ASIAN ART

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THAI ARTIST WINS BP PORTRAIT AWARD

Jiab Prachakul (b 1979) has won the prestigious first prize in the BP Portrait Award 2020. Prachakul's portrait, *Night Talk*, which depicts her close friends in a bar in Berlin. It is currently displayed in the BP Portrait Award 2020 virtual exhibition along with all 48 selected works online, while the gallery in London is temporarily closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Prachakul wins £35,000 and a commission, at the National Portrait Gallery's Trustees' discretion, worth £7,000, which is agreed between the National Portrait Gallery and the artist.

The winning portrait was selected from 1,981 entries from 69 countries. The judges thought the work was 'an evocative portrait of a fleeting moment in time, giving us a glimpse into someone else's life that is beautiful, mysterious and alive. It is loosely painted and the bold composition makes clever use of contrasting shapes'.

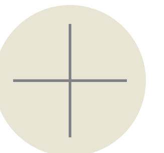
Born in Nakhon Phanom, in northeast Thailand, Prachakul studied filmography at Thammasat University before working as a casting director at a Bangkok production company, where she found she had a talent for producing advertising campaigns. In 2006, Prachakul relocated to London where she had an 'instant realisation' that she wanted to be an artist after viewing a David Hockney retrospective at the National Portrait Gallery. In 2008, she moved to Berlin and began selling her pictures at a local flea market, whilst setting up an online fashion brand, designing merchandise based on her artworks. She continues to run this business from her current home in Lyon. This is the first time she has been selected for the BP Portrait Award exhibition.

Night Talk portrays Prachakul's close friends Jeonga Choi, a designer from Korea, and Makoto Sakamoto, a music composer from Japan, who are pictured in a Berlin bar on an autumn evening. Prachakul wanted to capture their discussions about art and culture. The portrait explores notions of individual identity and how perceptions of selfhood can change over time. 'Our identity is dictated to us from the moment we are born, but as we grow up, identity is what we actually choose to be,' she said. 'I do believe that our circle of friends is what makes us who we are. Jeonga and Makoto are like family to me – giving identity. We are all outsiders, Asian artists living abroad, and their deep friendship has offered me a ground on where I can stand and embrace my own identity'.

The winner of the BP Travel Award 2019 was Manu Saluja for her proposal to create portraits of volunteers working in the vast communal kitchen at The Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. The resulting work can also be seen in the virtual exhibition.

• A catalogue featuring all 48 selected works accompanies the exhibition, priced at £9.99

Night Talk by Jiab Prachakul, 2019 © Jiab Prachakul, which judges described as an 'an evocative portrait of a fleeting moment in time'



CAST YOUR VOTE HERE The Visitors' Choice offers online exhibition visitors the opportunity to vote for their favourite portrait in the show

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NEWS IN BRIEF

FORBIDDEN CITY, BEIJING

China's Forbidden City reopened in May, three months after it closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The sprawling imperial palace in Beijing was shut down on 25 January as authorities closed tourist attractions and took other extraordinary measures to contain the virus in the country. There is a daily limit of 5,000 visitors, down from 80,000 before the pandemic

SIGG PRIZE, HONG KONG

Hong Kong–based artist Samson Young is the winner of the inaugural Sigg Prize. The Sigg Prize, a programme established by M+ in 2018 and awarded biennially, was formerly the Chinese Contemporary Art Award, founded by Uli Sigg in China in 1998. The Sigg Fellowship for Chinese Art Research is a new M+ programme held every other year to support new research on Chinese art. For the inaugural edition, the theme concerns the origins of the 1980s avant-garde.

LA BIENNALE, PARIS

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the health risks associated with the organisation of an international event, La Biennale Paris has announced the postponement of its 32nd edition to September 2021.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART NEW YORK

The museum has created a series of digital initiatives to help its global community feel inspired, connected, and uplifted. The Rubin Daily Offering, is a new video programme featuring art, ideas, and practices inspired by the Rubin Museum's collection to help achieve greater balance. Thursday through Monday at noon on the Rubin Museum's Instagram IGTV feed, practitioners, artists, teachers, and experts alike share 10 minutes of insights and tools that can help open a window into our inner worlds so we can better navigate the outer one. Each week a new speaker joins a Rubin staff member who introduces an artwork, which in turn serves as the inspiration for the offering.

Also available is a two-hour stream of the museum's Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room, which sits at the heart of the Rubin Museum's galleries. This new video brings the Shrine Room into people's homes so they can experience the installation's sites and meditative chants from anywhere via YouTube.

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS PORTAL

Yale University Press commissioned a new ebook for the A&AePortal, its innovative art and architecture platform, going live in July 2020. The e-publication explores the specific ways Impressionism, both as a term and as a style, was globalised. The Press's first original art ebook, Globalizing Impressionism: Reception, Translation, and Transnationalism is a digital-only volume exclusively available on the A&AePortal.

Patricia Fidler, Publisher, Yale University Press Art and Architecture commented that they were delighted to debut the first, original ebook on the A&AePortal.

