

# ASIAN ART

THE NEWSPAPER FOR COLLECTORS, DEALERS, MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES · OCTOBER 2024 · £5.00/US\$10/€10

## SUFI ART AND CULTURE MUSEUM FOR PARIS

The Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO (MACS MTO), is the first museum dedicated to exploring the art and culture of Sufism that opened in Paris in September. The museum is located on the banks of the Seine in the Parisian suburb of Chatou, facing the historic Île des Impressionnistes and housed in a 19th-century mansion. The establishment of the museum is an initiative of the Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi (MTO), School of Islamic Sufism, which is an international non-profit organisation with around 150 centres worldwide, spanning six continents.

A permanent collection of Sufi art and cultural objects and a programme of contemporary art exhibitions, talks, events, and workshops will reveal the rich contribution Sufism has made to global art and culture throughout history, from the musical traditions inspired by poets such as Rumi and Hafiz to the performances and paintings adapted from Attar's writing. The collection largely dates from the 19th century to the present day with

the oldest items from the Achaemenid Persian Empire (550–330 BC). The museum includes 600 square metres of exhibition space across three floors as well as a Sufi garden and an archival research library.

Many of the objects and practices represented in the collection – sculpture and site-specific installation, music, textiles, calligraphy, manuscripts, and ceramic and mirror mosaics – hold significant symbolic meaning in Sufism. These include a monumental granite *kashkul* sculpture (1974–76), modelled on the distinctive travel accessory of dervishes, Sufi seekers who embrace an ascetic life in pursuit of divine illumination. The sculpture is designed with precise calculations from Sufi numerology, *jafī*, by Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha, the 41st Master of the MTO Shahmaghsoudi School of Islamic Sufism.

Historically, *kashkuls*, a Persian term for alms bowls, were carefully hollowed and polished from the coco de mer seed. Stripped of their fruit and smoothed by their journey across the



The recently opened Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO, Paris

sea, *kashkuls* are symbolic of the Sufi journey of spiritual purification and enlightenment.

Sufism has enabled its practitioners to take a path towards self-knowledge and mindfulness since the 7th century. MACS MTO aims to establish a dialogue between the principles of Sufism and ideas presented through contemporary art and culture. The museum's inaugural exhibition features the works of seven international contemporary artists, selected for their connections and affinities to Sufi values and relationships with spiritual thought and contemplation. These works are shown throughout the permanent collections of Sufi art and cultural objects.

Within Sufism, gardens are considered to be an earthly paradise and MACS MTO's garden will provide a tranquil and meditative space for individuals and events, and will feature both the symbolic flora typical of Sufi gardens, such as cypresses, fruit trees, roses, and jasmines, alongside plants and flowers often found in French gardens.

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### FIGURE OF KALI DURGA RETURNED TO VIETNAM

The two-metre tall statue of the Hindu Goddess Kali Durga, Champa period (2nd to 17th century), was allegedly stolen in 2008 and handed over to officials at the Vietnam Embassy in London. The 7th-century bronze statue, which is believed to have been looted 15 years ago from a World Heritage Site in Quang Nam province, My Son Sanctuary, is to be returned to Vietnam.

The 250 kg statue was recovered after the Arts and Antiques Unit of the Metropolitan Police and the US Homeland Security focused their attention on Douglas Latchford, the disgraced dealer and collector of artefacts from across Southeast Asia and beyond, who purchased the figure in 2009. Latchford had been at the centre of a long-running investigation into the alleged looting of cultural property from the 1970s onwards.

In February 2024, Arts Council England granted permission to the Vietnam National Museum of History to export the bronze statue to Vietnam, which arrived back in Hanoi in June. Nguyen Van Doan, Director of the Museum, stated that the Durga statue supplements and completes the collections and emphasises the unity and diversity of Vietnamese history and culture, helping the facilitation and the popularisation of Vietnamese history and culture both at home and abroad.

#### SINGAPORE WRITERS' FESTIVAL

This festival is back for its 27th edition from 8 to 17 November, inviting festival-goers to reflect on what is truly in our nature – as humans, as writers and readers, as global citizens – navigating the world we live in today. Featuring over 300 international and local speakers, festival-goers can look forward to

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# ZADIE XA

by Olivia Sand

Beyond having a diverse practice involving painting, performance, textiles, sculpture and video, Zadie Xa (b 1983, Vancouver) has built an innovative approach to conceiving her multi-disciplinary exhibitions as immersive installations. Her work echoes aspects of her Korean heritage based on mythology, tales, fables, and a moral code from which our societies could learn. A keen observer of her surroundings, Zadie Xa relies on her practice to tell stories about the human condition, also highlighting the fate of the outcasts of society. In the following interview, she shares her journey towards becoming the artist that she is today.

**Asian Art Newspaper: You work in two areas – painting and textiles – and previously maintained two studios, one for each discipline. Is that still the case?**

**Zadie Xa:** Yes, I still do this, but now the two studios are in the same building and right across the hallway. So I basically only have one door in between, which is extremely convenient. It is good to keep the disciplines separate, if you do not have a large space for practical reasons. This way, I can



Zadie Xa, All images: courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac gallery, London · Paris · Salzburg · Seoul. Photo: Charles Duprat © Zadie Xa

compartmentalise and organise my way of working.

**AAN: The diversity of your practice is also reflected in your exhibitions. How do you connect these various disciplines of textiles, painting, sculpture, sound, and video?**

**ZX:** I studied conventional painting in my undergraduate years and my masters, but as soon as I graduated, I veered into working with textiles and performance, which then led me into working with video and sound, and then came installation. Therefore, performance was almost

like the gateway into expanding my practice as this kind of work encapsulates so many things. Through this experience, once I have been offered a physical exhibition, I would use this same methodology to conceive an installation or a live

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

more than 200 thought-provoking programmes that continue to push the boundaries of creative writing, exploring intersections between literature and other disciplines, and promote multilingual and cross-generational exchange.

### FIRST BUKHARA BIENNIAL

The Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF) has announced details of the Bukhara Biennial, a new immersive cultural gathering launching on 5 September 2025 in the UNESCO city of Bukhara. Curated by Artistic Director Diana Campbell, Recipes for Broken Hearts will mark the biennial's debut edition, a 10-week-long interdisciplinary experience spanning visual, culinary and performance art, textiles, crafts, music, dance and architecture. The event will serve as a platform to spotlight Uzbek artists and artisans, some of whom will collaborate with internationally recognised artists, including Laila Gohar (Egypt), Himali Singh Soin (India), Subodh Gupta (India), and Bekhbaatar Enkhtur (Mongolia).

The Bukhara Biennial will be the first event to take place in a renewed historic district in the city, which is undergoing a major conservation and revitalisation project led by architect Wael Al Awar of design studio Waiwai, who is also Creative Director of Architecture for the biennial's debut edition, with landscape design by VOGT Landscape Architects.

Waiwai's approach to the conservation of this district responds to Bukhara's continued reuse of old spaces and materials and how the architecture has evolved over time in relation to the landscape. He comments, 'The historic heart of Bukhara and its collection of architectural landmarks tell the story of a city that for centuries has embraced invention from around the world to create something new. In its revitalised form, which we will inaugurate with the biennial.' The new biennial will be one of the largest international initiatives in the field of contemporary art in Central Asia and a major transformative and evolving platform to engage with Uzbekistan's art and cultural heritage. Building on Bukhara's rich history as an important intellectual and economic centre for production on the Silk Roads and as a hub for cultural exchange between Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the 20th century, the event will showcase a multitude of disciplines with a strong focus on craft.

### NEW CURATOR, SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

The museum has announced that Aaron Rio is the new Tateuchi Foundation Curator of Japanese and Korean art. Since 2019, Dr Rio has served as Associate Curator in the Department of Asian Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In his new role, which he took up in August, he will oversee the artistic programme of

Japanese and Korean art.

### SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ASIAN ART

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art has announced that it is one of six recipients of the National Museum of Korea's Overseas Korean Galleries Support Programme. The award of \$1.4 million, the largest grant yet awarded, supports the National Museum of Asian Art's Korea programme for four years and will enable the museum to expand the programme, which aims to deepen audience interest in Korean art and culture. The funding supports a number of initiative to take place over the next four years, including the exhibiting and interpreting of key objects from the collection of former Samsung Corp. chairman Lee Kun-hee in association with the National Museum of Korea as part of a major Korean art loan exhibition that will be held at the National Museum of Asian Art 2025-2026. The museum will also reinstall its permanent collection of Korean art in a way that engages younger audiences and the community.

### 798 ART DISTRICT, BEIJING

The 798 Art District and 751 D-Park, two of Beijing's most iconic cultural industry parks, have announced their merger, a move set to enhance the city's cultural landscape. This merger will provide

larger venues for cultural events, enabling visitors to move seamlessly between the two parks without barriers. This initiative seeks to harness technological innovation to fuel cultural creativity and drive urban growth through cultural development. Over more than two decades, the 798 Art District has emerged as a hub for contemporary art in China, while 751 D-Park has set a benchmark in fashion design. Despite their shared industrial heritage, each park has developed distinct cultural characteristics. The newly merged parks will form the largest art and creative industry cluster in China, spanning over 500,000 square metres and hosting more than 600 entities. These include a diverse range of industries such as visual art, design, music, film, theatre, media, technology, fashion, automobiles, architecture, and culinary arts. Following the merger, the 798-751 complex will further enhance its infrastructure to enrich Beijing's public cultural activities.

### ASIA PACIFIC TRIENNIAL, AUSTRALIA

Over 70 artists, collectives, and projects that will participate in its 11th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT 11). Over 30 countries will be featured this year, including artists and artworks from Saudi Arabia, Timor-Leste, and Uzbekistan for the first time. The event runs from 20 November to 27 April, 2025.

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performance, all very much in 3D. For me, performance is important in order to engage with the viewer, who is also taking an active position. I try to keep the audience engaged and not bored. I am someone who gets bored very easily and initially, when I was making performance art, I was very conscious of wanting to bedazzle the audience, which is not always a positive thing. It is very important for people to realise that sometimes less is more, which is not always my strength, but that is the foundation on which I construct the show.

In addition, when you have a smaller studio space, it is impossible to practise. Therefore, I have to rely very heavily on thinking about the exhibition and the space vis-à-vis 3D modelling. For every exhibition, I work very closely with my husband, Benito Mayor Vallejo, who is also an artist. He will often recreate the gallery space or the exhibition space in 3D. This is how I can start thinking about how things will work. The type of exhibition building and how each object or encounter will happen is very important to me. This is what I think about first, followed by the image or what each work will be like. I realise that if I had the physical space, and the privilege of being able to move things around, maybe I would be more willing to be experimental. However, because of my personality, I would never be able to do that during an installation period. It comes down to being practical and being shrewd about the logistics of making a show.

**AAN: As you plan your projects ahead, do you also complete any preparatory sketches for your paintings?**

**ZX:** I have never been very attached to the idea of sketching in the way you think of a drawing. In my case, I wonder if it also has to do with the way I absorb information, or if it is because I am part of the generation of artists that started working with digital formats or Photoshop, a programme I rely on as well. For me, the paintings function more like images or backdrops for theatre or film. In that sense, the images are a consequence of trying to create different worlds. From here, I then think about who populates these worlds, and where they need to be placed within the space.



Have you ever seen a cabbage smile under moonlight? (2024), oil on linen, 160 x 160 x 4 cm © Zadie Xa



Friendship and Birdsong (2024), oil on linen, 70 x 90 x 4 cm © Zadie Xa

**AAN: Your practice that deals with textiles is very elaborate. How did you start this discipline?**

**ZX:** I grew up Catholic, and as a child, I was not exposed to museums or art shows. Therefore, looking at Biblical illustrations as a child, seeing stained glass windows, and the Stations of the Cross in church were my first real understanding of how pictures or images could transmit information. Similarly, my use of assemblage or some of the textile works – particularly the garments and how they are used in performance – are manifestations of my interest in the idea of ‘power suits’, as essentially objects that elicit power. Papal robes and the robes of Catholic priests are very ornate; they contain so much symbolism and are used in elaborate rituals. I realised there is considerable synergy between all kind of spiritual practices, because when you have a storyteller who is up in the pulpit, or who is around the fire talking to their audience, they are usually wearing some type of clothing that signifies their position and their status.

Another reason why I wanted to make textiles was my interest in identity politics in relation to clothing. I am referring to all kinds of clothing, for example, how we project who we are depending on what day it is, what mood we are in, and how this affected me and probably all teenagers. This is a time in life when you are trying to figure out who you are. Growing up, I was very committed to snowboarding and skateboard culture, and people wore

**AAN: Do you feel that the textiles have a life of their own?**

**ZX:** I love the idea that my artwork could potentially have a life outside, not just being in a gallery. That was very exciting and it was also when I started thinking about working with sound. I wanted to work with sampled edits of clips from the internet and mix in my own recorded ‘DIY’ imagery. I try to stay away from trends, because as we are so visual, it is easy absorb things. I am not trying to focus on a formal elegance so it will look good in the gallery, or what could be market friendly.

**AAN: Aspects of your Korean heritage have increasingly become important in your work. You were born in Canada and kept a link to Korean culture through your family. How did your familyland up in Canada?**

**ZX:** My parents are divorced, so I grew up with my mother. I am an only child in a single-parent household. My mother emigrated to Canada in the late 1970s/early 1980s with some of her siblings. It seems that at that time, Canada was actively encouraging immigration. In the case of my family, it was not

necessarily fleeing from somewhere in order to find a better life, but rather it was a moment of alternative possibilities. I am assuming this, as I have not asked my mother directly, but through conversations we have had, I have made my own observations. Back then, a lot of Korean people were being recruited to work in North America as healthcare workers, for example. My mother did not go that route, this is something I learned from her subsequently.

**AAN: Would you say that culturally you grew up in a Korean household?**

**ZX:** Growing up with a single parent in 1990s Canada probably made my mother much less rigid about forcing me towards continuing a certain cultural legacy. At the same time, my mother spoke to me in a mix of Korean and English, which she still does, even though she has lived there for 40 years. During my childhood, it was very much a Korean immigrant home, rather than a Korean home. At the time, I was also gently encouraged to attend Korean school, which I hated. Looking back it was a different era, because learning another language – especially if you were perceived to be outside of the mainstream, which was white Canadian – it was very detrimental to your sense of identity growing up in the suburbs. Being aware of that, I was quite hesitant to embrace Korean culture or Asian culture in general. As a young teenager, it was a point of pride to say you did not speak Korean, that you were like everyone else and only spoke English. A lot of kids like me grew up discouraged from embracing things with which they were actually quite familiar. I believe things have now changed, as today, perceptions of racism have mutated. However, when I was young, I felt it was very palpable to ensure you did not stand out. It was almost a safety device.

**AAN: So was it a major step to decide to embrace your Korean heritage and include it in your work?**

**ZX:** It is there for very specific reasons: practical reasons and conceptual grounding. It is not a manifesto, but rather a rationale or belief system. In art school in Vancouver and even at the Royal College of Art, I studied painting, mainly European masters, particularly in the context of postcolonial discourse. It was more about examining the gaze in whatever place a European painter visited. Therefore, when I was younger, there was a desire to deconstruct this gaze. This is, of course, very juvenile and is something young artists do all the time – wanting to deconstruct the gaze and subvert this type of imagery. I was never successful with this project, and as a young artist I did not receive much encouragement from my tutors, which was quite frustrating. On a broader scale, even artists in London in the 1990s, who were exploring this kind of topic did not gain much attention. In Canada, for example, there was a strong postcolonial discourse around the history of the country while I was growing up, in relation to indigenous art and communities. I am on the adjacent side of that, trying to understand a postcolonial discourse from that perspective, but struggling to incorporate it into my work. The reason why I started referencing Korean culture in a direct way is because that I thought it was what I knew best and was the most



familiar to me. A lot of these stories and related imagery were entry points for me as a young person, to understand the culture of my family, my mother, and things that felt familiar. Giving myself the permission to do this was very liberating.

In my opinion, if you really want to be an artist that finds some modicum of success – I do not mean that in a professional way, but in a way in which you enrich yourself and your ideas – you need to shift gears a little. This Asianart888

approach becomes a pendulum where you can shift your centre point. So it is not that there is a rejection of European Modernism, or wherever my base point was; I was actually identifying ways in which I could start pulling in many different trails. This is again very much related to the idea of collage. Physically, I am taking disparate pieces of information and putting them together. It is the way music, video editing, or film making works, where different synergies come together. When creating a work, there has to be a functional relationship to an idea. I am interested in the voices of craftspeople working in a village, in a community setting where they make these large wrapping clothes that had very specific functions. Also, what was it like to be in these locations where people made things together? How can that relate to the idea of a performative act, where you are embodying that ontology in your body and subsequently incorporating it into your work? Basically, I was giving myself permission to shift focus. I found a completely new way of working, based on a different fountain of ideas that were all right for me to take. It did not feel as though I was taking something from somewhere else that was inappropriate.

**AAN: There seems to be a tremendously rich heritage from which to draw. When did you consciously start integrating these new elements that you felt could work in your practice?**

**ZX:** The first time I went to Korea, I was approximately 10 years old. Unfortunately, I was not a child prodigy and I was not thinking in intellectual terms about what I was experiencing. Coming from North America and growing up in an immigrant, yet still very Westernised household, I perhaps had a narrow-minded North American perspective. In addition, in the early 1990s, Korea was very different from how it is now. As a 10-year-old, I realised that there was a whole world on the other side of the planet where they did things similar to me, but yet it was very different. It was basically a culture shock and it made a very big impression on me. As for incorporating specific elements in my work, this came slowly.

When I started making the textile works, initially my main source of

inspiration was fashion, basically snowboard, skateboard, and street culture, things that I was wearing in high school. It was a youthful way of dressing. There was a lot of symbolism that I took on because I was interested in the duality of those symbols. For example, I used to be attracted to the *yin-yang* symbol. I did that on purpose because as a child, I recognised it as an authentic marker of culture, not only for me as a Korean person, but also for East Asian people in general. Then, growing up in the West, I saw that the symbol was affiliated with surfboard culture, it then became something else again, relating to Zen and now, it is connected with yoga communities, and wellness. I like that there was a duality to this symbol that it had become devoid of meaning and had been completely commercialised by the West, but at the same time it retained its original meaning and continued to be, for people that are familiar with the symbol, something philosophical, sacred, or religious. It is something you do not think about so much if you are in Asia, because it just is. I created an internal dialogue about this and used it in my work because I liked that it initiated this friction – when Western audiences saw this work, they would read it as being very Asian, whereas Asian audiences would think this is a very strange take on what it is to be Asian by a Western person. That was the start of how I began integrating elements of Korean culture in to my work. It looked at traditional Korean regalia and then, slowly expanded to encompass the contemporary clothing that I would wear in high school. Later, it shifted to looking at things that maybe had more to do with Catholic robes and robes in general, perhaps a power suit or jacket, something that signals a supernatural ability.

