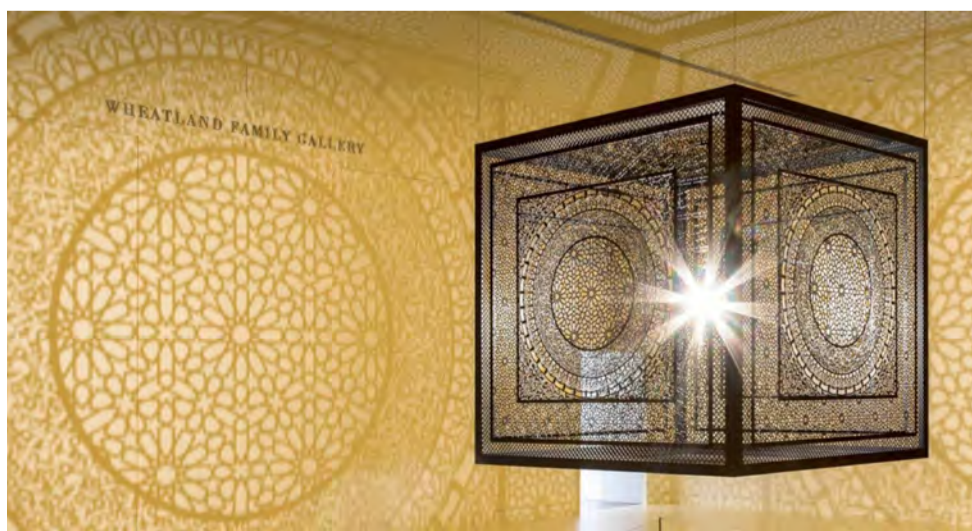
Born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan, Agha now lives in the US. In a conversation with Peabody Essex museum staff earlier this year, she described how women from conservative families in Pakistan – and other countries – who are confined to their homes connect to the natural world through stylised floral motifs. The exhibition, *All the Flowers Are for Me*, is a sort of rebellion for women. It is about reclaiming a private space, a space where women would feel welcome, which they could also open up to others,' she said.

Agha's work opens up a space where all of us, regardless of gender, race, age or nationality, can feel welcome. It provides a sanctuary in which we can contemplate shifting notions of justice and care, and where we can consider the profound political and social changes that are occurring in our country and around the world. The exhibition

also points to the opportunities and beauty that exist in the long shadows cast by free and open artistic and intellectual exchange and to the transformative potential of opening up – our space, our thoughts, ourselves – and sharing with others.

Persian and Turkish architecture, textiles and miniature paintings inspire the precise, stylised floral forms that compose Anila Quayyum Agha's sculptural chamber of light and shadow. This luminous installation provides an opportunity to contemplate the differences and commonalities that shape our lives and relationships. She describes this work as her effort to create a sense of how women can reclaim and safely open up private space to welcome others.

- Until 22 Feb 2021, at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, pem.org



Installation view All the Flowers Are for Me

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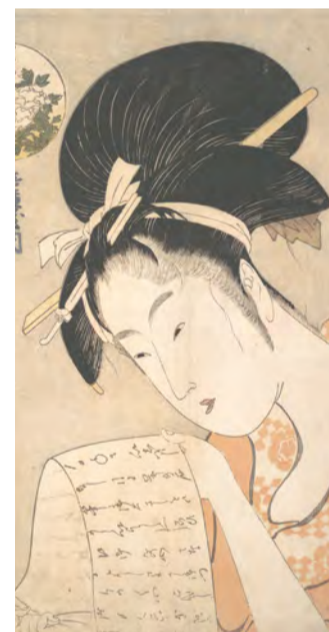
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# SAMSARA Sculptures by Sho Kishino

This exhibition of 43 works by the artist Sho Kishino (b 1972) explores themes of creation, renewal, and spiritual awakening. In Buddhism, *samsara* indicates the continual cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. It is upon realising this fundamental reality that Buddhists may free themselves from the chain of rebirth and become awakened spiritual beings. Kishino has described his creative process as a search for the light of the Buddha's teachings, a light that can help heal unease in the world.

