

# ASIAN ART

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## CHOLA AND VIJAYANAGAR BRONZES RETURN TO INDIA

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art announced its plans to return three sculptures to the Government of India, following rigorous provenance research that documented that the sculptures had been removed illegally from temple settings. The Government of India has agreed to place one of the sculptures on long-term loan. This arrangement will allow the museum to publicly share the full story of the object's origins, removal, and return, and to underscore the museum's commitment to provenance research.

The two Chola period (circa 850-1250) sculptures Shiva Nataraja, circa 990, and Somaskanda, 12th century, exemplify the rich artistry of South Indian bronze casting. The sculptures were originally sacred objects traditionally carried in temple processions. The Shiva Nataraja, which is to be placed on long-term loan, will be on view as part of the exhibition *The Art of Knowing in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Himalayas*, which opens later this month in Washington, DC. Chola bronzes were produced in Tamil

Nadu, India, from the 9th to 13th centuries, and represent a pinnacle of Indian metal casting, characterised by elegant, slender, and vibrant depictions of Hindu deities. Crafted mainly for temples using the lost-wax method, the copper alloy sculptures served as portable, sacred icons for religious processions.

The 16th-century work Saint Sundarar with Paravai comes from the Vijayanagar Empire (1336-1646), a dominant South Indian kingdom in Karnataka known for its immense wealth, art and cosmopolitan culture, with its capital at Hampi, and a highly successful trading power.

As part of a systematic review of its South Asian collections, the National Museum of Asian Art undertook a detailed investigation into the provenance of the three sculptures, scrutinising each work's transaction history. In 2023, in collaboration with the Photo Archives of the French Institute of Pondicherry, museum researchers confirmed that the bronzes had been photographed in temples in Tamil Nadu, India, between 1956 and

1959. The Archaeological Survey of India subsequently reviewed these findings and affirmed that the sculptures had been removed in violation of Indian laws. The Shiva Nataraja belonged to the Sri Bhava Aushadesvara Temple in Tirutturaipundi Taluk, Tanjavur District, Tamil Nadu, India, where it was photographed in 1957. In addition to photographic evidence confirming the sculpture's presence in the temple in 1957, a provenance researcher at the museum determined that a New York gallery had provided falsified documentation to facilitate the sale to the museum.

The Somaskanda and Saint Sundarar with Paravai entered the collection of the museum as part of a gift of 1,000 objects from Arthur M Sackler in 1987. Research led by the museum's team at the Photo Archives of the French Institute of Pondicherry confirmed that the Somaskanda was photographed at the Visvanatha Temple in Alattur village, Mannarkudi taluk, Tamil Nadu in 1959, and the Saint Sundarar with Paravai at the Shiva Temple in



Shiva Nataraja, Lord of Dance, India, Tamil Nadu state, Chola dynasty, circa 990, bronze. On loan from the Government of India. Photo: National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution

Veerasolapuram village, Tamil Nadu, in 1956.

Provenance research involves close examination of an object's physical characteristics alongside documentary evidence that together inform an understanding of an object's ownership

and movement over time. Researchers identify and inspect information from sources as varied as export licenses, dealer records, inventories, curatorial files, ship manifests, genealogical records, historical photographs, correspondence and many more to construct as robust an ownership history as possible. This research aims to uncover and tell the complex histories of individual objects and the networks of people who have interacted with them over time.

In December 2025, under the Smithsonian's Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns Policy, the museum announced its first ethical return of three sculptures to the Kingdom of Cambodia, with one of those cultural treasures to remain on display in the museum on long-term loan. The National Museum of Asian Art has been active in the field of Asian art provenance research since the early 2000s, refining methodologies, advancing scholarship, whilst building global partnerships and making research findings publicly accessible.



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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### ASIA SOCIETY, NEW YORK

In January, the Board of Trustees of Asia Society announced that the Honourable Kevin Rudd, Australia's Ambassador to the US, will return to lead the Asia Society from its global headquarters in New York on 31 March 2026. Dr Rudd will also serve as President of the Asia Society Policy Institute (ASPI) and will assume a leading role with ASPI's Center for China Analysis, which he established in 2022. He succeeds Kyung-wha Kang, who stepped down as Asia Society President and CEO in October to serve as the Republic of Korea's top diplomat in the US. He will also be actively engaged in ASPI's Washington office, particularly through the Center for China Analysis, in his ongoing engagement across the US system on China policy.

Dr Rudd served as Asia Society's President and CEO (2021-23) and the inaugural President of ASPI (2015-23). A distinguished diplomat, China scholar, and leading voice on Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific affairs, he led Asia Society and ASPI in aggressively pursuing its mission to navigate common futures on major policy challenges confronting the Asia-Pacific in security, prosperity, sustainability, and the development of common norms and values in the region. During his tenure, Dr Rudd developed the world-class Center for China Analysis within ASPI. From the Institute's beginning, he established ASPI as a leading global think-and-do tank, ranking in the top one percent of think tanks worldwide, with a distinctive voice and position in the global dialogue.

During his Asia Society presidency, he also led the establishment of two new locations, in Paris (Asia Society's first in the European Union) and Seattle (focused on AI and technology). Given the current challenges facing the Asia-Pacific and world, in his upcoming tenure, he will expand the Policy Institute's presence in Washington, DC, and deepen

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# WAEEL SHAWKY

by Olivia Sand

Unquestionably, the talk of the 2024 Venice Biennale was the Egyptian Pavilion featuring the work of Wael Shawky (b 1971, Alexandria). In a bold move to feature a 45-minute-long video at a venue where the audience is racing against the clock to cover all the exhibitions, *Drama 1882* revealed the artist internationally. With his video set in Egypt and based on the nationalistic revolution against British influence, the film presented a different way of making art: a *gesamtkunstwerk* where the artist created the sets, the production, the choreography, and wrote the music as well as the songs. In addition, in a world increasingly relying on AI, Wael Shawky's approach is genuinely bringing the artist back to the centre of the creative process that covers mediums as diverse as painting, drawing, installation, sculpture, and video.

Eager to explore the Arabic narrative within the topics he chooses to embrace, Wael Shawky is also a keen observer of the history of the Middle East and what shaped the region until today. In the following interview, he talks about his practice in light of a global context, which finds itself deeply rooted in history.



Portrait of Wael Shawky at the Egyptian Pavilion, 2024, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Lisson Gallery, Lia Rumma, and Barakat Contemporary. Photo: George Darrell, Lisson Gallery

Asian Art Newspaper: Following the revolution in Egypt in 2011, you decided not to exhibit there anymore. Considering the way things worked out for the 2024 Venice Biennale, where you represented Egypt, is there a chance you may change your mind in the near future?

Wael Shawky: No, and here is why: the Venice Biennale took place under special circumstances as the government had asked me to represent Egypt. It took me some time to start negotiating with them before being able to accept their proposal.

Of course, it was an honour to represent Egypt, but I also needed to make sure I could do it in the correct way. In the end, the government agreed with what I asked for, which was for them to give me the key to the pavilion and not interfere at all. There was no censorship, and they did not even know what topic I was going to address. As a result, they did not see any of the works until the opening – and they accepted it. That was extremely nice, and it worked out so it was a positive outcome for everyone.

Having that freedom also allowed us to raise funds for the project and to be capable of achieving the level we were ultimately aiming for. In that specific case, we relied on 'the independent artists', an idea which we were somehow seeking during the project.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

the Society's critical focus on public policy, arts, culture, and education.

Prior to joining Asia Society, Dr Rudd served as Australia's 26th Prime Minister (2007-2010, 2013) and as Foreign Minister (2010-2012). He is a fluent Mandarin speaker and leading international authority on China. He began his career as a China scholar, serving as an Australian diplomat in Beijing before entering Australian politics. He is the author of two major books on China and US-China relations: *On Xi Jinping* (2024) and *The Avoidable War* (2022). Founded in 1956, Asia Society is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year.

### CHINA INSTITUTE, NEW YORK

It is also a big year for anniversaries at the China Institute, founded in New York City in 1926 by American educators John Dewey, Paul Monroe, and Chinese scholars Hu Shi and Kuo Ping-Wen with the aim of the China Institute of America, as a US nonprofit organisation, to dedicate itself to deepening the world's understanding of China through programmes in art, business, cuisine, culture, and education.

In 1944, the institution moved into a building renamed China House (the former Frederick S Lee House) at 125 East 65th Street, given by Henry R Luce as a gift from the foundation established and named in honour of his father Henry Winters Luce. In 2015, the China Institute of

America relocated to Lower Manhattan in a new 41,000 square foot office space at 40 Rector Street, New York.

Apart from the centenary, it is also the 60th anniversary of the gallery exhibition space. Since 1966, the Gallery has presented more than 120 exhibitions showcasing both historical and contemporary works across a wide range of media and art forms. Covering 5,000 years of Chinese history from the Neolithic period to the present day with the China Institute Gallery being the only non-commercial exhibition space solely dedicated to Chinese art in New York and the US.

### PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM, MASSACHUSETTS

And another anniversary – The Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), the oldest continuously operating museum in the US, is celebrating the 200th anniversary of the museum's first permanent gathering and exhibition space – East India Marine Hall. Built in 1825, East India Marine Hall is the heart of the museum and is recognised today as a National Historic Landmark. Beginning 14 March 2026, visitors can experience a new, multimedia-enhanced installation of the hall featuring several hundred objects that offer a cross-section of PEM's global collection and represent its earliest years of collecting. The museum's founding collections, acquired from 1799 to 1867 by the East India Marine Society, a group

of sea captains and traders who sailed all over the world from Salem, form the basis of the museum's collections.

### CHINESE PORCELAIN AT THE FRICK

The Frick Collection is holding a free lecture, 'Looking East from Fifth Avenue: Chinese Porcelain at The Frick Collection', on 20 March during Asia Week. Join Yifu Liu, Anne L Poulet Curatorial Fellow, is to explore the evolution of Chinese porcelain at The Frick Collection, from Henry Clay Frick's earliest acquisitions to the museum's most recent additions. It examines the cultural significance of these objects in the early twentieth century and re-evaluates their relevance today within an American art institution traditionally celebrated for its European works of art.

### THE HIGH LINE, NEW YORK

The High Line in New York has selected artist Tuan Andrew Nguyen to produce its next plinth commission scheduled to open this spring. *The Light That Shines Through the Universe* is a recreated version of one of the two Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan that were blown up by the Taliban in 2001. The artist, based in Ho Chi Minh City, is known for a wide-ranging practice spanning sculpture and video with his work often relating to cultural memory and loss.

Measuring over 11 metres tall, the sandstone

sculpture's title comes from the local nickname for the colossi, *Sakal*, which translates to 'the light that shines through the universe'.

### ASIAN ART MUSEUM, SAN FRANCISCO

In December 2025, the Asian Art Museum today formally transferred four ancient bronze sculptures to the government of Thailand, concluding a multi-year process of research, review, and collaboration among US and Thai authorities.

The sculptures, long part of the museum's holdings and most recently featured in *Moving Objects: Learning from Local and Global Communities*, were determined through extensive research to have been illegally removed from Thailand in the 1960s and later acquired on the art market by the museum's founding collector, Avery Brundage. A multi-agency investigation with scholarship from Thai researchers and the Asian Art Museum's curatorial team, confirmed that the works were linked to the disgraced dealer Douglas Latchford, who was later indicted for trafficking Southeast Asian antiquities.

### AGA KHAN MUSEUM, TORONTO

In February, the Aga Khan Museum announced that Dr Ulrike Al-Khamis will retire from her role as Director and CEO after nine years of service where she played a pivotal role in shaping the museum's curatorial and international profile.

“  
The artist should not become a simple tool of propaganda  
”

In my opinion, the role of the government is to support the independence of artists and not the opposite. The artist should not become a simple tool of propaganda for these types of regimes. Ultimately, since the government accepted my conditions, I was very happy to take charge of the pavilion. But coming back to your original question, for now, I retain this same position because the idea is not to always be asking the government not to interfere. It happened this time and it worked out. I am very proud of it and so happy that even the government was supportive and cooperative towards my undertaking.

AAN: Considering the huge success of the Egyptian Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale, do you feel it triggered a change within Egypt's contemporary art scene or towards Egypt's contemporary artists?  
WS: It definitely changed something, but above all, it proved to many people that the Egyptian Pavilion was generally not bad. This showed that in the past it was not because



Exhibition view of Drama 1882 (2024), Egyptian Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale entitled 'Foreigners Everywhere', 2024, Venice, Italy, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut / Hamburg and Lia Rumma Gallery, Barakat Contemporary, and Lisson Gallery

there were no artists with the capacity or ability to make it great, rather the reason was simply the system. We need to keep that in mind. Now, as for future biennales, will there be another artist capable of doing this with them? I honestly do not know, but I hope that I managed to show the younger generation that there is a way to do it. It all comes down to the fact that the system is the problem. Events like the Venice Biennale, especially with the prizes they award and the aura and recognition that come with it, truly show the young generation in Egypt that they can hope for a light, a

dream, and that something can become real.

AAN: The subject of Drama 1882 addressed Egypt's history when a group led by the pioneering Egyptian nationalist Colonel Ahmed Urabi (1841-1911) opposed British influence. Recently, we are tending to see more countries starting to process chapters of their past, be this France with Algeria or Spain with Franco, for example. What is the situation in Egypt? Has it come to terms with certain chapters of its past? How do you see it?  
WS: I am currently working on a very

ambitious project that deals with the history of the Gulf. When we say the Gulf, of course, we are talking about Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and all the oil-rich countries located there.

My idea for the film is very metaphorical, exploring how the Gulf became extremely developed and rich, basically changing the whole system in a very short period. To me, that is a fantastic metaphor of humanity in the way they dream of development, and how they evolve and advance by changing their own system. As for the system itself, it is quite broad and can be anything,

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Exhibition view of *I am Hymns of the New Temples* (2023), Sfeir-Semler Gallery Karantina, Beirut, Lebanon, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg

2011, events can be understood in this geographical area, including Egypt. As a result, my undertakings stop in 2010.

From 2011 onwards, it is a whole new chapter that to me remains extremely vague as I do not know what this is or what it means. As an artist, I prefer to deal with what has been happening before, basically any period prior to the Arab Spring. If we think of Hosni Mubarak (1928-2020), for example, we can now look at the Mubarak era as I find we can easily analyse it in conjunction with what happened in the region during that time. The Arab Spring created various effects and had different consequences, meaning that starting in 2011, we are looking at a completely new chapter. Presently, the world is quite chaotic, and I do not know what to make of it, especially in Egypt with President El-Sisi (b 1954). Consequently, I feel that time frame cannot be analysed enough to the degree of making art.

**AAN:** Before embarking on a film and writing the script, while researching, what catches your attention towards choosing one distinct moment in history? Is it the injustice, the greed, or keeping a memory alive so people do not forget what the triggering factor was?

**WS:** Most of the time, I am fascinated by this idea of the dream of development. This dream of development can even come from a religious point of view, as is best exemplified by the speech given by Pope Urban II in 1094 in Clermont, France. In this very speech, the Pope is trying to explain to the Europeans that the reason why they are fighting with each other is because they do not have enough resources and not enough land. He is demonstrating that by moving to the east, they would find much more land and resources. As a result, by going there, people would ascend to a higher level, but at the same time, the Pope emphasised that if someone were to die on the trip, he would ensure their seat in heaven.

Ensuring a seat in heaven can be called a 'Christian Jihad', since it is based on this one idea that death will lead to a higher place if they are following the Pope's or religious direction. Ultimately, for me, when I try to look at all these chapters, including the Crusade's history, there is a lot of complexity in it as there is a religious background. Even though we do not know for certain, I assume that Pope Urban II really believed in what he was saying and had enough



Roman Woman 6 (2022), ceramic, clay and oil paint, 38 x 26 x 17 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg

charisma to convince all these people to move to Constantinople. Some of them even walked to Constantinople, with half of the first wave dying of hunger. When we try to understand this story, we feel that it is always based on people with this will of developing from one system to a higher system, even if it is based on religious aspects, with the desire to go from one system to a higher one to go to heaven. Usually, most of my work is about people in transition as they find themselves within this dream to move.

**AAN:** However, most times the dream and the transition come at a cost, is that not so?

**WS:** Yes, it does, but there is an outcome. For example, the first internationally recognised film I did was called *The Cave*, where I walked into a supermarket, reciting this chapter from the *Quran* called 'The Cave'. The idea about the cave is all



Untitled IV (2023), oil on canvas, 46 x 61.7 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



Maccus 3 (2022), ceramic, clay and oil paint, 37 x 28 x 15 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg

about migration. Basically, the story within the *surah* (a chapter of the *Quran*) is about the Prophet, like Moses for example. Moses went from one place to another to gain more knowledge and power. He was then asked by God to go and meet Al-Khidr, a man who was not a prophet, but someone who had wisdom and knowledge. So, God told Moses to go and find Al-Khidr to learn from him, but Moses was not patient enough. This story shows us this relationship between two people – a prophet and a knowledgeable man – and how in the end, Moses was not patient enough to learn from him. However, he nevertheless did make the trip to meet the person, he did make this migration to gain this knowledge. Every story in this *surah* tells you that you must travel to get knowledge and power, and that you subsequently need to come back to help your own people.



Untitled VII (2023), oil on canvas, 45.5 x 61.2 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



Frog 3 (2022), ceramic, clay and oil paint, 33 x 27 x 18 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg

This is the *surah*'s basic message.

Similarly, in one of the stories in a *surah*, which is about the seven sleepers, these young men who believe in God are seeking his help to protect them from the people in the village who are non-believers. As the village wanted to kill them, they asked God to protect them. They find a cave nearby where they hide and sleep for 309 years. In this case, the sleeping act itself becomes a form of migration because ultimately, it provides the same outcome after 309 years, the young men wake up to find that their story became something like a wisdom for the whole village. People living there had become more religious because of them. Once again, I am referring to the format that always fascinates me, namely this idea about a moving humanity to reach something higher.

**AAN:** Do you feel we actually learn something from history, or do we

ultimately tend to fall back into the same mistakes? What is your view considering that various events seem to repeat themselves at a higher frequency and with higher intensity?