**AAN: Beyond yin-yang, you started integrating various elements of Korea's cultural legacy into your work. How was this perceived in Korea?**

**ZX:** I had a lot of anxiety before showing in Korea, I felt very privileged that my first venture was



Passages via Moonlight and Non linear Time (2024), diptych, oil on linen, overall 180 x 360 x 4 cm © Zadie Xa

with the Korean Ropac Gallery. Based on my own perceptions, Koreans are very tough. In addition, I recognise that I am an outsider, and people can be territorial about national heritage, mostly because there is such a remix in how I use things. I am not trying to lift very specific imagery and just copy it. On the contrary, it needs to undergo a transformation; to me, this is not cultural appropriation. Surprisingly, the reception turned out to be very positive. However, I was still a little apprehensive about my most recent show in Seoul, because of the things I am interested in, Korean shamanism, for example, which culturally is socially frowned upon.

**AAN: Do you think that shamanism is more socially unacceptable in Korea than abroad?**

**ZX:** In Korea, there is a certain fear, specifically from an earlier generation, and perhaps there is also some social conditioning involved. However, my exhibition went very well, because I was fortunate enough to be working with a director from Andong. The village still adheres to certain shamanistic rituals, which are no longer common practice for people who live in big cities such as Seoul. Maybe there was some intention on his part to show the work, as he understands the work's spiritual and cultural perspective. I think it was also very important from an anthropological feminist perspective. The reception was overwhelmingly positive, also because Koreans travel a lot now and maybe they are excited to see aspects of Korean culture that are transformed and popular elsewhere, giving it a certain validity. I would imagine that there are folklorists or naysayers who consider it not quite right, or who are protective of this culture, which is understandable. I just feel very lucky because, initially, I was very apprehensive.

**AAN: What triggered your interest in Korean shamanism?**

**ZX:** I watched a film called *Island* (The Island) made in 1977. It is about an imaginary island, which seems to

Muscle Memory, Vision Quest (2024), oil on linen with sewn fabric, overall 180 x 400 x 4 cm © Zadie Xa

be based on Jeju island that is populated only by women and whenever men go there, they mysteriously die. It is a strange and dark drama. There are scenes prominently featuring a Korean shaman and it was the first time I had ever seen something like this in a fictional setting. She was sexually very vulgar and an unsavoury character. She was basically the village witch, and men only had disgust and disdain for her. To me, she felt like a stereotypical, sexually charged villain, and yet, I was very intrigued by this figure.

While researching shamanism, I found out that it was the indigenous ancestral religion of Korea. It was the predecessor of Buddhism and Confucianism. The nature of Confucianism, based on a patriarchal system, ended up pushing Korean shamanism to the margins. It was interesting to learn about its history, how all of the stories were told orally and how the traditions of being a

shaman were passed down either through inheriting it, or if you were possessed by a spirit illness having to convert. There is a whole ritual and practice that belongs to a person who is on the lowest rung of the societal ladder, who maintains a devotion to this ancestral practice. They possess a supernatural ability to speak with spirits, access to go into the underworld, and fall into a trance without the consumption of drugs or alcohol. There is this ritualistic aspect, too, in relation to dance, performance, and addressing an audience. And then there is the clothing. The performative aspect of this life spoke to me, as the framework of the storyteller is similar to an artist or a shaman. In Korea, shamanism is considered a very transgressive practice, something completely outside the margins of what is acceptable within modern Korean society. As a diasporic person, having access to your ancestors or ghosts of the past via this conduit interested me greatly. There were also other considerations, such as having a postcolonial look at Korea and how

old traditions are eroded because of modernisation, academia, or outside forces. In this respect, I was reflecting on a feminist methodology regarding how to carry on this tradition and its performative aspect, which yielding to a greater force or power, was very attractive to me.

**AAN: Speaking of shamanism in a broader sense, and how there are so many different worlds in your paintings, do you believe in reincarnation?**

**ZX:** I would not say I am fully agnostic, but because I was socially conditioned to be a Catholic, I suppose there are certain structures of how Catholicism or some Abrahamic religions function that probably still stay with me. Based on my interest in Korean shamanism and the access this affords to different deities and ancestors, in some ways, I do believe in spirits. Trying to think about these spirits scientifically, they are energies that do not disappear when someone dies; they do not just evaporate. I definitely feel there are supernatural beings, good and bad, that can have contact with us and

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ANASTASIA VON SEIBOLD  
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4 the Women of Iodo (2022), machine-stitched fabric, photo-printed cotton, mother of pearl buttons, copper bells on hand-dyed linen, 126 x 136 x 37 cm © Zadie Xa

maybe we have access to them. I do not follow a Buddhist doctrine, so cannot understand the ideas of reincarnation in the same way. However, I do believe that certain things should be treated with deference and respect. In many ways, I feel my work functions this way on a personal level when I include specific imagery or stories, or when talking about the perseverance of the Korean shaman and some very specific Korean mythological figures who within their storylines may have lived a suppressed or subjugated life. As a feminist, my work is a way to carry on their stories. It is important that they remain in the present and that they are accessing other audiences, too. People living today should be able to speak about the legacy of individuals who have become sidelined in our histories.

**AAN: Is it important for you to highlight a female character such as Princess Bari?**

**ZX:** I feel a kinship towards this character, and as I get older I am like an observer. Even though I do not think of myself as being one with that character, I am definitely attracted to the fact that she undergoes such a stereotypical heroine's journey. I like that there is an origin story for the godmother of all modern-day Korean shamans in this lineage of ancestral Koreans from the beginning of time. Observing more closely certain Korean religious doctrines, there is a similarity in how you reference Greek mythology. Sometimes, there are interesting crossover patterns. Princess Bari is like a conduit, because she is the person that appears when someone is going to die. There has been so much art made by contemporary Korean artists surrounding her character, that she clearly is someone very compelling in the contemporary world.

**AAN: It must be very challenging to paint about intangible things, the mystery of death, fear, the underworlds, etc. In terms of influences, beyond Bosch, are there artists you admire, as they share your interest in bridging different worlds?**

**ZX:** I love surrealist painters such as Dorothy Tanning (1910-2012), Max Ernst (1891-1976), with Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) being the one I probably like most. But I also enjoy the work of Leonor Fini (1907-1996), because of her relationship with her household pets. My own pets are also often featured in my work, not only because I have affection for them, but because I feel they do populate a certain type of personhood in my life. When talking about something to do with a supernatural spirit, like the figure of Princess Bari, I am intrigued by this idea of transmutation, that the spirit can also transfer their image into a

different animal and you are never quite sure who that is. There is this malleability with identity, and in my work, I use the fox a lot based on a three-pronged reasoning. One is that there are many foxes in London, the city where I live, and they are probably similar to the way all city animals live – basically, we have been encroaching on their habitat. The British press always vilifies them because they are seen as aggressive, attacking children and eating our garbage. However, looking at the behaviour of a fox, they are very smart animals. That was one point of interest. In addition, I felt such a kinship and empathy for them because their behaviour, this duplicitous nature has been socialised and become part of their biology, as they need to survive in close proximity to us. I suppose in many ways, foxes that live close to urban centres are like all city animals; they now depend on us being close to survive. So we both have to straddle this dangerous relationship and I was fascinated by that.

I also like the connection to European folk tales: there is Reynard the fox, who is this very duplicitous trickster figure, basically a wayward character. They are considered to be the outcasts of society, as being somewhat dangerous or malevolent. However, sometimes their personalities may change. I wanted to see how this was also related to a Korean, Japanese, or Chinese nine-tailed fox spirit. There are very similar characteristics of being duplicitous, as it can shape-shift, and change its form. Within the East Asian context, the nine-tailed fox often manifests itself as a beautiful young woman. This is another trope of this idea of femininity, stereotypical femininity, or 'womanness' being conflated with this notion of evil and malevolence.

For the nine-tailed fox, depending on what genealogy you are looking at and what country, it is mostly doing this because it needs to eat the livers of its victims in order to sustain itself. Each liver it consumes works towards the possibility of becoming either immortal, or gaining the ability to live 1,000 years, and if it achieves this, it can become human. Ultimately, the goal of this creature is to become human, and that means there is an innate desire to become close to us. This is my reading, based on the fact that I am used to seeing it all the time.

**AAN: Since there is so much happening in your paintings in terms of**



Installation view of the exhibition Rough Hands Weave a Knife, April to May 2024, at Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Paris © Zadie Xa



Tricksters, Mongrels, Beasts (2023), oil on canvas, triptych 240 x 600 cm, each 240 x 200 cm © Zadie Xa

**narrative, how do you go about the composition?**

**ZX:** Regardless of the discipline or the imagery, I do gravitate and understand a maximalist approach. In many ways, I feel it is natural and it is who I am. In order to start a composition, I use a lot of references from my archives on Pinterest, on my iPad, or on my phone. I use these images to inspire me. Then, they become either very heavily manipulated and changed, so the original reference points maybe so embedded that you cannot see them. This is how I usually start a work. I am an artist that is very concerned about where I fit within the lineage of global art history. I am always trying to locate myself in and amongst people that have come before me and/or that I admire, or with work that my work could be in dialogue. Maybe, that is why there is this mirroring effect where I need to speak to different artists. On another note, I may, for example, decide I want to work with the fox.

I want it to almost look like a human portrait, not the same, but I may reference royal portraiture in Spain. In portraiture, it is often about persons of importance, but in my work, I use animals instead. Sometimes, very simple things get me excited. It is also looking at films and popular culture that have nothing to do with what I am looking for or thinking about, but they will trigger visual cues for where I want to go. Since I use a drawing software on my iPad, there is the ability to have a lot of collaging and different layers, so I can try things out.

**AAN: What do you want to achieve with the titles of your works?**

**ZX:** Since I am someone who includes a lot of references within my work,

they are very important to me. I understand that if some audiences are not familiar with these references, the work may feel more obtuse. I am very much inspired by music, especially hip-hop groups from the 1990s. The poetry and the lyricism of the songs, as well as the things they might be referring to whether moments in history or pop cultural moments are important, even if they seem superfluous or frivolous. When you read a title, you read into the story. With my interest in storytelling or perhaps a slight obsession with control, I have this desire to guide the audience, but not in a way that is hand-fed. For me, words are very powerful. They are like magic.

**AAN: Regarding your sculptures, you have completed a piece in bronze, a medium that is new to your practice. Is this an avenue you would like to develop further?**

**ZX:** Yes, this is something completely new. I am all about context and reason. It is definitely something I would like to explore, because it brought something new and interesting to my work. I like sculpture that does not necessarily look like the type of traditional sculpture, and I am interested in objects or things filling up space. Therefore, once one works with bronze and maybe even aluminium, you think about scaling up because the pieces can weather environments and landscapes that are not necessarily a gallery. This is my primary interest. However, I feel it is also something that needs to be closely considered because a lot of large bronzes can negatively affect one's practice. There is lots of bad public sculpture and therefore, I want to make sure that it is well-thought-out first.

**AAN: One of the first contemporary artists from Korea to exhibit outside Korea in the 1990s was Lee Bul. I understand you are fond of her work. In your opinion, what makes her work so appealing, even to the younger generation of artists?**

**ZX:** I am indeed a huge fan of her work and I deeply admire her. She has been very generous, welcoming and friendly to me. I was fortunate to learn more about her work through an exhibition in London called *Rehearsals from the Korean Avant-Garde Performance Archive* at the Korean Cultural Centre. The exhibition was looking at the history of avant-garde performance in Korea from the 1960s onwards. There were many interesting artists to whom I had not been exposed. It was also the first time I saw a lot of Lee Bul's very transgressive feminist performances, where she had been suspended in the air. There are different periods in her career that I find immensely inspirational. She has been working with the body and

costuming in a kind of sci-fi at a time where those performances were incredibly risky in Korea. Also, looking at those cyborg sculptures made in the 1990s, I cannot help thinking how ahead of time she was with her work.

**AAN: Is keeping a studio in Korea an option you are considering, especially now that so many European and American galleries are opening a space there?**

**ZX:** I would love to do that. I find being in Korea very refreshing and restorative. I was in Seoul a few times last year, and one can truly feel the energy. Koreans themselves are very hardworking and competitive. Therefore, when Korean people take something on, they do it full-on. While I was there, I felt the artists, the people, even gallery-goers, were very enthusiastic and there is a good energy that does not feel bitter and jaded the way you may see in other larger Western cities. Even from a practical perspective, it seems Korea is the place that I should be for research: it is more direct, and I can physically go to spaces instead of reading. In addition, there are basic things in terms of production like materials, textiles, and threads, that can be cumbersome and expensive in London. That would facilitate so many more ideas. I have thought about it, and I need to go over the logistics in terms of visa, also because I have two dogs.

**AAN: Based on what you mentioned earlier as to where you fit in compared to other artists, past and present, what would you like to contribute to contemporary art?**

**ZX:** Through my practice, I want to encourage younger artists, artists of colour, or those outside of what the normal London scene is, to feel that the heritage of their family is something that would be an interesting source to use, parallel to other things we were taught in European art history. That is my goal. Without sounding narcissistic, I have this example of a young artist who had a portfolio of all these different Nigerian Yoruba traditional garments and performances and was thinking about how to translate that with her own work. Originally, the reference point was my work, which was very rewarding. It is encouraging that my work is somehow getting external attention and there is some type of validation, as it does not look like what is traditionally seen as successful. In London, it has been very positive to open up this perspective and widen the scope of different types of contemporary art. It is not just me, as I now see lots of different artists that are my contemporaries functioning in a similar way. With a generation of artists doing that, you set a precedent. Ultimately, that is the thing that I am most excited about trying to encourage and present.

An exhibition exploring the diverse representation of women during a unique era of Japanese printmaking is currently on show in Cambridge. Under the Kansei Reforms, (Kansei era, 1789-1801), in the late 1790s during the Edo period, the government became concerned about what they saw as excess, indulgence, and debauchery, and issued new rules for publishing, including prints. Poor harvests in the mid- to late 1780s had led to rising food prices and subsequent riots. The 1790s reform may have been prompted, in part, by the publishing of cheaply printed illustrated books that were thinly disguised lampoons of the government and their policies during this period of unrest. Ellis Tinois writes in the book *Japanese Prints: Ukiyo-e in Edo* (2016), 'In the late 1790, all commercially issued prints were required henceforth to carry a small official seal that read 'approved' (*kitavame*). The presence of this seal indicated that the print design had been approved for publication by a censor appointed by the publishers' professional association from among its members. The seal was impressed on the block-ready drawing and cut into the keyblock so that it appeared on every impression of the print. From 1791-1824 all commercially issued prints carried this seal'.

These strict reforms therefore encouraged print designers to change their design and they began to depict ordinary women doing 'respectable' tasks – working, playing music, and looking after children. A world away from the life of Edo's pleasure districts. However, these pictures did not show real individuals – artists continued to depict idealised fashionable beauties, but now in wholesome situations and scenes that may have been closer to viewers' own lives. To explore this period in Japanese prints, the exhibition has been divided into six sections: The Female Gaze, Working Women, Women in the Public Eye, Children, and Out and About and Socialising. At the same time, poetry groups and others commissioned luxury prints – *surimono* – with a limited circulation. As these were privately printed and for private consumption and not seen as commercial goods, *surimono* print designers were able to avoid the government censors. This allowed for more glamour and eroticism to be on display, as well as the use of lavish materials and techniques like metallic pigments and blind embossing. Works by artists such as Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Kitagawa Utamaro (circa 1756-1806) show how print designers sought new ways of creating images of beautiful women at a time when the government was concerned with public morality.

In Edo Japan, there was a separation of rank and gender, which influenced the roles women could play in Japanese society and the responsibilities they had within their communities. The cultivation of leisure was a key to raising social status as a woman. Courtesans, who worked in the pleasure quarters, were influential in setting standards in dress, hairstyles, and personal cultivation in regards to literature and the performing arts. The sophisticated art of hairdressing reached its peak during the Edo period and the elaborate styles changed so rapidly that there were eventually hundreds of different ways for women to dress their hair, which, in turn, brought an enthusiasm for hair ornaments. Like makeup, hairstyles were indicators of



Woman seen through a window gazing at a book of actors by Harukawa Goshichi, circa 1820-1830, *surimono*, colour print from woodblocks, with metallic pigment and blind embossing. All images © The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge



The Music Lesson by Utagawa Kunisada, 1825, *surimono*, colour print from woodblocks, with metallic pigment and blind embossing

# WOMEN IN JAPANESE PRINTS



A Bad Dream by Kitagawa Utamaro, circa 1800-1801, colour print from woodblocks



The Bamboo Screen Makers by Kitagawa Utamaro, circa 1793-1798, colour print from woodblocks



Dressing the Toddler by Suzuki Harunobu, circa 1768, colour print from woodblocks with blind embossing



Returning Sails at the Beginning of Autumn by Torii Kiyonaga, 1779, colour print from woodblocks

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*Female consumers of prints were drawn to scenes of everyday life*  
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age, social class, marital status, or even profession. In the hierarchical class-conscious society of the Edo era, women could not freely choose their makeup or hairstyle.

Fashion may have influenced some levels of society, but there were still general strict rules in place for makeup, hairstyle, and dress in a population that was divided into distinct social classes. This distinction allowed a visitor to learn to distinguish a married woman from a young girl, a nobleman from a middle-class woman, or a high-ranking courtesan. Edo-period societies, based entirely on a hierarchical system of classes and various rules, were highly influenced by social rank, age, profession, and stages of life, so that women had to be careful in choosing their makeup or hairstyle. Fashion was not just for the Floating World of entertainment that encouraged competition in style; it also had a general social branding function that helped distinguish an individual's status in society. But, as strict as the law was, the system did not stop the attraction of beauty, or the spirit and inventiveness with which women showed in their goal of reconciling social rules and elegance.

In this time of social upheaval, women were also encouraged to be the moral foundation of the country. The traditional notion of the

Confucian family – father to son, senior to junior, husband to wife – was promoted by the government. This system gave the woman a responsibility in producing more children for an enriched family life, and then to nourish and supervise the moral well-being of the children, adding to the vision of an idealised mother.