The was raised in Kyoto and has exhibited his sculptures in both Japan and the US. Many of the themes of his works reflect the city's role as Japan's cultural capital and centre of traditional arts, deep history with Zen Buddhism, and connection to surrounding nature. Kishino's study of Zen and engagement with Buddhist practitioners and monks, as well as the temples and shrines that have

formed the backdrop of life in Kyoto for centuries, have influenced every facet of his art. His use of natural and reclaimed materials, from river stones to bog wood to timbers from old temples, yokes the natural world to the subtle, subtractive aesthetic of his sculptures.

Kishino has cited the work of the Swiss artist and sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) as a significant influence on his style and practice. Giacometti's

sculptures are steeped in Cubism and Surrealism, imbuing his art with a sense of reality as if they were living figures. Studying Giacometti's works, Kishino concluded that sculpture should not be solely concerned with form. Rather, Kishino places greater importance on the dynamic between the object's internal and external space. He uses light and shadows, empty space and subtle interventions to create expressions, meanings, and relationships between time and nature that extend beyond the strictly physical forms of the works.

Kishino's father, Tadataka, himself a practitioner of Zen Buddhism, is a master of *Suiboku-ga*, traditional ink-wash painting. Tadataka's paintings, four of which are included in this exhibition, express themes of transience, quietness, and subtle movement. Displayed with Sho Kishino's sculptures, the paintings serve as a backdrop against which the three-



Bird (2019) by Sho Kishino, 72 x 34.5 x 23 cm, driftwood pine, Mt Fuji Japanese cedar, Oriental persimmon, Copper plate sourced from Daitokuji Temple, Nara



Seated (2020) by Sho Kishino 36 x 33 x 20 cm, Cypress wood (hinoki)

dimensional works exist; with their shared use of restrained imagery to hint at hidden representations, the paintings and sculptures also converse with one another. Kishino's brother Kan, a traditional ceramicist, has also contributed two Yakishime jars, which are coated with glazes that are naturally created by wood ash in the kiln; the random patterns that occur through this technique suggest the limits of human control over natural forces. Kan and Sho collaborated for this exhibition to include three sculptures that bring wood and ceramics together to highlight the interplay between deliberate actions and natural phenomena.



Heron (2020) by Sho Kishino 38.5 x 52 x 23 cm, Pine, Maple

Kishino sources many of his materials from ancient temples, historic samurai residences, and the banks of the Kizu River. By rediscovering these objects and materials, and repurposing them into works of art, Kishino gives them renewed life, setting them into motion along a new cycle of existence and meaning. The wood grain of a piece of lumber sourced from an old temple becomes the folds of a monk's robes. A stone from the Kizu River becomes the

perch for a curious heron peering into unseen waters. An unearthed fragment of bog-wood becomes a ghostly figure treading a path along a river. Kishino's works draw the viewer into a meditation on the cycle of the passage of time, the forces of nature, and the layers of intervention by the artist's hand.

• From 10 September to 8 October at Ippodo Gallery, 32 East 67th Street, New York. On view by appointment only. The exhibition can also be viewed online, [ippodogallery.com](http://ippodogallery.com)

# JAPANESE PAINTINGS, PRINTS, AND CERAMICS

On show at Sebastian Izzard is a select group of Japanese paintings, woodblock prints, and 17th-century Nabeshima ceramics at their gallery during Asia Week in September. Highlights include a painting of a *White Horse and Chinese Grooms* by the Nanga artist Yosa Buson (1716-1784) dated 1760. Buson educated himself about Chinese learning and literary traditions and combined this knowledge with his own poetic sensibility to develop one of the most lyrical and moving bodies of work in the corpus of Nanga painting.

A yellow-ground print of a seated beauty holding a fan by Kitagawa Utamaro (1754-1806) from 1794 is also included in the exhibition. This print belongs to a set of 10 depicting three-quarter length views of high-ranking courtesans of the Yoshiwara. It is the only known impression of the first edition.

Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825) was the leading theatre print-designer and book illustrator at the turn of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. His depiction of the actors Bando Mitsugoro II and Segawa Kikunojo III in a theatrical scene is from a set featuring double half-length portraits for plays staged in three of Edo's theatres in the fall of 1796. This print appears to be the only known impression extant. Deluxe actor prints such as this may have been commissioned privately for promotional purposes or for wealthy members of fan clubs, thus accounting for its rarity. Also on view is a selection of



Morokoshi of the Echizenya, maids Ayano and Orino (Echizenya uchi Ayano Orino), 1794, KITAGAWA UTAMARO (1754-1806), colour woodblock print, oban tate-e, 38.7 x 25.4 cm, from the series: Array of Supreme Portraits of the Present Day (T ji zensei nigao-zoro-e); signed: Utamaro hitsu; publisher: Wakasaya Yoichi

fine Nabeshima porcelain. These wares were made only for domestic consumption, and for presentation purposes rather than for actual use. A dish with a stylised cherry blossom and cloud design from the early 18th century is representative of the mature period of Nabeshima porcelain production. Blooming cherry is associated

with spring, renewal, and death and is a potent symbol for Japan.

• From 14 to 25 September, Sebastian Izzard, 17 East 76th Street, 3/F, New York. Viewing at the gallery is by appointment only during exhibition hours: 11-5. Closed Sunday. The entire exhibition can also be viewed online at [izzardasianart.com](http://izzardasianart.com)



Utamaro, "Courtesans Komurasaki and Hanamurasaki from the House of Tamaya," from the series Courtesans of the Greenhouses in Double Mirrors, c.1798, woodblock print.

Kuniyoshi, Warabi: Inuyama Dosetsu, from The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido, 1852, woodblock print., Ronin Gallery,



# FOUNDER'S FAVOURITES

Ronin Gallery is opening its 45th anniversary season with an online exhibition – *Founder's Favorites*. Curated by Ronin Gallery founder Roni Neuer, this exhibition features some of her favourite works after 45 years of working in the world of 18th through 21st century Japanese prints. While some of the works are merited by rarity and masterful design, others are endeared through inextricable memories and outstanding printing quality. From the early days of *ukiyo-e* to a new generation of

contemporary talents, the exhibition invites you to experience the works that have claimed a special presence in a career of collecting.

A featured artist in the exhibition is Hasui Kawase. As a major Japanese landscape artist of the early 20th century, Hasui's prints are characterised by their serenity of mood and flawless composition. While nostalgic in the subject matter, his work reflects the innovative blend of familiar and international influence that

characterized the *Shin Hanga* (New Print) movement.

In September, the gallery is also launching its new, improved website. Over the past six months, they have worked with Oracle to bring their website and backend systems to the same best-in-class level as the physical gallery at Bryant Park Place. A clean new design, granular filters and optimised search lets you explore the collection your way.

• Ronin Gallery, New York, online exhibition on [roningallery.com](http://roningallery.com)



Rirkrit Tiravanija, installation view. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

## ONCE UPON A TIME

Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija (b 1961) has been part of the contemporary art world for more than two decades, often creating performances/ installations relying on the active participation of the audience. Alternatively, he has also completed pieces, collages, multi-media works with slogans challenging the world order as we know it. In his latest exhibition, *Untitled 2020, Once Upon a Time/After Jasper Johns*, Rirkrit

Tiravanija revisits a seminal work by Jasper Johns from the early Sixties: the American flag. Relying on two different media, traditional Aubusson rugs as well as marble, the artist is adding new slogans, commenting on the present situation, but also encouraging the viewer to question the idea of the flag, what it stands for and what it actually means. Not only does it challenge the symbol of the flag, but to a much larger

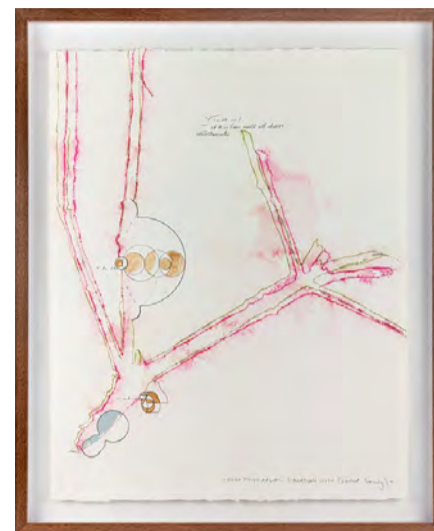
extent, it also looks at the impact America has in the world as a country. Rirkrit Tiravanija has always been an unconventional artist, trying to come up with a new approach in order to make his exhibitions an experience for the viewer. It should not be any different with this exhibition.