It meaningfully enriches the platform's ever-expanding library of key works of

continued on page 2

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PALA POTHUPITIYE

by Olivia Sand

Growing up during the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009), Pala Pothupitiye (b 1972) lived through a conflict that had wide ramifications in terms of social injustice, oppression, religious conflicts, confiscation of land, as well as witnessing a vast displacement of people and economic strife. Experiencing some of these issues first hand, it seems only logical that he would address them in his practice, raising awareness towards a country that prior to the war, and independence from the British in 1948, had been ruled by various colonial powers over the centuries, including the Portuguese and the Dutch. Pala Pothupitiye acknowledges that he has benefited from the old colonial system in terms of education, and his goal now is to raise awareness and stimulate discussions when it comes to Sri Lanka's identity and history today. Therefore, whether working on maps, sculptures, or installations, he creates new narratives, looking at the past decades in a different light, working with the idea of reconciliation. The artist discusses his approach more thoroughly in the interview below.

Asian Art Newspaper: Why did you choose maps as the primary medium for your work instead of vintage photographs, for example?
Pala Pothupitiye: It is a long story. I was born into a family where both of my parents were artisans. They were involved in traditional art forms: my mother in traditional, healing spiritual dances and my father designed costumes and masks, which are anchored in our cultural traditions and beliefs. As a young boy, I remember I used to watch them very closely. However, when I moved to the city, I realised that this type of art and its traditions was now considered more as crafts, thus relegated to the category of 'low art'. I believe this mainly happened as a consequence of the colonial influence and it was this thought that led me to use a map in my work for the first time.

After finding a map of Colombo, featuring the English names of all the roads and streets, I decided on the following project: every day, I would go through one specific street at a time, collecting durable, scrap material until I had finished walking through all the roads shown on the map. Once I had gathered everything together, I recreated one of my father's costumes with this discarded material. That was my very first piece. After that, I read a great many books about Euro-centrism, as well as works about the effects of colonial influence on the country. In Sri Lanka, once the war that had lasted for close to 30 years between the Sinhalese Buddhists and the Hindu Tamils was over, I continued my reading and research to find as many reasons as possible as to why the war had started, as well as exploring the various concerns people had raised.

I could not help but wonder about the land issue, as one of the parties involved (the Tamils), wanted to create a separate homeland. The map was the most obvious and tangible object I found. Then, it occurred to me that the map was a very strong colonial object in itself, a tool used to help conquer a country in order to present a 'better' state conceptually. This is how I came to think about maps and, as the next step, I started working directly on their surface, highlighting, for example, historical stories regarding boundary issues between the Sinhalese and Hindus and Buddhism and Hinduism.

AAN: In your case, is the land issue that you address in your work also based on a personal experience?
PP: Yes, it was also a personal experience that led me to work with maps. In my case, I witnessed how during the war people with power took land from the weaker ones. War served as a motive to divide land, a division which also takes place on maps. I come from a southern Sinhala Buddhist lower-

continued on page 4

NEWS IN BRIEF

scholarship in the history of art, architecture, decorative arts, photography, and design.

Given our current moment, e-resources are even more vital for online course work and remote learning. The Press is currently making trial subscriptions available through the end of the current academic year.

SOTHEBY'S HONG KONG

Following the rescheduling update in March, the auction house has announced the full schedule of the 2020 Spring Sales series, from 5 to 11 July in Hong Kong, at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, including Chinese ceramics and paintings, as well as modern and contemporary art.

⊕ More information

KIMSOOJA, SWEDEN

The Wanås Foundation presents *Sowing Into Painting*, a multidimensional project including site-specific installations, film, sculpture, and painting by the artist Kimsooja. Wanås Konst is a unique cultural foundation in Southern Sweden composed of a sculpture park and art galleries on the site of a medieval castle and an organic farm. With this exhibition, Kimsooja creates new works incorporating this diversity of locations and investigates the conceptual relationship between (agri)culture, painting and textiles. The title, *Sowing into Painting*, is also the title of Kimsooja's new planting project, a field of flax. Taking advantage of the surroundings, she cultivates two varieties of flax plants to generate linseed oil and linen. As well as being a physical source of painting materials, the field becomes a fluid tableau woven into the earth. Sown at the end of April, it will grow, flower, and be harvested over the course of the exhibition. Bringing together the whole cycle of life and art, this project expands the notion of painting and textile production that characterise Kimsooja's entire oeuvre. In the Art Gallery space, Kimsooja presents *Meta-Painting*, a new series of conceptual paintings made from raw linen canvases. Relating to the Sowing Into Painting project in the nearby field, these works show the product of the harvested flax transformed into linen canvas and art objects. Stretched into monumental tableaus and wrapped into *bottaris* – Korean bundles – the canvases turn into an installation, a three-dimensional painting.

⊕ For all event information

ROSEBERY'S, UK

The auction house has announced their new auction calendar for June and July. Islamic Arts on 16 June, Arts of India on 17 June, and Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian Art on 28 July.

⊕ More information

SOVEREIGN ART FOUNDATION

The Sovereign Art Foundation (SAF) has announced the names of 31 mid-career artists short listed as finalists for The 2020 Sovereign Asian Art Prize, the 16th edition of Asia's prize for contemporary artists.

⊕ More information

NEW CURATOR PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

The museum has announced that Hyunsoo Woo has become the head of the East Asian Art Department, when Felice Fischer, after 48 years of service, retired to an emeritus position. Hyunsoo Woo arrived at the museum in 2006, after having worked for five years at the Japan Society Gallery in New York as Assistant director and then Interim Director. At at the Philadelphia Museum of Art she assumed the newly created position of Associate Curator of Korean Art, becoming a full curator in 2017.

GWANGJU BIENNALE, KOREA

The 13th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea's largest and longest-running biennale, has been postponed from September to February 2021.

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The Met's rich repository of past programming is sharing some favourite videos, highlighting a cross-section of Asian artworks in the collection.