**WS:** Based on my reading, we are of course repeating a lot of our mistakes. However, and this is the truly surprising part, even though we are making the same mistakes over and over again, that does not mean that history is repeating itself. What leads us to believe that history is repeating itself are the results – as opposed to the causes – of something that happened sometimes over a thousand years ago. Nothing ever vanishes or can be erased from history: by doing something to humanity today, the results in history will unquestionably be visible a hundred or even a thousand years later, with nothing having disappeared. People tend to think that all the genocides that have taken place throughout history can just be erased from memory. That is simply impossible. That is the cycle of history and at times, it is extremely bloody, vicious, but simultaneously, there is humour in it because one can identify how it is happening again almost in the same way. Surprisingly, we tend to make an analogy to events that happened in the past and consider them the same, even though they are not. The result is simply the same, like the result of the Crusades for example, which is what is still present in people's memory today. It has shaped the relationship between West and East, a significant aspect that cannot be ignored. This is precisely the reason why as an artist it is even more important for me to try to understand this history. It has nothing to do with the idea that I am attempting to show that the Arab history is 'correct' or 'clean'. I simply just want to try to understand it from the Arab point of view, based on Arab writers and Arab historians, and how they saw things during that time. Ultimately, that is the way we humans make analysis even though we can never get a definite answer as it is a never-ending process.

**AAN:** At some point, you were reluctant to collaborate with adults, preferring to work with marionettes and children. For the film *Drama 1882*, what prompted you to bend your rules and work with adults?

**WS:** Looking back at my practice, it has been a transition from working with marionettes to working with children and subsequently with



Stills from *Drama 1882* (2024), 4K video, sound, colour, VFX, arabic with English subtitles, Dolby surround 5:1, 45 minutes, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Lisson Gallery, Lia Rumma, and Barakat Contemporary



Still from *Cabaret Crusades: The Path to Cairo* (2012), HD video, colour, sound, 59 minutes, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



Still from *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa* (2015), HD video, colour, sound, 120 minutes, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



Still from *Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show File* (2010), HD video, colour, sound, 31 minutes 49 seconds, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



Still from *Cabaret Crusades: The Path to Cairo* (2012), HD video, colour, sound, 59 minutes, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



Still from *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa* (2015), HD video, colour, sound, 120 minutes, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg

masked performers. Basically, all these characters were partially made in order not to have any dramatic expressions and not to depend on the acting skills of any performer, including the children. The children do not know the history: I just tell them to do one thing or another and they remain very innocent. They are talking about something they do not even know as I make them memorise a very complex text in classical Arabic. They do not know the meaning of the text, but they know how to pronounce it.

Whenever I try to explain the way I proceed, I always emphasise that my motivation is to kill drama in my work. I do not want to have drama in my films. When people look at the final piece, I want them to be connected through the topic, the music, the script, but not through the acting skills as I do not want to rely on the skills of an actor. I obeyed these rules until the Venice Biennale. With the film being made in Egypt – as well as in my hometown Alexandria, which meant a lot to me – I was determined to do something truly different to the degree that I wanted to challenge myself. I therefore decided that I would also be working with adults this time, ultimately calling the piece *Drama 1882*.

By the time I was working on the piece, I had started to learn more from the marionettes and their movements. I thought it would be wonderful if we could use these movements together with this idea of hypnotised performers. Looking at all the performers, you feel that they are hypnotised – not manipulated by strings or anything of that kind, but they are hypnotised by movements. That was the idea behind the film, and I am very happy by this shift and transition, and the way it turned out. As an artist, I believe you always must challenge yourself, doing things against or even beyond what you know.

**AAN:** Would you say that working with puppets or marionettes is a closed chapter, which is now behind you?

**WS:** No, not at this stage. Honestly, I love the idea of working with marionettes, not only with marionettes, but also with objects and animals. I like to try to explore new figures because, in my opinion, as humans, it makes it more straightforward for us to project ourselves. I often had the impression that it was easier for the audience to

identify with a puppet instead of identifying with a superstar actor. This is an interesting aspect for me to deal with, not only to create a new visual language, but also towards a different analysis of history. In this sense, the story does not always revolve around this figure that we know in history as being evil. Things are open for change and when looking at this figure as a puppet, it triggers a different kind of judgement, which depends on the story itself and not on what we know about the character.

**AAN:** You frequently said that different types of media all have their own limitations. Would you tend to say that film has the least limitations of all?

**WS:** Over time, I have come to realise that film is the medium with the most limitations! I say this based on all the parameters that come together, be this the dimension of music, the dimension of time, etc. I always try to compare the making of a film with the making of a drawing, both mediums relying on a process that I love. Drawing is unquestionably the most direct and spontaneous, as well as the most physically connected to the product: it is as if you are immediately and without thinking brought it from your subconscious to the paper. It is impossible to achieve this in films as there are layers and layers that need to come together: actors, filming, post-production, lighting, and music. Therefore, and I say this not only for me, but for many filmmakers: the most incredible thing about making a successful film is when nobody notices the difficulty behind it and when none of these elements are visible to the audience. Of course, the ideal scenario is when everything ends up coming together naturally. In addition, and even though it is complicated, I try as much as possible to give my films this sense of spontaneity even though everything is well calculated.

This is why I keep saying that film is at the exact opposite of making a drawing that is completely spontaneous and surreal. The question I was facing was how to calculate everything in the film to the degree of making each scene not only look surreal, but also spontaneous? That is quite a challenge.

**AAN:** Are there any artists you admire because they met that challenge?



Still from *The Cave, Amsterdam* (2005), video, colour, sound, 12 minutes 45 seconds, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg

“  
I have realised  
film is the  
medium with  
the most  
limitations  
”

**WS:** Absolutely. For example, I am fascinated by Gerhard Richter, who I feel is incredible. Even though he is someone who relies on just one medium – painting – it is admirable how he can move between the extremes of photorealism and abstraction. How is it possible to accomplish that? How can one be



Exhibition view of *Al Araba Al Madfuna* (2018), courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg. In 2004, Wael Shawky embarked on a research journey in search of historical, religious and philosophical peculiarities that shaped political and social life in Egypt, travelling from his native town of Alexandria via Cairo and the Nile along to southern Egypt

abstract, making it feel spontaneous, but at the same time controlled? In my opinion, this man is a genius for truth.

**AAN:** As to the production of new projects, how do you go about funding, which is a crucial parameter within film-making?

**WS:** Sometimes, I put some of my own money towards part of the production, but I am fortunate to have gallery representation. In Venice, for example, I had four galleries involved, and every one of them supported the project to make it work. In that instance, we even managed to get support from Egypt, as well as from private collectors. On other occasions, I considered myself extremely lucky to be invited – as in the case of Pompeii, for example. I was approached to make a film there which ultimately resulted in a big production that the city was happy to support. As for *Cabaret Crusades*, there were large institutions interested in supporting this project. Interestingly, I made one production in Italy, one in France, and one in Germany, and they were the main forces behind the Crusades. It was just a fantastic outcome. Sometimes, museums support a project while being fully aware that they are supporting something meaningful that also has to do with their own history. And it is irrelevant if the project highlights the Arab point of view, as this intellectual discourse is extremely important to the institutions too, thus making things much easier.

**AAN:** You were appointed Artistic Director of the first edition of Art Basel Qatar (February 2026), entitled *Becoming*. What was your approach to making the event genuinely special, and not just another art fair that happened to take place in the Gulf?

**WS:** My involvement with the fair was for this one time only. It will not be more than this as I cannot make the time. I made the first edition and, so far, it has been wonderful, as I learned a lot from the experience on a personal and artistic level. Of course, I was honoured to be part of this first edition, but it goes further than that as we also need to develop a professional market in the region. Being part of the launch of this new undertaking was something important for me, as I see it as a continuation of my involvement with the Fire Station in Doha – a former fire station converted into a contemporary art space supporting artists at the early stages of their career – where I am the artistic director. Therefore, my involvement is also about education, but on a more global scale: there can be many museums being built in the region, in Qatar or in Saudi, but one still needs a market. Without an existing market, how can I convince a Qatari student in Doha to drop everything and leave to become an artist? I am very happy with this fair and satisfied with the way I conceived it, even though it was only one edition and with 87 galleries limited in terms of size compared to some of the other fairs.

**AAN:** What made this fair different, not only to the collectors, but also to the artists?

**WS:** Generally speaking, artists are not extremely fond of art fairs because they create the work, which is subsequently sent to the gallery, where it is taken out of its original context. Then, the work is displayed at an art fair, again in a completely different setup, which has nothing to do with the artist. As a result, the work ultimately loses its narrative. It is therefore my belief that it is important to involve the artist more in this undertaking instead of the opposite. Until now, it seems that most artists are not involved in art fairs, either because they do not want to be, or because they do not like it as it is a commercial venue. As a result, we tried to make a statement with this edition, to make sure the art itself became part of the narrative.

# MAKING WAVES

## The Art of Japanese Woodblock Prints

Over 100 Japanese prints from celebrated artists such as Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), and Kitagawa Utamaro (1754?-1806), among many others, will create a visually impressive display and provide intriguing insight into the history and development of Japanese woodblock printing.

Covering over 300 years of printing history, from the 17th to 21st centuries, the exhibition invites visitors on a journey through the origins and techniques of early printmaking before looking at major themes such as the 'floating world' of urban entertainments, the beauty of the Japanese landscape, legendary heroes, and seasonal celebrations. It also explores how print artists responded to major changes in Japanese society, from Japan's development into a modern industrial nation in the late 19th century through to the present day.

*Ukiyo-e* developed as an independent genre in painting and book illustration by the late 1600s. The idea of the floating world (*ukiyo*) was initially based on a Buddhist phrase referring to the transience of life, but was adopted by popular writers to evoke fleeting moments of beauty and pleasure that provided distraction from the cares of a regimented society. Book illustrations on these topics gained such popularity that artists began creating single-sheet woodblock prints to sell. Edo became the centre to produce *ukiyo-e* prints.

The genre of these floating world prints was first created in the Edo period (1603-1868) as a response to the changing status of Japan's rule, which not only transformed Japan's political and economic world, but also caused major social changes in its population, bringing wealth and prosperity to the new urban elite and townspeople (*chonin*). The term *ukiyo-e* itself first took hold at first in literature, establishing a trend from the 1670s in books of the floating world, *ukiyo zoshi*, which were written in *kana*, the native Japanese language, and not in Chinese, the language then used in public and for official administration. These books told stories of fantasy linked to the experience of the common people, the new citizen classes and burgeoning city life, incorporating aspects relating to the world of pleasure and the fleeting enjoyment of earthly things, episodes of libertinism and love theories, which had until then been seen as misleading for the spiritual growth of the individual by Buddhist scholars, and therefore rejected.

In Edo, tastes and fashions were dictated by the emerging urban class, composed mainly of wealthy merchants who, despite having no political power, began to allow themselves to enjoy luxury and entertainment of all kinds. *Ukiyo*, which until then had been understood in the sense of attachment to the illusory earthly world from which to escape, according to Buddhist teaching, now took on an opposite sense of enjoyment of the fleeting moment and of everything that was fashionable.



Evacuation of Chiyoda Palace by Hashimoto Chikanobu, from the series The Inner Palace of Chiyoda, woodblock colour print, 1896, courtesy of York Museums Trust



Nakanochi in the New Yoshiwara by Kitagawa Utamaro II (flourished 1800s-30s), woodblock colour print, 1810, courtesy York Museums Trust

In response to government restrictions placed on floating world subject matter in the early 1800s, artists began to explore new topics such as travel and heroes of ancient tales. Prints were a perfect medium for this artistic experimentation. After a breakthrough by Suzuki Harunobu in 1765, which allowed the production of multi-block colour prints, artists explored realism, nature, perspective, framing, and light with a level of intensity that spread their influence not only across Japan but also, after the country opened to foreign trade in 1868, to Europe. There, the Impressionists, struck by the Japanese printmakers' use of colour, atmosphere, and composition, created a watershed style embarking upon Modernism.

No exhibition of *ukiyo-e* could be complete without prints of the daily pleasures on offer in Yoshiwara, the pleasure district that had developed just outside the city boundaries of Edo, where, once you entered the door, the shogunal rules no longer applied. Here fashion, novelty, and seduction reigned, fuelled by the elegance and rivalry of courtesans, who were supported by their wealthy patrons. The floating world is brought to life in these colourful depictions in a frozen moment of daily life. The interiors of the tea houses, the stroll along the central street of the pleasure district, beauty and bathing rituals, fashions, hobbies,



The Seventh Month by Hosoda Eishi (1756-1829), from the series Twelve Months in the Floating World, woodblock colour print, circa 1790s



A red Kintaro acting as an umpire for two battling tengu by Torii Kiyonaga (1752-1815), colour woodblock print. Tengu are winged, beaked, and clawed birds that lived in the mountains and forests.

“*Ukiyo-e* developed as a print form during the Edo period”

and festivals are all brought before our eyes by the great masters of the genre such as Utagawa Toyokuni, Kitagawa Utamaro, Katsushika Hokusai, Chobunsai Eishi, and Keisai Eisen.

A few prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige are included in the York exhibition alongside other *ukiyo-e* artists. Born to a family of artisans in Edo (present-day Tokyo), Hokusai began his artistic career at the age of six. At 19, he entered the school of Katsukawa Shunsho, where he mastered *ukiyo-e* following the style of woodblock prints and paintings focusing on images of courtesans and *kabuki* actors – the major celebrities in Japan's cities at the time. Later, Hokusai began exploring other styles of art, turning away from the traditional subjects of *ukiyo-e* in favour of landscapes and daily life in Japan. Throughout his lifetime, Hokusai is thought to have designed about 3,000 prints. On show is the

instantly recognisable *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (1830-31), created when the artist was about seventy, more popularly referred to as 'The Great Wave', which has become one of the most iconic images of Japanese art in the art world.

Also represented is Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), one of Japan's most popular and prolific artists. The artist's engaging way of depicting landscape, nature, and daily life in print was popular in Japan in his own day and continues to influence and inspire today. Hiroshige's long career coincided with the last decades of Japan's Edo period, a time of rapid change that eventually brought an end to samurai rule. As Japan confronted the encroaching outside world and the pressures of modernisation, Hiroshige's calm artistic vision encouraged a sense of continuity and hope. Possessed of outstanding technical skills as both a colourist and draughtsman, Hiroshige stands out also for crossing social boundaries, as can be seen in his landscape prints and his unusual

compositions, which often include humorous depictions of people involved in everyday activities in wonderful detail, as well as masterly expressions of weather, light and the seasons.

Other artists, such as Chobunsai Eishi (1756-1829), also helped popularise the many theatres, tea houses, and celebrities and actors of the pleasure district in Edo. These *ukiyo-e* artists not only made prints for sale to Japan's growing merchant class but also were hired to produce posters and advertisements for theatrical performances, as well as private commissioned works such as luxurious *surimono* for the new year and private events. Eishi was a prominent artist at the time, known for his paintings and woodblock prints of tall, graceful women (*bijin-ga*). Originally a samurai and painter for the Shogunate, he adopted the name Chobunsai Eishi when he moved to the world of *ukiyo-e* in the mid-1780s.

Chikanobu Yoshu (1838-1912) was a later *ukiyo-e* artist, becoming one of the most prolific woodblock print artists of this period, working with both traditional subjects, such as actors, courtesans, scenes of famous beauty spots, and beauties, as well as topical subjects such as war and rebellion. Born into a samurai family in Echigo province, Chikanobu became one of the final, great *ukiyo-e* artists, aiming to preserve the traditional culture of Japan at a time when the country was becoming rapidly modernised. One of his prints in this exhibition depicts court life in the palace of the Tokugawa shogunate. The evacuation (*tachinoki*) seen in *Evacuation of Chiyoda Palace* from 1868 probably refers to the Great Fire of 1844 that destroyed much of the castle. Female guards, garbed in black robes tied with a bamboo-motif *obi*, assist in the emergency evacuation, carrying *naginata* spears – the weapon used by samurai women.

Contemporary woodblock prints are also featured in the exhibition, including several works by the current President of the Royal Academy of Arts, Rebecca Salter, which she created in collaboration with Sato Woodblock Workshop, Kyoto. Also on show are woodblock prints depicting the North York Moors by Scottish-based artist Laura Boswell, as well as works by London-based artist Nana Shiomi, whose 2001 print, *Hokusai's Wave - Happy Carp*, is displayed alongside the woodblocks Shiomi used to produce it, allowing visitors to gain an understanding of the technical process of woodblock printing.

Other works from York Art Gallery's own collection of Japanese prints, some of which have never been exhibited before, are also on display. They accompany a range of loans from regional and national institutions, such as early printed books from the British Library, kimonos from Durham Oriental Museum, and a selection of Japanese prints from Maidstone Museum and the British Museum.

● Until 30 August, York Art Gallery, York, UK, [yorkartgallery.org.uk](http://yorkartgallery.org.uk)



A fishing place in Awaji, Hyogo Prefecture, circa 1920. Awaji constituted its own province between the 7th-19th centuries. After the Meiji Restoration, Awaji was incorporated into Hyogo Prefecture in the Kansai region. Today, Awaji Island is connected to Honshu Island by the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, the longest suspension bridge in the world.

## JAPANESE FISHERMEN'S COATS FROM AWAJI ISLAND

Awaji Island, in the Seto Inland Sea, is considered Japan's 'first island' according to the *Kojiki* (712), and holds great cultural significance as the legendary birthplace of the nation, being the first island created in the Japanese archipelago by deities Izanagi and Izanami. Izanagi (Male-who-invites) and Izanami (Female-who-invites), are the central Shinto creator deities in Japanese mythology. They created Awaji Island as the very first of the Oyashima (eight great islands) of the Japanese archipelago. After descending from heaven, they stirred the sea with a spear, and the brine dripping from it formed Onokoro Island, where they established their home and began the *kuniumi* (birth of the land) process.

Situated between Honshu and Shikoku, the island served as a vital, historic, and agricultural conduit for the imperial court. During the Heian period (794-1185) and earlier, the island was first known as Miketsukuni, providing abundant food and marine products to the Imperial court. Today, it preserves ancient traditions in the Awaji Ningyo Joruri puppetry, traditional incense making, and is the location for significant Shinto sites, including the oldest shrine, Izanagi Jingu. It is also home to a distinctive regional dress – the fishermen's coats of Awaji.

At the northern tip of Awaji, a steep-hilled island 50 kilometres long and 20 kilometres wide, lies just off the port city of Kobe. In imperial times the island's name was changed to Mikkekoku (Land of Food) in recognition of the abundance of its farm produce and the seafood caught

off its shores. Today, highways and bridges connect Awaji Island to its larger island neighbours, Honshu and Shikoku. Sadly, many of the historic buildings in the fishing villages were destroyed in the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake.