**Olivia Sand**  
 ● From 5 September to 10 October, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, crousel.com

## JITISH KALLAT Circadian Studies

Jitish Kallat's recent series of drawings entitled *Circadian Study* (contact tracing) is currently in the viewing room of Nature Morte's website. In lieu of the current lack of actual exhibitions in the gallery space, the viewing room provides a deep immersion into the artist's practice. This is particularly true for *Circadian Studies*, where that gallery is also able to share rare glimpses of Kallat's studio processes, as well as an immersive look at his new series of drawings.

Jitish Kallat has frequently marked the passage of time in his work with drawings that record natural elements, registering images from descending raindrops or reading wind-patterns with fire. Kallat has been developing a 'vocabulary of studio rituals' that explore aesthetic questions mediated by nature. He has described these as 'systems of self-imposed artistic constraints' that alter his intuitions and perceptions. His most recent series began as an accidental activity during a fortnight of self-isolation at his studio, after an overseas trip in March 2020. One of his daily routines was watering the plants on the studio terrace coupled with the practice of tracing contours of shadows from fallen twigs.



Circadian Study (contact tracing), 2020 by Jitish Kallat

It was during the following weeks that this process began to gain complexity, detail and meaning. Kallat says that 'these works are primarily about attention and observation. While drawing, there are moments when one is so absorbed in outlining the edge of the shadow that one misses the backscatter of the sun reflected from the paper. In bright sunshine you see utter darkness under the stem, catching a fleeting glimpse of night during day. The drawings are formed by red and green lines, each registering a position of the sun relative to the tree-stem at different moments, by recording the shifting shape of the moving

shadow. As I hydrate the tracings, the two lines secrete colour and exchange energies. The paper does not feel like a surface anymore ... it feels like a field of impulses: haemoglobin and chlorophyll, night and day, oxygen and carbon and the fallen twig itself as a repository of carbon and breath exchanged over time'.

'It is often after a passage of some days that Kallat revisits the tracings. Drawings begin to emerge in the gaps within the tracings; small annotations that speak back to early intuitions, closing some kind of an inner loop within the work,' he says.

● At [naturemorte.com](http://naturemorte.com), New Delhi, [viewingroom.naturemorte.com/jitishkallat](http://viewingroom.naturemorte.com/jitishkallat)

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## NYC AUCTIONS

### SOTHEBY'S

Sotheby's September sales in New York during Asian Art week include **Kangxi Porcelain: A Private Collection** on 22 September. **Junkunc: Chinese Jade Carvings**, 22 September. **Indian, Himalayan, Southeast Asian Works of Art**, 22 September. **Important Chinese Art** on 23 September. **The Hundred Antiques: Fine & Decorative Asian Art** online sale from 18-29 September.



Peachbloom-glazed amphora vase, Kangxi mark and period, height 15.4 cm, est \$200/300,000, Kangxi Porcelain, Sotheby's



Gilt-copper figure of Avalokiteshvara, 9th/10th century, height 10 1/2 in, est \$300/500,000, Sotheby's



Gold, silver and glass-embellished bronze vessel (fang hu), Warring State period, 4th/3rd century BC, height 35.1 cm, est \$2.5-3.5 million, Sotheby's



Bronze figure of Shiva tripuravijaya, chola period, Tamil nadu, est \$1-1.5 million, The James and Marilynn Alsdorf Collection Part 1, Christie's

### CHRISTIE'S

For Asian Art Week in New York, Christie's has a series of sales representing the works of art from East to South Asia over 11 live and online sales. Lots can be viewed, by appointment, at the Rockefeller Center galleries, from 16 September.