⊕ **Watch Soyoung Lee, former associatate curator of Korean Art, discuss 'Korea through the Western Eye'**

Summer 2020

PEOPLE
2 Sri Lankan artist and activist Pala Pothupitiye
6 Zhang Peili's latest work in Shanghai

TRAVEL
8 The photographer James Kerwin on travelling and his latest series from the Lebanon and Georgia
10 Pots and performanes: the cultural legacy of Tamba-Sasayama, in Japan

12 Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk, the enduring legacy of Japan
14 *Focus on Korea*
Modern and contemporary writing in Korea. Sacred devotion, a Korean Buddha in the National Museum of Asian Art in Washington DC
15 Celebrating Buddha's birthday, in Seoul.
16 Golden Needles: Embroidery arts from Korea, in Cleveland
17 Contemporary Korean craft, in Philadelphia
18 From the Archives: Venice and the Islamic World
20 Jain art
21 Bali behind the Scenes and Chiharu Shiota in Paris
22 Japanese art in Washington
23 Islamic Arts Diary

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caste family, from a very remote village where there is a great amount of caste friction. As a result, I have seen our land being taken away by the powerful high-class élite. Of course, such an experience does remain present in the back of my mind – and that is precisely where the map comes in.

AAN: Where do you get the maps from? Are they from books and then enlarged, or do you have other sources?

PP: It varies. One of the series I completed was entitled *The South-Asian Map*. It was based on maps produced by the Nepali new magazine *Himal Southasian*, which attempts to make people reconsider the way they look at regionalism in this part of the world. That allowed me to have access to maps covering the South-Asian region, examining the colonial influence, as well as other issues. Beyond these pieces, I also bought some maps from the Survey Department of Sri Lanka, acquiring both old and contemporary Ordinance Survey maps.

AAN: It seems that some of the stories you came across also influenced the narrative of your work. Do you agree?

PP: As well as collecting old maps, I also stumbled across old stories from colonial times. These findings stress that the colonial power that prevailed then is actually still visible now. In my work, I draw from these historical facts and records. A series that goes back to an earlier time, shows that the Dutch built 13 forts around the coastal area of Sri Lanka. This work focuses on the existing link between colonial power and trade, how it affected the country, and how the Dutch controlled the country and its diplomacy. In my opinion, a map is a very colonial object, and the idea of mapping is very powerful: if someone measures you (whether you like it or not) from an hierarchical point of view, you will somehow already be inferior to the person who is conducting the research. The fact is that many countries around the world were submitted to colonial powers. I find the map to be an excellent way to convey and address these issues of power and colonialism.

AAN: Are the maps subsequently glued on to the canvas?

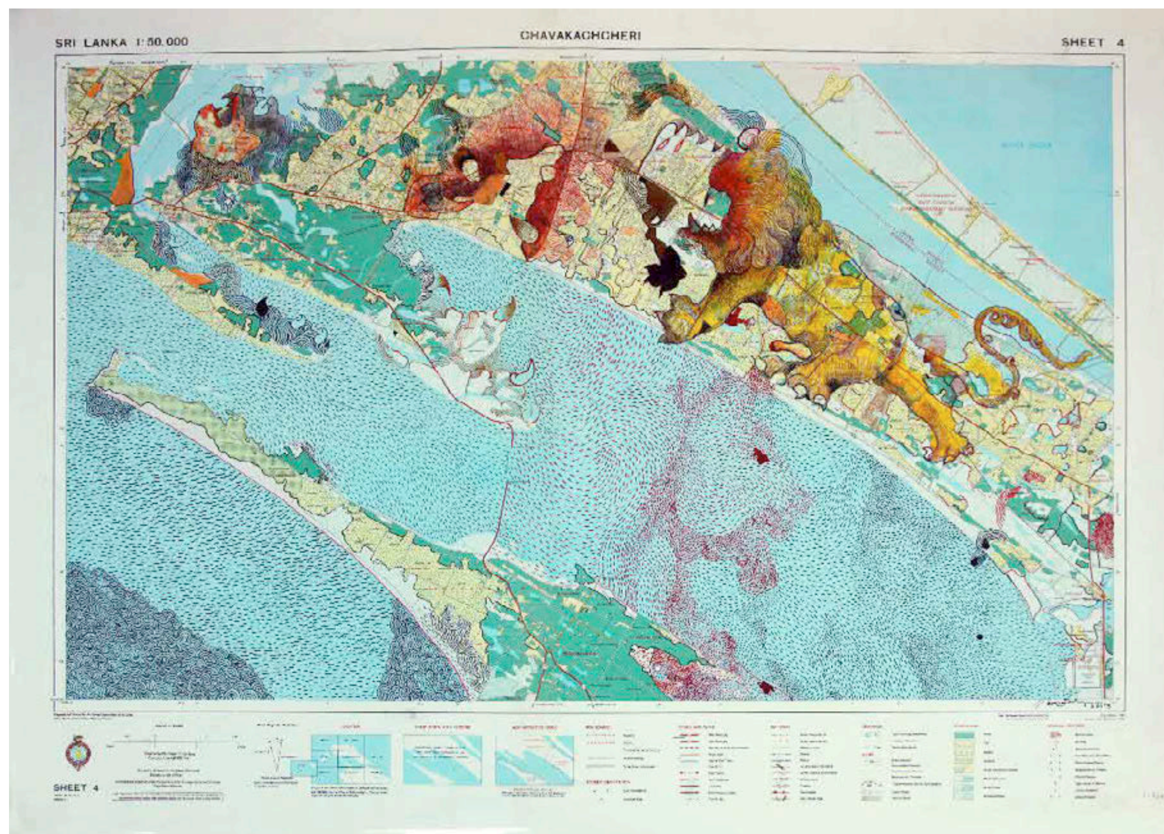
PP: There are different techniques. For the first series, I worked directly on the map. That series was mainly about the recent Sri Lankan Civil War. Then came another series where I actually created half of the work digitally. After it was printed, I added collages and over-painted, where I also relied on printmaking and silk-screen techniques.