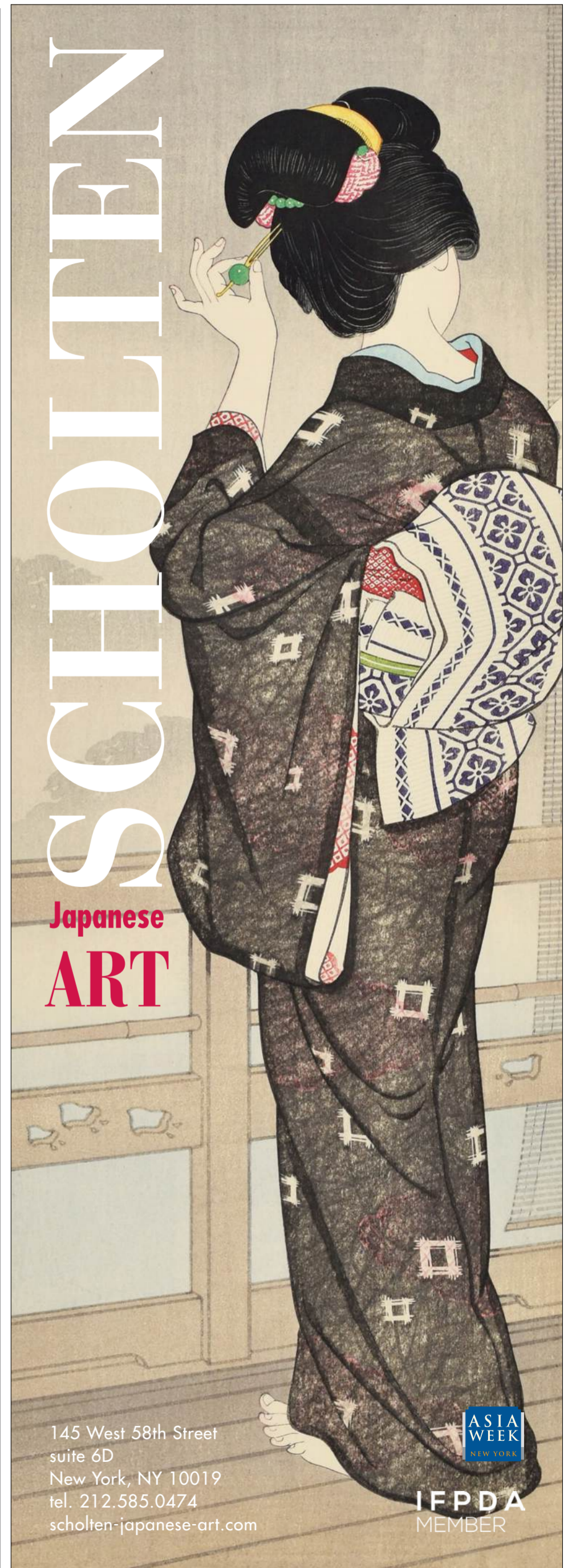
Indigo-dyed quilted cotton coats called *donza* were traditionally worn throughout rural Japan prior to the 20th century. Like many traditional costumes that have fallen out of favour in past decades, the elaborately embroidered coats of the Awaji fishermen are no longer worn as indicators of status within the community.

These coats are renowned for their intricate white-on-indigo geometric patterns, created by women to provide warmth and strength for fishermen. These heavily stitched, layered indigo-dyed cotton coats, popular through the 1920s, functioned as protective, durable work wear and stylish, symbolic garments for community festivals. The coats, which could take many months to make, represented care and protection. While most *sashiko no donza* were made by fishermen for their husbands or grandmothers for their grandsons, wealthier families would commission skilled needlewomen to embroider more elaborate *sashiko* designs. Many of these designs date back to at least the 17th century and were talismanic, protecting the wearer from misfortune at sea. The Iwaya Shinto shrine, on the northern tip of Awaji, still preserves a small number of these jackets for use at the annual Bountiful Fish Festival, where the creator deities of Japan, Izanagi-no-mikoto and Izanami-no-mikoto are enshrined.

Continued on page 8



Traditional Awaji fisherman's coat, Awaji Island, first half of the 20th century



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“  
These coats  
were rarely  
worn after  
the 1930s  
”

Traditional Awaji fisherman's coat, Awaji Island, first half of the 20th century



Iwaya Shinto shrine on Awaji Island, the home of the creator deities

According to historian Luke Roberts, of the University of California at Santa Barbara, who co-curated the exhibition *Japanese Fishermen's Coats from Awaji Island* in 2001 with Los Angeles County Museum of Art Japanese textile expert Sharon Sadako Takeda, sashiko no donza were rarely worn after 1930, when fishermen began putting engines in their boats and other forms of mechanisation significantly altered the way of life in the string of villages along the island's northern coast. In the wake of industrialisation, men's formal clothing styles changed to factory-made business suits and jackets. Running-thread sashiko quilting long practised by the fishermen's wives and mothers was replaced by machine-stitched clothing. Thanks to one man's determination, however,

more than 20 fine examples of the island's unique sashiko no donza have been preserved. In 1975, Tominaga Takashi began a personal mission to collect sashiko no donza historical artefacts from the five villages that comprise the town of Hokudan. Among the representative items of the region's fishing culture that Tominaga acquired are thousands of clay octopus pots, some dating from the Jomon period (circa 10,000 BC to circa 300 BC).

As well as collecting old fishing gear for his museum, he searched out examples of the garments fishermen wore – not for work on the boats, but for related activities such as selling fish and the annual blessing of the fishing boats.

Although farmers in northern Japan also traditionally wore sashiko-quilted coats, on Awaji Island and

throughout much of central and southern Japan they were worn solely by fishermen and sailors. The fishermen wore their sashiko no donza about town, to parties, while visiting friends, and while assuming positions of authority on the job. Sailors wishing to appear well-dressed wore them into ports of call for an evening's entertainment.

Wives and mothers created these coats for their menfolk. The finest, most elaborate of them, which took from two to six months to complete, were saved for special or formal events. Fishermen would wear the coats unbelted – without either the traditional straw rope (*nawa*) *obi* worn for work or the silk *obi* used for dressing up – so that the designs enveloping the body could be viewed without obstruction.

Since no two sashiko no donza are

identical, people would marvel at the different designs. The construction of sashiko no donza differs from most Japanese quilted items, which are padded with unspun cotton. When wet, such wadding becomes heavy and is slow to dry. Instead, sashiko no donza were composed of three or more layers of dyed cotton fabric stitched together with white cotton thread. More like thick darning yarn than fine thread, the overall patterning of white stitching added another layer of protection against cold and damp weather, as well as identifying the wearer's occupation within the feudal hierarchy.

The most intricately stitched sashiko no donza patterns dazzle the eye, visually transforming the flat surface of the cloth into three-dimensional shapes. Each coat part – front, back, centre-front overlaps,

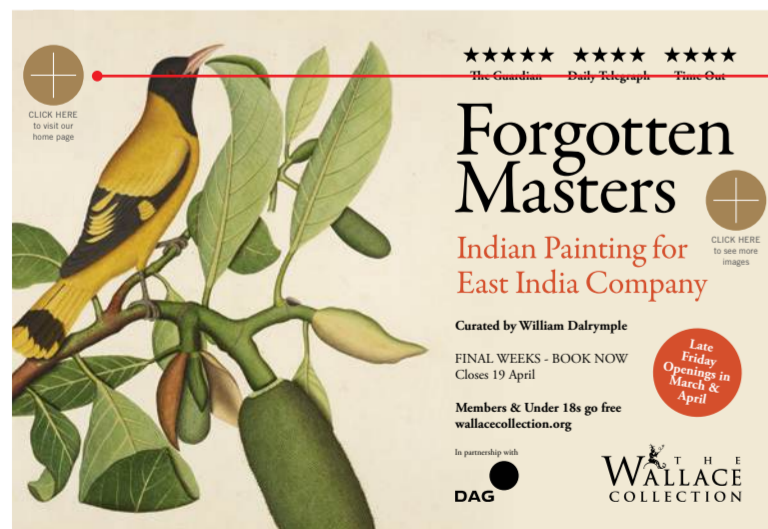
collar, and sleeves – functions as a logical, predetermined section on which to organise different sashiko stitch patterns. Many of the coats are simply decorated with parallel vertical running stitches.

Others feature dense zigzag or herringbone designs or variations on traditional persimmon flower and lozenge patterning. The most locally derived of all the sashiko patterns are the geometric grids overlaid at each intersection with criss-cross stitches which, in appearance, resemble the knotted configuration of fishing nets.

While sashiko no donza are still worn by performers during the Bountiful Fishing Festival, held at Awaji Town on the second Sunday of March each year, their proud role as distinctive regional costume has almost faded into the realm of cultural memory.

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Dragon-carp-shaped ewer, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century, National Treasure, National Museum of Korea



Bamboo-shoot-shaped ewer and basin, with a basin which served to keep the liquid in the ewer warm, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century



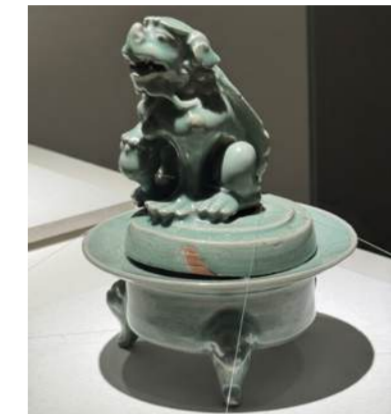
Girin-shaped incense burner, this type of ewer was likely used in national events and various important rituals, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century, Amorepacific Museum of Art



Lion-shaped incense burner, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century, Deaseom Island, Taean-gun, Chungcheongnam-do province, Treasure, National Marine Heritage Research Institute. This incense burner differs from other celadon pieces through the omission of some features and exaggeration of others on the lion, demonstrating the range in expression in sculpting during this period.



Mandarin duck-shaped incense burner lid, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century, Gaecheon, Gyeonggi-do province, National Museum of Korea



Lion-shaped incense burner, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century, National Treasure, National Museum of Korea

# GORYEO CELADONS



Human figure-shaped ewer, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 13th century, Nae-dong, Dalseong-gun, Daegu Metropolitan City, National Museum of Korea. This figure is holding seven peaches with both hands, if it is not the Queen Mother of the West, who resides on Mount Kunlun and dispenses sacred peaches (considered symbols of eternal youth), it is believed to be a figure at least related to her.

in clay can be dated to the Neolithic period on the Korean peninsula, when clay figurines of humans and animals began to be produced. The diverse techniques used in making these ceramics during the earlier period, especially during the Three Kingdoms (57 BC-AD 668) and Unified Silla (668-935) periods, laid the foundation for the distinct sculpted styles that developed during the Goryeo period. Korean potters had mastered the technique of making celadon by the 1100s and started to produce undecorated celadon glazes ranging from yellowish-brown and blue-green to the blue-grey, 'jade blue' hues, which reached the height of sophistication and production by the end of that century.

The Goryeo period is regarded by many as a golden age of refinement and taste, when the court and elite of society commissioned an abundance of fine works of art. Celadons are good examples of the exquisite objects made under imperial patronage which were purely for the use of the court and aristocracy.

Buddhism had reached Korea through China and trade along the Silk Road with the religion beginning to flourish on the peninsula during the Goryeo era when it became the state religion. While the government codified laws and introduced a civil service system, Buddhism was shaping a fledgling Buddhist state anxious to create objects that catered to its newfound religious credentials. Along with Buddhism, the Daoist religion also played a role in the life of Goryeo. Buddhist and Daoist liturgical objects were both crafted in celadon with the vessels decorated with religious motifs. Unusually, Buddhist icons, which were usually made of wood or metal, were also crafted in celadon. A section of the Gyeongju exhibition, 'Into the Other World', looked at sculpted celadons shaped with religious motifs or crafted for religious purposes. Some sculpted celadon wares express wishes with religious beliefs or endeavours to reach the spiritual realm beyond the secular realm. As the Daoist and Buddhist religions flourished in Goryeo society, sculpted celadon wares were



Turtle-dragon shaped water dropper, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century, and turtle-dragon shaped ewer, 12th century, Treasure, National Museum of Korea

“  
The Goryeo dynasty is regarded as a golden age of refinement  
”



Lion-shaped pillow, celadon, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century, Treasure, private collection. Unlike Chinese ceramic pillows of the same period that typically depict a single lion, the Goryeo version features two lions

commissioned to serve not only everyday purposes in religious places but were also made for specific liturgical purposes as prime objects of worship or used as ritual accoutrements. The monks in Buddhist monasteries often came from noble families and would have been used to using celadon objects in their daily life, and some domestic objects would have been incorporated into monastic life. Sculpted celadon incense burners, water sprinklers, *jeongbyeong* (*kundika* in Sanskrit) would have been needed, as would spouted bowls, ewer and bowl sets, and tea bowls. The Gyeongju exhibition paid particular attention to the works with Daoist motifs to emphasise the fact that Daoism flourished alongside Buddhism in the Goryeo period, however, noting that such extant examples are extremely rare during this period.

Over the 11th and 12th centuries, Goryeo artisans gradually mastered celadon technology, which had already developed earlier in China over many centuries. This development was able to occur because Goryeo was exposed to diverse cultural influences in the rapidly changing geopolitics of the time. Historical records and literature during this time show that Goryeo celadons had become highly prized in China, as a thriving network had developed between China and Goryeo based in Gaegyeong, Goryeo's capital. Sculpted ceramics imported from China vied alongside domestically produced celadons for customers from the court and noble households, demonstrating the reverence with which these ceramics were held among the elite. Ding wares, Ru wares, and Jingdezhen porcelains were also imported from Song China (960-1279) for royalty and the court and, in turn, their fine craftsmanship would have influenced Korean makers. These imported ceramics and local celadons were reserved for the court and religious institutions as the cost of production put them out of the range of ordinary citizens. To cater to the Korean elite, the craftsmen of Goryeo were selective in adopting foreign influences and modified foreign styles to fashion them to fit their own

domestic style to produce wares with a unique 'Korean' sensibility. The superior workmanship and distinctive designs of sculpted celadons from Goryeo also began to be recognised by an international audience beyond China.

In *Precious Beyond Measure: A History of Korean Ceramics*, Beth McKillop and Jane Portal note that as these [celadon] wares were expensive to produce, they were made by closely controlled communities of potters under local government supervision and transported to the capital for the enjoyment of the elite. Most of the celadons produced would have been used for eating and drinking, such as

ewers, bowls, cups, cup stands and dishes. Other types of containers were also used by aristocratic women for cosmetics and toiletries. The scholar would have used celadon water droppers and inkstones in the *sarangbang* (study) with many of the scholar's objects being in the form of auspicious animals, such as ducks, toads, turtles, or lions. Brush stands and rests were also popular items made in celadon for the gentleman's study.

The translucent bluish glaze is a distinctive trait of Goryeo celadons, which adds a sense of vitality to the figural forms, elevating the artistry of sculpted celadon to an unparalleled

degree. Beth McKillop and Jane Portal write, 'The colour of the glaze on Goryeo celadons differs from that on Chinese celadons. This is because the small manganese content is slightly higher than the small titanium content. The glaze also contains about 3 per cent iron. Much scientific research has been carried out in recent years both in Korea and in the West on the chemistry of clays and glazes, giving rise to new discoveries about the material qualities of Goryeo ceramics.'

From the late 11th to 13th centuries, celadon production was concentrated in the coastal Jeolla Province, especially in Buan and Gangjin. The most concentrated production areas were found in villages such as Sadang-ri, Yongun-ri, and Gyeoyul-ri. The Gangjin kiln sites formed a huge complex of about 188 kilns near the sea. The raw materials needed to produce these ceramics, such as fine clay, silica, and an abundance of firewood, were found in the nearby mountains. The area was also linked to trade routes that exported and transported wares across Korea, China, and Japan. Archaeological and textual evidence has identified the Sadangri kilns at Gangjin as key producers of the highest quality celadon for the aristocracy during Goryeo's peak demand in the 12th century.

These Goryeo kilns were long, tunnel-like climbing kilns built on slopes, fired in a tightly controlled low-oxygen atmosphere to bring out the characteristic blue-green glaze. They were often over 10 metres, built of clay and brick on hillsides so the flame and heat could travel up through multiple firing chambers. To create Goryeo celadon's distinctive blue-green colour, potters created a reducing (low-oxygen) atmosphere by sealing the kiln and restricting airflow so that the fire consumed available oxygen and altered

the iron in the glaze to produce the soft greenish tone. The Korean mud-built kilns, adapted from Chinese brick kilns, were highly valued because their smaller, clay-dominated structure made temperature and reduction easier to control to attain an even and pure glaze. Finished pieces were then shipped to the capital, Gaegyeong, the largest

celadon market at the time and then transhipped via the maritime route along the coast of the West Sea of Korea.

As previously mentioned, it was during this period that Goryeo celadon attained a sophistication in style and techniques to rival the celadons produced in China. Apart from objects for religious use, *meiping* or prunus vases, jars, ewers, bowls and water droppers were also highly revered and produced to serve the demands of the court and religious institutions. The Gyeongju exhibition explored the height of this sophistication mainly in the sculpted forms of animals, plants, and flowers. Mythical beasts were popularly represented by dragons, *girin* (*qilin* in Chinese), as well as less exotic animals such as birds, monkeys and ducks. The mythical beasts were considered auspicious animals that symbolised the authority and prestige of the royal court and their nobility. Animal forms were often produced as incense burners, water droppers, and pillows.

A centrepiece of the exhibition was the dragon-carp shaped ewer that forms a hybrid imaginary animal with a dragon head and body of a fish. This fish-dragon (also known as a *makara* in some cultures) would have been highly valued, requiring highly skilled craftsmen to execute the complex and intricate forms showing the diverse techniques needed in making figural ceramics. It is miraculous that it has survived for centuries, allowing the modern viewer to discover the sophistication and taste of the people of Goryeo and contemplate them quietly sitting with dignity in the modern world.

● Sculpted Celadons of the Goryeo Dynasty, exhibition catalogue available  
● *Precious Beyond Measure, A History of Korean Ceramics*, published by Reaktion Books

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Jade plate with dragon pattern, China, Liao or Jin dynasty, 10th/13th centuries © National Palace Museum, Taipei



One of a pair of vases decorated with dragons, Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign (1736-95), underglaze blue porcelain with wucai (five-colour) enamel decoration © National Palace Museum, Taipei



Mirror decorated with clouds and a dragon, middle Tang dynasty (618-907), 8th/9th centuries, bronze with a silvery reflective surface © National Palace Museum, Taipei



Offerings to the temple of agriculture, Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period (1723-35), ink and colours on silk, former collection of HN Frey © Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris



Carved red lacquer cinnabar stationery chest, Qing dynasty (1644-1911) © National Palace Museum, Taipei

clawed *mang* dragon could be worn by lower ranking members of the imperial household, officials, and other courtiers. Mandarin civil and military officials also wore square badges that showed their rank at court. The dragons depicted on the robes are an ancient symbol of authority, good fortune – they were seen holding or chasing the flaming Pearl of wisdom and truth, symbolising the wearer's desire to attain inner wisdom. This is the wishing jewel or *cintamani*, which was introduced to China with the arrival of Buddhism along the Silk Road during the Han dynasty.