**Japanese & Korean Art**, 22 September, includes Japanese prints by Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige and Kitagawa Utamaro, as well as Meiji-period works of art, including cloisonné by Namikawa Yasuyuki and Namikawa Sosuke and modern paintings by Morita Shiryu, Shinoda Toko and Suda Kokuta. **A Lasting engagement: The Jane and Kito de Boer Collection**, 23 September, offers more than 150 works of Indian art, including works by Ganesh Pyne, Rameshwar Brooa, Akbar Padmasee and MF Husain, FN Souza and K Laxma Goud.

**The South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art** sale on

23 September takes place alongside the de Boer single-owner sale.

**Devotion in Stone: Gandharan Masterpieces from a Japanese Private Collection**, 23 September represents works from a private collection including figures, friezes and narrative reliefs. Highlights include a grey schist triad of Buddha Shakyamuni with



Grey schist triad of Buddha Shakyamuni with bodhisattvas, Gandhara, 3rd/4th century, from a Japanese private collection, estimate on request, Christie's



White jade 'elephant and boys' group, Qianlong period (1736-1795), est \$500-800,000, Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, Christie's

bodhisattvas and seen as one of the most important Gandharan sculptures to be offered to the market.

**Sacred and Imperial: The James and Marilynn Alsdorf Collection Part 1 and Part 2**, 24 September includes masterpieces of Indian, Himalayan, and Southeast Asian art, Chinese ceramics and works of art and Chinese paintings. Highlights include South Indian

and Chinese bronzes, Himalayan Buddhist figures, peach-bloom porcelains, Yongzheng and Qianlong monochromes, jade carvings, and an album of landscapes and calligraphy attributed to Zhang Ruitu.

**Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian Works of Art**, 24 September includes Central Indian sandstone sculptures from the Herbert and Florence Irving collection and a selection of early Nepalese cast sculptures including a gilt-copper figure of Avalokiteshvara from the Khasa Malla Kingdom. **Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art**, 25 September.

The four online sales include works from the Jane and Kito de Boer Collection (4-25 Sept), Contemporary Art Asia (4-27 Sept), works from the James and Marilynn Alsdorf Collection (4-29 Sept) and The Ankarcona Collection of Japanese Lacquer and Asian Works of Art (10 September-1 October).

### BONHAMS

In New York on 21 September Bonhams are offering **Elegant Embellishments**, a collection of Chinese jewellery and accoutrements spanning more than 2,000 years, including hair ornaments, earrings, necklaces, bangles, belt hoot and mat weights, including works from the Robert Kuo Collection. From the Warring States (475-221 BC), or Western Han period, comes an inlaid bronze garment hook (est \$20-30,000), from the Song dynasty (960-1279) on offer are a selection of gold jewellery, including a pair of gold bracelets (\$8-12,000). Gold jewellery from the Ming and Qing dynasties includes a pair of Ming-dynasty figural earring pendants and a gold 'dragon' bracelet, both estimated at \$8-12,000.

An afternoon session on 21 September will offer **Chinese Paintings and Works of Art**, highlights include an Imperial gilt-lacquered bronze 'phoenix' vase, Qianlong mark and of the period (\$70-100,000). On 23 September, **Indian, Himalayan & Southeast Asian Art** and **Fine Japanese and Korean Art** and on 24 September, a highlight includes Yuami by Hashiguvchi Goyo (1880-1921), est \$15-20,000.

Imperial gilt-lacquered bronze 'phoenix vase', Qianlong period, est \$70-100,000, Bonhams



## LONDON AUCTIONS

### CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PAINTINGS

Chiswick Auctions, London, 29 September

The first ever single owner collection of Chinese contemporary ink to take place in London in September. Entitled **An Odyssey in Ink: the Nanyue Pavilion Collection of Contemporary Chinese Paintings**, the sale consists of 93 works by artists working in the field of contemporary ink including Wucuis Wong, Li Xubai, Wang Dongling, Wang Tiande, Qin Feng, Gu Wenda, Qiu Deshu, Wei Ligang, Li Jin and Chun-yi Lee, as well as a number of emerging talents. The collection was amassed by a private collector based between London and Singapore over the last 30 years.