Although it was mostly men making these alluring prints, women also bought and enjoyed them. Female consumers were drawn to scenes of everyday life where the beauty of ordinary women was celebrated. These intimate, tender and often funny scenes would have been recognisable to women then and remain familiar to us today. They also remind us that women also worked to support themselves and their families.

From promenading courtesans to women artisans at work, this collection of prints reveals a narrative of women from all walks of life in Edo Japan and encourages the visitor to not only explore this female gaze, but also to glimpse into these women's lives who are portrayed doing 'ordinary' things – tasks that still feel recognisable today.

● Until 17 November, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, [fitzwilliam.cam.ac.uk](http://fitzwilliam.cam.ac.uk)

# A SILK ROAD OASIS

## Life in Ancient Dunhuang

The International Dunhuang Programme (IDP), based at the British Library in London, is a pioneering collaboration that brings together online collections from the Eastern Silk Roads. To mark the 30th anniversary of IDP, the British Library is bringing together documents and objects from Dunhuang for the first time in over 20 years. This exhibition complements the show at the British Museum and chooses to explore Dunhuang through the manuscripts, charts, books and letters created by people who lived in this city on the Silk Road over the centuries.

The British Library, British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, and the National Museum of India hold a significant amount of manuscripts and other pieces acquired by Sir Aurel Stein (1862-1943) from the Buddhist site of Dunhuang, on the Silk Road, between 1907 and 1914. Stein made eight major expeditions to the area, exploring numerous sites, which were no more than ruins in the shifting sands. He was also the first foreigner to gain access to the Dunhuang caves, which had been first discovered in 1900 by Wang Yuanlu (1850-1931). Stein's first interest in the area focused on the ancient kingdom of Khotan in Xinjiang, the once flourishing Buddhist kingdom at the crossroads of trade and pilgrimage routes, located on the edge of the Taklamakan Desert. His focus subsequently changed to concentrate on the oasis town of Dunhuang.

Rosemary Whitfield, in her book *Aurel Stein on the Silk Road*, describes what Stein found when he arrived: 'In 1907, Dunhuang was a square-walled prosperous oasis town approached on poplar-lined streets and surrounded with farms, orchards, and well-tended fields. To the south rose several high sand dunes, hence Dunhuang's alternative name: Shazhou or "city of sand".'

During his initial stay in Dunhuang, while preparing for the excavations with early Indian Buddhist art. The caves had been a thriving centre of worship from about the year 400 with those seeking merit along the Silk Road, however, the caves had lain largely undisturbed since 1368 when the Chinese had pulled out of the area. On show in the exhibition is a stencil drawing used to produce the 'Thousand Buddha' drawings on the cave ceilings from the 9th and 10th centuries.

Over the centuries, the caves had remained a place of worship, but had eventually fallen into relative disuse, although pilgrims were still actively worshipping at the site. Wang Yuanlu, the keeper and self-appointed guardian of the cave complex, had moved to the area around 1899. He had also started to raise funds for the restoration and upkeep of the caves. In June 1900, when he was clearing the sand from the corridor of a large cave-temple, he first stumbled upon the concealed entrance to a small room, now Cave 17, or The Library Cave, which contained tens of thousands of manuscripts, printed

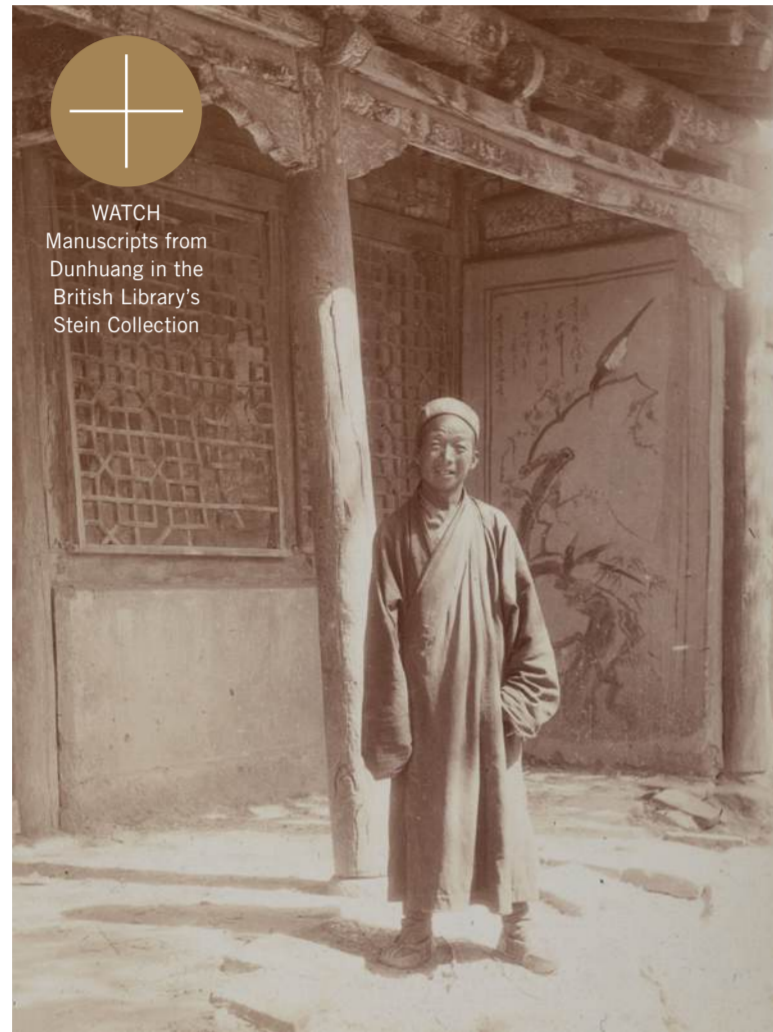


Photo of the priest Wang Yuanlu, taken by Aurel Stein and included in his photographic album, 1907 © British Library Board



Aurel Stein's photo album, taken during his visit to Dunhuang, 11 June 1907 © British Library Board



**WATCH**  
Dunhuang at the Crossroads: The Manuscript Evidence, part of the 'Transnationality and the Silk Roads' webinar series co-hosted by the Dunhuang Foundation and Rice University's Department of Transnational Asian Studies

Old Tibetan Annals, 9th/10th century © British Library Board

**WATCH**  
Manuscripts from Dunhuang in the British Library's Stein Collection



The Diamond Sutra, the world's earliest printed book, dated 868 © The British Library Board

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*These manuscripts document the cultural vibrancy of the city*  
”

documents, paintings and textiles.

Whilst staying in Dunhuang, Stein had heard from a Turkic trader about this cave within the Thousand Buddha Caves that was full of manuscripts and he was eager to inspect the contents for himself. Stein set off to visit Wang in May 1907, and he was allowed his first glimpse of the cave, which Stein reported as having 'two categories of bundles: the 'miscellaneous' bundles, filled with manuscripts in various languages and formats, paintings and ex-votos; and the 'regular' bundles, which he assumed mostly contained Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist manuscripts'.

Apart from the Buddhist manuscripts found at Dunhuang, other manuscripts document the cultural and artistic vibrancy of the city. These aspects of life in the oasis are explored through the stories of the scribe, who was responsible for copying Buddhist sutras into Tibetan at a time when the region was part of the Tibetan empire; the printer, who exemplifies the diverse crafts and skills exchanged along the Silk Roads; and the artist, who painted the spectacular murals for which the Mogao caves are now known. The international network of diplomatic and mercantile exchanges along the trading routes is also revealed through stories from the merchant, who played a major role in trade along the Silk Roads, the diplomat who engaged in international diplomacy and dialogue among the Silk Road kingdoms, and the fortune-teller, whose work regulated many aspects of daily life. The enduring legacy of Dunhuang as a site of pilgrimage and worship is illustrated through the Buddhist nun,

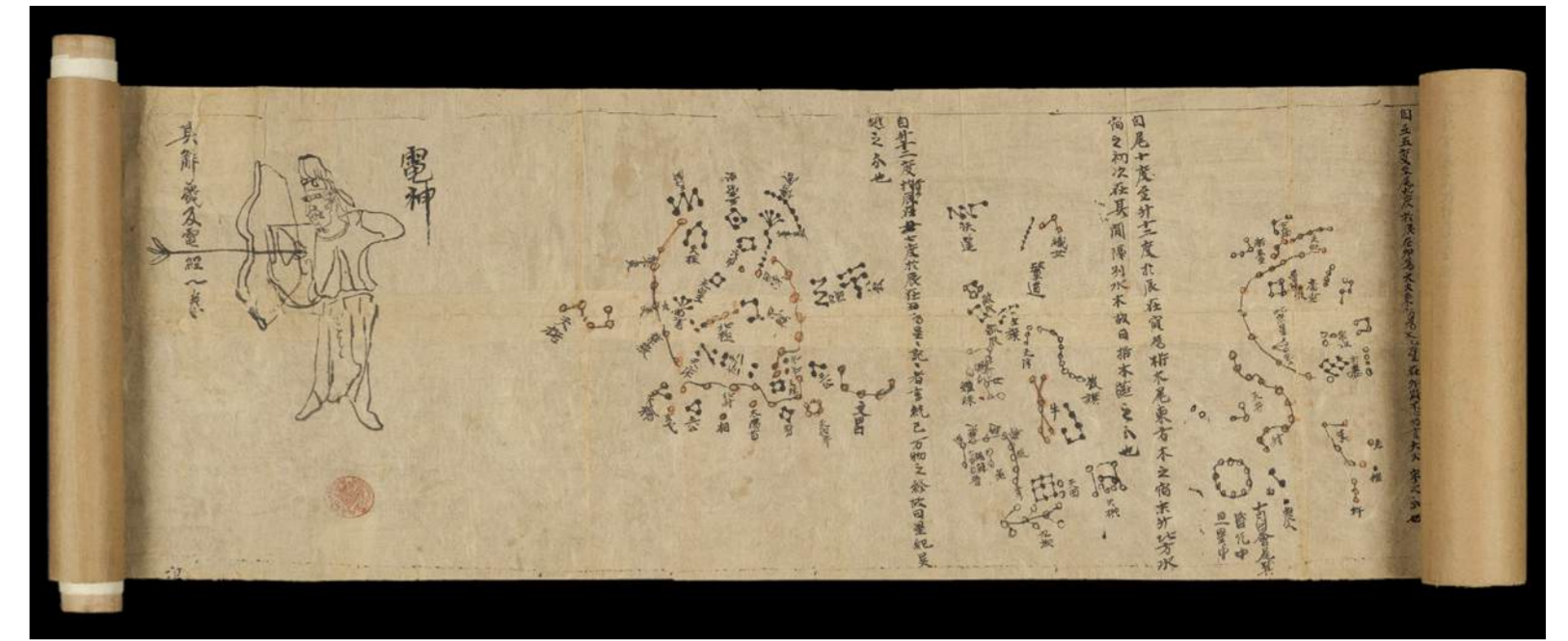
who held an important role in the community, and the lay Buddhist, whose devotion led to the production of many of the manuscripts and paintings on display in the exhibition.

Two major highlights of the exhibition are *The Diamond Sutra* (868), from Cave 17, the world's earliest complete printed book with a date, and one of the most influential Mahayana sutras in East Asia. In the form of a scroll it is nearly six metres in length, consisting of a pictorial frontispiece followed by the text of the Mahayana Buddhism sutra, with the original Sanskrit text having been translated into Chinese. The 7th-century *Dunhuang Star Chart* is the earliest known manuscript atlas of the night sky from any civilisation. This Tang-dynasty celestial chart is one of the first known graphical representations of stars from ancient China, showing each of the lunar months, as well as the north polar region. A total 1,345 stars are mapped in 256 constellations.

Another aspect of the Silk Road is the history of the peoples who travelled its course. The Sogdians, a nomadic race originating in Central Asia were the great traders and transporters along these commercial routes, who saw China as a land of possibility, offering lucrative markets and jobs. Many Sogdians seized this opportunity and found a home, and a living, in China in a variety of occupations: as traders, entertainers, craftsmen, scribes, translators, monks, soldiers, and military leaders. Little was known about the Sogdians until a mailbag that had been lost or discarded in transit was unearthed centuries later by Stein among the ruins of a watchtower in the Dunhuang Limes (a series of military sites spread over more than 140 miles). The bag contained several remarkably well-preserved letters from members of the Sogdian diaspora established in the region. Some of these were still folded, with the address of the intended recipient on the outside. Two letters in the exhibition, written in early Sogdian dating from the 4th century, give textual evidence for Sogdian traders in China, which is reinforced by visual evidence elsewhere of numerous Chinese tomb sculptures (*mingqi*) showing them as traders and grooms, often identified as wearing conical felt

hats. This type of hat was characteristic of the inhabitants of ancient Sogdiana, a land extending over part of modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Their language of ancient Iranian origins served for centuries as a *lingua franca* throughout Central Asia and along the Silk Road. After the Arab conquest they were gradually supplanted by the Khotanese and the Uighurs, who came from principalities located farther east along the Silk Road.

Mobile, multilingual, and highly skilled, the Sogdians did not only carry foreign goods along the Silk Roads and into Dunhuang; they also fostered the transfer of ideas, particularly beliefs from their own culture and those of nearby regions, transforming parts of the world far from their homeland. As attested by archaeological findings, the Sogdians originally practised Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism. On show in the exhibition is a manuscript fragment dating from the 9th century about the prophet Zoroaster or Zarathustra, nearly 400 years older than any other surviving Zoroastrian scripture. Other religions represented by manuscripts in the exhibition include one of the most important and complete manuscripts among the Old Uyghur Manichaean texts, the *Xuastuanji*, a confessional book of Manichaean Uyghurs. Also on show is the longest surviving manuscript text in the Old Turkic script, a Turkic omen text known as the *Irk Bitig*, or 'Book of Predictions'. The *Old Tibetan Annals* are the earliest surviving historical documents in Tibetan, giving a year-by-year account of the Tibetan empire between 641 and 761, with Khotan falling to the Tibetans between 665 and 670. In 2005, monks discovered a 1,800-year-old tomb in the Ngari district, and when excavations began in 2012, they found a large number of



The Dunhuang Star Chart, 649-700 © British Library Board

quintessential Chinese goods inside. The haul lends itself to the idea that merchants were travelling from China to Tibet along a branch of the Silk Road that had been lost to history. Among other artefacts, archaeologists unearthed exquisite pieces of silk with woven Chinese characters *wang* and *hou* (king and prince), a mask made of pure gold, as well as ceramic and bronze vessels.

The Tibetan Empire constantly vied with Tang-dynasty China for control and in the mid-8th century ruled the region for over 100 years, due to a treaty that defined the borders between the two kingdoms signed in 783. By the beginning of the 9th century, the Tibetan Empire controlled territories extending from the Tarim Basin to the Himalayas and Bengal, and from the Pamirs into what are now the Chinese

provinces of Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan.

This exploration of the lives of ordinary people, from the Dunhuang manuscripts, allows visitors to examine the ancient past and to discover new aspects of this oasis town that was a melting-pot of languages, culture, and religion. Melodie Dounny, lead curator of Chinese Collections at the British Library, sums it up neatly, 'We hope to show how these stories from the first millennium still resonate in our contemporary world, particularly in a cosmopolitan hub like London, which so many diverse communities call home'.

- From 27 September to 23 February, 2025, British Library, London, bl.uk
- Catalogue available
- International Dunhuang Project, <https://idp.bl.uk/>



Illustrated Sutra of the Ten Kings, 10th century © British Library Board

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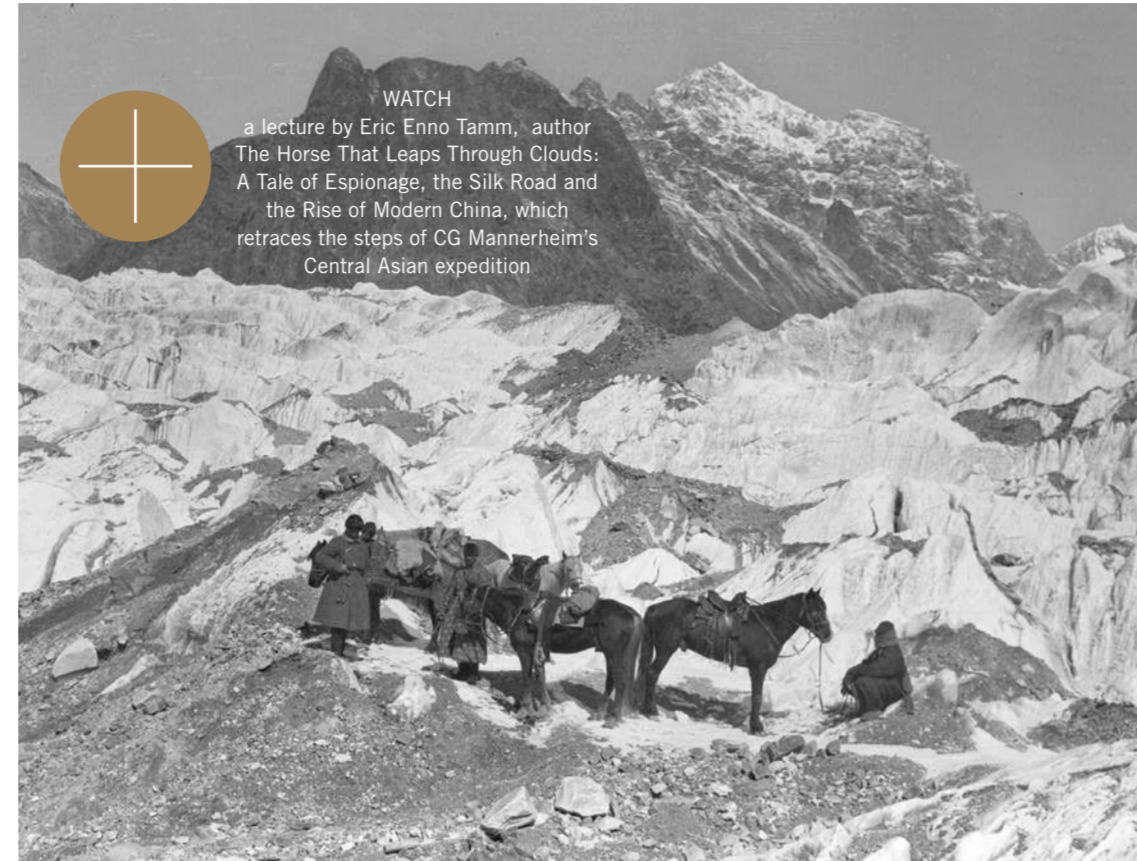
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Mannerheim with local officials, the circuit intendant (daotai), garrison commander (zhentai), and regional governor (difang guan), in Aksu, Sinkiang, in 1907