Today, it still remains an emblem for China, as well as a powerful cultural symbol throughout East Asia and for Sinitised communities worldwide. Through popular objects and festivals, the images and depictions of the dragon are endlessly varied. The mythical creature continues to play its role as an intercessor between heaven and earth, bringing strength and prosperity to humankind. As a benevolent and honourable animal, the dragon continues its transformations, appearing on a multitude of objects in contemporary material culture. Its hybrid and fluid body particularly lends itself to a graphic and decorative motif, making it capable of elegantly adapting to all types of media and formats. From children's toys to ancestral altars, it adorns both secular and ritual objects to this day.

Associated with the lion, the dragon also accompanies dances that, drawing inspiration from martial arts, bring protection and prosperity during the Lunar New Year, the opening of businesses, or other local festivities. To the sound of drums and firecrackers, these choreographies drive away malevolent spirits and help to balance the invisible forces governing the land and buildings. These lion dances are performed throughout the world and not just at the Lunar New Year – they are present at other major traditional, cultural, or religious festivals to bring good luck, prosperity, and drive away evil spirits. They are also commonly featured at business openings, weddings, and to honour special guests with the costumes and masks used for lion and dragon dances illustrating the contemporary vitality still seen in these ancient traditions.

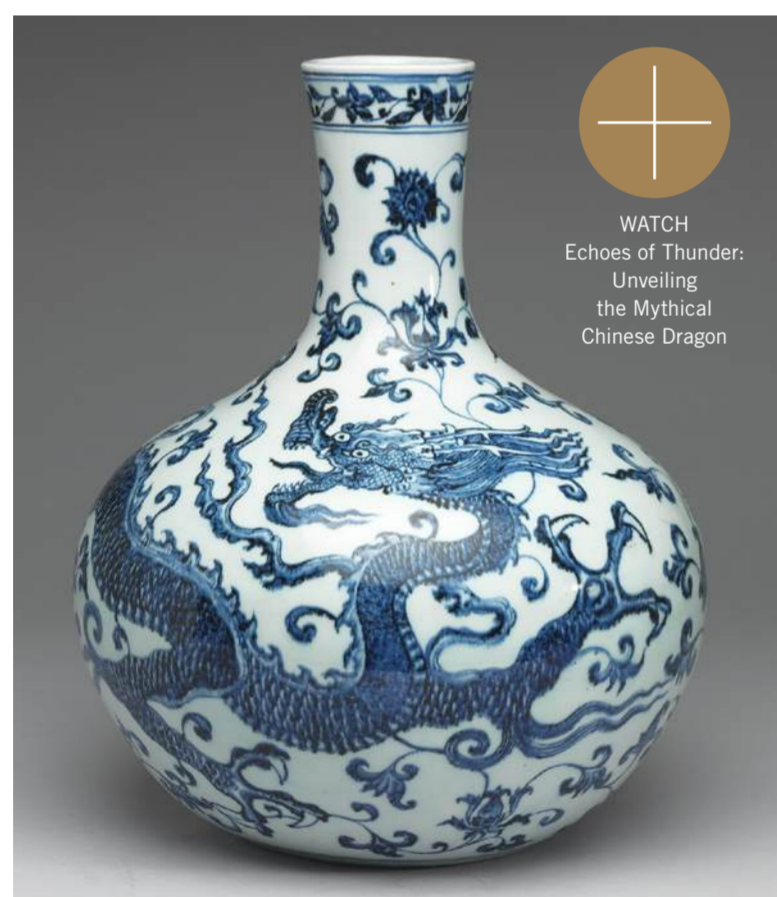
- Dragons was at Musée quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris, from November to 1 March, 2026.
- Catalogue available

# HERE BE DRAGONS

Dragons, unlike in the West where they were often seen as evil, were seen in China as largely benign and auspicious spirits that dwell in the sky and were closely related to the element of water. East Asian dragons have serpentine bodies, four legs but no wings, but they can fly. They are wise and powerful but can also be dangerous as well as helpful. Their association with water gives life to the earth – they were thought to bring rain clouds during drought, but were also blamed for great floods. Found throughout all periods of Chinese history, dragons are beneficent beings linked to rain and water as well as being identified with the emperor and the imperial court. To explore this mythical world, works from the heritage collections of the National Palace Museum in Taipei were shown in Paris at Musée du quai Branly, to explore the history of dragon iconography and the importance of this powerful symbol in Chinese imperial arts.

From the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) onward, the imperial dragon is commonly depicted chasing the flaming pearl amidst the clouds, alone or in pairs. The pearl represents thunder and evolution, in reference to a legendary belief that pearls were born from the fertilisation of seashells with thunder. This motif is also considered a magical jewel – *cintamani* in Buddhist contexts – the 'precious pearl which grants all desires'.

The Three Teachings (Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism), as well as folklore, have attributed countless forms and meanings to the dragon, manifesting it as a master of rain, lord of the waters and mountains in local nature cults. Merging with the mythical Indian serpent (*naga*), the dragon also becomes the guardian of the Buddha, while Daoism makes it one of the four fundamental creatures and a mount for immortals. Alongside the Black Tortoise of the north, associated with water, the White Tiger of the west,



Vase in the shape of a celestial sphere decorated with a dragon and lotus, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Yongle reign (1403-24), blue and white porcelain © National Palace Museum, Taipei

associated with metal, and the Vermilion Bird of the south, associated with fire, the Azure dragon of the east, associated with wood. Dragons are also part of the zodiac, where they are granted a special status: among the 12 animals of the cycle, the dragon is the only mythical creature. Even today, being born in the Year of the Dragon is a sign of strength of character and charisma, foreshadowing great success.

With the dragon's history spanning nearly 5,000 years, appearing as early as the Bronze Age in the Yellow River Valley, where it influenced social, political, spiritual, and artistic life. A symbol of strength, prosperity,

natural vitality, and authority, dragons acquired an emblematic dimension in the Chinese world. At once terrestrial, aquatic, and aerial, they populate tales and myths, developing their own majestic aesthetic. Evoking wisdom, harmony, and, conversely, indomitable power, the dragon has inspired the creativity of artists and artisans for centuries, crossing ancient and contemporary Chinese civilisations, influencing the arts and traditions of a vast cultural area.

In China, jade and jade carved objects, are considered the most precious material with calligraphy revered as the most prestigious art form. As the supreme animal of the

bestiary, the dragon has been associated with these disciplines since ancient times, first appearing in the Neolithic period. The earliest dragon-like images, such as the 'pig dragon', appeared in the Neolithic Hongshan (4700-2900 BC) and Xinglongwa cultures in Northern China, located in present-day Mongolia and northeastern China. It is characterised by a snout, small ears, and a long, coiled body. The connection to the dragon is purely symbolic, as the use and meaning of this type of jade remain hypothetical due to a lack of written sources. The dragon figure also took shape during the Bronze Age (2700 to 800 BC), before becoming the emblem of the emperors, holders of the Mandate of Heaven.

Legend suggests the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) created the first dragon totem by incorporating the animal emblems of defeated tribes, making it a composite creature. While initially simpler, the dragon evolved, according to the *Eryu*, one of the oldest Chinese dictionaries, into a beast that has deer antlers, a camel's head, hare's eyes, a serpent's body, a mollusc's belly, carp scales, eagle's claws, tiger's paws, and ox ears. The Paris exhibition also explores the dragon in this earlier period of Chinese art through jade sculptures, alongside later objects such as bronze vases adorned with animal motifs, calligraphy, and funerary objects – all recalling the dragon's central role in the beliefs and rituals of ancient China onwards.

Although its image gradually developed on royal objects from the Bronze Age onwards, the mythical animal was not assimilated to the emperor in official texts until the Liao dynasty (907-1125), where it showed its power linked to the divine right of the emperor as the 'god on earth'. Some court officials also wore dragon robes to represent the authority of the emperor symbolising the power to institute the will of the emperor and administer his laws and decrees. Dragon robes worn by high-



Jade pig-dragon, northeast China, end of the Hongshan culture (4700-2900 BC), jade © National Palace Museum, Taipei

ranking officials, jade seals and plaques, as well as royal documents and calligraphy, all illustrate the dragon's imperial role.

In Chinese civilisation nine, is considered the most perfect number, being the square of three. It represents the triad of heaven, earth, and humankind upon which the balance of the universe rests. The emperor, son of heaven, wore a robe adorned with nine dragons – each dragon a combination of nine different animals – covered in 81 scales. This number was considered auspicious and its multiples are even reflected in the architecture of the Forbidden City, which is said to contain 9,990 rooms in buildings with nine beams, 81 columns, and 270 tiles. Legend also recounts that the dragon has nine sons, notably represented in architecture: Bixi, with the body of a tortoise, supports pillars; Chiwen, resembling a fish, protects roofs from fire; Pulao adorns the handles of bells; Bi'an surmounts

the gates of courthouses and prisons; Taotie appears on bronzes; Gongfu on bridges; Yazi on the hilts of swords and axes; Suanni on incense burner lids, in the form of a lion; and Jiaotu on door knockers.

At the centre of the imperial palace, representing a microcosm of the world, stood the dragon throne, marking the fifth cardinal point, at the junction between earth and heaven. Holder of the Mandate of Heaven, the emperor exercised dual political and religious power, as commander of the armies but also as master of the rituals ensuring earthly prosperity and harmony. As a benevolent and noble symbol, the yellow dragon, the colour of the zenith, adorned the objects of the sovereign and his entourage. From the Zhou dynasty (1045-221 BC) to the Tang dynasty (618-907), the animal was traditionally depicted with three claws. From the 11th and 12th centuries onwards its form changed when it was shown with four or five claws. A 12th-century edict prohibited its use outside official art, and the yellow, five-clawed dragon remained the official emblem reserved for sovereigns until the end of the empire in 1911.

Silk dragon robes, *lung pao* (dragon robe) were worn by the emperor, his family, and imperial ministries and were seen as emblems of their office. Imperial roundels embroidered with dragons were also worn by the emperor and close members of the imperial family, although they could also be awarded to nobles and officials. The four-



Divination manuscript, Vietnam, Yao culture, first half of the 20th century, ink and colours on paper Photo: Sylvain Leurent © Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris



Infinite cycles box containing figurines of the 12 animals of the zodiac with an album of Yongnian calligraphy by the Jiaqing Emperor, (r 1796-1820), figures and box Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1735-96), jade, sandalwood © National Palace Museum, Taipei



Mask and body used in the auspicious lion dance. Photo: Thibaut Chapotot © Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris

# AHOM CULTURE IN ASSAM

Not just influencing language and culture, the Ahom dynasty from northeast India added to every aspect of Assamese society, including religion, education, architecture, and the arts. They also developed strong trade links with neighbouring regions, including Bengal, Bhutan, and the Naga tribes. The Ahom kings, who ruled for 600 years (1228-1826), established their primary capital on the south bank of the Brahmaputra in Upper Assam, with Sivasagar serving as a major capital from 1699 to 1788. Founded by Sukaphaa in 1228, the Ahoms brought sophisticated administrative, technological, and military skills from Upper Burma/Southern Yunnan. The Ahom rulers maintained detailed historical records known as *The Buranjis* (royal chronicles), written in Tai and later Assamese languages.

Their society produced a vibrant economic and political relationship between Assam and the larger north Indian region, building and influencing the Hinduism and Tantric Shaivism prevalent in the former kingdom of Kamarupa with their own belief systems.

Ancient Assam was ruled by several kingdoms that included the Varmanas (Kamarupa kingdom, 350-650), Pala dynasty (900-1100), Salstambhas/Mlechchhas (mid-7th century to end of 10th century), and Kamarupa-Palas (10th/12th centuries). The Ahom and Koch dynasties built on the lands ruled by these earlier dynasties, with each of the earlier kingdoms leaving behind traces of their own architectural influence and culture. However, none of these ancient temples have survived, however, echoes of this ancient past have been found in archaeological surveys and excavations undertaken in modern-day Assam.

Pre-Ahom culture in Assam was dominated by small tribal chiefdoms and nomadic cultivation, part of the Brahmaputra valley, which was divided into several small kingdoms and local authority. These Pre-Ahom groups followed animistic and indigenous religions, including nature worship and veneration of the ancestors. It was not until the Ahom dynasty arrived that the Assam region developed into a centralised state based on the cultivation of rice, bringing with it a mixed Tai-Assamese religious and cultural system.

In the 13th century, under the first Ahom king, the artistic styles and iconographical canons of the Brahmanic heartland continued to influence artists. The Ahom civilisation brought a developed idea of a unified state by organising the various clans and creating the idea of a centralised monarchy and administration. The early Ahoms followed their own Tai-Ahom religion (Phuralung), combining ancestor worship with animism, sitting alongside Buddhist and Daoist elements. Over time, the court and people increasingly adopted Vaishnavism and Shaivism, leading to a largely Hinduised society, but allowed for a syncretic culture in



The strategic location of Charaideo enabled the Tai-Ahoms to migrate and settle in the region. Aerial view of the royal burial grounds, moidsams © Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam

“  
Most stone  
carvings to  
survive in Assam  
are from the  
Ahom period  
”

belief systems and culture, combining Tai practices with local Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan elements.

The earliest known stone carvings and sculpture of Assam belong to the Gupta and post-Gupta period and are found in the Ganga and Yamuna river-deity images on the temple door-frame (5th/6th century) at Da-Parbatiya, Tezpur. Tezpur, known as Sonitpur in ancient times, was the capital of the Salastambha dynasty (7th-10th century), which eventually became part of the Ahom kingdom in the 16th century to become an important military, administrative, and cultural hub.

Much of the temple sculpture of Assam mainly follows the Nagara



Figure of Ganga, Ambari, sandstone, pre-Ahom period, circa 13th/14th century, Assam State Museum



Nataraja, Ambari, sandstone, circa 13th/14th century, Assam State Museum



Figure of Vishnu, Ambari, granite, circa 13th/14th century, Assam State Museum



The 18th-century Rang Ghar was originally used as an amphitheatre serving as a venue for cultural activities for the court and the public in the Ahom period

style of architecture that first emerged around the 5th century during the Gupta empire (320-550) when it was rapidly gaining popularity in the homelands of much of northern India. It soon became a well-established and popular style throughout the medieval period. Gupta temples were usually constructed on a raised platform or *jagati*. Ahom temples, particularly those dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu (like those of Sivadol and Devidol),

are consistently built on high, sturdy, artificial platforms following Gupta style, a structural feature that helped protect them from floods. The distinct ornamental foliage and other features of Gupta sculpture are also clearly apparent in medieval temple sculptures of Assam. The artists drew heavily on Hindu mythology to create their fluid and decorative reliefs for temple walls. Gupta architecture is known for its highly decorative T-shaped doorways, featuring multiple *shakhas* (door jamba) decorated with floral scrolls, figures, and the important river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna.

The Ambari archaeological ground in Guwahati, the present-day state capital, is a significant historical site that has revealed evidence of an ancient pre-Ahom temple complex dating primarily between the 7th and 14th centuries. This complex is now recognised as a major archaeological zone from where large amounts of stone sculptures and specialised pottery that have been excavated indicate that it was an important centre of religious, artistic, and trade activity associated with the Kamarupa kingdom. The site was

discovered by accident in 1967 during the construction of the Reserve Bank of India building. The sculptures in the Ambari Archaeological Museum and the Assam State Museum mainly date to the Salastambha and Pala dynasties (circa 10th to 12th centuries) and feature the unique local style that blends eastern and northern Indian medieval art with earlier influences. Objects recovered from the site primarily depict the deities of the Brahmanical pantheon – Vishnu, Surya, and Nataraja. An important sculpture on display in the Assam State Museum is a 13th-century stone statue of Nataraja (Shiva as Lord of the Dance), the largest of its kind in Assam.

In 2024, the *moidsams* (homes for spirits) of the Ahom dynasty officially joined the ranks of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Nestled in the foothills of the Patkai Ranges in eastern Assam, this royal necropolis serves as a profound testament to the Tai-Ahom people, who migrated to the region in the 13th century under the leadership of Prince Sukaphaa (1228-1268). Having established Charaideo as their first capital, the dynasty spent the next six centuries crafting a 'sacred geography' that seamlessly integrated their funerary architecture with the natural landscape of forests and water that echoed earlier beliefs.

The burial mounds were created by building an earth mound (*ga-moidam*) over a hollow vault constructed of brick, stone or earth (*tal*), and topped by a shrine (Chou Cha Li) at the centre of an octagonal wall (*garb*). This shape symbolises the Tai universe with the shrine at the top being the *mungklang*, a middle space symbolised as a golden ladder, establishing a heaven-earth continuum. These vaults house the earthly remains of monarchs and royalty alongside grave goods intended for the afterlife, ranging from daily necessities such as food to transport that could include horses and elephants. Evidence has also been found of monarchs being buried with attendants or queens. Tai-Ahom funerary rituals of *me-dam-me-phi* and *tarpan* were also carried out at the Charaideo necropolis. While burial mounds appear elsewhere in the Brahmaputra Valley, the 90 moidsams at Charaideo are considered the definitive examples of this tradition. Even today, the site remains spiritually vibrant, serving as the backdrop for ancestral rituals that sustain the cultural legacy of the Tai-Ahom people.

Today, the moidsams are largely intact, as is their rural landscape setting in which they sit, providing visual reminders of a culture that dominated Assam for over 600 years. These royal burial mounds and Ahom culture in general are well documented in *The Buranjis* and provide invaluable details of the Tai-Ahom world view and daily life, including the funerary rituals and spiritual associations, as well as detailed accounts of the materials and labour required to construct the moidsams. Started by King Sukapha (1229-68) in the first year of this reign, these manuscripts documented historical events, state policies, the royal lineage, as well as the construction of moidsams.