Civilization Landscape Series 0017, 2012, by Qin Geng (b 1961), ink on paper, 125 x 200cm, est £18-22,000, Chiswick Auctions

# Islamic Arts Diary



The Lovebird and the Woman (2020) by Onur Hastürk, marbled paper cut and pasted on passe-partout

By Lucien de Guise

## EAST AND WEST IN GERMANY

Now that galleries are coming out of the comparative hibernation of the past few months, there is much activity from the smaller venues and almost nothing from the big boys. There will not be any Islamic blockbusters in the near future to rival the *Inspired by the East* collaboration between the British

Museum and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. Instead there is a flowering at galleries that many will not have heard of. Among the most vigorous of these is Anna Laudel's gallery in Dusseldorf.

Winning lots of attention at the moment – beyond Düsseldorf – is *Assimilation*. This is a solo show by Turkish artist Onur Hastürk, highly regarded for his work combining historic styles of Islamic painting with contemporary art. On this occasion

he brings together different artistic cultures of Islam with the highly publicised output of Matisse and Warhol. They are now having gloriously colourful conversations with each other.

Islamic art is as diverse as the locations in which it has developed over the past 1,400 years. Similarly, Matisse and Warhol adapted what they knew of different locations and cultures into their avant-garde production. With Hastürk, the



Odalisque with Red Caftan (2019) by Onur Hastürk, acrylic, watercolour and 23 carat gold on paper



Flowers on top of a Table and Odalisque (2020) by Onur Hastürk acrylic, watercolour and 23 carat gold on paper

combinations are visible but prominence is given to traditional Islamic-art techniques. Assimilation comprises three different series, each with a clear theme: Matisse, Warhol, and Classical Miniatures.

The Matisse theme brings together the modern and the traditional. The French master's paintings combine the naturalism of the European painting tradition with the rhythmic patterns of Islamic carpets and the shallow compositions of Islamic miniature painting. Hastürk interprets Matisse's extraction of Oriental motifs in his paintings and cutouts for a new kind of ornamental decoration. Among the intriguing components are the chapel vestments of a priest designed by Matisse,

which can be viewed as a counterpart to the series of talisman kaftans that Hastürk made. Warhol is also reflected in Hastürk's work. The most obvious examples are inspired by Warhol's 1957 'Gold Book' of flowers, shoes and models — all updated using gold paper. Materials are equally important to the Turkish artist's tribute to classical miniatures, a subject that he explored extensively as part of his academic studies. Delving into the Ottoman tradition, this modern artist makes contemporary use of many techniques that are associated with his homeland's distant past, most notably marbling and gilding.

● *Assimilation* runs until 31 October in Düsseldorf

## LOOSE THREADS IN LONDON

Another small gallery that has extended an earlier exhibition is the Aga Khan Centre Gallery. Somewhat overshadowed by its much larger sibling in Toronto, this institution is enjoying some of the limelight that comes with easy access. *Rethreading & Retracing* is an exhibition by textile artist Bita Ghezelayagh. Looking back to her Iranian heritage, she transforms old woven textiles and carpets into novel pictorial objects and works of art. Using traditional embroidery techniques, along with found materials, she repurposes discarded textiles. Giving them a regenerated life, they also acquire an altogether different purpose. This exhibition ranges over her output, including a series of new works created recently that have never been displayed before.

For a jewel-like finish there are carpet squares partly rethreaded and adorned with shimmering mirror borders. At the other extreme is her new *Offcut* series that deconstructs forms so that they resemble templates for body armour. This exhibition connects us to Bitá's cultural history of textile traditions in Iran as well as drawing on her place of birth: Florence in Italy. In addition, she has been immersed in French culture, having studied architecture in Paris. Working with Iranian calligraphers in Tehran is just another facet to this cross-cultural innovator.