AAN: The history of your country lends itself very well to the rich narrative in your work.

PP: Yes, indeed. Looking back at the time during the war, especially with the '1990s trend', artists were the ones who spoke up against the conflict and its consequences, sometimes taking great personal risks. This movement was not only visible in Sri Lanka, but also took place in several South-Asian countries, for example, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India.

AAN: In your work, you frequently feature a depiction of tigers and lions like in the Jaffna Map, which in 2010 led you to win the Sovereign Asian Art Prize, the most prestigious art award in the Asia Pacific region.

PP: I frequently refer to the emblems

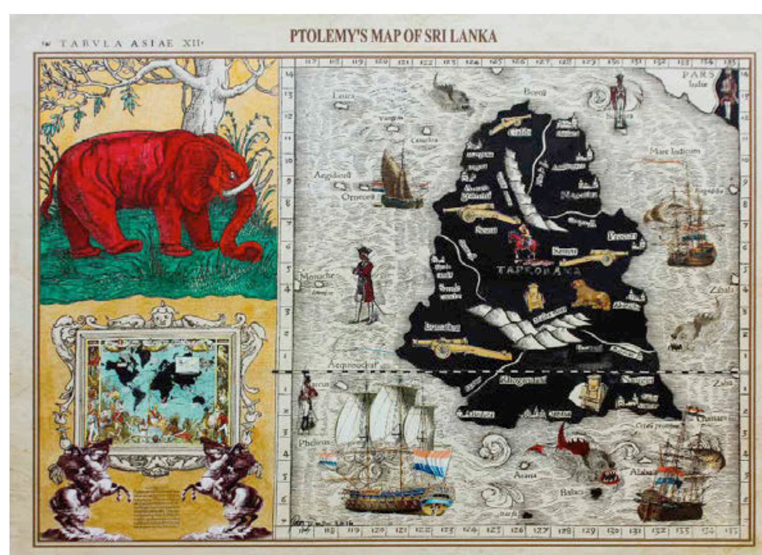


Chavakachcheri Map (2015), government printed map, ink, pencil, Japanese rice paper, 25.75 x 36 in. Courtesy of the artist

of tigers and lions, as these symbols tend to be read according to a specific background. The lion is connected to what is considered the origins of the Sinhalese, as we feel we are descendants of the first king of Sri Lanka – described in the Pali epic *The Mahavamsa*. Vijaya, the first king of the island, was the son of Sinhabahu (Sanskrit: *sinha*, lion; *bahu*, feet). The tiger, on the other hand, was the emblem of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The war opposed these Tigers and Lions: the Tigers being mainly from the north of the island, pre-dominantly Hindu Tamils; the Lions from the south with a majority of Sinhalese Buddhists. Of course, this is a very crude generalisation of the parties involved, but this is the way most people perceive the clash between both sides: the North and the South: the Tigers and the Lions. The LTTE terrorists in the North and the Sri Lankan Army in the South – the Tamil Hindus against the Sinhalese Buddhists.

Within my work, I am attempting to show that there is no difference between the fighting parties, which is why I have combined both symbols together as 'ligers', with ferocious nails and limbs brought out of the map. One needs to realise that it is not the general people that are fighting, but the élites who are generating this opposition and running things from behind the

This Is Not A Hero's Dress (2017), galvanized tar barrel sheets, printed maps, mixed media. 39 x 26 x 11. Courtesy of the artist



Ptolemy's Map of Sri Lanka (2016), acrylic and ink on archival print on archival canvas, 22 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist

scenes. They were the power behind this war, basically controlling and steering it according to their own interests. We can thus refer to the Jaffna élite, the Hindu élite, the Colombo-Buddhist élite, and many more sections of society.

When carefully looking at the map, one cannot really differentiate between the claws and the teeth, or the ferocity between the tigers and the lions. However, the consequences of the conflict have had a deep impact on society, displacing close to 300,000 people, who are depicted on the border areas of the map. While referring to the war, I focus on the land that is, in turn, naturally linked to the map. With this idea of division and separation, there is, of course a huge colonial influence. This was an institutionalised war, a produced war, and I try to showcase this idea through using the map in a kind of surrealistic way.

AAN: How does the local audience react to your work?

PP: I think the public like my work and many local people have also written about it. However, at the very beginning, they were not too fond of it, the reason being that initially I was mainly working with discarded material that I had recovered from the streets. That first series was around the art versus crafts debate, which collectors and art lovers did not seem to enjoy that much. I guess the turning point was once I began completing my map series it then led to exhibitions in various museums at home and abroad. From that moment on, people noticed a different approach and started appreciating my work. It marked a major change.

AAN: You are also frequently depicting tools (knives, axes) as sculptural motifs. How do you relate to them?