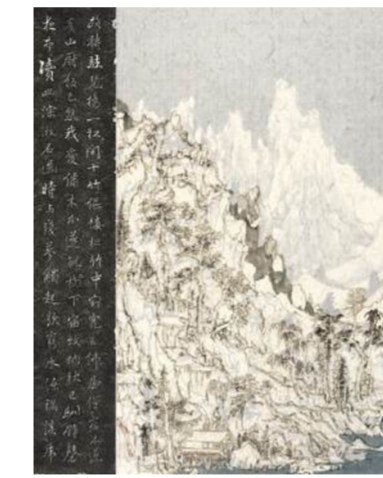
This rich cultural landscape of the Ahom dynasty that overlaid the earlier Kamarupa kingdom is still very much visible in Assam today, allowing visitors to experience and gain some understanding of this vibrant and culturally complex society of the region.

# ASIA WEEK NEW YORK 2026

Asia Week New York is now in its 17th year of celebrating Asian art and art from the Islamic worlds. A mix of 25 international and American dealers are showcasing works of art with a couple of members choosing to be present online only. The main event runs from 19 to 27 March.

As usual, Asia Week New York coincides with the spring sales at the auction houses, which are also hosting both physical and online sales. For ease, we are listing a selection of the in-gallery shows first, followed by the online activities.

• More information can be found on the website for all connected events and the latest news, asiaweekny.com



Ancient Trees Imprinted in Water (2025) by Wang Tiande (b 1960 Shanghai), xuan paper, ink, burn marks, and rubbing, 75.5 x 88 cm, Alisan Fine Art

## Chinese Art

### FU XIAOTONG AND WANG TIANDE

Alisan Fine Art, 12 March to 18 April

This year the gallery is presenting two solo shows. *Fu Xiaotong: NUN-7*. The artist is known for her intricate paper pinhole creations of 'traditional' landscape compositions. The title *NUN* has been used by Fu Xiaotong since 2020, with this exhibition marking the seventh iteration of the ongoing series. *Nun* (or *Ni*) refers to a chaotic life-force in ancient Egyptian mythology, known as the 'Great Earth Mother'. Often considered the oldest god, Nun is the personification of the boundless primeval waters of chaos, representing the primordial abyss from which all life and existence emerged. In both her paper works and sculptures, Fu consistently engages with the void – the spaces created by the armature of her sculpture, the holes created with each pinprick. The works show how she interprets the natural world from two contrasting perspectives: from afar, in her serene, distant mountain and waterscapes, and on a microcosmic level, in her investigation of plant cells and organic tissue. In some pieces, forms appear densely aggregated, resembling cellular structures; in others, the dispersion and branching of pinholes evoke patterns of growth, division, or migration found in living systems.

The second exhibition is *Wang Tiande: Of Streams and Clouds*. Wang Tiande is an innovative avant-garde ink artist known for his creative use of incense sticks as a form of brush. Well-versed in traditional Chinese art and culture, Wang searches for new possibilities in the realm of ink art. His most groundbreaking practice replaces brushes with incense sticks, burning into layered

rice paper and ink. This unique approach reimagines traditional landscapes and calligraphy, conveying the ephemeral nature of art. This practice began several years ago, while viewing Ming-dynasty paintings in a friend's collection, Wang considered the potential to combine authentic historical paintings and calligraphy with his own burned and painted works. An avid collector of older artwork, he began layering and attaching pieces from his collection to his own creations. The resulting works occupy a hybrid state, part historical 'ready-made' and part contemporary painting, presented as artefacts in pristine, black shadow-box frames. Two large-scale works anchor the exhibition; *Clear and Distant Amid the Dense Forest* is presented in a long, horizontal scroll. In contrast, *Sheshan Resting Over Water* is a tall vertical work – not unlike the paintings of the Song dynasty (960-1279).

• 120 East 65th Street, NY 10065, Alisan.com.hk. Asia Week reception 12 March, from 6-8pm.

Event: In Conversation: Wang Tiande and Elnor Cervone, On Materiality, 21 March 1-4 pm

## CONTEMPLATION / MEDITATION Concepts and Cultures

Fu Qiumeng Fine Art, 5 March to 11 April

This exhibition explores how Eastern and Western artistic traditions have visualised inner stillness, reflection, and states of heightened awareness. Rooted in classical Chinese philosophy, the exhibition draws inspiration from Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought, where inner cultivation and cosmic order are understood as deeply interconnected. From Confucian contemplation – emphasising moral clarity, calm reflection, and self-perfection – to Daoist and Zen practices of meditation that quiet the mind, dissolve conceptual thinking, and release ego attachment, Eastern



Fifth Dimension-QM4 (2020) by Hisao Hanafusa, hand signed and dated, aluminium print on canvas, 24 x 20 in, 61 x 50.8 cm, Fu Qiumeng



Group of works by Yasuhara Kimeji (1906-1980), Dai Ichi Arts

traditions have long approached art not as visual imitation, but as a conduit for spiritual resonance and embodied presence.

In contrast and dialogue, the exhibition also considers Western artists who, whether intuitively or through direct engagement with Eastern philosophy, pursued similar contemplative states. Featuring works that range from classical and modern East Asian art to modern and contemporary American painting, the show presents images that are sometimes representational, often abstract, and always oriented toward inducing clarity, calmness, or mental sharpness.

• 65 East 80th Street, G/F, New York, NY 10075, fuqiumeng.com. Hours: 10-6pm, otherwise by appointment.

Opening reception 19 March, 5-8pm

## Japanese and Korean Art

### CERAMIC MODERNISMS New Perspectives on 20th Century Japanese Ceramics

Dai Ichi Arts, 19 to 27 March

In the first of a series of exhibitions, this show for Asia Week presents key works that trace the development of modern Japanese ceramic expression during the early 20th century. Together, the three artists in this show unveil a complex narrative, re-examining current histories that largely locate the advent of ceramic modernisms and vessel-art expressions in the Kyoto avant-garde circles. The show also adds Tokyo as a vital site of experimentation, where modern Japanese ceramics emerged through artists who strove to express a liberating and contemporary vision during an important period of rapid change.

The artists are Yasuhara Kimeji (1906-80), Kusube Yaichi (1897-1984), and Miyanohara Ken (1898-1977), all of whom championed new expressions of art, design, and beauty through vessels. Yasuhara Kimeji, who was active in Tokyo and known as Yasuhara Yoshiaki, declared in 1930 at the founding of the Totokai Ceramic Association (Society of Eastern Potters) that ceramic works can transcend established forms and tradition. His work exemplifies the spirit of individualist mid-century modernism in Japanese vessel art.

Miyanohara Ken was born in Kagoshima but was also heavily active in Tokyo. He was Yasuhara's peer as a student of Itaya and Miyagawa. Inspired deeply while apprenticing under Itaya, he excelled in slip inlay, carving, and complex glazes, bridging continental ceramic traditions with contemporary

abstraction. His work, influenced by European art, particularly French Art Nouveau, earned him major recognition at the Nitten exhibitions and the Japan Art Academy Award.

Kusube Yaichi was born into a Kyoto pottery family known for export wares. During his life, he developed an avant-garde ceramic practice in the 1920s and 1940s. Early international exposure led him to exhibit abroad, winning awards at the 1924 and 1936 Paris World's Fairs. His mastery spans white porcelain to overglaze painting, reflecting both technical command and a forward-looking vision. His modern forms, as appreciated in flower vases, incense containers, water droppers, and other classical ceramics from the later years are particularly coveted.

• 18 East 64th Street, 1/F, New York, NY 10065, daiicharts.com. Opening reception 19 March, 4-7pm

## CAPTIVATING Cats in Japanese Prints and Paintings

Egenolf Gallery, 22 and 23 March

Japanese prints and paintings with cats have always held a special attraction, much like the alluring yet unknowable felines themselves. In Japan, cats historically served as mousers, companions, mumm and even monsters. This group of works includes 19th-century classical *ukiyo-e* prints and drawings of beauties with cats, as well as ink paintings and prints from the early 20th century that feature the felines as the primary subjects. Also featured is a curated selection of fine 18th-to-20th-century Japanese prints and drawings in the gallery's only New York appearance for the year.

• Exhibiting at The Mark Hotel, 25 East 77th St, New York, NY 10075, egenolfgallery.com.

Hours: 11-6 or by appointment



Purple Magnolia 'Awakening of Spring' (2025) by Daisuke Nakano (b 1974), wash paper, silver leaf, ink, and mineral-based pigments, 43.3 x 17.9 inches, Ippodo Gallery



Ouch! That hurts! by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861), 1852, from the series Celebrated Treasures of Mountains and Seas, colour woodblock print, 35.4 x 24 cm, Egenolf Gallery

## BANQUET OF LIFE Nihonga Paintings by Daisuke Nakano

Ippodo Gallery, 19 March to 18 April

This is the Japanese painter's long-awaited third New York solo exhibition, coinciding with Asia Week New York 2026. The 10 new works on view mark the pivotal transition of the seasons. Daisuke Nakano (b 1974) celebrates the natural world through glorious depictions of flora and fauna: blanketed in shimmering snow, at the turning point of the springtime thaw, and in full blooming colours. Nakano stands out as a luminary force among the few remaining Nihonga traditionalists today, evoking classical ideas and pushing them to their limits of colour, composition, and craftsmanship. His scenes are overflowing with flourishes of complementary colours and a dynamic interplay of lively birds, insects, and flowers.

Native to Kyoto and a master of Nihonga painting traditions, Daisuke Nakano draws upon historical Japanese image-making to paint bright scenes of nature in a state of undisturbed purity. Each

Continued on page 16



Beauty Sharing a Pipe by Keisai Eisen (1790-1848), colour woodblock print, 39.4 x 26.7 cm, Bunsei era, circa 1823, from the series Customs of the Floating World: A Contest of Beautiful Women, signed: Keisai Eisen ga, publisher: Jakurindo (Wakayama Yoichi), censorship seal: kiwame (approved), Sebastian Izzard Asian Art

pigment is ground from rare and precious minerals mixed with *nikawa*, deer-collagen glue, and placed upon a background of gold and silver leaf on *washi* paper in keeping with methods developed in Japan over centuries. Nakano's influences draw primarily from paradigms codified during the height of Edo (1615-1868) aesthetics, which often centred on imagined landscapes and the life teeming within them.

• 35 N Moore Street, New York, NY 10013, [ippodogallery.com](http://ippodogallery.com). Opening reception 19 March, 5-8pm

**JAPANESE PAINTINGS AND PRINTS, 1900-1860**

Sebastian Izzard, 20 to 27 March

In the 19th century, *ukiyo-e* artists were organised into two main schools, the Katsushika and the Utagawa, but as the century progressed the fortunes of the Katsushika rose during the Tenpo period and then faded after the death of Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), their leader, in 1849. Hokusai and his students specialised in *surimono* and book illustration in the first decades of the 19th century. It was only in 1830, when faced with a family crisis, that the artist returned to commercial printmaking, with spectacular results. These works are represented here by the some of his more interesting prints from this period. The better organised Utagawa school came to dominate the field by the end of our purview. Their stock-in-trade were images of actors and beautiful women, but they also turned to other areas, including landscapes and illustrating classics of Japanese and Chinese poetry and literature, which were now simplified, annotated, and modernised by astute authors and their artist collaborators. Figures such as Genji, the 'shining prince' of Murasaki Shikibu's 10th-century novel and poets such as the Heian courtier Ariwara no Yukihira, were reimagined in amusing, irreverent and inspiring ways. Chinese-inflected bird-and-flower prints also became popular, as did both Chinese and Japanese themes for warrior prints.

Landscapes are the crowning achievement of this era and are fully represented in this exhibition. Landscape prints were first published in the 18th century, but in the early 19th century, the market was stimulated by the emergence of a leisure travel industry centred on pilgrimages. Tours of far-off shrines and temples required expertise in how to navigate the problems that might be encountered on the way, which in turn created a flourishing market in travel guides describing post-stations, local beauty spots, and other famous places. This literature not only gave artists such as Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) and their peers a receptive market, it also provided them with recondite local information and descriptions of topography that they could employ



The Pleasures of Edo by Hishikawa Moronobu (1618?-1694), handscroll, ink, colour, and metallic pigments on silk, 38.4 x 11.849 m, Edo period, circa Jokyo era (1684-88), unsigned, Sebastian Izzard Asian Art

to enliven their designs. Patrons of the artists could enjoy escapism vicariously, without the upheaval and discomfort that actual travel might incur. Landscapes never went out of fashion and could be repeatedly printed until the blocks wore out. Collectors are therefore cautioned to seek out only the finest impressions available.

Also on show is an important handscroll by Hishikawa Moronobu (1618?-1694), considered a seminal figure in the history of *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world). More than any other artist, Moronobu can be credited with transforming *fu-zoku-ka*, a tradition of genre paintings depicting scenes of contemporary life, by integrating it into the elegant art of the floating world, with its initial focus on the theatre and the pleasure quarters. Since the early 16th century, Japanese painters had developed and refined the art of genre painting, produced primarily and most dramatically on folding screens, but also on other formats, such as handscrolls, hanging scrolls, and albums. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when Japanese genre painting shifted in emphasis or replaced by *ukiyo-e*, but the process is generally agreed to have occurred sometime around the 1670s and 1690s, years that align perfectly with those of Moronobu's career. This handscroll, rich with expensive ground mineral and metallic pigments, is a work that exemplifies Moronobu's artistry and depicts an idealised world of pleasure detailing the entertainments offered in Edo, one of the largest cities in the world at the time. Produced in the 1680s, it is one of eight such handscrolls securely attributed to Moronobu or his workshop, and is unusual among them for its unique combination of scenes from the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters and theatres, as well as scenes illustrating pleasurable activities across the seasons in Edo.

• 17 East 76th Street, 3/F, New York, NY 10021, [izzardasianart.com](http://izzardasianart.com). Hours: 11-5pm, or by appointment

**SIX CELESTIALS**

Joan Mirviss, 19 March through April

On show are 40 works by six artists whose careers established the foundations of contemporary Japanese clay art. Born as the 19th century drew to a close, three of the artists in this exhibition played critical roles ushering Japanese clay into the 20th century. As the founder of the ceramics department at Kyoto City University of Arts and longtime professor, Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886-1963) was a fierce advocate of individuality, a trait that is captured in his own elegantly formed and decorated porcelain vessels, as well as in the diverse body of work produced by his many students. The work of Ishiguro Munemaro (1893-1968) is bold and undeniably modern, even as it was rooted in the ancient Chinese techniques that he dedicated his life to researching. In contrast with these contemporaries of his, both of whom were designated with the prestigious title of Living National Treasure for their work, Kawai Kanjiro (1890-1966) held true to the spirit of the *Mingei* (folk art) Movement he helped pioneer by eschewing official honours or recognition for his undisputed mastery of historical glazes.

As representatives of the next generation, the remaining three artists of this exhibition developed their ceramic legacies in the second half of the 20th century. Though he studied the historical glazes of Shino,



Iro-e platter with floral patterning by Tomimoto Kenkichi, 1936, porcelain with enamel overglaze, 2 x 11.25 x 11.25 inches, Joan B Mirviss

Oribe, and celadon, Okabe Mineo (1919-1990) breathed new life into these traditions with his innovative and entirely unique forms. With his ever-evolving palette of glazes, patterns, and forms, Kamoda Shoji (1933-83) created some of the most evocative and sought-after works of the 20th century. Finally, Tanaka Sajiro (b 1937) continues to hone his skills in the art of wood-firing with natural glazes to create vibrant and contemporary works inspired by the historical tradition of Karatsu wares.

• 39 East 78th Street, Suite 401, New York, NY 10075, [mirviss.com](http://mirviss.com). Hours: Weekdays 11-6 pm and by appointment, including Sat 21 March. Hours: Sun 22 March 12-5pm

**STERLING 25 Years in New York**

Scholten Japanese Art, 19 to 27 March

This year celebrates the gallery's silver anniversary and to celebrate, they have organised a selection of works reflecting their continuing commitment to exploring the intertwining development of Japanese woodblock prints from the early to mid-20th century by artists who designed *shin-banga* (new prints) and *sosaku-banga* (creative prints), while expanding their collective understanding of the art and artists who contributed to this field. The prints on offer are supplemented by several paintings related to the design and/or aesthetics of the period, with a fresh look at new artists and related genres. Important and coveted works by highly sought-after artists such as Hasui, Shinsui, and Yoshida Hiroshi are juxtaposed with intriguing finds by little-known or unknown contemporaries. The timeline begins at the turn of the 20th century and includes the creative explosion seen during the post-war period.



Tennoji Temple in Osaka (1927) by Kawase Hasui (1883-1957), Souvenirs of Travel, third series, colour woodblock print, 38.6 x 26 cm, Scholten Japanese Art



Words That Shape Me II (2024) by Kizaki Kazutoshi, madake bamboo, rattan, 13 x 17.5 x 17.5 inches, Tai Modern

18th and early 19th century, but the application technique had been largely forgotten by the turn of the 20th century. The lost art of mica printing returned to use principally due to the efforts of the influential artist Hashiguchi Goyo (1880-1921), as is found on two works by the artist, both dated 1920, included in the exhibition. Goyo was the first established Japanese artist (who was not a printmaker at the time) to venture into the nascent genre being developed by the visionary publisher Watanabe Shozaburo (1885-1962) in the mid-1910s, who wanted to create modern prints that utilised Japanese printing techniques featuring Western influences.

• 145 West 58th Street, Suite 6D, New York, NY 10019, [scholten-japanese-art.com](http://scholten-japanese-art.com). Hours: Duration of the exhibition: 19-27 March, 11-5pm, with appointments appreciated. Otherwise by appointment until 3 April.

**JAPANESE BAMBOO ART Tradition and Transformation**

Tai Modern, 19 to 23 March

Exploring the enduring dialogue between historical tradition and contemporary innovation in Japanese bamboo art, this show weaves together historic and contemporary pieces. It also brings together works by artists across generations, demonstrating how the medium continues to evolve while remaining deeply rooted in traditional techniques and philosophies. Among the highlights is *Kanchiku Flower Basket* by Tanabe Chikuansai I (1877-1937), a masterwork from one of Japan's most important artistic lineages. This work, made from the gnarled roots and stalks of *kanchiku* (marbled bamboo), exemplifies the literati aesthetic, sensitivity to material, and technical precision that established the Tanabe family's enduring influence on the field.

Contemporary bamboo sculpture is represented by Kizaki Kazutoshi (b 1976), whose *Words that Shape Me II* brings a deeply personal and conceptual approach to the medium. Reflecting on his inspiration, Kizaki states 'I gathered together the many precious words I received from family, friends, and acquaintances around me. With the desire to bring myself closer to an ideal form and to give back to those around me, I created this work using a new method of construction'.