The Mannerheim expedition climbing the Muzart Glacier. The Muzart Pass crosses the Tian Shan mountains in Xinjiang and connects Aksu in the Tarim Basin with the city of Kujia, it is now more commonly called in China the Xiata Trail



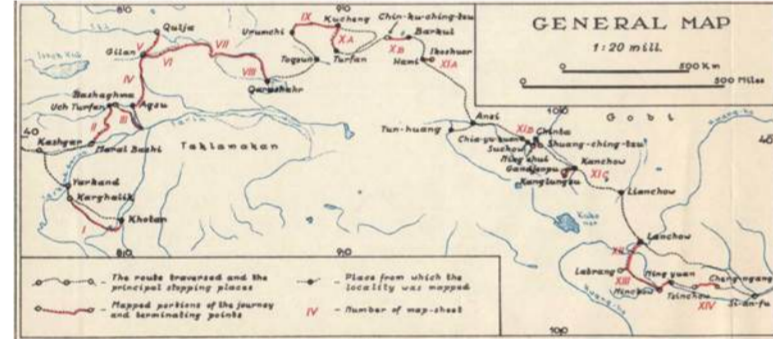
Mannerheim joined the French expedition for a short time, here Paul Pelliot and the photographer Nouette are at the Kok Bulak camp, Issyk-kul (Kyrgyzstan), seen standing near Hassan Beg's tent, in the Alai Valley, Osh region, Ferghana. Hassan Beg was the Kirghiz (Kyrgyz) chief and grandson of the Queen of the Alai



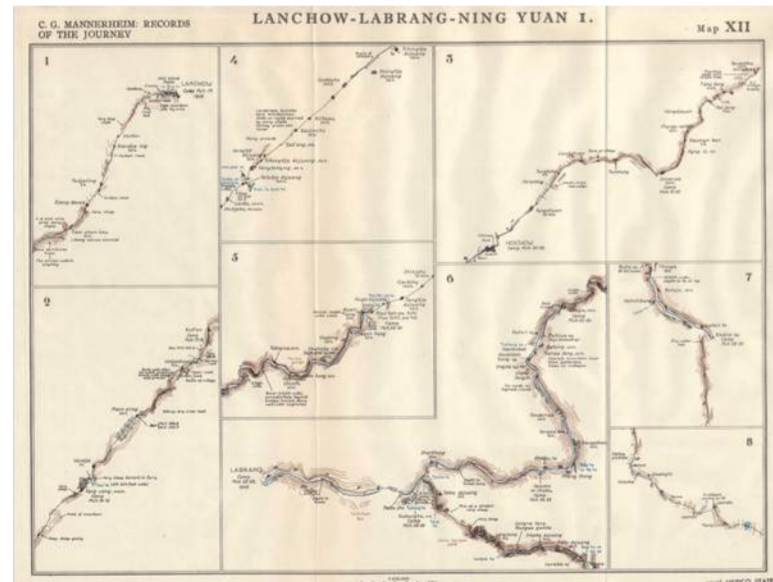
Photograph of the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso, taken in 1910

An exhibition that traced the footsteps of Carl Gustav Mannerheim (1867-1951) was first shown in Helsinki from 1997 to 2001, and explored his two-year journey through Central Asia. In 1906, Mannerheim received orders from the Russian General Staff. He served as a colonel in the Russian army, as Finland only declared independence from the Russian Empire in December 1917, after the start of the Bolshevik Revolution (March 1917-June 1923). He was asked to 'undertake a journey from Russian Turkestan through Chinese Turkestan on to Western China and the provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi and on to Beijing, so Mannerheim set off from St Petersburg on 6 July, 1904, leaving by train towards Moscow and across the Caspian Sea to Krasnovodsk (now Turkmenbashi) in Turkmenistan, on to the approaches of the Silk Road, reaching Tashkent on 19 July in the same year.

# MANNERHEIM IN CENTRAL ASIA



The general map drawn by Mannerheim charting the expedition to Central Asia, 1906-1908



One of the detailed maps, Lanchow (Lanzhou)



Mannerheim spent more than a month in Kashgar, Sinkiang (Xinjiang). Foreign residents of Kashgar: Sir George Macartney, the British Consul-General with his wife; David Fraser; the Swedish missionaries Lars Erik and Sigrid Hoburg, Joan and Ellen Tornquist, and Adolf Bohlin, Paul Pelliot with two members of his expedition, Dr Louis Vaillant and the photographer Charles Nouette. There is a comprehensive archive of over 1,500 photographs by Nouette from this expedition in Musée National des Arts Asiatiques, Paris

The aim of the expedition was to study the conditions of the interior of northern China, collect statistical information, and related materials, and perform various tasks of a 'military nature'. In fact, the main purpose of the trip was to evaluate the state of China, its strengths, military forces, and the repercussions of central government reforms in the parts of China adjacent to Russia. Mannerheim was effectively being asked to become part of The Great Game. This situation had come about because of the rivalry that occurred between Great Britain and Russia as their spheres of influence converged in Mughal India, Turkestan, Afghanistan, and Persia and the British and Russian empires' influence in Central Asia. It was a time of distrust, diplomatic intrigue, and regional spats – a time of spies and military interventions.

It was also a time of groundbreaking research in Central Asia with many countries sending archaeologists to monitor and record the newly discovered ancient cities, monasteries, and other buildings along the Silk Road. Huge numbers of manuscripts were being found along with paintings, sculpture, jewellery, and daily objects representing the many cultures that flourished along the Silk Road. There were expeditions from the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, and Japan, being led by such celebrated explorers as the

archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein (1862-1943), Sinologist Professor Paul Pelliot (1878-1945), Indologist, Tibetologist, and archaeologist Dr Albert Grunwedel (1856-1935), geographer and explorer Sven Hedin (1865-1952), and the Prussian wine-merchant-turned-archaeologist Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930).

For the mid-part of his journey, Mannerheim was to join forces with the French mission, with a condition

of Mannerheim joining the expedition being that it was to be led by Professor Pelliot. However, relations between the two men soon soured, due to disagreements over the financing of the expedition and the question of command. Inevitably, Mannerheim decided to set out on his own. Rumours had circulated in the Russian delegation that Japanese agents had been seen on the outskirts of Kashgar. As Kashgar was at the

beginning of this part of Mannerheim's journey, the local Russian consul also briefed Mannerheim about the movements of British agents in the Pamir Mountains and in Eastern Turkestan between 1904-1906, as well as the Japanese activities in the region in 1905-1906. Mindful of his military duties, Mannerheim left Pelliot and, accompanied by his two Cossacks, set out to investigate the area on his own terms. Keeping to the western edge of

the Taklamakan Desert, he made his way to the oasis towns of Yarkand and Khotan – Khotan having the most heavily cultivated agricultural land and a gathering place for nomads and traders along the Silk Road. This part of the journey was to last over three months.

During the expedition, it was necessary to keep constant note of the distance covered and to observe the country traversed, with everything



Mannerheim with foreign and local dignitaries at a dinner hosted by Sheng Yun, the Governor of Gansu province, Aksu, Lanchow (Lanzhou), during new year 1908



Arms and armour belonging to the Governor of Gansu, recorded as dating from the Ming dynasty



Bayangol shaman Otsir Bo's talisman, cymbals and drum, Ulaan Bataar, Mongolia

“The main reason for the trip was to evaluate the state of China”



Interior of the Kura lamasery, in the Tekes Valley, Kazakhstan

measured, seen, and observed, noted and entered on a detailed map. With great conscientiousness, Mannerheim accrued careful and precise notes of all not only the important features of the main route, but also of the many serendipitous detours. Subsequently, these maps were subjected to detailed and laborious revisions. Mannerheim, by himself and in collaboration with others, made clean drafts of a large part of the original route, but some parts of the material were untouched and remained in their rough state. The atlas published in Mannerheim's *Across Asia from West to East (1906-1908)* is based on these materials. The total length of the mapped route is slightly over 3000 kilometres. Despite

the rumours he had heard, there was no sign of Japanese agents, so Mannerheim returned to Kashgar and spent January 1907 making clean copies of his draft maps, developing photographs, and overhauling the expedition's equipment. He also assessed the objects he had amassed and arranged for them to be sent by rail to Finland. He then continued his journey through the Tarek-Avat Valley to Kirgiz joining the classic northern Silk Road route, where he had the chance to see the looms the women used for weaving textiles.

Later in 1907, he restarted his journey and moved on to Maralbash and Aksu, now in Xinjiang, crossing the Tian Shan mountains and resting

for a month in Urumchi, then onwards to Lanchow (Lanzhou) in Gansu province, Xian, and his final destination of Beijing. The most important stop on the final stage of his journey was to visit the Wutai Shan monastery in June 1908, some 300km from Beijing. Here the exiled 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (1876-1933) was in residence. Born during a time of political turbulence, the Dalai Lama was forced to leave Lhasa as one of the consequences of the British 1904 invasion of Tibet led by Sir Francis Younghusband. Wutai is one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism and since ancient times has been claimed as the home of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, Manjusrī.

During the trip, Mannerheim wrote his diary in Swedish to conceal the fact that his ethnographic and scientific expedition was also an elaborate intelligence-gathering mission for the Imperial Russian army. At the meeting, the 13th Dalai Lama gave a blessing of white silk for the Tsar Nicholas II (1868-1918). In return, worried about the Dalai Lama's safety, Mannerheim gave him a Browning revolver and showed him how to reload the weapon; he was obviously worried about the Dalai Lama's safety.

Mannerheim's own scientific investigations were financed by the Finno-Ugrian Society, with the cost of the object collections being covered by the Antell Collection Trustees, who showed great interest in the expedition and requested him to collect archaeological and ethnographic materials, and manuscripts, as well as study the then little-known tribes of northern China. He had assembled a large collection of material along with approximately 1,500 photographs.

He spent a month in Beijing, writing up reports for the General Staff and cataloguing the final part of the collections. He was still meticulous in his records, keeping a daily meteorological record, writing reports of archaeological excavations, documenting anthropometric measurements, as well as ethnographic and folkloric material. It was from Sarts in Chinese Turkestan that Mannerheim assembled what was numerically the biggest collection of his expedition – over 400 items. Most

of the items come from Kashgar, where Mannerheim had spent a month, which gave him time to study the way the locals lived and worked. In a letter to the Antell Trustees from January 1904, Mannerheim wrote, 'In order to add to the ethnographic collection and to give it more interest, I have tried through extensive photographic work to throw more light on the tribes with whom I stayed, especially from the anthropological and ethnographic point of view.'

Mannerheim successfully completed his mission even though the Chinese government probably knew of his purpose from an early stage in the expedition. At the end of the journey, in the Russian embassy in Beijing, he was shown newspaper articles that speculated on the identity of the foreigner with two names, who had photographed bridges, mapped topography, and surveyed mountains, as well as visiting sites of military importance.

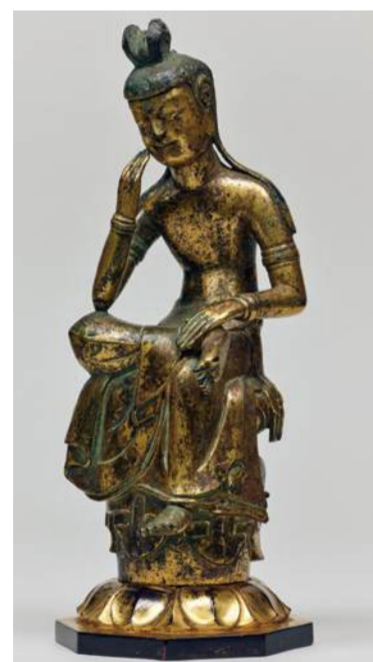
His success came from his temperament, military background, and meticulous preparation for the expedition. Mannerheim had read related literature from the travels of Marco Polo to the accounts published by the Russian explorer Nikolay Przhevalsky (1839-1888), Sven Hedin, and Sir Aurel Stein. In his memoirs he writes, 'It gradually became clear to me that in addition to my military duties I would perhaps also be able to gather scientific material that would help to augment our knowledge not only of the geography of Inner Asia, but also of its ethnography and antiquities.'



Wall painting from the west wall of the 'Hall of the Ambassadors' in Afrasiab, Uzbekistan, showing a ceremonial procession on its way to pay tribute to the ancestors of the ruler of Samarkand, including figures from neighbouring and distant lands as far as the Korean Peninsula, circa 660s, length 11 metres, approximately the whole western wall of the room © ACDP of Uzbekistan, Samarkand State Museum-Reserve

# SILK ROADS

The British Museum's new exhibition looks at the vast scope and influence of the Silk Road by re-examining the notion of these routes as simple East-West trade exchange by looking at the interconnection and interlocking networks between different peoples and how these diverse often transitory populations led their daily lives. As the focus goes beyond the traditional vision of trade, it takes a closer look at the adoption of cultures and beliefs in these multicultural settlements, alongside the new ideas and objects they produced and exported. This complex web of transcontinental relationships and how they were connected is explored by dividing the exhibition into six broad geographical areas: East Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Steppe, Central Asia to Arabia, the Mediterranean, and Northwestern Europe. These trading routes, by land and by sea, have been used since ancient times and bore witness not only to the turbulent histories created by war, geopolitics, and natural disasters, but also to the growth and transformation of these areas brought by merchants, diplomats, pilgrims, and soldiers – of numerous languages and different faiths. The exhibition aims to unearth these human and often surprising links, found on a journey of over five centuries, from AD 500 to 1000.



Bodhisattva with one leg pendant, 600s, found of Mount Naci, Wakayama, Japan, gilt bronze, height 33.3 cm (with pedestal), gift of Mr Kitamata Tomeshiro and others, Tokyo National Museum

little evidence to suggest that individuals personally journeyed from one end of the map to the other, and only certain groups appear to have travelled significant distances themselves. However, these people formed links in long chains that

could transmit information about distant lands. Recent research into mechanisms of exchange and interconnectivity has characterised travel routes as building blocks within regional networks that intersected with each other at key hubs such as urban centres, ports, and markets. Here, goods could be exchanged by relay, from one network to another, creating a chain of segmented journeys that added up, eventually, to a far-flung passage.

The exhibition progresses from east to west, and the first section features objects from Xian (Chang'an) the capital of Tang-dynasty China (618-907), Nara (710-914) in Japan, and Geumseong, the capital of the Silla Kingdom (57 BC-AD 935) on the Korean Peninsula. Xian was a cosmopolitan city and had important links with Buddhism, which had spread throughout China, but also had links to the important trading ports to the south. This is seen in the cargo of the 9th-century Belitung shipwreck, found off the Indonesian coast of Sumatra, which was carrying Tang-dynasty ceramics and other objects. The trading ship, which sank in the waters then controlled by the thalassocratic Srivijaya Empire (600s-1100s), was believed to have been on its return journey to Arabia or the Persian Gulf, showing the extent of maritime trade across the Indian Ocean.

Buddhism was a major religion that



Tang court women in a boat, detail from the north wall painting from the 'Hall of the Ambassadors', Afrasiab © ACDP of Uzbekistan, Samarkand State Museum-Reserve

*“Buddhism was a major religion that travelled along the Silk Roads”*

travelled along the Silk Roads, originating in India; the faith was carried along these trade routes first to China and then into the Korean peninsula and beyond to Japan. In the 8th century, Nara's capital, Heijo-kyo, was an important stop along the Silk Roads, which had modelled itself in the 7th and 8th centuries on the layout of Chang'an. Evidence of this flourishing trade and exchange of ideas can still be seen at the Shoso-in Imperial Treasure

House, which holds imported luxury items from as far as the Byzantium and Sasanian Empires, objects from Central Asia, as well as items from Tang China and Silla Korea. Buddhism also brought a flourishing trade in incense to East Asia. The Buddhist connection between Japan and Korea is evidenced in the earliest religious objects found in Japan, such as the gilt-bronze figure of a seated bodhisattva with one ankle resting on a knee, often referred to as the mediating or pensive bodhisattva, which can be seen in this exhibition. These figures were popular and typically associated with the Maitreya, the future Buddha, in both regions. Some scholars suggest that this example came from the Korean peninsula, based on its style and physical properties.

The section devoted to Southeast Asia to the Tarim Basin looks at the importance of the Southeast Asian kingdoms and the rise of the Tibetan Empire. Luk Yu-ping, a co-curator of the exhibition writes in the catalogue, 'Srivijaya emerged as a polity in the river basin of southern Sumatra by the 670s. Over time, it gained control of the key shipping channel of the Melaka (Malacca) Straits and seems to have

extended its authority to the Malay Peninsula, including parts of present-day southern Thailand and Malaysia. They also capitalised on the commerce established through the maritime routes between China and the Indian subcontinent. Additionally, Srivijaya was a major Buddhist centre that attracted practitioners from abroad. The Chinese monk Yijing (635-713) visited the region as part of his journey from China to India and recorded his journey in his accounts. John Guy notes in his essay 'Introducing Early South East Asia', in *Last Kingdoms, Hind-Buddhist Sculpture of Southeast Asia* (2014), 'Yijing tells of his departure from Guangzhou on a Persian ship in 671, arriving first at Srivijaya before departing for India on a merchant ship from 'Kacha', likely Kedah in Malaysia.'

There was also an intensification of commercial and diplomatic exchanges in the 600s and 700s. Other powerful kingdoms that rose on the maritime trade include the powerful Hindu-Buddhist Mataram Kingdom, adjacent to Srivijaya in Central Java. In the period between the late 8th century and the mid-9th century, the kingdom saw the blossoming of classical Javanese art and architecture reflected in the rapid growth of temple construction with the Buddhist temple of Borobudur being a shining example. One relief found at the temple shows the kingdom's interconnectedness – a scaffaring ship dated to the late 700s or 800s.

The Tibetan Empire, which reached its peak between the 6th and 9th centuries, had a complicated relationship with Tang China, marked by hostilities, as well as peace and diplomatic engagement. The high quality of Tibetan metalware during this period can be seen in the silver vase, dating between 700-900, on show in the exhibition. Luk Yu-ping notes that surviving examples show a blending of artistic styles and metalworking techniques, such as the pairs of phoenixes, a motif found in Chinese art, but also a shape and beaded edge that were inspired by Sasanian models that had spread throughout Central Asia.