PP: The tools in my work have a history, as they are connected to my personal experience. One curved knife, a tea-pruning knife, is used on the estates. During the ethnic violence, this very sharp knife was also used to kill people. This happened in my home town and I know about it first-hand. Before completing these works, I had seen my fellow artists' pieces, such as Jagath Weerasinghe's *Celestial Knives* series, or Masooma Syed's sword made of hair with a silver belt and a buckle. On my side, I want to strongly attach the idea of lion to these tools, whilst also emphasising the shape of the animal. On top of having such a personal connection with these tools, I decided to go one step further by studying traditional drawing, using their sculpture motifs and patterns in order to make my work more effective.

AAN: Referring to the difference between art and crafts, it seems there are two groups: one which emphasises the difference between both and one that embraces both, as all are looking for new avenues. How do you see it?

PP: This debate started in our part of the world in the early 1990s. Curators came to Sri Lanka to meet artists who had been working under the influence of crafts. What I witnessed is that these curators were highlighting the importance of the works which incorporated crafts, crediting only the artist and not the craftsman. Ultimately, this separation has remained with the craftsman still being a craftsman, although the so-called 'artist' had taken their influence from these works. Again, when it came to the arts and crafts debate, both traditions have continued to be marginalised. It seems that this approach has been reproduced in many institutions around the world.

AAN: Based on the way you are working, are you also trying to bring that approach to your current work by featuring some of today's issues?

PP: Actually, yes. When working on my pieces, I also try to address current issues through the map. On one hand, the map is history, but on the other, it can also harbour many different readings and understandings. It can be a real map, a geographical map, or a conceptual map with various readings of society. Then the map becomes a lens that allows me to consider all these things.

AAN: What type of current issues are you referring to?

PP: For example, while I was working on the South-Asian Map series, I was examining the conflict in Kashmir, as well as the huge environmental issues in the whole of the South-Asian region. People in India or Pakistan especially show little concern for the environment, mindlessly throwing things on the ground, thus destroying the environment. This then accumulates, unattended, and increases the risk of diseases like malaria and dengue, among others. These are just a few examples of the present issues I try to tackle through my work.

AAN: When addressing issues that are considered sensitive, have you faced any problems in terms of censorship?

PP: Yes, absolutely. I have encountered major difficulties, as I wanted to send my work to Hong Kong. My shipment was stopped at the airport in Sri Lanka by security, as my work was said to feature the LTTE logo, which of course was not the case. I had only painted tigers on the map, as I had done previously, actually painting both, lions and tigers – the symbols of the people who have been fighting. Because of a fabricated story, I had to justify myself, my work was very thoroughly checked, officials visited my studio and I had to request permission to send my work abroad. The whole incident was very disturbing, but ultimately I managed to get my work to Hong Kong.

AAN: As a result, are you practising a kind of self-censorship within your art?

PP: I do not care about these things. I do whatever I have to do, as I think artists have a responsibility towards society. Therefore, I take it as it is without paying attention to what other people might say. However, I care a great deal about what I feature and include in my work, such as people's pictures, or their stories, for example. Everything else is of little importance and does not impact my work in any way.

AAN: When you say that as an artist, you feel you have a certain responsibility towards society, can you elaborate and be more specific?

> *I try to address current issues through my maps*

PP: Artists cannot simply venture into these commercial undertakings just for the sake of earning money, focusing on commissions and commercial work. Of course, as artists, we have been criticised for the issues we address in our work. However, it resonates with people's feelings and their way of thinking, as they appreciate and acquire our work. Therefore, I strongly believe that artists have a larger responsibility towards society.

AAN: Today, considering the times you experienced and have lived through during the war, what does the concept of 'country' mean to you?
PP: In my opinion, the idea of country is also a colonial idea. It is the same for the idea of this island which has had many names given by the colonisers. In a contemporary situation, the notions of country, identity, and boundary are strongly intertwined and cannot be separated from one another. Sometimes, we believe we have a country, when as a matter of fact, we live within the boundaries created by the colonisers.

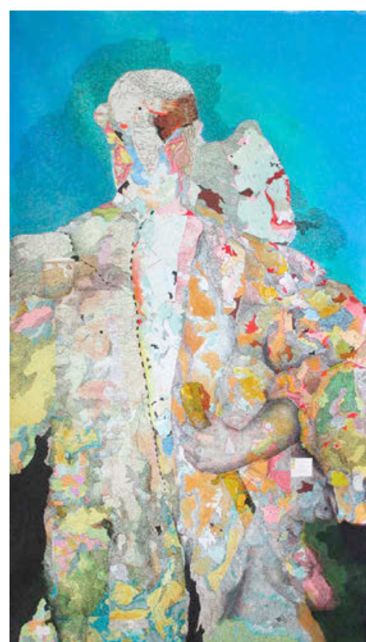
AAN: In your opinion, is Sri Lanka's contemporary art acknowledged and appreciated in all its diversity?
PP: Today, whenever curators and collectors come to Sri Lanka, they have a tendency to 'anthropologise' our history of violence. It seems that the only thing they are looking for within our work is violence. For example, Colombo now has a Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art which opened in December 2019. Its first exhibition is exactly about what I was referring to earlier, 'anthrophologising' the violence in Sri Lanka and primarily focusing on that aspect. After the war, there was a big market regarding this tragic event and its history. However, I believe that today, there are other ways to look at contemporary art in Sri Lanka, which have yet to be explored.