• Exhibiting at Colnaghi, 23 East 67th Street, New York, NY 10065, [taimodern.com](http://taimodern.com) Hours: daily 11-5pm. Opening reception 19 March 5-7pm

**Korean Art**

SUKI SEOKYEONG KANG

Tina Kim Gallery, 12 March to 2 May This is a solo exhibition of the late Korean artist Suki Seokyeong Kang (1977-2025) to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the artist's untimely

passing; this exhibition stands as both a memorial and a celebration of her singular artistic vision. The presentation brings together significant sculptural and two-dimensional works from the last decade of the artist's life and will mark the New York debut of pieces from some of Kang's most influential series.

For Kang, art was a method of measuring how the individual inhabits the world, a practice deeply rooted in the Korean concept of *jari*, denoting a 'place', 'seat', or 'territory'. Initially trained in traditional Korean painting, Kang transcended the static representation of landscape, reimagining it instead as a lived experience defined by the body and its equilibrium. Working with industrial materials like steel and aluminium alongside the organic warmth of silk, thread, and *hanji* (Korean mulberry paper), she developed a unique visual vocabulary defined by the limits of her own physicality. The scale of her sculptures was often determined by what she could lift, carry, or embrace. Consequently, her objects exist not as monumental, imposing structures, but as tender extensions of human motion, balance, and mutual support.

The exhibition also features major works from the artist's *Jeong-step* and *Mora-nuba* series, which further articulate her investigation into the structural rhythms of earthly existence. The wall-mounted *Jeong-step* works are grounded in the logic of the grid, referencing the *Jeongganbo* – a 15th-century Korean musical notation system where each square represents a unit of time and pitch. With the *Jeong-step* works of delicate silk thread framed in wood, Kang unites the delicacy of traditional Korean painting materials with hard-edged architectural structure.

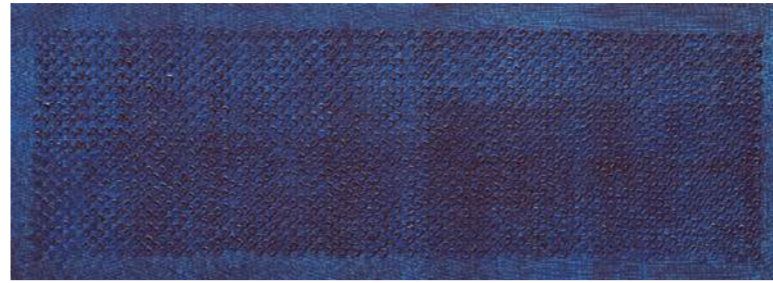
• 525 West 21st Street, New York, NY 10011, [tinakingallery.com](http://tinakingallery.com). Opening reception 12 March 6-8pm

**GENEALOGIES OF TIME Korean Modern and Contemporary Art**

Space 776, 6 to 31 March This exhibition examines the present condition of South Korean contemporary art through the coexistence of multiple temporal layers. Rather than following a chronological narrative, the exhibition brings together works from different generations to reveal how artistic questions persist, shift, and reemerge over time by exploring the practices of Jeoung Keun Chan (b 1965, South Korea), Hyeongsu Kim (b 1961, South Korea), and Hak II Kim (b 1965, South Korea). Working across distinct formal and conceptual approaches, these artists articulate current positions within South Korean contemporary art, engaging with enduring concerns related to form, materiality,



Jeong #07 (2023-2024) by Suki Seokyeong Kang (1977-2025), colour on silk mounted on Korean Hanji paper, thread, wood frame, 160 x 160 x 6 cm, courtesy of the artist's estate and Tina Kim Gallery. Photo: Sangtae Kim



Inside and outside (2005) by Guiline Kim (1936-2021), oil on canvas, 30 x 70 cm, Space 776

perception, and structure. Their works reflect how inherited artistic sensibilities are tested and reconfigured under present-day conditions.

Alongside these contemporary practices, works by Kim Guiline (1936-2021, South Korea) are presented to expand the exhibition's temporal scope. Shown in proximity to contemporary works, his paintings allow different moments in South Korean art history to be viewed together, emphasising continuity and transformation rather than linear progression. Through the juxtaposition of works across generations, the exhibition offers a focused view of how contemporary practice appears from layered historical conditions while remaining firmly grounded in the present.

**Indian & Himalayan Art**

INDIAN CLASSICAL PAINTINGS AND COURTLY OBJECTS

Art Passages, 19 to 25 March

Highlights of this year's show include a large textile painting of *Vishvarupa*, a universal form of Krishna, as revealed to Arjuna, largely based on the Hindu concept of the universal man in the *Rig Veda*. Other highlights include a painting on paper from an obscure *Bhasmasura* series, or the story of the ash demon, depicting Bhasmasura, obsessed with Parvati, chasing Shiva and Parvati with a magic bracelet to destroy Shiva and obtain Parvati for himself. Another painting, presumably from the last episode of a Bhasmasura series, depicts Mohini, an enchantress form of Vishnu, coming to Shiva's aid to deal with Bhasmasura. In this scene, Mohnini tricks Bhasmasura in imitating her dance moves with a final act of touching her head. Bhasmasura



Vishvarupa, also titled Virata Swarupa (universal form), is a depiction of Vishnu turned into a description of the universe. Vishvarupa, India, Rajasthan, Kotah, circa 19th century, ink, opaque watercolour and gold on textile, 79 x 50 cm, Art Passages



Western Tragopan (Tragopan melanocephalus), Mughal India, circa 1660, opaque pigment with gold on paper, laid down in a cropped album page with gold arcs of foliage on a rust ground, with gold-splashed margins ruled in gold and black, 11.8 by 9.7 cm, Oliver Forge Brendan Lynch

touches his head forgetting all about his magic bracelet, which starts to burn him instantly.

• Exhibiting at 115 East 72nd Street, Suite 1 B, New York, NY 10021, Hours: 10-6, or by appointment. Opening reception 19 March, 5-8 pm

**LUMINARIES, MYTH AND FANTASY IN INDIAN AND PERSIAN PAINTING**

Oliver Forge Brendan Lynch, 19 to 27 March

This year's show comprises 40 court paintings from India and Persia, dating from the 17th to the 19th century. Highlights include a folio from a *Ramayana* series, Pahari Hills circa 1800-1815, a Mughal-period depiction of a tragopan (pheasant family), and an early Qajar portrait of a courtesan, signed Mirza Baba (fl 1789-1810), from Persia.

• Exhibiting at 67 East 80th Street, Suite 2, New York, NY 10075, [forgelynch.com](http://forgelynch.com)

**OBJECTS OF VENERATION Buddhist Art from India and the Himalayas**

Carlton Rochell Asian Art, 19 to 27 March

A highlight of the show includes a 3rd-century Gandharan stone relief panel portraying the Maitreya in Tushita Heaven. Carved in schist, the relief presents the future Buddha



enthroned beneath an elaborately rendered baldachin, flanked by bodhisattvas, celestial beings, and architectural elements derived from Greco-Roman visual traditions. The work exemplifies the sophisticated synthesis of Indic religious iconography with Hellenistic sculptural naturalism that defines Gandharan art. The sensitive modelling of the figure, rhythmic drapery, and narrative clarity reveal the technical mastery of early Buddhist workshops operating at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Mediterranean world. The panel stands as a powerful testament to Gandhara's role in shaping early Buddhist visual culture.

Other works include the Nepalese figure Vasudhara, goddess of wealth and abundance, a gilt-alloy sculpture from the 12th/13th century that exemplifies the extraordinary achievements of Newar metalworkers during Nepal's medieval artistic flowering. Other works include a 13th-century Tibetan portrait painting of a monk from Central Tibet. Depicting a youthful lama seated in meditation with hands raised in the teaching gesture (*dharmachakra mudra*), the painting presents the figure enthroned within an elaborate cosmic setting populated by lineage masters, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and protective deities. Distinguished by its refined line work, subtle shading, and jewel-like palette, the painting belongs to an extremely small group of surviving portraits associated with the Kagyu monastery of Yazang, founded in 1206. Scholarly analysis suggests that the portrait likely represents Western artists such as Monet, Rinchen Jose, the second abbot of Yazang, who died in 1242.

• Exhibiting at Adam Williams Fine Art, 24 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10075, [carltonrochell.com](http://carltonrochell.com)

As travel restrictions eased in the 19th century, a new wanderlust swept through Edo. The merchant class embraced the freedom to explore, and woodblock artists responded with *meisho-e* – pictures of famous places. Rather than idealised visions, these images offered recognisable landscapes that allowed viewers to revisit memories or dream of future journeys. Hokusai and Hiroshige defined the form, combining human presence with nature's vastness in compositions that later captivated Western artists such as Monet, Whistler, and Van Gogh.

The Meiji Restoration ushered in photography, lithography, and

24 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10075, [carltonrochell.com](http://carltonrochell.com)

**Independents**

LANDSCAPE MASTERS Hokusai, Hiroshige, Hasui & Yoshida

Ronin Gallery, until 30 April

Celebrating Japan's most iconic interpreters of the natural world, this show brings together works of both *ukiyo-e* and *shin-banga* to trace more than a century of artistic innovation—from the bold vistas of the Edo period to the atmospheric modern landscapes of the early 20th century. Featuring works by Hokusai Katsushika, Hiroshige Utagawa, Hasui Kawase, and Hiroshi Yoshida, the show invites visitors on a journey through Japan's seasons and scenery. From mist-laden harbours and snow-capped mountain passes to luminous evenings and bustling city streets, these prints reveal the enduring allure of the Japanese landscape.

Through separated by a century, all four masters share an abiding love for Japan's natural world. Highlights of the exhibition include selections from Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, Hiroshige's *One Hundred Views of Edo*, rare pre-quake editions by Hasui, and Yoshida's luminous explorations of time and space – each offering a distinct perspective on place, season, and the passage of time. Together, these works stand as a testament to the universal appeal of the Japanese landscape and the enduring power of the woodblock print.

• 32 West 40th Street, New York, NY 10018, [roningallery.com](http://roningallery.com) Hours: Mon-Fri 11-6pm



In the Mountains of Totomi Province by Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1845), from the series the Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji, circa 1832, colour woodblock print, Ronin Gallery

sweeping modernisation, challenging the future of woodblock printing. Yet by the early 20th century, a powerful revival emerged. Artists like Hasui and Yoshida fused Western Impressionist influence with traditional carving and printing techniques, creating *shin-banga* – a modern reinvention of the Japanese woodblock print. Their work introduced nuanced light, shifting weather, and a heightened realism while remaining deeply connected to *ukiyo-e*'s lineage.

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**BANQUET OF LIFE:**  
Nihonga Paintings by Daisuke Nakano  
March 19-April 18, 2026  
Flour Summer - Whirls of Spring, 2025  
Washi, gold leaf, ink, and mineral-based pigments  
145cm x 32.5cm

**Bonhams**

This March marks Bonhams' first Asia Week New York sales at its newly opened US flagship building at 111 West 57th Street.

**23 March Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, including The Francine and Bernard Wald Collection of Fine Snuff Bottles, Part III.** Two significant groups of Qing-dynasty zitan furniture, both from the same private North American family collection, anchor this sale. The first is an imperial zitan corner-leg table, Qianlong period, carved on each face with a continuous lozenge band of Buddhist symbols incorporating *shou* characters accented with bats in high relief, and hoof feet. The second is a carved zitan corner-leg table, Qing dynasty, carved on the vertical faces with a key fret band with a narrow lotus petal band, and a series of zoomorphic cloud scrolls and *kui*-dragon heads forming a central *taotie*.

Other highlights include a Yangcai blue-ground 'lotus' vase, Qianlong period, decorated with four large lotus blooms at the shoulder.

**23 March Chinese Paintings, Calligraphy and Prints**

**24 March Indian, Himalayan & Southeast Asian Art**

**25 March Fine Japanese and Korean Art and Netsuke from the Collection of Joseph and Elena Kurstin, Part II** The highlight of this sale is a large 18th-century white porcelain moon jar from the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897), representing the pinnacle of Joseon white porcelain from the Gwangju official kilns. Constructed using the demanding two-part joining

technique, it achieves a nearly perfectly spherical proportion with a join line that is barely perceptible, a testament to extraordinary technical control in throwing, drying, glazing, and firing. The soft, milky white glaze epitomises late Joseon taste, distinct from the cooler whites of Chinese Qing-dynasty porcelain and the brilliant whites of Arita ware. With only around 30 surviving moon jars of this size known – the firing success rates were below 10% for works of this scale, making examples of this size and preservation exceptionally rare. Closing the week of live sales is Netsuke from the Collection of Joseph and Elena Kurstin, Part II presenting the next instalment of the internationally recognised collection of fine Japanese *netsuke*.



Yangcai blue-ground 'lotus' vase, Qianlong six-character seal mark and of the period, est \$300-500,000, Bonhams



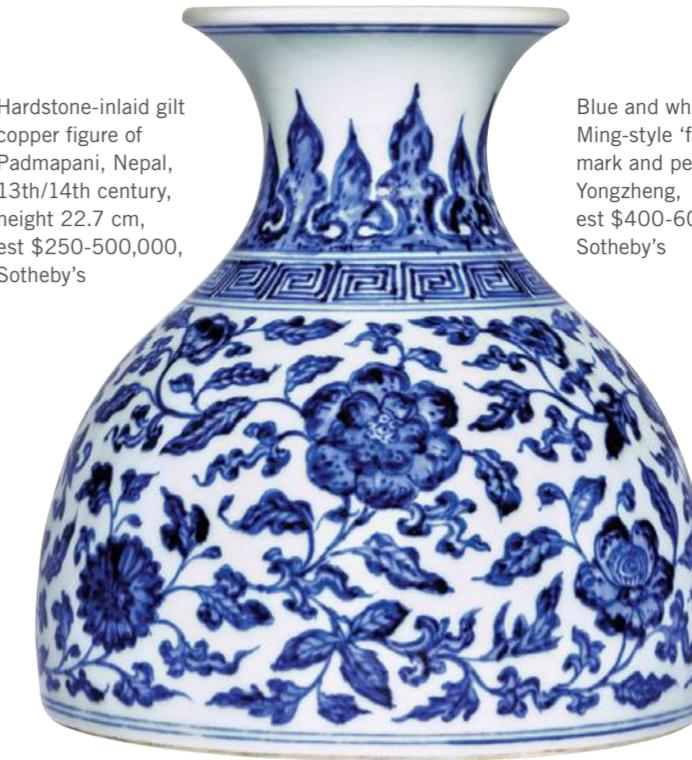
Large white porcelain moon jar, Joseon dynasty (1392-1897), 18th century, est \$800,000 to \$1 million, Bonhams



Two imperial zitan corner-leg tables, Qianlong period, \$800,000 to \$1.2 million, Bonhams



Hardstone-inlaid gilt copper figure of Padmapani, Nepal, 13th/14th century, height 22.7 cm, est \$250-500,000, Sotheby's



Blue and white Ming-style 'flower' vase, mark and period of Yongzheng, est \$400-600,000, Sotheby's



Guan lobed dish, Southern Song dynasty, est \$1.2 to 1.8 million, Sotheby's

Huanghuali trestle-leg altar table (qiaotou'an), late Ming dynasty, 17th century, est \$200-400,000, Sotheby's

**Christie's**

Christie's Asian Art Week of March 2026 series of sales features six auctions – four live at Christie's Rockefeller Center, and two online.

**24 March Japanese and Korean Art** This season's Japanese and Korean Art sale is led by an impressive moon jar (Bonhams' moon jar is offered the next day), Hokusai Katsushika's iconic work *The Great Wave*, and a recently discovered 15th-century Buddhist hanging scrolls.



Painted wood figure of a Bodhisattva, Jin dynasty (1115-1234), height 160 cm, est £600-900,000, Christie's

**25 March South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art** This season's sale is offering several important works that have not been seen in public for several decades. The sale is led by Tyeb Mehta's 1977 masterpiece *Gesture*, as well as works by Sayed Haider Raza, Maqbool Fida Husain, Jehangir Sabavala K Ramanujam, and other artists. A second sale, Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian Art, is also scheduled for 25 March.



Large doucai 'dragon' moon flask, Qianlong sealmark in underglaze blue and of the period (1736-1795), height 50.2 cm, est \$800,000 to £1.2 million, Christie's



All Ready (2000) by Lu Dan (b 1953), scroll, mounted and framed, ink and colour on paper, inscribed and signed with one seal of the artist, 35.7 x 29.8 cm, est \$25-35,000, Christie's



Pair of painted grey pottery figures of horses, China, Tang dynasty (618-907), the larger height 39.7 cm, est \$12-18,000, Christie's



Under the Well of the Great Wave off Kanagawa (The Great Wave) by Hokusai Katsushika, woodblock print from the series Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji, 25.1 x 36.8 cm, est \$800,000 to \$1 million, Christie's

B Prabha and Shanti Dave, as well as notable works on paper and prints by Zainul Abedin, Ivan Peries, Ganesh Halo, and Jogen Chowdhury, among others.

Highlights include two contemporary paintings by the Chinese artist Liu Dan, an extensive selection of Tang-dynasty pottery from the Max N Berry Collections, a diverse offering of prints by some of Japan's most famous artists, including Hokusai and Hasui, and a choice of Indian miniature paintings from two private American collections.

**18 March to 2 April Arts of Asia** Arts of Asia Online features a curated selection of artworks representing centuries of history and culture across Asia.