The great travellers of the Silk Roads were the Sogdians from Central Asia, now in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, explored in another section of the exhibition. On show for the first time in the UK are monumental wall paintings from ancient Afrasiab, circa 660s, from the 'Hall of the Ambassadors', an aristocratic house in the old city of



Leggings, silk and linen, 81 x 24 cm, 600s-800s, Caucasus, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



ONLINE Silk Roads lecture, 10 October

This figure of a female musician from Tang-dynasty China was intended for burial as part of a larger ensemble. She holds a pear-shaped lute (pipa) that was introduced to China from India and Central Asia in earlier times. During the Sui (581-618) and Tang dynasties, imported music, such as from India, Bukhara and Samarkand, played using the lute and other instruments, was systematically integrated into the court music repertoire © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford



Map of the world from al-Idrisi's Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhra'q al-afaq (Pleasure of He who Longs to Cross the Horizons), 1533 manuscript of a 1154 original. The map was originally drawn by al-Idrisi (active 1154) for the Christian King of Sicily, Roger II (r 1130-54). It follows a tradition in Islamic mapmaking that orientates the world southwards and places the centre of the world in Mecca, the focus of Muslim pilgrimage and shows Arabia as part of the wider world of Afro-Eurasia, and its connection to the Mediterranean coastline extending to the Iberian Peninsula and eastward across the Indian Ocean, reaching China © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford



Gold shoulder clasp from Sutton Hoo © The Trustees of the British Museum



Silver vase, 700s-800s, Tibet or Xizang Autonomous Region, height 16.8 cm, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Samarkand, excavated in the 1960s. The paintings show the cosmopolitanism of the Sogdians and their role in establishing the commercial routes – they engaged in trade across thousands of kilometres, from the steppe to India, China and to the Mediterranean, with the peak of activity between the 500s-700s. The western wall painting depicts representatives from foreign lands bearing gifts, including emissaries from Tang China and the Tibetan Empire.

The Sogdians also established diaspora communities particularly in China, which further facilitated the interaction of cultures. Luk Yu-ping writes, 'The size of a Sogdian merchant caravan could range from just a few to several hundred people, and it may have been joined by travellers from other regions. They traded in a great variety of goods, from horses to gemstones, furs, textiles and even peaches. Many of the western imports in Chang'an probably arrived there through the Sogdians'. They also excelled at making textiles, their richly patterned clothing, particularly with medallion or roundel designs. An example of this design being widely used along the Silk Roads, from the eastern Mediterranean to Japan, can be seen on a pair of silk-and-linen leggings, 600-800s, from the Caucasus region, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collections.

The journey from Central Asia to Arabia looks at the vastly complicated and changing world of the Islamic heartlands. During the 6th and the first half of the 7th century, this area was largely dominated by the Sasanian Empire, based in Persia, and the Byzantine Empire (330-1453), which dominated the Mediterranean world. The Abbasid and Umayyad Empires would also wax and wane in the period covered by the exhibition.

Tim Williams and Luk Yu-ping write

that the Arab conquest led to the establishment of a vast political and economic area under the banner of Islam, in which interregional and long-distance trade thrived. People were on the move and followed the empire's expansion, including the traders, artisans, and scholars, whose travels, in turn, facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas. The rulers of this new Islamic empire had to engage with a diverse population of different faiths, cultures, and languages. The movement of luxury goods into Sogdiana apparently continued during the early Islamic period. This is suggested by the significant discovery of a group of seven elephant-ivory chess pieces in Afrasiab, also in the exhibition – they are the earliest known chess pieces to this day. They were excavated at the archaeological site of Afrasiab in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Coin finds from the same excavated layer help date it to the 700s. Probably originating in India around 500, the game of chess spread to the Sasanian Empire, then across the Islamic world and to Europe. Initially played among the nobility as a means of training in military tactics, it spread westwards to the Sasanian Empire and later became popular across the Islamic world, before eventually reaching Europe.

Northern Europe stands right at the very end of the Silk Roads, and in Britain the discovery of a remarkable hoard, from a Viking burial ship dating to the late 500s/early 600s was excavated at Sutton Hoo in the late 1930s. The people buried at Sutton Hoo were not only closely connected to their Scandinavian neighbours but clearly engaged in travel and trade across huge distances. Items from the Byzantine Empire, Egypt, and across Europe were also found. A shoulder clasp with garnet cloisonné metalwork in the exhibition not only shows the remarkable workmanship of the period, but the long-distance links created by the objects themselves, which combine different types of garnet linked to sources in India and Sri Lanka, as well as to Bohemia (in the Czech Republic). Connections between people and settlements were vital to the success of the Silk Roads; interaction and acceptance of different cultures aided and allowed the diverse cultures to thrive along these complex commercial routes from east to west. The romance of the Silk Roads continue to capture people's imagination today and leisure travel thrives along these routes, bringing a new type of prosperity to regions that had fallen into decline.

- From 26 September to 23 February, 2025, British Museum, britishmuseum.org
- Catalogue available, £30
- Online lecture, via British Museum website: Silk Roads by Sue Brunning and Luk Yu-ping, 17.30-18.30
- In 2014, sections of the land routes were designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, detailed on their website



Seafaring ship depicted on a relief that adorns the Buddhist Borobudur temple, Central Java, late 700s or early 800s

# SPLENDOUR AND BEAUTY

## Ming Gold

Hairpin with phoenix decoration, Ming dynasty, gold filigree set with rubies and sapphires, 14.8 x 4.7 cm, weight 36.1 g, Xian



For the autumn, the Guimet is inviting visitors to experience the splendour of Ming-dynasty (1368-1644) gold jewellery and precious objects for the imperial court. The bulk of the exhibition is a loan of vases and ornaments from the Qujiang Museum of Fine Arts in Xian. Since ancient times, gold has been considered in China a symbol of wealth and social status, alongside bronze, jade and silk. Unlike silver, which became the main monetary value and was used for trade under the Ming, gold was usually reserved for decoration or the making of luxury objects, such as ceremonial tableware and jewellery. Given the value of the metal from which these objects are made, objects from the Ming dynasty are relatively rare survivors, as many of them were subsequently melted down to allow the manufacture of new pieces. Also, as most of the gold items produced during this period were intended for personal use – and not as tomb goods – hardly any gold pieces from the Ming dynasty survive in the Palace Museum Collections. The ones that have survived are linked to the imperial family and were probably interred as personal possessions, such as those found in the tomb of the Wanli emperor (r 1573-1620).

When the Ming dynasty overthrew the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), they restored Chinese traditions and Confucianism to the empire. Between 1405 and 1433, Admiral Zheng He's (1371-1433) fleet undertook six official voyages on behalf of the emperor, crossing Southeast Asia and rounding the Indian peninsula to reach the eastern



Jue, libation cup, decorated with dragons and its mountain-shaped support, Ming dynasty, reign of Wanli (1573-1620), dated 1601, gold set with rubies and sapphires, diam. 10.8 cm (cup), diam. 16.7 cm (tray), weight 342.4 g, Xian

coast of Africa in the monumental ocean-going Chinese junks that then dominated the high seas. All of this was at an extraordinary financial cost. The Western Ocean (*xi yang*) spanned the now South China Sea and extended westward through the Strait of Malacca and across the Indian Ocean to the east coast of Africa. As the emperor's emissary, Zheng He forged the initial links with foreign rulers asking them to give their allegiance to the Yongle emperor (r 1402-24). One of the most remarkable tributes during this period was the gift of a giraffe sent by the ruler of Bengal to the Yongle emperor in 1414 (now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art).

The beginning of the 16th century marked a decisive turning point: in search of new commercial routes to reach Asia, European navigators (Vasco da Gama in 1498, Christopher Columbus between 1492 and 1504, and Fernand de Magellan between 1519 and 1522) opened maritime routes that connected Europe to Asia and the Americas, helping to enforce Ming China's role as a globally trading country. This allowed for the expansion and broadening of trade goods to include gold, silver, spices, precious stones, and even exotic animals to be imported into the empire. The cities of the south also grew richer, leading to the rise of a new wealthy merchant class – and with this – the desire for material comfort and luxury objects to show their rising status. In this context of urban growth, there was a high demand for such luxury products as embroidered silks, goldwork, and jewellery.

One of the first measures taken by the Ming emperors upon their accession to power was to restore the customs and clothing of the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties, considered the paragons of Chinese tradition. This decision reflects the concern of the new rulers to establish distinctive clothing, designed to counter that worn by the Mongols. Ornaments and jewellery made of gold, jade, or silver, such as hair ornaments, belt buckles, plaques, pendants, earrings, rings



Hairpins with palace lantern decoration, Ming dynasty, gold filigree, height 17.6-18.6 cm, weight 23.8-25.2 g, Xian

“  
The Ming restored the customs and clothing of the Tang  
”

and bracelets, were all designed to be essential accessories for the clothing worn by the elite. Much like the garments themselves, these accessories served as an indicator of rank and social status. As such, they were subject to detailed regulations – sumptuary laws – that aimed to define what was appropriate to wear, depending on the social position



Pendant with openwork decoration of winged dragons, Ming dynasty, gold set with rubies, 18.2 x 7 x 3.8 cm, weight 92.2 g, Xian

occupied by each person within the hierarchy. Certain fabrics, colours, and designs were reserved for court costume and identified the wearer as being from the imperial household. This regulation was intended to restrict the use of precious materials while guaranteeing the exclusivity of certain motifs to members of the imperial family and the highest representatives of the administration. The dragon, pheasant, or phoenix motifs were, in principle, also reserved for the exclusive use of the emperor and some of his closest relatives. Ming princes, their wives, and children represented an imperial presence in the regions, and their costumes echoed those of the emperor.

At the turn of the 15th century, and even more so in the 16th century (the period to which most of the pieces in the exhibition are attributed), the production of gold objects and ornaments developed widely. Some of the most beautiful pieces were enhanced with precious stones: rubies, spinels, blue, yellow or green sapphires, or any other rare material, such as white or pale green jade, freshwater pearls, and kingfisher feathers. The imperial court controlled the manufacture of gold jewellery and ornaments made for its members. Craftsmen worked in precious metals in the department called the Jewellery Service (*Yinzuoji*), in charge of making jewellery and other silver and gold objects. The distribution of these ornaments by the emperor to members of the family and court for marriages or new office, was a guarantee of wealth and social success. Gold ornaments were also considered capable of revealing the radiance of a female face, the whiteness of which had long been praised by poets. Regardless of their ostentatious function, they were also part of the livery of aristocratic women and were closely associated with the ideal of feminine beauty. Against this backdrop of economic prosperity and the weakening of imperial power, the manufacture of gold objects experienced unprecedented growth, as wealthy elites still desired to imitate the fashions and practices of the aristocracy. However, these objects were not of the quality produced by the imperial workshop.



Three ornaments in the shape of a bat topped with the character shou, Ming dynasty, openwork gold filigree set with rubies and sapphires, 7-8 x 5.8-6.7 cm, weight 19.8-24 g, Xian. All images Qujiang Museum of Fine Arts © Peter Viem Kwok's Dong Bo Zhai Collection

Buddha figure, Ming dynasty, gold, 7 x 3.2 cm, weight 6.8 g, Xian

Ewer decorated with a dragon and lion playing with a ball, Ming dynasty, reign of Wanli (1573-1620), dated 1601, gold, 27.4 x 21.4 x 7.7 cm, weight 869.8 g, Xian

The choice of motifs was also of great importance, as in addition to showing the rank or wealth of the wearer, they often conveyed a more general talismanic message, such as luck, wealth, happiness, health, or longevity to the person who wears them. Flowers and birds are traditionally associated with the seasons and carry auspicious meaning: the prunus evokes beauty and winter; the peony wealth and spring; the lotus purity and summer; the chrysanthemum integrity and autumn; and a basket of flowers is associated with fertility.

The lantern promises abundant harvests and is associated with the New Year celebrations. Animals are also associated with auspicious signs: the bat is a symbol of happiness; the crab of success; and the butterfly with longevity. Certain elements were also borrowed from religious iconography, such as the staff of Buddhist pilgrims or the attributes of the eight Taoist Immortals, including the calabash or double gourd, evocative of abundance and prosperous descendants. Plants constitute an inexhaustible repertoire of motifs, while flowers, naturally associated with the seasons, allude to certain qualities or virtues advocated by Confucian thought. The prunus, whose flowers are the first to bloom at the end of winter, evoke resilience. The peony, which flowers in spring, is synonymous with wealth and success. The lotus, an aquatic summer flower associated with Buddhism, evokes purity, while the chrysanthemum, whose flowers bloom in autumn, is considered a symbol of endurance.

The vast majority of designs depicted on this jewellery carry an auspicious meaning. This is particularly the case when considering the *ruyi* sceptre, holding the meaning 'according to your desires'. Its end forms a trilobed volute, the shape of which is inspired by the shiny *ganoderma* species: a mushroom to which the Chinese pharmacopoeia links fortifying virtues, and according to Taoist practices, the quest for a long and healthy life. The 'longevity' character itself (*shou*) is also a particularly popular motif found on many pieces of jewellery from this period.

There are themes directly borrowed from religious iconography, such as the figures of Buddhist deities, which were particularly appreciated as

ornament for the central hairpin (*tiaoxin*) that aristocratic women wore above their forehead, on the front of their hair-bun cover. Under the Confucian precept of filial piety, married women (as well as adult men) were prohibited from cutting their hair. It was to be pulled up and worn in a bun. The hairstyle of elite women was decorated with combs and pins of various shapes, the number and patterns of which denoted the rank of the wearer. These are arranged in a symmetrical composition, so that with the exception of the central ornament placed above the forehead, the hairpins always came in pairs.

Taoist themes, such as the Eight Immortals and their attributes, for example, the calabash gourd and the basket of flowers, are also among the favourite motifs for female accessories.

Earrings are among the most common types of feminine jewellery, and seemingly there were three models, all intended for pierced ears. The ear studs feature a small ornament placed in front of the lobe, with a thick 'S'-shaped post at the back which acts as a counterweight. The rings, which can also be enhanced with a small ornament positioned on the front of the lobe, are sometimes decorated with a pendant or a simple engraved motif. Drop earrings are a more imposing and heavier accessory that is suspended under the earlobe using an 'S' rod which rests behind the ear on the mastoid bone or on the neck to support the earring.

A final section in the exhibition is devoted to exploring the main techniques used in the manufacture of gold objects at the time: casting, hammering, embossing, chasing, setting, filigree and granulation, explained through new multimedia content developed with the support of L'École des Arts Joailliers.

The exhibition is organised by the Guimet Museum and the Qujiang Museum of Fine Arts (Xian, Shaanxi, China) as part of the Franco-Chinese year of cultural tourism and the celebration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and China.

- Until 13 January, 2025, Musée Guimet, Paris, guimet.fr
- Catalogue available

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# ASIAN ART IN LONDON 2024

Asian Art in London (AAL), the 27th edition, runs from 30 October to 8 November. This year, AAL has reorganised to group the majority of gallery shows in the auction houses around Mayfair and St James, complementing those members with permanent gallery spaces in central London. Three of London's major auction houses, Bonhams, Christie's, and Sotheby's, are hosting the gallery shows on their premises.

Late evening viewings have always been part of the event with the opening night for Kensington on 2 November, St James's on 3 November, and for Mayfair on 3 November. Check AAL's booklet to see which galleries are participating. The ticketed gala party is on the opening day of the event, 30 October, returning this year to the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington.

A one-day symposium, organised in association with, SOAS-AlphaWood takes place on Sunday 3 November to discuss pan-Asian historic and contemporary art, focusing on a range of disciplines, with panel discussions on ceramics, textiles and metalwork. Email [assistant@asianartinlondon.com](mailto:assistant@asianartinlondon.com), for more information on this ticketed event.



Nightlight modelled as a crouching tiger, kosometsuke, 17th century, Marchant



Pair of mid-18th-century, Chinese export, reverse-painted mirrors, Rolleston



Persimmons (1991) by Daniel Kelly, 120 x 148 cm, Kamal Bakshi

## IN THE GALLERIES

### Kensington

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Marchant,

28 October to 8 November, Kensington Church Street

The show will be the last at the gallery's long-time location in Kensington. *Kosometsuke* is the term used for the blue and white Ming-dynasty porcelain ware made for the Japanese market. This is the third exhibition with this subject matter the gallery has produced over the years, although kosometsuke pieces have been featured within several other Marchant exhibitions. Highlights include a 17th-century blue and white night light, modelled as a crouching tiger, from the Jintsu family in Tokyo – only one other similar example appears to have been published. Also on offer is an incense burner in the form of a rooster, with no other exact examples appearing to have been published. The second exhibition, *Blanc de Chine*, features a collection of figures, vases, and other related objects collected over the years.

#### CHINESE EXPORT WORKS OF ART

Rolleston,

30 October to 9 November, Kensington Church Street

The gallery is presenting a collection of Chinese and Chinese export works of art, showcasing the influence of European style on Chinese design and the allure of Oriental goods in the West. Highlights from the collection include a pair of export reverse-painted mirrors depicting the married woman-unmarried girl opposition, a particularly rare composition of 18th-century Chinese mirror paintings, and a pair of Yongzheng period (1722-35) *famille-rose* fish bowls, made during the 18th century, which were made both for the emperor and for export where they formed part of the imposing decor of European palaces and the Oriental collections of the great country houses of England.

#### WORKS BY DANIEL KELLY & OTHER RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Kamal Bakshi, Kensington, by appointment only

The printmaker Daniel Kelly moved to Kyoto in 1978 and began to study traditional woodblock technique under Tomikichiro Tokuriki. Combining his expansive knowledge of techniques with innovative amalgamations of media, Kelly challenges the boundaries of each individual art form, as well as the limits of his own expression. From concrete to paint, polyvinyl to old book pages, his works push visual distortion and a vital physicality.

### St James

#### OBJECTS OF THE TANG AND SUNG

Paul Ruitenbeek Chinese Art, 1-7 November, at Rupert Maas Gallery

This Amsterdam gallery, new to AAL, is presenting a selection of Tang- and Sung-dynasty ceramics alongside a selection of Chinese lacquerware, scholars' objects, and snuffbotles.