AAN: When it comes to contemporary art within this region, collectors and curators often tend to mainly focus on India. Why is that?
PP: It is all related to our history. A long time ago, the Sri Lankans had a war with an Indian King which led to the colonisation of Sri Lanka by India. This attitude is still present. During the civil war, from 1983 to 2009, we artists were working on the island and there were no galleries, no curators, no collectors, there was absolutely nothing. We were basically just working for ourselves. Based on my experience, when it comes to India, having many museums with collectors, artists, curators visiting their country, does not always imply that the art to be found there is of great intellectual quality. Overall, and from what I have seen, it tends to be very commercial and quite Euro-centric. The main focus and aim seem to be towards being included in the Venice Biennale, or in an exhibition at Tate Modern. I am not at all aligned with that line of thinking and I tend to follow a different route: I am not going after museums, and I do not do any commissions solely for commercial purposes, regardless of the money offered. I had an artist friend who was involved in that system in India and after completing commissioned works for five years, he was empty and had no more outlook or perspective as to where his work was going. He may have earned a lot of money, gained some fame, but in my opinion, he lost his creative edge in the process.

South Asia Map. Credit: Lalith Manage, Theertha Artists' Collective, Colombo

AAN: Has the situation recently changed in Sri Lanka ?
PP: The situation has improved and artists are concentrating on their work, with museum curators and collectors from India also coming to Sri Lanka. Artists should have the luxury of focusing on their work, avoiding worrying about the market, about how to get their work into private collections and prestigious museums.

AAN: Several years ago, a biennale was taking place in Colombo. Why was there no additional biennale after the 2016 edition?
PP: I guess it did not continue because Sri Lanka does not have the money to stage such a biennale. A biennale, like the Venice Biennale or the Kochi Muziris Biennale, requires many sponsors which we do not have. Also, during the last edition, there were several problems, one of them also being difficulties amongst the different galleries. Therefore, it was bound to fail and to disappear. Another problem was that the biennale, of which there were four editions, remained totally unknown to people as soon as you went 10 kilometres outside Colombo. Basically, artists were exhibiting and the art circles, the diplomats, and the élite were hosting events and parties, but nothing else happened beyond that. The biennale did not nurture any knowledge beyond an already initiated circle. It lacked direction. I do not believe such a biennale would presently work in this part of the world.



Degree Holder (2017). Credit: Lalith Manage, Theertha Artists' Collective, Colombo.

AAN: Are the activities of the recently launched Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Colombo helpful in creating an impact, or does it seem to be a rather conservative and traditional undertaking?
PP: I find it very conservative. Although I was invited to participate in their exhibition, I decided not to. As I indicated earlier, they were looking at Sri Lankan art by 'anthropologising' violence, neglecting many other areas that have remained left out. That is my personal opinion and I am aware of the fact that when it comes to my work, I can be quite outspoken: when I have something to say, I say it and if there is something that bothers me and disturbs me, I voice it too. I am a firm believer in the power of blunt honesty.

AAN: You are involved in running various art spaces in Colombo. What type of art spaces are they, and what is the goal of their undertaking?
PP: I am on the board of directors and also one of the founding members of Theertha Artist's Collective in Colombo. As I indicated earlier, I am from the countryside and for people in Colombo, people like myself were considered outsiders, all the more so as we did not speak English, and it seemed we did not quite know how to behave in the gallery space, restaurants, and other places. If you are unable to speak English fluently, people will look down upon you as a village boy. At that time, it was difficult to survive in Colombo, because no one was supporting us. The collective has done incredible things for the art scene. For example, they gave me a job, allowing me to work there three days a week, giving me the opportunity to devote the rest of my time to my art practice in the studio. In addition, they gave me money to attend classes at the British Council in order to study English. Also, as a group of artists, we decided to go to different places beyond Colombo to organise training programs for teachers, art workshops with children, workshops with craftsmen, with parents, etc. Actually, we work with people from very different backgrounds. We have now been doing this for almost 20 years! The collective also features an exhibition space, Red Dot Gallery, which is a non-commercial and experimental space. Beyond exhibitions, it is very broad as it also produces art publications featuring criticism, and philosophy.

AAN: In 2010, you won the Sovereign Asian Art Prize. What did winning the prize change for you?
PP: To me, it served as an excellent way to draw more attention to my work. In addition, nearly all the prize money went into the creation of the Mullegama Art Center in Colombo. The centre is run by a group of artists, along with myself, and includes university lecturers, and school teachers, all of whom are practising professional artists. In addition, we have a senior traditional religious-art artist, as well as a senior traditional jeweller who are also part of the centre, providing training to young artists and engaging in collaborations and contributing to research work of local and foreign artists. Artists from Austria, Australia, Pakistan, India, England, Italy, Nepal, and Bangladesh have had a residence at the centre, while many others have visited. The centre is a hub for local and foreign artists, as well as art-related professionals such as art-writers, poets, curators, art historians, dealers and museum professionals. Since its inception, the centre has conducted art workshops for children numerous times. It runs art classes free of charge for local school students, supporting young artists by selling traditionally rooted contemporary craft objects designed and produced by them in Colombo.

AAN: You have spent some time in Pakistan. Was that stay related to a residency?
PP: I stayed in Pakistan for two years. I studied in Lahore, but after two months, I became very disappointed with the programme. Consequently, I continued living there, but visited craftsmen, mainly jewellery designers, miniature artists, and embroidery workers, learning from them and from their lifestyle. I then attended Beaconhouse National University in Lahore and trained with various craftsmen for two years, which was a very enriching experience.