Kishi Monju, Ko Shohei, and Chokaro (Manjusri on lion, Huang Chuping, and Zhang Guolao) by Sesso Toyo, each sealed Toyo, 15th century, triptych of hanging scrolls, each 89.9 x 38.7 cm, excluding mount, est \$250-350,000, Christie's



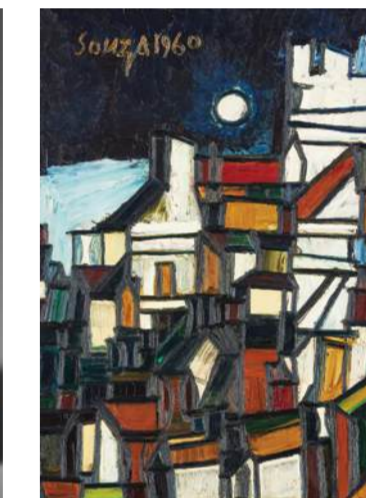
Second Act (1958) by Maqbool Fida Husain (1913-2011), oil on canvas, 121.9 x 190.2 cm, est \$2.8 to 3.5 million, Sotheby's



An inscribed silver and copper-inlaid copper alloy figure of Lowo Khenchen Sonam Lhundrup, Tibet, 16th century, height 19.1 cm, est \$150-400,000, Sotheby's



Huanghuali folding horseshoe-back armchair (jiaoyi), late Ming/early Qing dynasty, 17th century, est \$1.2 to 2 million, Sotheby's



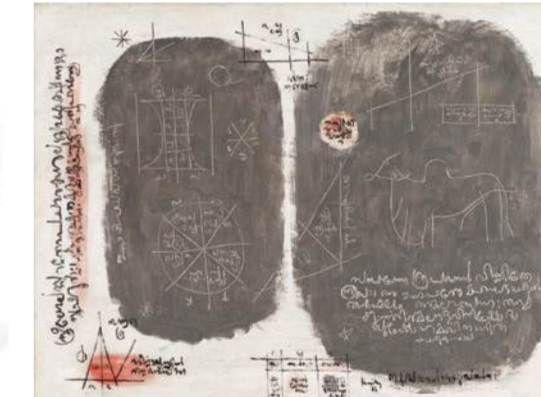
Houses in Moonlight (1960) by Francis Newton Souza (1924-2002), oil on board, 76.5 x 60 cm, est \$300-500,000, Sotheby's



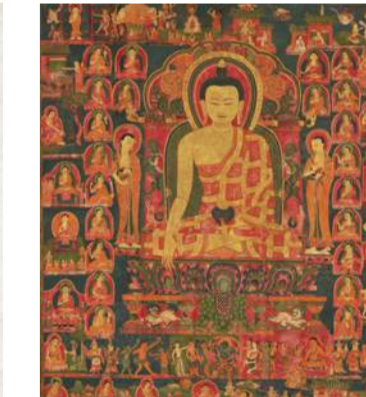
Huanghuali and huamu 'fu character' armchairs (sichutouguanmaoyi), late Ming/early Qing dynasty, 17th century, est \$500-800,000, Sotheby's



Large blue and white 'fruit and flower' jar, mark and period of Xuande, est \$1.5 to 1.8 million, Sotheby's



Untitled (1964) – Words and Symbols – by KCS Paniker (1911-77), oil on canvas laid on mountboard, 76.8 x 102.2 cm, est \$70-150,000, Sotheby's



Thangka depicting the life of the Buddha, Tibet, 14th century, 73.4 x 86.4 cm, est \$220-500,000, Sotheby's

**Sotheby's**

These Asian sales are the first held at the auction house's new American headquarters after its move at the end of 2025.

**24 March Indian & Himalayan Art, including Property from the Zimmerman Family Collection** This sale, part of the inaugural Asian Art auctions at the Breuer Building, is led by an assemblage of Tibetan and Nepalese art from the Zimmerman Family Collection, considered one of the preeminent collections of Himalayan art in the US, and part of it forms the core of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Himalayan holdings. Jack and Muriel Zimmerman began collecting Tibetan and Nepalese art in 1964 and went on to become the foremost collectors of their generation.

**25 March Huanghuali for the Scholar's Studio: An Important Private Collection of Classical Chinese Furniture** Comprising 14 works from the Ming and early Qing dynasties, the *huanghuali* furniture comes from a private collection. The sale is led by a 17th-century folding horseshoe-back armchair (*jiaoyi*), formerly in the collection of Frederic Mueller and previously part of the Museum of Classical Chinese Furniture in Renaissance, California. With fewer than 30 examples of this form known to survive from the Ming dynasty, the folding horseshoe-back armchair is

one of the rarest and celebrated forms within the canon of classical Chinese furniture. Other highlights include a pair of 17th-century *huanghuali* and *huamu* 'fu character' armchairs (*sichutouguanmaoyi*), also formerly in the Museum of Classical Chinese Furniture; a late Ming-dynasty *huanghuali* trestle-leg altar table (*qiaotou'an*); and a 17th-century *huanghuali* sedan chair from the esteemed collection of Robert and Alice Piccus.

**25 March Chinese Art** The inaugural Chinese Art auction at the Breuer building offers lots from early ritual donors to Qing imperial works of art.

Highlights include a group of Tang and Song ceramics from an American private collection, including a Song-dynasty Guanyao lobed dish formerly in the Frederick M Meyer Collection; a Xuande mark and period blue-and-white jar from the Chang Foundation; a dappled black-glazed bowing Ferghana horse from the Pritzker Collection, as well as an early Western-Zhou dynasty four-handled archaic bronze ritual food vessel from a Colorado family collection. The sale also includes a selection of Ming and Qing porcelain, archaic bronzes, jades, lacquer wares, scholar objects, classical furniture, a group of ink rubbings from the Wu Family Shrine, and historical documents relating to the Xi'an Incident,

presented on the 90th anniversary of this pivotal moment in modern Chinese history.

**26 March Modern & Contemporary South Asian Art** This season's Modern & Contemporary South Asian sale features paintings and works on paper from across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, spanning the 20th and 21st centuries. The sale is led by a seminal work by Maqbool Fida Husain, *Second Act* (1958),

which is the most widely published and frequently exhibited work sold in this category at Sotheby's.

Other highlights include a Francis Newton Souza published in Edwin Mullin's *F. Souza* monograph (1962), a Kattingeri Krishna Hebbar shown in the landmark Geneva show *Coups de Coeur* (1987), a KCS Paniker from the *Words and Symbols* series, plus works by Vasudeo S Gaitonde, Jagdish Swaminathan, Ram Kumar, Bhupen Khakhar, Anwar Jalal Shemza, and Zainul Abedin.

**Other Auctions**

**24 March Asian Works of Art, Doyle**  
**25 March Asian Art Signature Auction, Heritage Auctions**  
**27 March Asian Words of Art, Freeman's**

## SACRED PAPER Korean Ritual Arts

While Christianity and Buddhism appear to be the dominant religions in Korea, the deeper current shaping everyday Korean life may in fact be shamanism, sustained by the simple yet urgent desire for safety, good fortune, and good health.

Throughout a modern history marked by upheaval, war, loss, and rapid change, the quiet wish for the well-being of one's family has remained constant. Embedded in shamanic ritual, this exhibition presents a view of an enduring pulse beneath Korean daily life, where the spiritual and the practical intersect and intertwine.

Tracing this pulse through two regional traditions of Korean ritual paper art, the exhibition reveals how such fragile materials carry the weight of human hopes and wishes. From Chungcheong Province to the East Sea coast, paper art becomes a vessel for devotion, an architecture of protection, and a record of how communities imagine their place between the visible and invisible worlds.

In Chungcheongnam-do, the Seolwi Seolgyeong tradition creates intricate cut-paper structures that define and organise



Above: Korean Shamanic Funeralary Ritual from Chungcheongbuk-do, Korea

Below: Seolwi Seolgyeong (2025) by Park Jongseung, spirit-invoking ritual paper banner, 64 x 95 cm

ceremonial space. The artist Jongseung Park creates intricately cut paper forms to construct a sacred shrine originating in Chungcheongbuk-do, South Korea, demonstrating how mulberry paper can be transformed into structures that shelter, guard, and channel spiritual presence.

Along the East Sea coast, ritual practice extends this spiritual intent in a different direction – the artist Dr Heera Shin presents

folded paper flowers, lanterns, and ornaments that serve as vivid articulations of blessings offered to the deceased in this area.

● 9 March to 24 May, Charles B Wang Centre, Stony Brook University, New York, stonybrook.edu

● LECTURE  
Mon 9 March  
at 4pm, 'Paper and Things  
Otherwise Unseen:  
A Journey Through Korean  
Shaman Rituals'  
by Dr Laurel Kendal



## KAWAI KANJIRO House to House

This solo exhibition celebrates the remarkable life and career of folk potter, poet, and artist Kawai Kanjiro (1890-1966) for the first time in the US. Kawai is best known for his influential role in the *mingei* (folk art) movement in Japan, which he founded in the mid-1920s with his friends, the philosopher Yanagi Soetsu (1889-1961) and the potter Hamada Shoji (1894-1978). Showcasing representative works from

Kawai's personal collection that are rarely seen outside his former home (now a museum known as the Kawai Kanjiro House), the exhibition traces the evolution from the artist's early functional ceramic ware to his late-career modernist wood sculptures.

After the war, Kawai launched a prolific wood carving practice, creating dynamic sculptures and stylised masks inspired by contemporaneous artistic,



Kawai Kanjiro (1890-1966)

mechanical, and scientific imagery. He continued to produce ceramics, experimenting with sculptural forms, new glazes, and decorative techniques. He also designed household wares, published articles, and brushed calligraphy imbued with his

philosophies. Yet his *mingei* beliefs persisted: in 1956, the Japanese government extended him the official honour of Living National Treasure for his achievements in ceramics, but he refused, preferring to work as an anonymous craftsman.

Kawai passed away in 1966, leaving behind a rich legacy in multiple fields of modern art. His former residence opened as a museum, known as the Kawai Kanjiro House, in 1973.

● 10 March to 10 May, Japan Society Gallery, New York, japansociety.org



Mei Lanfang performing in the opera Farewell My Concubine, performed in the US © Chinese National Academy of Arts jPjffjffj

## THE DANCING GODDESS Mei Lanfang

This spring, the China Institute is exploring the life and work of Peking Opera performer Mei Lanfang (1894-1961). His 1930 North American tour, organised by the newly established China Institute of America, launched Peking opera onto the world stage and made a significant impact on modern theatre. With his original fusion of song, dance, and dramatic acting, Mei captivated American audiences and inspired artists from Broadway to Berlin.

This exhibition revisits a milestone of cultural exchange and features a

comprehensive array of Mei's innovative stage costumes from his own collection, which were designed to allow dance movements that revitalised Peking opera, along with rare photographs, performance videos, original production props, and artwork. Most of the objects in the exhibition are on public view in the US for the first time, on loan from the Chinese National Academy of Arts in Beijing, the world's foremost archive of Mei Lanfang memorabilia.

● 12 March to 19 July, China Institute Gallery, New York, chinainstitute.org

## BUDDHA AND SHIVA, LOTUS AND DRAGON



Stem cup, North China. Tang dynasty, circa late 7th/early 8th century, silver with embossing, chasing, engraving, and microscopic traces of gilding, 4.8 x 6.4 cm



Storage jar, Korea, Joseon dynasty, circa mid-18th century, porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue, 44.5 x 34.9 cm



The Buddha Shakyamani in Abhaya-mudra, India, probably Bihar, Gupta period, 6th century, bronze, 68.6 x 27.3 x 17.8 cm, Asia Society, New York. All images: Mr and Mrs John D Rockefeller 3rd Collection. Photo: Synthescape, digital image © Asia Society

In celebration of Asia Society's 70th anniversary, Asia Society Museum is showing *Buddha and Shiva, Lotus and Dragon: Celebrating 70 Years of Asia Society and the Rockefeller Legacy*. Buddhist and Hindu sculptures are on display alongside Chinese, Korean, and Japanese ceramics to showcase the diverse range of bronzes, ceramics, and metalwork assembled between the 1950s and the 1970s by John D Rockefeller 3rd (1906-78) and his wife Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller (1909-92). John D Rockefeller 3rd founded Asia Society in 1956 with the mission to promote greater knowledge of Asia in the US. The bequest of the collection to Asia Society in 1979 underscores the Rockefellers'

conviction that aesthetic encounters with great works of art promotes deep cross-cultural understanding.

The exhibition comprises 70 objects drawn from Asia Society's permanent collection assembled between the 1950s and 1970s. The first section explores Buddhist sculptures, tracing the transmission of Buddhism across Asia over two millennia. The exhibition continues with Hindu sculptures from South and Southeast Asia – largely from the 10th to 14th centuries – which form another strength of the collection. The last and largest section of the exhibition showcases metalwork and ceramics from China, Korea, and Japan.



Tea Leaf Jar, Nonomura Seiemon (Ninsei), circa 1574 to 1660-66, Japan, Kyoto Prefecture Edo period, mid-17th century, Kyoto ware, stoneware painted with overglaze enamels and silver, 30.5 x 24.1 cm

● 18 March to 3 January 2027, Asia Society, New York, asiasoc.org

## THE INFINITE ARTISTRY OF JAPANESE CERAMICS



Deep vessel, Japan, Middle Jomon period (circa 3500-2500 BC), earthenware with cord-marked decoration and sculptural rim, height 41.9 cm, Harry G C Packard Collection of Asian Art

This exhibition traces more than 13,000 years of ceramic artistry in Japan, from its Neolithic origins to the country's dynamic contemporary art scene. The exhibition presents approximately 350 works in three rotations, drawn mostly from The Met's own collection, focusing on works from the Harry G C Packard Collection. Bringing together exceptional works shaped by centuries of cultural exchange with China, Korea, and Europe, the exhibition invites visitors to explore how materials, techniques, function, and meaning



Dish with three jars, Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), circa 1680-90s, porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze polychrome enamels, Hizen ware, Nabeshima type, height 15.2 cm, Harry G C Packard Collection of Asian Art

intersect in one of the world's most enduring ceramic traditions. The exhibition is displayed across 10 thematic galleries, highlighting the remarkable diversity of Japan's regional ceramic practices. Distinct local clays, methods, and systems of patronage gave rise to a wide spectrum of forms, surfaces, and uses, ranging from everyday tableware to vessels created for tea masters and elite

households. By placing ceramic works in dialogue with other art forms, it highlights broad aesthetic and cultural trends. A selection of works also represents the abstract qualities of medieval natural ash glazing. Themes of the exhibition include monochrome wares such as elegant early Japanese celadons; ceramics repaired with *kintsugi* (gold joinery);

whimsical blue-and-white porcelains adorned with flowers and insects; and exquisite examples of Nabeshima ware, once produced exclusively for the Tokugawa shogunate and its circle.

A focused section on tea culture illuminates the evolution of Japanese-style tea (*wabicha*) and tea cuisine, anchored by masterworks such as a striking early-17th-century Oribe vessel, a recent acquisition, reflecting the refined sensibilities of tea master Furuta Oribe (1544-1615).

Several galleries are celebrating the pleasure of food presentation, featuring vessels for comfort food used by commoners travelling along the historic Tokaido highway connecting Kyoto and Edo. Luxurious porcelain and lacquerware, designed for festive banquets among the elite, are also on view. Enhancing these narratives, a selection of rare garments, including richly embroidered wedding robes, and other decorative arts offer further insight into the broader visual culture in which these ceramic traditions flourished.

Much of the selection is drawn from the Harry G C Packard Collection, presented in honour of the 50th anniversary of this landmark acquisition. Comprising more than 400 artworks, including Buddhist sculptures, paintings from the medieval period through the 19th



Bottle with decoration of a pine tree, Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), circa mid-17th century, stoneware with iron-painted design and copper-green glaze over brushed white slip, Takeo Karatsu ware, 33 x 19.1 cm, Harry G C Packard Collection of Asian Art

century, and a wide range of pottery, the Packard Collection became the foundation of the museum's well-known Japanese art holdings. Many of the ceramics featured in the exhibition, seldom on show to the public until now,

underscore the ingenuity, vitality, and enduring legacy of Japanese ceramic artistry.

● Until 8 August, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org

## THE HUM OF LIFE A Thousand and One Tales from Bali



Detail from a *tantri* story, Bali, ink and colours on cotton, 1890-1910, 258 x 567.5 cm, gift of Professor Benedict R O'G Anderson

The perpetual 'hum of life' (*senandung hidup*) is not as orderly or harmonious as tourist literature would have us believe. Balinese paintings, textiles, shadow puppets, masks, and sculptures reveal a multitude of narratives, from imaginative folk tales to the heroic and moral lessons of the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mababarata*, to the gendered relationships, humour, and magic of local Indonesian stories. They also detail aspects of daily life in Bali in which storytelling, performance, and religious practice intertwine.

One of the works is a

vibrant *ider-ider* (a long, narrow cloth hung under the eaves of a shrine), where the *tantri* is shown gesturing elegantly to the reclining king, who she entertains with a tantalising story night after night, in the Balinese version of the *Thousand and One Nights*. The elaborately carved Balinese door to the right of the scene serves as a threshold to the collection of stories that await.

Nearly three decades of collecting Balinese art at the Johnson Museum are currently being celebrated in an exhibition. The collection has been made possible in large part by the unfolding

history and reputation of Cornell's Modern Indonesia Project, founded in the 1950s, and generous donations to the Museum from scholars of Southeast Asian studies, their families, and their students. Twenty years ago, the museum acquired a significant collection of Balinese story cloths and shadow puppets from anthropologist Joseph Fischer that have become an important resource for teaching the history of Balinese art, along with other textile gifts.

● Until 17 May, Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, museum.cornell.edu

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www.orientalceramicsociety.org.uk

Image: The Butler Collection

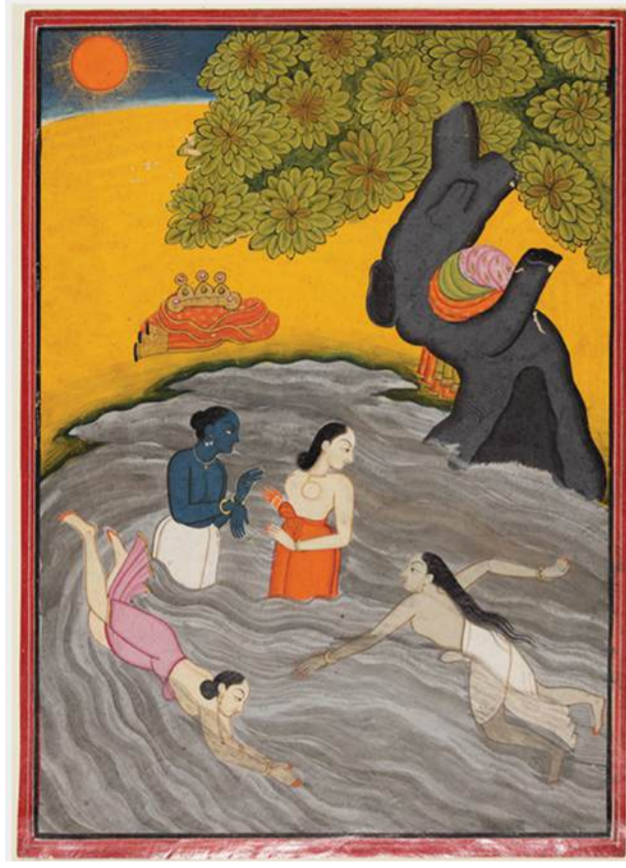
## LONGING Painting from the Pahari Kingdoms of the Northwest Himalayas

Featuring more than 40 works of art, *Longing: Painting from the Pahari Kingdoms of the Northwest Himalayas* presents colourful court paintings from present-day India dating between the 17th and 19th centuries. Practicing unique techniques, artists produced these small, portable paintings primarily for royal, noble and priestly patronage. The paintings were often given as gifts between regional nobility, families and political allies, creating large networks of artistic exchange.