Yao Li Bai Mourning Chao Heng (2022) by Fu Yi, ink on paper, 178 x 277 cm, Mo Hai Lou



Bamboo carved brushpot, Kangxi period, China, 16.6 x 12.3 cm, Ruitenbeek

#### SUBLIMATION

Mo Hai Lou,

30 October to 4 November, at Christie's

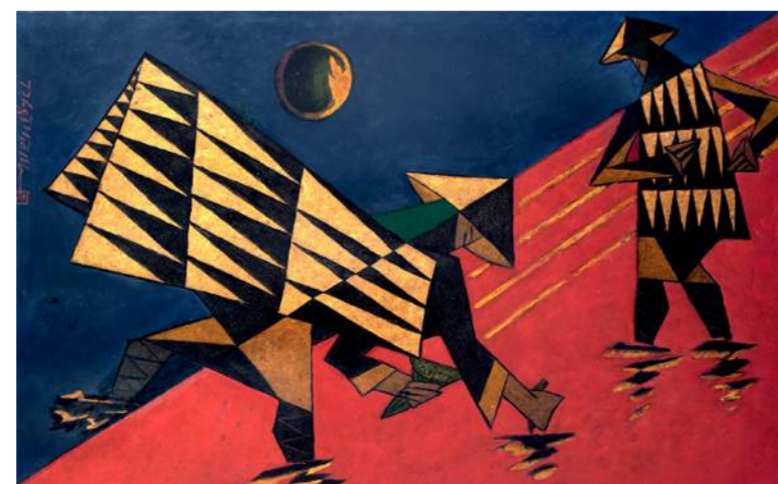
This Taiwanese gallery is presenting a seven artists in a group show entitled *Sublimation*. Each artist presents a unique blend of contemporary artistry deeply rooted in tradition, offering a profound exploration of cultural heritage and creative evolution. The artists are Fu Yi-yao, Tai Xiang-zhou, Su Hsien-Fa, Grace Han, Vincent Fang, Chu Yu-yi, and Chi Po-Chou.

#### BOOK LAUNCH

Feng-Chun Ma,

1 November, Royal Overseas League

Feng-Chun Ma is launching her book during AAL in St James's –



Night Transplanting (2008) Phung Pham, lacquer on wood, 74 x 120 cm, Thang Long Art Gallery

*A Thousand Years of Hundred Boys in Chinese Art, 10th to 20th Century*. This illustrated bilingual volume (English and Chinese) includes 100 items of Chinese ceramics, works of art, textiles, and paintings, all featuring boys, which reflect the importance of having male children in traditional China. Each item is extensively researched and described within its historical, cultural, and religious context, with an emphasis on the rich symbolic meanings behind each object.

### Mayfair

#### A GLIMPSE OF VIETNAM

Thang Long Art,

31 October to 8 November, at Bonhams

The exhibition, *A Glimpse of Vietnam*, comprises the visualisation of human stories painted by four notable Vietnamese artists, each with their own distinctive and unique point of view and rich with character. On show is a diverse collection of artworks by Phung Pham (b 1932), Le Thiet Curong (b 1962), Ly Tran Quynh Giang (b 1978), and Ngo Van Sac (b 1980). The four artists, each hailing from different art generations – from the post-French-colonial era to post-1986 Vietnam's Renovation through to contemporary art – each with their distinct signature styles and techniques: Phung's mastery of cubism on traditional Vietnamese lacquer, Le Thiet Curong's minimalism with gouache on cheesecloth, Quynh Giang's intense expressions through oil on canvas, and Ngo Van Sac's unique wood-burn and mixed media portraits.



Large underglaze blue and copper-red porcelain jar, guan, Yuan dynasty, circa 1320-1352, height 33 cm, Eskenazi

#### BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAIN FROM THE YUAN AND EARLY MING DYNASTIES

Eskenazi, Clifford Street

28 October to 15 November

This is the first exhibition on the subject to be held at the gallery since 1994. The Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) saw the invention of blue and white porcelain as we know it today, creating pieces that are appreciated around the world. The exhibition presents seven exceptional and distinctive objects chosen for their quality including a cup, five dishes and an extraordinary guan jar – one of the rarest porcelain objects to be shown at Eskenazi. Each of these objects showcases the extraordinary

achievement of potters creating blue and white porcelain in the 14th and early 15th century; its manufacture would baffle Europeans for centuries until the beginning of the 18th century when the Meissen manufactory mastered the technique.

The highlight is the guan jar which embodies the innovative, bold and ground-breaking nature of Yuan dynasty porcelain. It is one of a select group of only five known Yuan porcelain guan jars of this design, three of which are in museum collections (the British Museum, London; the Palace Museum, Beijing; and the Hebei Museum, Shijiazhuang). The other was acquired by Eskenazi in 2002 and is now in a private collection.

### At Sotheby's

#### EASTERN EXPOSURE: MEANING & MATERIALITY IN CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART

Sundaram Tagore, at Sotheby's Main Galleries

Sundaram Tagore has organised a group exhibition of work by five contemporary artists who take a process-driven approach to creating paintings and sculptures that explore ideas of cultural multiplicity, alterity, and the natural world. The artists include Hiroshi Senju, Miya Ando, Sohan Qadri, Kenny Nguyen, and Zheng Lu. Additional works of contemporary Asian art will also be on view at Sundaram Tagore Gallery's permanent location, in South Kensington, 4 Cromwell Place.

#### SOTHEBY'S WEMYSS & GEORGE STREET GALLERIES

29 October to 4 November

Eleven dealers are showing in Sotheby's gallery space in the building opposite the main auction house: Art China, Raquelle Azran Vietnamese Art, Hanga Ten, Ming Gu Gallery, Susan Ollemans, Simon Pilling, Runjeet Singh, Jacqueline Simcox, Schoeni Projects, Slaats Fine Art, and Anastasia von Seibold Japanese Art.

*Art China* is featuring the artist Qi Yang, showcasing the fusion of Zen and Neo-Expressionism in contemporary art. Qi Yang, a distinguished German-Chinese artist, has gained international acclaim for blending his unique artistic vision with profound



Silver River (2023) by Zheng Lu, stainless steel, Sundaram Tagore

philosophical influences from China. Neo-Expressionism, which emerged in the late 1970s to the mid-1980s in Germany, emphasises individual emotions, bold colours, and dynamic lines, contrasting with Impressionism's focus on landscapes.

In parallel, Chinese Zen Buddhism seeks enlightenment through sudden awakening. Qi Yang merges these philosophies, creating deeply expressive art. A highlight of the show is *Lotus Meditation* that blends

Continued on page 18



Asian Art in London

30 October – 8 November 2024

[asianartinlondon.com](http://asianartinlondon.com)



Lotus meditation (2024) by Qi Yang, acrylic on canvas, 205 x 160 cm, Art China



Woman with Fan, 1940s, Indochina, anonymous, 55 x 46 cm, oil on canvas in original frame, Raquelle Azran

the spontaneity of Zen art with the bold, emotive lines characteristic of German Expressionism.

*Hanoi Harmonies: Here and Then and Now* is the exhibition offered by **Raquelle Azran**. The 'Here' is the beautiful city of Hanoi, where the French established the *École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine* and which continues to be the vibrant centre of Vietnamese fine art; the 'Then and Now' celebrates the 100 years between the 1924 founding of the art school and today.

Featured are works in oil on canvas, lacquer on wood, silk, and watercolours on handmade paper, plus limited edition woodblock prints and lithographs. The oldest works are by French painter-travellers who spent time in Indochina. The newer works by Vietnamese master painters such as Nguyen Tu Nghiem and Phung Pham and contemporary



In Der Fremde (2022) by Li Chevalier, 100 x 80cm, Ming Gu Gallery

painters Vu Thu Hien and Vu Dinh Tuan span from the 1960s to the present.

Li Chevalier's upcoming solo exhibition, *Unveiled Silence*, at **Ming Gu Gallery**, is an exploration of East-West artistic dialogue.

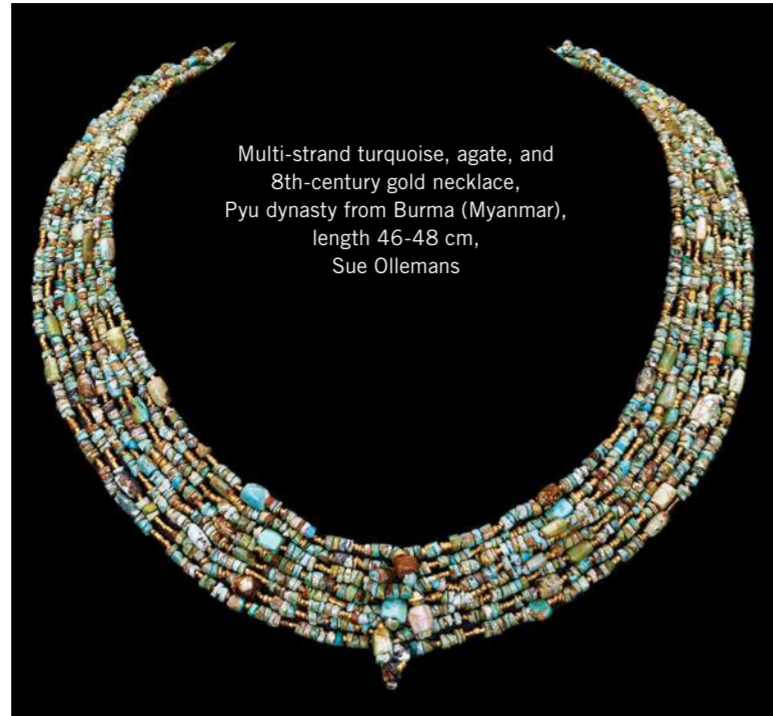
Renowned for her innovative fusion of ancient Chinese ink techniques and contemporary expression, Chevalier's works offer a unique and thought-provoking perspective. Born in Beijing and educated in Paris and London, the artist's work reflects her deep understanding of both Eastern and Western art traditions. Through her masterful use of ink, pigment, and texture, Chevalier creates evocative landscapes and abstract forms that invite contemplation and introspection.

*Intrinsic Beauty: Japanese Works on Paper* is the title of this year's show from **Hanga Ten**, which includes works by Iwao Akiyama, Daniel Kelly, Katsunori Hamanishi, Ray Morimura, Shiko Munakata, Toko Shinoda, and Nana Shiomi.

**Susan Ollemans** is presenting a selection of traditional and classical Asian jewellery from China, India, and Southeast Asia. Highlights of the show include a 19th-century gold repoussé bracelet from Bengal and a multi-strand turquoise, agate, and 8th-century gold necklace, Pyu dynasty from Burma (Myanmar).

The title of **Simon Pilling's** show this year is *The Art of Display*. Traditionally in Japan, life was separated into extraordinary days and ordinary days. Extraordinary days were those of festivals, auspicious events and ceremonies; ordinary days were for mundane work. Many of the objects in this exhibition are pieces created for extraordinary days, transforming the ordinary into extraordinary through design. A number celebrate food – an aspect of Japanese society that has come to epitomise our view of the singular Japanese devotion to raising everyday events to a level of an artform, in harmony with the seasons. Decoration and the art of display, *kazari*, has been central to the Japanese aesthetic for centuries. Those values remain very much alive through Japan's years of modernisation up to the present day.

As usual, **Jacqueline Simcox** will be offering a range of Chinese textiles, including a Ming-dynasty panel of



Multi-strand turquoise, agate, and 8th-century gold necklace, Pyu dynasty from Burma (Myanmar), length 46-48 cm, Sue Ollemans



Imperial cinnabar lacquer 'Buddhist lions' treasure box and cover, Qianlong six-character and suanni baobe four-character marks and of the period, Mark Slaats

green silk velvet, embroidered with a large, five-clawed, imperial dragon chasing a flaming pearl amongst five-coloured, wish-granting, clouds. The dragon is embroidered in polychrome silks and with couched gold-wrapped thread over a padded base. The panel would have been part of a large wall hanging with dragons in cartouches surrounded by auspicious Buddhist emblems such as the Wheel of the Law and Parasol, together with swastikas (*wan*), symbols of light and wishing longevity for the emperor. Another highlight is a 19th-century



Standing tray, Shoshu – Early Autumn, by Bison, Showa period, 1930s, 45.5 x 12 cm, signed tomobako, Simon Pilling



Panel of green silk velvet embroidered with a dragon, Ming dynasty, 84 x 58 cm, Jacqueline Simcox



The First Day of Spring (Risshun), by Suzuki Harunobu, from the series Fashionable Poetic Immortals in the Four Seasons (Fuzoku shiki kasen), woodblock print, circa 1768, 27.9 x 21 cm, Anastasia von Seibold



Evening Moon at Itako (Itako no yuzuki) by Kawase Hasui, watercolour on paper, 1950s, 47.8 x 36.2 cm, Anastasia von Seibold

*kesi* scroll of the Eight Immortals and Three Star Gods gathering in the gardens of the Queen Mother of the West to gather the peaches of Immortality.

The highlight of **Slaats Fine Art** exhibition is a rare imperial cinnabar lacquer 'Buddhist lions' treasure box and cover (Qianlong six-character and *suanni baobe* four-character marks and of the period). Other works of Chinese works on offer include ceramics, jade, *cloisonné*, paintings and imperial lacquerware.

**Anastasia von Seibold**, specialises in Japanese works of art with a focus on 18th- to 20th-century Japanese prints, and is presenting *Shin Hanga: New Prints for a Modern Era*. The exhibition features woodblock prints by key *shin-hanga* (new print) movement artists, including Kawase Hasui (1883-1957), Ohara Koson (1877-1945), Takahashi Shotai (Hiroaki) (1871-1945), and Kasamatsu Shiro (1898-1991).

Alongside these are woodblock prints by two important Western artists who travelled to Japan during the early 20th century and were equally instrumental in the *shin-hanga* movement - Charles Bartlett (1860-1940) and Elizabeth Keith (1887-1956). A highlight of the exhibition is two large and rare watercolour paintings by Kawase Hasui. The first is a moonlit evening scene of boats moored at the water's edge alongside the town of Itako, present-day Ibaraki Prefecture. The second is a springtime scene of an entrance gate of Matsuyama Castle with a large blossoming cherry tree. Extremely rare in comparison to his woodblock prints, both original paintings can be considered masterpieces by the artist. Outside of the exhibition period, artworks can be viewed by appointment at 4 Cromwell Place, London.

## AUCTIONS

### FINE CHINESE ART

**Bonhams**  
7 November,  
New Bond Street

Appropriately, in the year of the dragon, the Fine Chinese Art sale leads with a large gilt-decorated *grisaille* and copper red enamelled Kangxi-period 'dragon' rouleau vase (est £100-200,000). Representations of dragons are closely associated with imperial authority and were often found in early and middle Qing imperial art. This 'dragon' lot is a monumental ink panoramic gilt-embellished ink painting of two imperial five-clawed dragons transposed onto the large-scale rouleau vase. The painting style makes reference to the heritage of Song-dynasty painting borrowing from Chen Rong's (circa 1200-1266) iconic Song-dynasty painting *Nine Dragons*, dated to 1244.

Much of the work of transforming the evolving and eclectic Qing imperial style was done by Liu Yuan, a pioneering product designer and master craftsman at the mid-Kangxi court in the 1680s, who was influenced by Chen Rong's dragons. Another dragon lot is the large *famille-rose* dragon dish with a Yongzheng six-character mark and of the period (est £250-400,000). The dish exemplifies the pinnacle of craftsmanship achieved during the brief but illustrious reign of the Yongzheng emperor, a period renowned for its stringent standards of quality and precision. Rich in auspicious symbolism, this piece would have made an ideal gift for an Imperial birthday. However,



Dragon rouleau vase, Kangxi period, gilt decorated grisaille and copper red enamel, est £100-200,000, Bonhams



Dragon dish, famille-rose, Yongzheng six-character mark and of the period, est £250-400,000, Bonhams



Portrait of Prince Guogong (1702-1768), sixth son of Yongzheng, circle of Jean Denis Attiret, oil on Chinese paper, est £80-120,000, Bonhams

### FINE ASIAN ART

**Dore & Rees**  
11 November, Frome

A highlight lot of the sale is a pair of Chinese imperial porcelain yellow-ground vases (est £7-9,000). There is a London viewing of selected lots at Asia House, New Cavendish Street from 3 to 5 November. A related talk by Katharine Butler and Tuo Zhang, *Can AI Understand Art? Recent research using VLMs (Visual language models) on Chinese Porcelain*, is at Asia House on 4 November at 3pm.



Pair of imperial porcelain yellow-ground vases, est £7-9,000, Dore and Rees



Goto lineage, 18th-century tsuba, Edo period, est £10-15,000, Bonhams

**Bonhams Online**  
1-11 November  
4-11 November, Ben Janssens  
Oriental Art: From Spink to TEFAP  
4-11 November, Collector's Treasures: Asian Art

## CHINESE AND JAPANESE WORKS OF ART

Auction 6th Nov, 2024 | 11:00

Our biannual Chinese and Japanese sales offer a wide range of fine works representing the richness and breadth of East Asian ceramics, sculptures, bronzes and works of art.

Head of Sale Stephen Loakes [stephen.loakes@olympiaauctions.com](mailto:stephen.loakes@olympiaauctions.com) + 44 (0)20 7806 5541

Viewing Times:  
3rd Nov 2024 12:00 - 16:00 | 4th Nov 2024 10:00 - 20:00 | 5th Nov 2024 10:00 - 17:00

An Edo period, late 17th Japanese six-fold screen 'Egrets in the snow'. Estimate £6,000-8,000



Pale celadon jade peach and bat group, late 18th-early 19th century, Qing dynasty, China, height 7.5 cm, est £1-2,000, Olympia Auctions

### CHINESE AND JAPANESE WORKS OF ART

**Olympia Auctions**  
6 November,

**Kensington Olympia**  
Offering a selection of lots from private collections across, the UK, the sale's highlights include a Japanese six-fold screen, *Egrets in Snow*, a collection of Chinese snuffbottles, a Chinese white jade 'peach and bat' group from the Qing dynasty, and a Chinese stone panel from the collection of Peter O'Toole.

### CHINESE, JAPANESE & SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

**Roseberys**  
6 and 7 November, London

This auction focuses on the deeply rooted visual cultural tradition of worshipping various polytheistic religious systems in China. Roseberys has selected a group of porcelains, paintings, textiles, and other works of art that feature illustrations of immortals and deities for the sale. A highlight of this two-day sale is a group of *famille-verte* figures dating to the Kangxi period (1662-1722). These figures were adapted to fit Chinese cultural contexts, blending with indigenous beliefs and practices. This cross-cultural exchange has enriched Chinese religion, creating a unique synthesis of foreign and native elements that continue to shape its religious landscape. Other highlights include a large famille-verte enamelled octagonal vase, also from the Kangxi period. From Tibet, there is a gilt-bronze figure of Buddha



Chinese famille-verte octagonal vase, Kangxi period, height 52 cm, est £20-30,000, Roseberys

Vairocana, dating to the 15th century.