AAN: During your studies in Colombo, you decided to major in sculpture. Why is that?
PP: I truly like three-dimensional forms. Before I went to university, I was involved in various activities that all carried three-dimensional features, whether working with a ritual artist or making masks with my father. Sculpture, therefore, was a logical choice, and even after graduating, my first works, designing costumes based on discarded material, carried that three dimensional element. I remain a multi-disciplinary artist, working on painting or sculpture, and sometimes even with installations that feature other aspects like smell or sound.

AAN: You have now been working as an artist for several years. Looking back, do you feel your work has changed over the past years?
PP: My work has changed according to my understanding of the art scene, the art critics, and the art world in general. I was fortunate to be able to travel abroad, and have some exhibitions in other countries. This experience encouraged me and led me to change my work, although I cannot precisely say how it happened. However, I feel that when I travel, when I look at other artists' work and interact with different people, getting interested in fields that go beyond art. This way I can gain more knowledge and, in turn, this influences my way of working.

AAN: As you mentioned the work by other artists, who has inspired, or influenced, you?
PP: I very much like the work of Indian artist Mithu Sen (b 1971), whom I find a wonderful and very powerful artist. She has influenced me a lot and I find her work to be very strong conceptually. I was not only influenced by famous artists, but also by younger ones, including fellow artists from college.

The Other Trade (2016), acrylic and acrylic ink, on archival print on archival canvas, 32 x 96.5 in. Courtesy of the artist

Full Set of Bones (2019), Carrara marble, edition of 6, 28 x 59 x 181 cm, from the exhibition The Annual Report Card of OCD. Courtesy the artist and Rén Space

Zhang Peili in the studio, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Rén Space

ZHANG PEILI

by Michael Young

There was a moment of high drama at the conclusion of my interview last November in Shanghai with internationally renowned Chinese video artist Zhang Peili. Suddenly, he realised he had lost his ID card, a critical piece of personal documentation that in China must be carried at all times and which facilitates such things as buying a train ticket, what you can do, and where you can go. Evening was drawing in and Peili was anxious to return to his home in Hangzhou at the conclusion of the interview. Time, it seemed, was running out fast. Pockets were searched and bags upended, as barely suppressed panic ensued. But there, buried in the pile of clutter on the table, was the lost ID card. All was well.

In late 2019, we had talked at Ren Space, a small contemporary gallery tucked down an alley in Shanghai's cultural heritage precinct of Longmen Cun. The building dated from 1935 and with its restored elegant Art Deco interior, it oozed charm. The gallery had devoted its entire exhibition space over three floors, to Peili's solo exhibition, *The Annual Report Card of OCD*, a glorified self-portrait made up of high-tech robotically carved sculptures of his bones and several organs. The exhibition marked a significant moment in Peili's decades-long career, which has embraced painting, photography, installation, performance, moving-image work, kinetic installation and sound work, with exhibitions around the world, too numerous to mention. The Annual Report Card of OCD marked the first time Peili had turned to pure sculpture.

Peili was born in 1957 in Hangzhou, not far from Shanghai, in Zhejiang Province. He graduated in 1984 with an MFA in painting from the prestigious Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now the China Academy of Art). He participated in the radical 1985 *New Space* exhibition that rebelled against academic and aesthetic tastes of the day, and from 1986-87 was a member of the Pond Society, which staged performative avant-garde interventions around Hangzhou as a reaction to the current art conservatism that was manifest in socialist realism. In 1987, he painted *X?* a series of 141 large paintings of latex gloves, in flat monochrome colour that possessed an almost sombre monumentality and which, with their obsessive sense of repetition and graphic simplicity, bordered on banality, a trope that he explored in subsequent video works.

Peili abandoned painting in 1988 after being asked to create a video work for the Huangshan Conference on Modern Art that laid the foundations for the ground-breaking *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition that took place in February the following year in Beijing's National Art Museum of China. On borrowed video equipment, he filmed his latex gloved hands over three hours, as he repeatedly smashed a mirror and then glued the shards back together, before smashing it again. The video's length was determined by the fact that it was the longest video tape available to Peili, while the name, *30x30,* referred to the size of the mirror. Its tedious repetition would bore those who had the stamina to watch, but demonstrated Peili's enduring fascination with the monotony of repetition and how it seemed to articulate the passage of time. It also confirmed in him the realisation that, in his words, 'an artwork itself was not the most important thing but that it was the process, that mattered'. 'For me the most basic motivation or departure point for making my video work, is monotony and meaninglessness,' he continued enigmatically, as our conversation slowly began to unfurl.

For Peili, video was able to convey the passage of time in a way that painting could not. Also pertinent historically, was the fact that 30x30 subtly critiqued the hypnotic banality of popular television, and the pervasive nature of political authoritarianism, in a country dealing with the rapid relaxing of economic regulations, social transformations and personal freedoms, under Deng Xiaoping's reforms. 30x30 was a seminal and ground-breaking work, and is now widely regarded as the first video artwork in China, and earned Peili the sobriquet, 'the father of video art in China'.