Organised thematically, the exhibition encourages visitors to experience art as multisensory. Select paintings are paired with scent or touch opportunities, while others are paired with musical soundscapes, to heighten the works' *bhava* (emotion or mood) and encourage multiple ways to physically, intellectually and emotionally connect with the art.

Influenced by the region's culture and politics, the artworks portray longing in several ways, including through paintings of devotees who long to connect with the divine, individuals and couples who yearn for romance, and rulers and noblemen who longed to be at the centre of political control.

The exhibition is part of a larger research project connecting the South Asian art collections at the Cincinnati Art Museum, the



Krishna playing with the gopis in the Yamuna, circa 1770, India, Himachal Pradesh, Nurpur, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, Cleveland Museum of Art, purchase and partial gift from the Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection, Severance and Greta Millikin Purchase Fund

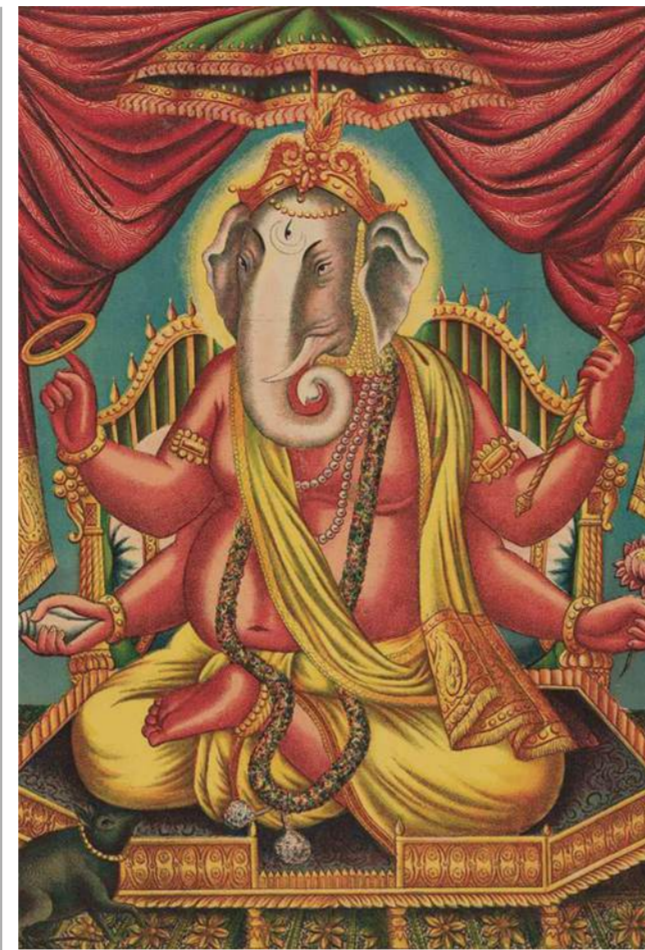
Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) and the National Museum of Asian Art (NMAA) in Washington, DC. Alongside scholars based in India, curators from these three museums are working collaboratively to research, publish and display works from the Catherine

Glynn Benkaim and Ralph Benkaim Collection. Beginning in April 2026, the CMA and the NMAA will also present exhibitions of paintings from the Pahari kingdoms.  
● Until 7 June, Cincinnati Art Museum, cincinnatiartmuseum.org

## DIVINE COLOUR Hindu Prints from Modern Bengal

Vivid prints of divinities are part of daily life for Hindus in India and around the world, used for worship in homes, factories, and offices, as well as for adornment on cars, calendars, computers, and shop counters. The art world has historically overlooked these images, often called 'calendar art', because they are inexpensive and mass-produced. However, they have a rich and fascinating history in and influence on Indian art, religion, and society.

This exhibition explores these popular prints' origins and powerful impacts. When Indian artists encountered the new printmaking technology of lithography in 19th-century Calcutta (today Kolkata), then the capital of British India, they used it to reinvent devotional art. Depictions of Hindu gods became more realistic, colourful, and accessible than ever before. Shrines in homes across the economic spectrum came to host these images, mixed and matched according to a family's taste. Though the lithographs of Hindu gods created by Bengali artists were not expensive, they were valuable in other senses. Sold in the bustling bazaars of Calcutta where presses competed to attract customers, the prints served an important role in home worship, satisfied the artistic sensibilities of a Bengali society that had absorbed European fine art values, and helped to spread new political ideas. The



Ganesha, printed by Amar Nath Shaha, circa 1895-1900, lithograph, Marshall H Gould Fund

exhibition also considers how lithography gave these artists, who produced thousands of prints that travelled quickly across the nation, a means to change not just devotional but also artistic, political, and social life.

A highlight of the exhibition is the MFA's collection of 38, 19th-

century, lithographs from Calcutta, it is the first of its kind in the US, featuring more than 100 objects, including other prints, paintings, sculpture, and textiles from the museum's South Asian collection and select loans.  
● Until 31 May, MFA Boston, mfa.org

## IN BLOOM How Plants Changed Our World

The Oxford Botanical Garden is the oldest example in the UK, founded in 1621 by Henry Danvers, 1st Earl of Danby. Originally established a 'physic garden' to grow medicinal plants for teaching and research at the University of Oxford. While many of the original plantings were European medicinal herbs, 17th-century gardens quickly began importing plants from wider areas as trade routes expanded, including Asia and beyond.

One example is the import of Chinese tea plants first to India, then Ceylon (Sri Lanka) with botanical samples and drawing being sent to the UK. In the 1840s, Scottish botanist Robert Fortune, trained in botanical gardens, travelled to China to collect plants for the Horticultural Society, later acting for the East India Company. He collected tea seeds and plants, and, importantly, documented that green and black tea came from the same plant.

The Ashmolean itself owes its existence to two obsessive gardeners who set out to

'collect the world'. In the 17th century, John Tradescant the Elder and the Younger, gardeners to royalty and aristocracy, travelled to the Low Countries, France, Russia and North America, gathering plants, seeds, specimens and intriguing objects that later formed the Ashmolean's founding collection.

This history is explored at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford as it traces the journeys that some of Britain's most familiar blooms and their journey to arrive in the UK. Featuring more than 100 artworks,



Wardian case, circa 1870, wood and glass, 120 x 80 x 60 cm, The Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

including botanical paintings and drawings, historical curiosities, and new work by contemporary artists, the exhibition follows the passion and ingenuity of early plant explorers and the networks that influenced science, global trade and consumption. Discovering how plants changed the world and left a legacy that still shapes our environments, food and drink, and house gardens today.

Many of our most beloved species of plants and flowers, including tulips, roses, orchids and camellias, reached Britain through the networks of empire linking Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Seeds, dried specimens and living plants travelled along the same maritime and commercial routes that transported people and goods, a movement that often depended on the expertise of local people that went unrecorded in Western accounts.

Some arrivals triggered intense public interest. Tulips fuelled the Dutch speculative bubble known as

'tulipomania' which, at its height in the 1630s, saw rare tulip bulbs being sold at the cost of a canal-side house. Ferns, orchids and rhododendrons too inspired later Victorian collecting frenzies. Other plants became woven into everyday life. Tea, now integral to British identity, grew into a powerful commodity whose cultivation and trade had far-reaching economic and political effects.

Another innovation featured in the exhibition is the 'Wardian Case', a revolutionary sealed glass container, developed by Nathaniel Ward in the 1840s. This ingeniously simple solution facilitated long-distance plant transport and made it possible for living specimens to survive long voyages, encouraging the mass movement of plants across the world. This transportation of plants came with significant costs to colonised and indigenous peoples.

As European demand for profitable and desirable species grew, collecting and cultivation began to reshape



Tea jars for black (Bohea) and green tea, Worcester Pottery, 1775-80, stoneware, height 13.2 cm, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

local ecologies and economies. In many regions, land was reorganised for export crops and large single-species plantations, creating 'monocultures' that replaced local biodiversity and made communities more vulnerable to environmental and economic shocks. Britain's role in the opium trade, which contributed directly to the Opium Wars (1839-60), was a notoriously exploitative chapter in the nation's history. The global spread of tea and other cash

crops shows how botanical collecting, commerce and imperial ambition often carried consequences beyond the plants themselves.

*In Dream* returns to this origin point, examining how plants were acquired, classified and circulated in the 17th century, and how the wish to grow and understand them shaped knowledge and culture.  
● 19 March to 16 August, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, ashmolean.org  
● Catalogue available



WATCH  
Robert Fortune and  
Tea from China



Embossed gold belt buckle, circa 19th century, with multiple hands of Fatimah, courtesy of the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. Photo: Nasjonalnuseet/Annar Borgli

### SCANDI NOIR

Scandinavia can be relied on to provide an entirely different vision of a field that many think they know well. Deviant Ornaments at the National Museum of Norway is the sort of survey that will not be happening in the Islamic world. Examining the history of 'queerness' in Islamic art is a first – perhaps not to be followed in the future. There are very few conventional Islamic-art exhibitions at the moment, so this new approach might raise some alternative awareness. *Deviant Ornaments* sets the scene with its title. Spanning more than a thousand years and

four continents, it brings together textiles, manuscripts, video, digital-art photography, music and painting. There is nothing as mainstream as distinctions of place and chronology. The approach is global and yet brings in some of Norway's art history, which usually has little connection with the Islamic world.

It is going to be a tough sell for most Muslims, but the curator is really trying to invite discussion and understanding. Instead of Western concepts of 'coming out', there is instead an emphasis on 'letting in' – a term apparently developed by psychologist Seltnch Hammoud-Beckett, which



The Dance (2022)  
by Kasra Jalilipour  
© Kasra Jalilipour

has been adopted by many Muslims with divergent inclinations. Going one step further in an age with the new non-binary 'normal', the exhibition space has had a work created to protect it. Although there is a lot of content from India on display, this guardian force of the safe space was created by a Senegalese textile artist.

Featuring dozens of amulets, this protective feature might raise as many uncomfortable questions about superstition in Islam as it does about the main theme of 'deviance'.  
● Deviant Ornaments at the National Museum of Norway, Oslo. Ends 15 March

### ORIENTALIST REHABILITATION

Whenever questions are raised about external perceptions of Islam, the word 'Orientalist' is bound to surface. Fortunately, more attention has been given recently to the original understanding of the word.

No other movement has made the same effort with appreciating the Islamic world as that enterprising band of painters who headed east and south in the 19th century to record the lives of their neighbours. There are new exhibitions coming up to tackle the theme, and last year an attempt was made in Doha – by the Lusail Museum in collaboration with Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art – to explain the French artist considered by many to be the greatest villain of them all, Jean-Léon Gérôme. It was an impressive display of the definitive Orientalist painter and sculptor, spoiled mainly by the compulsory introduction of modern reinterpretations of the subject.

For a more direct and less apologetic approach there is one commercial gallery that has been taking up the cause and letting the artists' works do the talking. Instead of letting the thoughts of Edward Said and Linda Nochlin loose on the subject,

politicians. It was reflected gloriously on the gallery windows, encouraging visitors to look around and realise that the only thing saved from the Second World War German airforce is St Giles' Cripplegate church. The show ended last year and could have been an effective way of showing that Palestine has a strong and adaptable culture – now mostly outside its homeland. Being in London's stark but pristine and super-expensive financial district removes the viewer further than ever from the devastation of the real Palestine.

The Ramallah Art Fair brings us back to a land that has been shaped by living under a very destructive occupation. The works on display are far from being the stock-in-trade of those slick outfits which roam the world as part of Art Basel. These are affordable works with improvised displays. They have not been through the painstaking process of being selected for 'a concisely curated showcase celebrating Qatar's vibrant cultural landscape...'

What any part of Palestine would not give to have something like the Doha Design District when electricity and running water are the priorities.

None of this has held back the creative stalwarts from Palestine and the Golan Heights who are participating in the art fair. Forty-two artists explore contemporary themes of displacement, loss, identity, memory and the daily realities of living with oppression while also presenting artworks that envision a future without occupation. Resistance

and resilience are central subjects in the artistic production of the Ramallah Art Fair, which is divided into two sections: Contemporary and Rare. Among the Contemporary, the works of Alaa Albaba convey the reality of Palestinian refugee camps that have existed for so long they are barely noticed. Others show the daily anguish of life in Gaza or the vigour of street demonstrations. Within the 'Rare' section is the output of artists whose lives have mostly ended but continue to inspire the constantly regenerating art scene of Palestine. Attention is given to one living artist in particular. Shafiq Radwan's original village was destroyed in 1948. After that he went on to have a successful career as an artist, only to lose all his works recently in the rubble of his home in Gaza.

● Ramallah Art Fair, Narratives Under Occupation, Zawayeh Gallery, Ramallah, Palestine, ends 29 March



The Camp, Grey (2025)  
by Alaa Albaba, acrylic on canvas, courtesy Zawayeh Gallery

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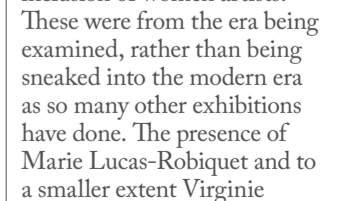
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Taking Refreshment at Ain Sefra  
by Marie Lucas-Robiquet,  
oil on canvas, courtesy Colnaghi

responded to encounters across time, cultures and locations. The diversity of artistic traditions is paramount in the story of cross-border encounters. Most exciting of all, with both exhibitions, was the inclusion of women artists. These were from the era being examined, rather than being sneaked into the modern era as so many other exhibitions have done. The presence of Marie Lucas-Robiquet and a smaller extent Virginie Demont-Breton might even put a stop to the endless talk elsewhere of the 19th-century 'male gaze'.



The Watering Hole at Sunset  
by Charles-Théodore Frère,  
watercolour on paper,  
courtesy Colnaghi

# Islamic Arts Diary

by Lucien de Guise

### THE SHOW GOES ON

There cannot be many conflict zones that still prioritise art as much as Palestine. The fragile 'peace plan' hasn't stopped outrages in the West Bank and hardly provides reassurance about basic human existence in Gaza. Despite this, the Ramallah Art Fair is boldly continuing with its fifth edition: 'Narratives Under Occupation', organised by Zawayeh Gallery of Ramallah and Dubai.

The title says it all really. Nothing could be more different from, for example, Art Basel Qatar. The first edition of the latter event took place in early February, and the razzmatazz surrounding it was extensive, although perhaps not as much as the Diriyah Biennale, which has more millions poured into it by Saudi Arabia. Qatar is rich but small, so the effort has to be focused although the Basel name seems to be worth its weight in something more valuable than gold. Like everything else in the Gulf, it shows the massive disparities of the Middle East. Resource-rich countries with little cultural history take all the international limelight while localities with millennia of visual creativity, such as Palestine and Egypt, hardly appear on the radar of the free-wheeling art world.

In Qatar they brought in Egyptian (born) artist Wael Shawky as artistic director of the fair's first edition. He is an impressive figure and no doubt helped this version of Art Basel turn out to be a bit less commercial than it



The Ramallah Art Fair is a small but valiant event when compared to the latest Art Basel, this time in Qatar

might have been. Most of the time he is well away from his home region in the very different surroundings of Philadelphia.

Alongside some noteworthy Middle Eastern galleries, the fair itself had the global art-world glamour of essential names like Gagosian, Hauser & Wirth, Pace, White Cube and David Zwirner. Few of them had any connection with the Arab world. It was, however, gratifying that the Paris-based Galerie Chantal Crousel was exhibiting the work of a personal favourite, Mona Hatoum. Not only is this artist originally from the Middle East, but she is also more specifically of Palestinian heritage. The real bonus is that she is acclaimed far beyond her place of birth. Her recent exhibition at the Barbican Art Gallery in London was just one of many shows that Mona Hatoum has had in her new homeland.

As a small digression, I would like to mention retrospectively that her exhibition was a landmark in many ways without generating a lot of publicity. This artist was paired with the late, great Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti. The two are very different and yet were given equal billing at this exhibition. Hatoum creates situations and settings in which the human form is superfluous, while Giacometti created almost nothing except humanoid bodies, usually the etiolated type seen brooding or striding across the countless galleries in which his work has been exhibited.

Just as Giacometti developed advanced anxiety from the destruction of the Second World War, Hatoum is stirred by more current conflagrations. Being of Palestinian descent, there is that ever-present conflict in the background. As most of her work was created long before 7 October 2023, it's a useful reminder that this battle in the Middle East has been bubbling away for more than three years. Not that Hatoum's focus is oppressively about the Palestinian cause. She is against all injustice, and there was no need for trigger warnings about flags, rivers, the sea or any proscribed organisations. She is above that. As with Giacometti's anti-war stance, there is no preaching or politicising.

The exhibition ended with further incendiary thoughts. The final work was *Hot Spot* (2018), which has more colour than the whole show combined. The red neon globe suggests destruction – by climate change as well as warmongering

politicians. It was reflected gloriously on the gallery windows, encouraging visitors to look around and realise that the only thing saved from the Second World War German airforce is St Giles' Cripplegate church. The show ended last year and could have been an effective way of showing that Palestine has a strong and adaptable culture – now mostly outside its homeland. Being in London's stark but pristine and super-expensive financial district removes the viewer further than ever from the devastation of the real Palestine.

The Ramallah Art Fair brings us back to a land that has been shaped by living under a very destructive occupation. The works on display are far from being the stock-in-trade of those slick outfits which roam the world as part of Art Basel. These are affordable works with improvised displays. They have not been through the painstaking process of being selected for 'a concisely curated showcase celebrating Qatar's vibrant cultural landscape...'

What any part of Palestine would not give to have something like the Doha Design District when electricity and running water are the priorities.

None of this has held back the creative stalwarts from Palestine and the Golan Heights who are participating in the art fair. Forty-two artists explore contemporary themes of displacement, loss, identity, memory and the daily realities of living with oppression while also presenting artworks that envision a future without occupation. Resistance

and resilience are central subjects in the artistic production of the Ramallah Art Fair, which is divided into two sections: Contemporary and Rare. Among the Contemporary, the works of Alaa Albaba convey the reality of Palestinian refugee camps that have existed for so long they are barely noticed. Others show the daily anguish of life in Gaza or the vigour of street demonstrations. Within the 'Rare' section is the output of artists whose lives have mostly ended but continue to inspire the constantly regenerating art scene of Palestine. Attention is given to one living artist in particular. Shafiq Radwan's original village was destroyed in 1948. After that he went on to have a successful career as an artist, only to lose all his works recently in the rubble of his home in Gaza.

● Ramallah Art Fair, Narratives Under Occupation, Zawayeh Gallery, Ramallah, Palestine, ends 29 March

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