During Asian Art in London, Roseberys's preview is at *Bowman Sculpture Gallery*, St James's from 2 to 3 November. On 3 November, at 5pm, Bill Forest, head of Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian art, is hosting a talk, *The Path to Divinity and Immortality: Heroes and Deities in Chinese Art* at the gallery.

### CHINESE ART

**Sotheby's**  
6 November, London

The top lot of the sale is a pair of *wucai* 'fish jars', estimated at £600,000-one million. The sale is also offering a group of



Pair of wucai 'fish' jars and covers, marks and period of Jiaping, est £600,000 to £1 million, Sotheby's



A group of Qing imperial porcelain from the collection of Sir Thomas Hohler, Sotheby's



## THE IMAGINARY INSTITUTION OF INDIA Art 1975-1998

This exhibition charts a period of significant cultural and political change in India, featuring nearly 150 works of art across painting, sculpture, photography, installation, and film. This landmark group show examines the ways in which 30 artists have distilled significant episodes of the late 20th century and reflected intimate moments of life during this time. It uses two pivotal moments in India's history to survey the creativity and works produced during this period: the declaration of the State of Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975 and the Pokhran Nuclear Tests in 1998. Using this timeframe, the exhibition aims to explore this transformative era marked by social upheaval, economic instability, and rapid urbanisation.

The declaration of the Emergency in 1975 and the ensuing suspension of civil liberties can be seen as a moment of national awakening, signalling how it provoked artistic responses, directly or indirectly. It surveys the artistic production that unfolded over the next two decades or so, within the turmoil of a changing socio-political landscape. Culminating in the 1998 nuclear tests, the show illustrates how far the country moved from the ideals of non-violence, which once had



Speechless City (1975) by Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, courtesy of the artist and Vadehra Art Gallery © 2024 Gulam Mohammed Sheikh



Grey Blanked (1988) by Bhupen Khakhar © Estate of Bhupen Khakhar

been the bedrock of its campaign for independence from British colonial rule.

Unfolding loosely chronologically across both floors of the gallery, the show guides the visitor through this tumultuous time. The artists featured grapple with the shifting context of late 20th-century India; some responding directly to the national events that they were living through, while others

captured everyday moments and shared experiences. All of them combined social observation with individual expression and innovation of form to create work about friendship, love, desire, family, religion, violence, caste, community, and protest. This has determined the four broad sections that shape the exhibition: the rise of communal violence; gender and sexuality; urbanisation and shifting class structures; and a growing connection with indigenous and vernacular practices.

Artists in the exhibition include Pablo Bartholomew, Jyoti Bhatt, Rameshwar Broota, Sheba Chhachhi, Anita Dube, Sheela Gowda, Sunil Gupta, Safdar Hashmi, M F Husain, Rummuna Hussain, Jitish Kallat, Bhupen Khakhar, K P Krishnakumar, Nalini Malani, Tjeb Mehta, Meera Mukherjee, Madhvi Parekh, Navot Altuf, Gieve Patel, Sudhir Patwardhan, C K Rajan, N N Rimzon, Savindra Sawarkar, Himmat Shah, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Arpita Singh, Jangarh Singh Shyam, Vivan Sundaram, and J Swaminathan.

Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2003) was renowned for his vibrant palette, unique style and bold examination of class and sexuality. Khakhar played



Village Opera-2 (1975) by Madhvi Parekh, courtesy DAG © Madhvi Parekh

a central role in modern Indian art and was also a key international figure in 20th-century painting. Khakhar combined popular and painterly aesthetics, absorbing diverse art-historical influences with ease, from Indian miniature and devotional iconography to 14th-century Siense painting and contemporary pop art. He evolved an engaging figurative style, which was part of a new wave of narrative painting and figuration that moved away from the modernist canon in vogue in Bombay and Delhi. His work is represented in this exhibition with *Two Men in Benares* (1982) and *Grey Blanket* (1988).

Another artist whose practice is not confined to painting is the painter, poet, and art critic Gulam Mohammed Sheikh (b 1937). Sheikh spearheaded an art movement that rejected the abstract and non-representation and focused on resurrecting the

narrative for socially reactive figuration closely linked to the living concerns of people by creating a visual language by being open to experimentation and academic influences, referencing Indian and European art, as well as including political events to craft his own narrative.

Madhvi Parekh (b 1942) is a self-taught artist from Gujarat, and the wife of the artist Manu Parekh. Art was a part of her consciousness through childhood memories and her family rituals such as the traditional floor designs of *rangoli*, popular folk stories, and simple village life. Apart from folk motifs, legends and figures, Parekh also uses imaginary characters both in figurative and abstracted orientations, revealing a sense of rhythm and repetition. Often, she utilises the settings of Kalamkari and Pichwai paintings where the main character of the composition sits in the centre, with the minor or secondary ones filling the borders.

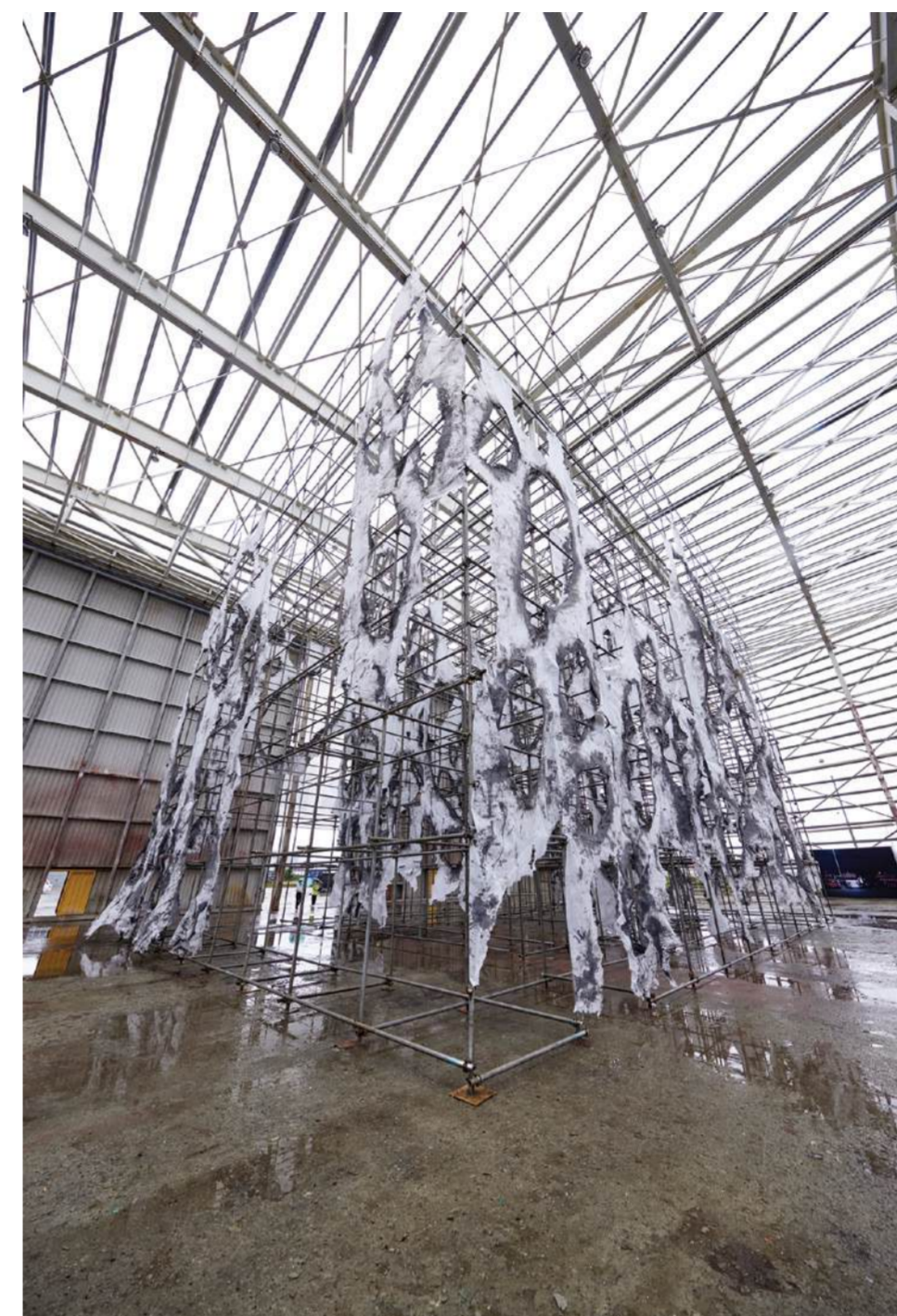
Most artists are represented by multiple works, providing a fuller view of their practices and highlighting the aesthetic evolution in their oeuvres. In this way, the exhibition also traces the development of Indian art history from the predominance of figurative painting in the mid-1970s to the emergence of video and

installation art in the 1990s. Primarily wall-based art in the upper galleries will give way to installations downstairs, with works presented alongside an exhibition design inspired by the transforming urban landscape of India during the period and the shifting boundaries between the public and the private, the street, and the home.

A specially curated film season, *Rewriting the Rules: Pioneering Indian Cinema after 1970*, runs alongside the exhibition from 3 October to 12 December. This season of documentary and narrative films from the 1970s through the 1990s considers the emergence of the new Parallel Cinema – one of South Asia's first postcolonial film movements. Like the trajectory traced in the exhibition, this was a time of shifting aesthetic choices whereby filmmakers rewrote the traditional rules of what constituted Indian cinema, opting for a creative hybridity and experimentation that fused together aspects of Indian art and culture with broader international styles.

- From 5 October to 5 January 2025, Barbican Art Gallery, London, barbican.org
- 26 to 27 October, is a weekend of free entry to the exhibition, coinciding with
- Darbar Festival of Indian classical music (24-27 October), visitors can enjoy Indian arts and culture from across the Barbican's diverse programme on the eve of the Hindu Festival of Lights, Diwali, and the Sikh celebration Bandi Chor Divas

## MIRA LEE Tate Turbine Hall



Landscape with Many Holes Skins on Yeongdo Sea (2022) by Miree Lee © Busan Biennale Organising Committee. Photo: Sang-tae Kim

Miree Lee (b 1988) is known for her visceral sculptures which use kinetic, mechanised elements to invoke the tension between soft forms and rigid systems. This new work will be the first major representation of her work in the UK. Born in South Korea, Lee now lives and works between Amsterdam and Seoul. Using industrial materials such as steel rods, cement,

silicone, oil and clay, her work explores the animated nature of these materials as they pour, drip and bulge. Lee's sculptures have a raw, organic appearance with elements suggestive of living organisms which are combined with machine parts. Motors or pumps channel oozing liquids through them with an unsettling effect. Lee is interested in the power of

sculpture to affect both the viewer and the immediate surroundings and is unafraid to push artistic boundaries in spectacular ways. Her atmospheric sculptures and installations engage the senses and create spaces to reflect on themes of emotion and human desire.

- From 8 October to 16 March, 2025, Tate, London, tate.org.uk



Installation view Drawings on Newspapers (2023), by Sumi Kanazawa. Photo: © Taihei Soejima 2023

## ERASE AND SEE

Work by Japanese artist Sumi Kanazawa is currently on show at the Daiwa Foundation in London. Through an understanding of the contradictions and discrepancies that are contained in our past and present, Kanazawa suggests ways of being more imaginative about how to live now, to problematise distinctions conventionally drawn between individuals, politics and society, and between public and private identities. This is exemplified by her *Drawings on Newspapers*, showcased here.

Like a star-spangled night sky, this large-scale installation radiates the kind of information that floods the world, counteracted through artistic intervention. Kanazawa uses a black 10B pencil to obliterate printed words and images in newspapers, except for those that appeal to her, either for a reason or intuitively. The remaining content is thus excised from its context to weave new stories. For Kanazawa, the erasure of context is a liberating experience, pointing up the discrepancy between an

individual's sense of time and that regulated by society. In this way, her work constitutes an idiosyncratic overview of a social context from the delimited space within which an individual exists. Significantly, Kanazawa creates her work at night, during 10pm-3am, when most people are fast asleep. Her time-consuming artistic process goes against the grain of modern mass- and social media, encouraging us to slow down and break free.

- Until 25 January, 2025, Daiwa Foundation, London, dajf.org.uk

## HAEGUE YANG Leap Year

A first for the UK, this exhibition surveys the work of Haegue Yang (b 1971), considered to be one of the leading artistic voices of her generation. Yang's work is both spellbinding and boundary-pushing, probing into contemporary ideas of cross-cultural pollination, modernism and folk traditions, as well as personal and political histories. *Leap Year* will illuminate Yang's multifaceted, interdisciplinary and highly inventive practice from the early 2000s to today, echoing the Hayward Gallery's mission, as part of the creative engine of the Southbank Centre, to champion artists from across the world whose ideas challenge and spark new ways of thinking.

Arranged into five thematic zones, the exhibition will

include three major new commissions and several new productions to present a visual and sensory experience through installation, sculpture, collage, text, video, wallpaper, and sound. Yang's artwork often transforms everyday domestic items and industrial objects, from drying racks and light bulbs to nylon pom-poms and hand-knitted yarn, into distinctive sculptures and multimedia installations that engage the senses. It also features key works from some of her most notable series, including *Light Sculptures*, *Sonic Sculptures*, *The Intermediates*, *Dress Vehicles*, *Mesmerizing Mesh*, and the *Venetian Blind* installations.

Haegue Yang, commenting on her practice, says: 'My artworks often have very long names with seemingly odd combinations of words that

are hard even for me to memorise, whereas my exhibition titles are much simpler. This naming tradition mirrors my relationship to art-making versus exhibition-making. Art-making is like weaving together a piece of complex, and therefore impossible to un-weave, fabric, while exhibition-making is like tailoring it into something comfortable to wear. Both acts are eager attempts towards perfection. For this survey show, I deliberately unfocused my eyes to obtain the hidden 3D vision of my own practice, which is a rare, perfect occurrence like a leap year.'

Newly commissioned *Sonic Droplets in Gradation – Water Veil* (2024) is part of Yang's ongoing *Sonic Sculptures* (2013-) series. Visitors will be invited to walk through a curtain of blue and silver stainless-steel bells which trigger sonic reverberations, signalling their arrival. The materiality of the work is steeped in layers of references,



Installation view, Latent Dwelling, Kukje Gallery Hanok, Seoul, 2023, courtesy Kukje Gallery. Photo: Chunho An © Haegue Yang

from East Asian traditions and folklore to Modernism, contemporary art history, and nature, and it will act as a physical gateway into an artistic world imagined by Yang.

Modular structures, geometries, and movements are some of the main considerations in Yang's practice. *Sonic Dress Vehicle – Hulky Head* (2018) and *Sol LeWitt Vehicle – 6 Unit Cube on Cube without a Cube* (2018) are two large sculptures adorned with bells, macramé surfaces or blinds. These artworks are activated intermittently during the exhibition's run; they are pushed and pulled on floor vinyl that is inspired by

meteorological charts. Yang's recent work investigates the relationship between matter and spirituality. Working with mulberry paper, Yang explores the use of this material in ancient belief systems and practices. In her series of collages, *Mesmerizing Mesh* (2021-), the artwork references sacred and ritualistic paper objects related to shamanism and folk or pagan traditions, while *The Intermediates* (2015-) features hybrid 'creature-like' sculptures made from artificial straw that draw from global weaving techniques.

Leap Year will conclude with an ambitious new commission of a large-scale Venetian Blind installation,

*Star-Crossed Rendezvous after Yun* (2024). This work features ascending layers of Venetian blinds in varying formations and colours that guide visitors through the space, alongside two breathing stage lights and a historic musical score. Yang's work often highlights underrepresented, even obscured, yet pioneering and referential figures of Modernism. This new artwork was inspired by *Double Concerto* (1977), created by the late Korean composer and political dissident Isang Yun (1917-1995).

- From 9 October to 5 January, 2025, Hayward Gallery, London, southbankcentre.co.uk
- Catalogue available

## DIGITAL HERITAGE NOW! AI With You

This exhibition offers a unique experience that re-explores and reinterprets Korean cultural heritage through artificial intelligence (AI). The exhibition highlights the deepening connection between humans and machines in this new digital era, where human emotions and AI interactions come together to create a unique harmony of feelings. Mind by artist group Shinsungback Kimyonghun, features AI that analyses human emotions observed through a ceiling-mounted camera and then generates corresponding wave sounds by moving an ocean drum placed on the

floor. The exhibition also brings together the enigmatic expression of the digital Pensive Buddha and the varied emotions displayed on the faces of audiences, creating an unpredictable sea of emotions. In addition, the exhibition features digital data of several Korean national treasures, including Mongyu dowondo and the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty, as well as Korean cultural heritage items housed in institutions in the UK.

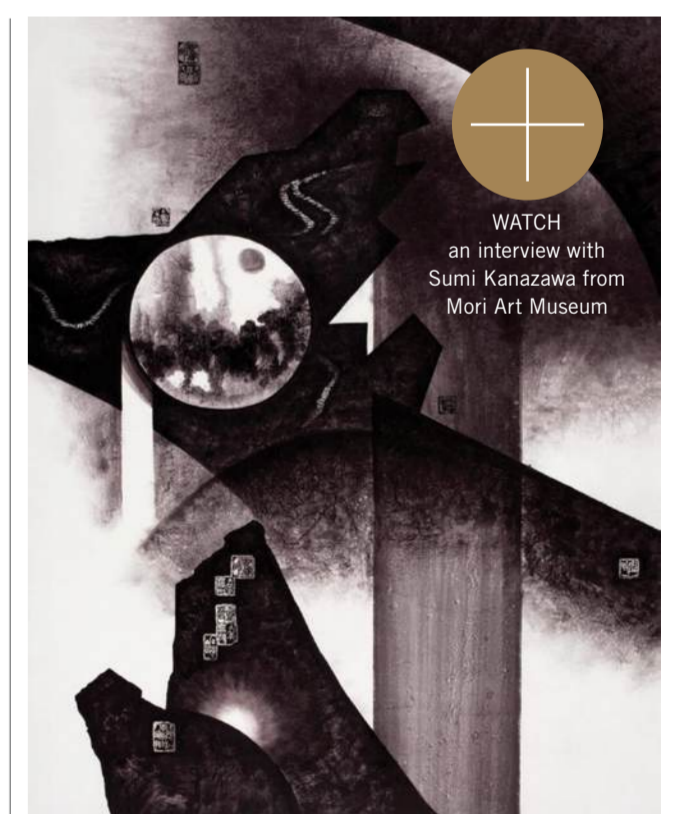
- Until 1 November, Korean Cultural Centre, London, kkcuk.org.uk

## STRANGE WONDERS

Subtitled *Dreams, Desire & Daoism*, this exhibition encompasses a broad and impressive range of works from Jizi's oeuvre from sharply angular, energetic abstract 'mindscapes' to vastly extending scrolls asserting a persistent and concerted creative exertion during his lifetime. This is the first retrospective of the artist, who is also known as Wang Yushan (1941-2015). This presentation brings his work into view for audiences unfamiliar with the artist, allowing us to appreciate his distinctive oeuvre within the historical development of contemporary ink and its hybrid evolution.