● *Rethreading & Retracing* by Bitá Ghezelayagh at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery, London, ends 4 October



Mirror series (2019–20) by Bitá Ghezelayagh © Bitá Ghezelayagh

## FASHIONABLE BAGS IN BATH

Long before the lockdown, the Courtauld Gallery in London had closed for renovations. The fabulous collection has been put to good use, though; it has travelled to Bath to spend some time at another museum that does not receive the coverage it deserves. The Holburne Museum is housed in a magnificent building and has recently hosted an exhibition by Grayson Perry: the memorably named *Pre-Therapy Years*.

The Courtauld contribution, however, consists of some of the finest Islamic metalwork that has survived the ravages of time and the stripping out of precious inlays. These objects range in date from the 13th to the 16th centuries, the highpoint of an art form that has never been equalled, although it was given a slightly bad name in the 19th century with imitations that did not capture the technical brilliance of the originals. The Courtauld's collection was formed by the prominent Victorian art collector Thomas Gambier Parry. Being a true Victorian did not hamper his ability to see that Islamic art was an ideal complement to his acquisitions of precious medieval and early Renaissance paintings and decorative arts.

Many of the most impressive pieces in the collection have been on permanent display in the Courtauld Gallery since the 1960s. The prized metalwork has seldom travelled outside London. Never has such a large group of Islamic metalwork objects been brought



The 'Courtauld Bag', now in the fashionable environs of Bath's Holburne Museum

together to be shown outside the Courtauld. The most spectacular piece in the collection is the so-called Courtauld Bag. The name does not really do it justice. It is more a miracle of meticulous inlay than a mere bag. The decoration is of the kind of luxurious brilliance that Mosul was famous for producing before the Mongol invasion in 1262. Small roundels all over the surface contain musicians and revellers, while elsewhere horsemen appear prominently. One of the equestrian figures is seen dramatically spearing a lion.

The latest research indicates that the bag was created for a noblewoman of the Il-Khanid dynasty (1256–1353), descendants of Genghis Khan who clearly did no harm to Mosul masterpieces. It is one of the most splendid pieces of Islamic metalwork in the world, and its shape and function make it a unique object.

Along with the other marvels of the Courtauld collection, this is definitely an unexpected treat for visitors to Bath.

## PAPER PRIZE FROM CHINA

Emotions can run high with medieval Islamic art. The latest controversy to emerge during the global lockdown involved a copy of the *Qur'an*. It was not the usual sensitivity about the holy book being improperly treated by a Southern Baptist preacher. This time it was about provenance. Perhaps nobody would have noticed if it had not fetched ten times its estimate at Christie's on 25 June. While scholars wondered about where it had come from, the auctioneer went full steam ahead on its undoubted qualities. It is a ravishing version of a book that is usually predictable in its appearance. This 15th-century Timurid *Qur'an* is an extreme rarity, copied on Ming-dynasty gold-painted coloured paper. There are only four other known *Qur'ans* written on Chinese paper.

As Christie's declared: 'This magnificent *Qur'an* is a captivating example of the innovation of the imperial ateliers of 15th-century Persia; it also embodies the physical evidence of the cultural and diplomatic relations between Ming China and Timurid Iran'. It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic outcome to this cross-fertilisation of nearby empires. The paper is rather more astonishing than the calligraphy, which is fairly mainstream. The quality of the paper is the first thing to strike

those lucky enough to handle the book. Visually there are many treats, too, with pages that are often dramatically coloured and feature gold speckles or Chinese motifs such as landscape and peach blossoms. Most unusual – and the first time I have seen it – there is the occasional bird on view. Those who say Islamic art is anti-figural are usually incorrect. In the case of the *Qur'an*, though, it is extremely rare to see anything like a bird or a person.

The controversy with this *Qur'an* related more to provenance, which was limited, and to the possibility that someone in the future might carve up this copy and sell the individual components as has happened with other books. Given the extremely high price this fetched (the highest ever for a *Qur'an*, over £7 million), it would take a committed book vandal to do such a thing. In the meantime it is testimony to happier times in the relationship between the Islamic world and China.



A 15th-century Timurid copy of the *Qur'an* sold recently at Christie's and was subject to much admiration as well as some misgivings

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