Proponents of ink in the mid to late 20th century, such as the modern master Jizi, were influenced by global and transnational developments in the later 20th century. His work exemplifies the hybrid modernisation of ink painting, exploring dynamic compositions in huge works of landscape and the cosmos in dialogue with earlier ink painting traditions and influences from Japan and the West.

Alongside Jizi's work are works by artists who are key figures of contemporary art recognised in China, yet whose work is rarely exhibited in the UK. *Strange Wonders* includes painters



The Dimension of Tao of Ink (2010) by Jizi, ink on paper, 195 x 185 cm

from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as well as those in the Chinese diaspora to place their works into the story of modern ink contextualised within the broader framework of modern and contemporary art that is often dominated by the Western canon. Other artists included are Gu Wenda and Xu Bing, pioneers of Chinese conceptualism in the realm of

the deconstruction of language, and Guo Le and Cai Yuan are included to show forms of abstraction by diaspora artists that can be placed within a broader context of transnational artistic practice in relation to the philosophical discourses of ink.

- From 10 October to 14 December, Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London, soas.ac.uk

## TIGER IN THE LOOKING GLASS



Enter the Jungle (2024) by Chitra Ganesh, watercolour and acrylic on paper, 45.5 x 60 inches, courtesy Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco



LISTEN to Chitra Ganesh talk about her work

From the early stages of her artistic career, Chitra Ganesh (b 1975) has always seen herself as an activist, bringing exposure to causes she felt strongly about and highlighting conditions that needed attention. Born in New York to Indian parents, her focus was initially directed to the condition of Southeast Asian women living in America, a focus that has progressively shifted to broader issues related to femininity, sexuality or power. In a moment

when topics like abortion or gender are widely discussed, Chitra Ganesh echoes these issues, offering ways to embrace them.

As a visual artist who also studied comparative literature, her practice draws from a variety of references and disciplines, bringing together elements from mythology, folk tales, Surrealism, and comics, to name just a few. Her lush paintings that frequently incorporate embroidery or jewellery

feature elaborate narratives that challenge stereotypes and traditions applied to women. Through her diverse practice that is based on painting, installation, and video, Chitra Ganesh makes it a point to create work that is related to our existence and our time. Her latest exhibition is doing just that.

Olivia Sand

● Until 26 October, Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco, gallerywendinorris.com

CHINYEE  
Enraptured by Colour

A solo exhibition by the late Chinese American artist Chinyee (b 1929 Nanjing, China) is currently on show at Alisan Fine Art's New York gallery. This is the first solo exhibition of her work since she passed away last June. Chinyee's work, often been described as 'Lyrical Abstraction', is permeated with influences from both East and West. Her loose, unformulated brushstrokes reflect both Asian brush techniques and years of careful study of modern abstraction. The symphonic, colourful, and optimistic aura of her works is edged with dynamism. Anchoring the exhibition is a selection of works from the 1960s, two of which were recently part of the critically acclaimed exhibition *Action / Gesture / Paint: A Global Story of Women and Abstraction 1940-70*.

The artist commented on her work in 2018, 'Painting to me is a process of discovering, shaping and reshaping my inner being. I work spontaneously – starting with a line or a dot, similar to Chinese calligraphy... then I let the drama begin to develop among the colours and lines under my subconscious control. I seek in my



Dancing Lotus (1990) by Chinyee, acrylic on paper, 106.68 x 75.56 cm, Alisan Fine Arts

work rhythm, harmony among conflicts, lines with energy, and even surprise. I chose to do abstract painting... the language utters energetic rhythm, subconscious cries, and subtle poems'.  
● Until 26 October, Alisan Fine Arts, New York, alisan.com.hk

SHOZO SHIMAMOTO  
The Poetry of Gesture

Bonhams Cornette de Saint Cyr are exhibiting in Paris a selection of works by Gutai group member Shozo Shimamoto (1928-2013), during Art Basel Paris week. This selling exhibition is the first retrospective dedicated to the artist to take place in France and features works from 1950 (the pre-Gutai period), through the Gutai period (1954-1972), to the artist's last performances in Italy from 2008 to 2011. Some of these works are exhibited for the first time.

The Gutai group was founded in Japan in the 1950s and was best known for a broad range of experimental art forms, often combining painting with performance. The pair of shoes used by the artist during one of his last performances are also on display. During the 1950s and 1960s, Shimamoto explored the boundaries of painting by throwing bottles onto large-scale canvases, applying layers of thick matter on them, and perforating the paper canvas, giving way to his *Ana* (Holes) series.

The 'hole' works that he began prior to his participation and membership in the influential Japanese avant-garde group, Gutai Art Association, are particularly significant. At approximately the same time, Italian artist Lucio Fontana (1899-1968) began making perforations in the canvas to restore the picture plane to three dimensions, or create a new spatial depth. Shimamoto conceived his painting as holes, breaking through layers of glued newspapers to achieve this effect.



Shimamoto's live performance at the 2nd Gutai Exhibition, Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo, October 1956 © Osaka City Museum of Modern Art



Punta Campanella 44 (2008) by Shozo Shimamoto, acrylic on canvas and glass

A few years later, following his encounter with French art critic Michel Tapié (1909-1987) and his growing interest in art informel, Shimamoto created several works in this style. These became some of his most pivotal pieces, marking a transition to a Tapié-inspired approach that emphasized materiality and rough surfaces, while still referencing his earlier *Ana*

experiments with punched newspaper.

Highlights of the exhibition include an oil and plaster on canvas untitled from 1960 and *Punta Campanella 44* (2008), acrylic on canvas and glass, and *Bottle Crash*, acrylic on fabric and glass.

● From 11 to 17 October, Bonhams Cornette de St Cyr, 6 avenue Hoche, Paris, bonhams.com

GOOD MORNING KOREA  
In The Land of The Morning Calm

For almost 20 years, Maison Guerlain has organised contemporary art exhibitions within its premises on the Champs-Élysées. Its latest project is to be unveiled in October, coinciding with the Art Basel Paris fair held at the nearby Grand Palais. Entitled *Good Morning Korea: In The Land of the Morning Calm*, the exhibition brings together a group of artists from different generations and at various stages of their careers. Featuring established artists such as Lee Bul, Lee Bac, Anicka Yi, the late Nam June Paik, or Park Seo-Bo, the show also highlights up-and-coming artists like Heemin Chung, Yoon Ji-Eun or Omyo Cho.

The show illustrates what can be observed within the contemporary art world: that Korea harbours a very diverse and vibrant art scene besides, also featuring innumerable artists with outstanding technical skills. No other country can presently pride itself on such a rich reservoir of artists covering all media, with some of them pioneers in their disciplines. The exhibition is also a reflection of how Korea has, over the past decades, become a model of innovations that are widely echoed abroad. With some pieces specifically commissioned for this exhibition, Maison Guerlain is relying on its know-how to make this project not only a visual



When You Believe (2013) by Hyunsun Jeon, detail, watercolour on canvas, courtesy Esther Schipper © Hyunsun Jeon

experience, but also an olfactory one. Good morning Korea is an immersion as well as an ode to a country whose contemporary art scene is

presently unmatched on the Asian continent.

Olivia Sand

● 16 October to 12 November, Maison Guerlain, 68 avenue des Champs-Élysées, Paris

## Islamic Arts Diary



Who Will Make Me Real (2005) by Raeda Saadeh, photograph, archival pigment print © courtesy of the artist

by Lucien de Guise

## THE ART OF SEEING

Orientalist art is back in the spotlight – in a positive way. Last year, there was *Mirror or Mirage?* at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. In 2024, the beam has been focused on one artist in particular, Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) – and what an artist he was. This year happens to mark the 200th anniversary of his birth, but he is so central to Orientalist art that would be possible to see the whole genre through his work. In reality, Qatar Museums has allowed many others into the picture. None of this distracts from his starring role.

*Seeing Is Believing: The Art and Influence of Gérôme* gives due credit to an artist who not only shaped an era, with paintings of exceptional popularity, but also mentored almost everyone who came into his orbit. After spending decades in the wilderness, his role is being reclaimed. This feat is being accomplished in the style that the showman Gérôme would have enjoyed, with the combined resources of the future Lusail

Museum and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art at his reputation's disposal.

Although the exhibition strictly speaking opens in November, it is so early in the month it deserves an October preview. A staggering 400 works are on display, which is a feat not even Qatar Museums could have managed single-handedly. The two institutions doing most of the lending are the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. In addition to the classic Orientalist paintings of the 19th century, this exhibition has plenty of participation from the contemporary world. Gérôme's influence is that extensive. Nor are they leaving out two of the villains – in my opinion – most responsible for degrading the artist's reputation: Edward Said and Linda Nochlin.

In an admirably even-handed way, the curators wend their way through the post-colonial miasma. They even use a currently popular term for the old 'Orient' that works well in this context. MENA (Middle East and North Africa) is an expression that Gérôme might



Rider and his Steed in the Desert (1872) by Jean-Léon Gérôme, oil on canvas, courtesy of Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

have liked, as he did not venture further east than these parameters. It does make me wonder whether the term 'Middle East' will one day be dismissed in the same way that 'Far East' has been dumped in favour of 'East Asia'. Is there some regional resistance to being called 'West Asia'?

The exhibition has been neatly divided into three sections. The first of these looks at the long and energetic life of the main attraction. As a professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Gérôme is thought to have passed on his wisdom to perhaps 2,000 students. A number of these are on view at the



The Pyramids of Dashoor (1858) by Francis Frith, from the South-West Albumen, print from collodion negative, mounted on paper

● *Seeing Is Believing: the art and influence of Gérôme* at Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar, from 2 November to 22 February 2025



The Black Bard (1888) by Jean-Léon Gérôme, oil on canvas, Lusail Museum © Lusail Museum, Qatar Museums

although the Qatar version seems to be a much bigger and more lavish journey. The harem features a lot.

Beyond all the technical and political angles to Gérôme's work there is the pleasure of viewing. His paintings acquired a seedy edge when one was used for the cover of the first edition of Edward Said's book *Orientalism*. Other works could not be further from his naked young snake charmer surrounded by suspicious characters. One that really deserves attention has had several titles, but is basically an equestrian scene with a horse that looks close to death. Anyone with a soul and a mild interest in mankind's relationship with the animal kingdom should love this work. It is neither dry nor academic and is certainly not disparaging towards the Arab rider or his steed. Maybe the reason Gérôme's painting is so moving is because it is so different from his usual output. This was not an artist who left town very often. Palaces, bath houses, mosques, and other urban haunts were his natural habitat. The great emptiness of the desert was hardly his style at all. He had been there, sketched it and then left. The contrast between the slick finish of the rider and horse against the bleakness of their surroundings is a result of his pioneering interest in photography as a record. The horse's chestnut coat glistens in the sun and the tack has the artist's usual precision. All around them, though, is nature at its most hostile.

● *Seeing Is Believing: the art and influence of Gérôme* at Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar, from 2 November to 22 February 2025

## STONE-PASTE PIONEERS

From paintings that show how the Islamic world might have looked, it is quite a leap into the realm of the objects depicted on those Orientalist canvases. Among the favourite items of Rudolf Ernst were Kashan ceramics, or at least vessels that look like they might be from there. Almost always they are in turquoise, which leads us on to the latest exhibition at Sam Fogg in London. *Cobalt and Turquoise* is one of those rare exhibitions that takes us back to the days when 'Oriental ceramics' were a scholarly pursuit. Like-minded men (usually) created the Oriental Ceramic Society more than a century ago and were the subject of a superb centenary exhibition at the Brunei Gallery three years ago. Among the mainly Chinese ceramics that they enjoyed handling, there were also Kashan wares.

The Sam Fogg exhibition explores the use of blue pigments and glazes in the production of fine stone-paste ceramics in Kashan workshops circa



Bowl with underglaze-painted radial decoration, Kashan, Iran, circa 1200-1220

1150-1350. As in those distant days of connoisseurship, the quest was not for quantity. At Sam Fogg's elegant Mayfair premises there are a mere twelve objects. These reflect the diverse production of medieval Persian ceramics workshops and their vibrant experimentation with blue glaze and underglaze-painting combinations. This move to underglaze painting

was a radical step for the region. The majority of objects in the exhibition comprise a group of underglaze-painted pots and jugs made in and around Kashan in the more precise time frame of 1180-1220. A small and remarkably intact water jug decorated with pigment-laden strokes of cobalt blue and incised decoration illustrates the Kashan workshops' pursuit of the translucent and decorative effects of Song-dynasty porcelain, using a Persian jug form. More striking in terms of design are wares such as a bowl with radial decoration in a stunning palette and an aesthetic that seems almost disturbingly modern. More than anything it is the irresistibly tactile, spontaneous quality of these ceramics that makes them masterpieces, admired long ago in an age when all Islamic art was thought to be Persian.

● Cobalt and Turquoise at Sam Fogg, London, ends 11 October

## PARIS IN THE AUTUMN

On the other side of the English Channel, a museum dedicated to Sufi art and culture has just opened. The Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO is the first to explore this field. Located in Chatou, a suburb of Paris, it features a permanent collection of Sufi objects and a programme of contemporary art exhibitions, talks, events and workshops.

The new venue celebrates the rich contribution Sufism has made to global art and culture, from the musical traditions inspired by poets such as Rumi and Hafiz, to the performances and paintings adapted from Attar's writing.

The earliest object on display is from the Achaemenid Persian Empire, around 2,500 years ago, while the latest takes us up to the present day. Probably the

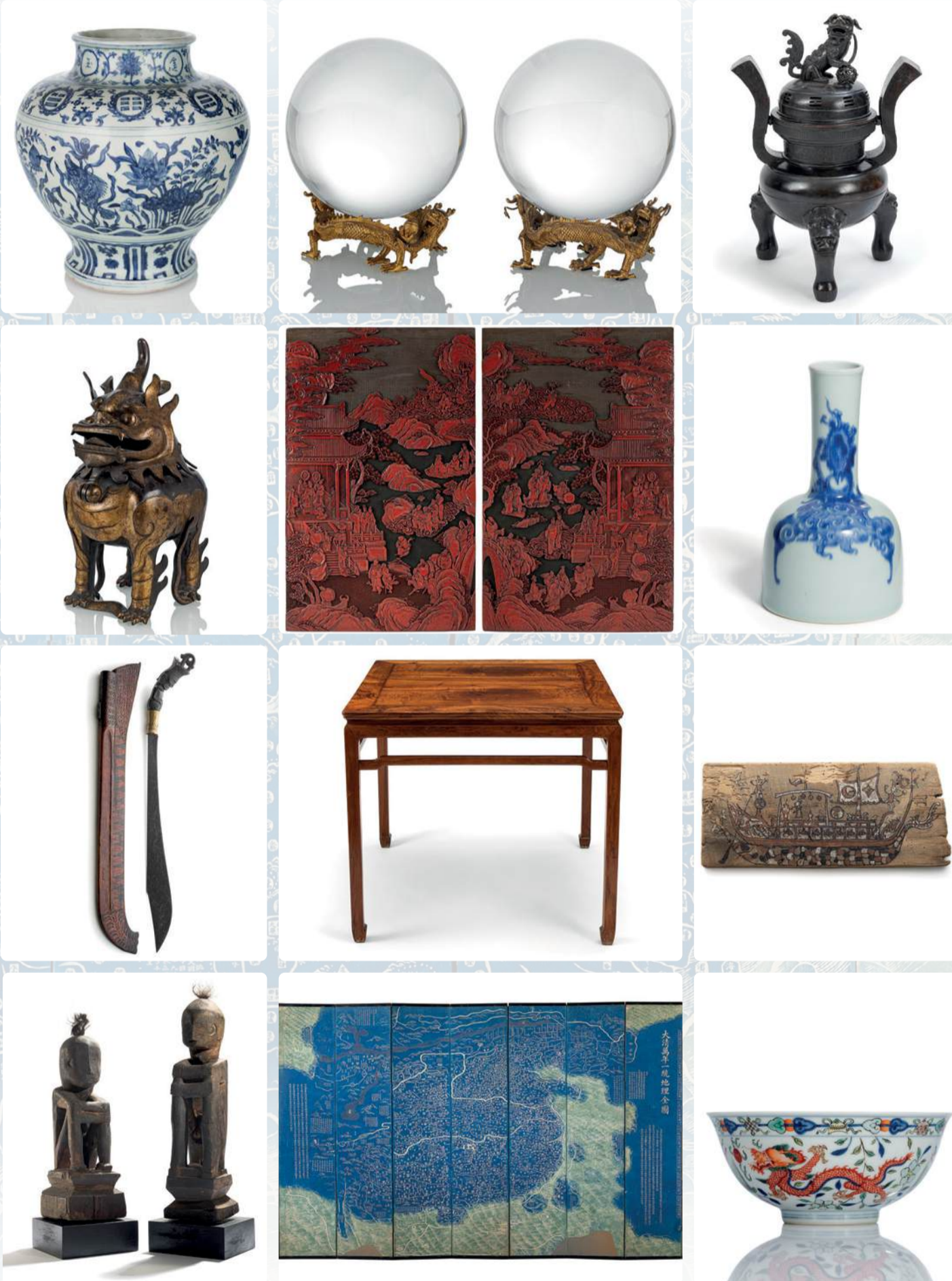
best-known name is Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, one of Iran's most respected artists.

Her pioneering mirror-mosaic works were influenced by the architecture of the Shah Cheragh mosque in Shiraz and the work of leading Sufi scholar, Annemarie Schimmel.

Other features to look out for are gardens. Within Sufism, these are considered to be an earthly paradise. The latest version provides a tranquil and meditative space for individuals and events. It includes a synthesis of the symbolic flora typical of Sufi gardens, such as cypresses, fruit trees, roses and jasmines, alongside plants and flowers often found in French gardens. The new museum is located on the banks of the Seine, facing the historic Île des Impressionnistes, and is housed in a 19th-century mansion.

## FINE ASIAN AND TRIBAL ART

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