> *I never define my work. An audience creates its own understanding*

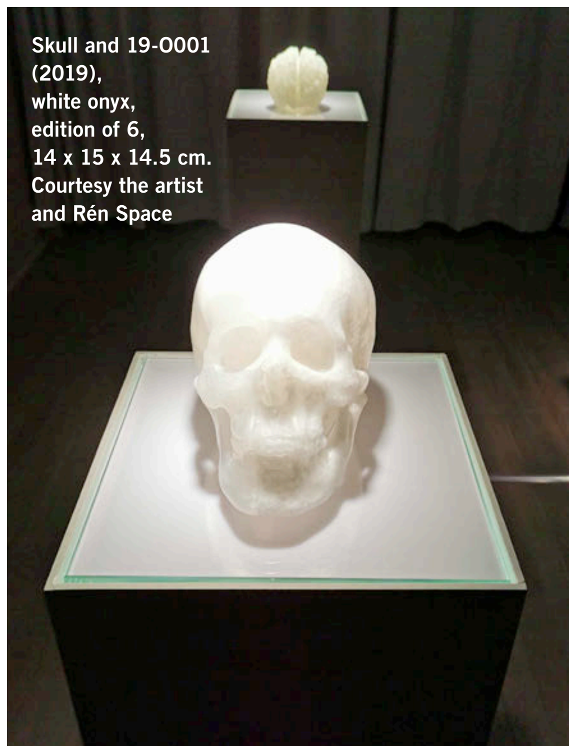
This work was quickly followed by *Document on Hygiene No 3* (1991) a two-hour-long, silent, video that showed Peili repeatedly wash a live chicken. Over the course of the video the distraught chicken became complacent and subdued. Recently it was included in the Guggenheim 2017 exhibition *Art and China after 1989: Theatre of the World,* in a shortened 20-minute version, the two-hour version perhaps considered too repetitive and boring for viewers. Repetition and boredom however, proved a critical component of Peili's approach to video making. He wanted the audience to become bored and ultimately, disturbed, and he wanted them to become conscious of the passage of time.

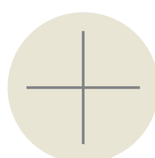
Skull (2019) from the exhibition The Annual Report of OCD in Shanghai

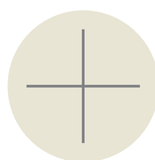
The recent Ren Space exhibition featured life-size sculptures of the bones in Peili's body – all 206 of them – laid out in various configurations as well as the complete skeleton being laid out flat, on a gurney-like table, in a darkened room. Sculpted robotically in Italy from Carrara marble, the bones possessed an eerie presence. Each part of his body had been meticulously scanned using MRI medical imaging in China and then carefully carved from Carrara marble in Italy using advanced automated carving techniques.

The project took two and half years in the planning and execution. There were many difficulties along the way, Peili said. He had to learn the techniques of polishing, finishing, carving, and visited many places in Italy to be inspired by classical sculpture. Some of the bones were

X? series, signed in Pinyin and dated 1987 on the reverse, oil on canvas, 99 x 79.5 cm


Skull and 19-0001 (2019), white onyx, edition of 6, 14 x 15 x 14.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Rén Space


LISTEN TO Zhang Peili talking about his work


WATCH Zhang Peili 30x30, (1988), single channel video, 32'09''

carved from marble, some onyx and some travertine, each stone offered unique characteristics, he explained. One of Peili's skulls – there were multiple skulls on show - was carved from white Mexican Onyx and possessed a dazzling translucence. 'I favoured marble. It is an elegant, classical and sublime material,' he stated. It was all rather chilling and macabre, a *memento mori*.

Moments before I arrived at Ren Space, Peili had just finished an interview with Chinese television and was sharply dressed in grey slacks with a black zip-through leather jacket over an untucked, patterned, business shirt. He appeared tired and irritable. Even as he was faultlessly courteous when he greeted me, it soon became apparent that the questions I asked were ones he had answered countless times before and his countenance grew dark and his eyebrows furrowed.

In the alley outside, children played in the warm autumn air, electric motorbikes purred and men cursed. Inside the gallery, a distinct chill descended. However, gradually against this sound-scape of life the stilted question-and-answer session unexpectedly shifted a gear and a real conversation began to emerge, me speaking through an interpreter and Peili answering in Mandarin, although it was obvious he understood some English, having spent 10 months in New York in 1994-95.

I was not surprised to learn that Peili's exhibition calendar was bursting at the seams. He was in the throes of preparing for a group show – *Move on China 2019* - at HOW Art Museum (HAM) in Shanghai with long-time artist friends, Feng Mengbo and Wang Jianwei – equal giants in the Chinese conceptual art firmament. Peili's installation at HAM, *Live Report: Hard Evidence No 2*, showed the burnt and blackened remains of redundant technology; computer monitors, keyboards, television screens, portable radios et all, arranged on a circular plinth like a technological graveyard. To one side a monitor played a series of stills from the earlier conflagration. A mutual acquaintance spoke of how Peili in recent years had become dazzled by the speed of technological development.

On the other side of town in the annual Art021 art fair, Peili had just installed his enigmatic, immersive kinetic installation, *XL Chamber No 2*, a container-sized windowless box with electric shutters that unpredictably closed and opened, and randomly trapped people inside. It was painted a seductive, and benign, duck egg blue. Adults inside looked alarmed and bemused as the shutters slid down, and trapped them inside. XL Chamber created a litany of Instagram moments, but it possessed a chilling silent narrative of lost freedoms, pre-emptory incarceration, and lack of control – tropes that had fascinated Peili, throughout his career – almost 20 years of which have been spent teaching new media art at the China Academy of Fine Art in Hangzhou, a department that he had established in 2003.

In September 2021, there will be a survey show at UCCA in Beijing exploring his work of the previous decade. Peili is deliberately obtuse about explaining his work, preferring the audience to supply their own interpretation, as to what it means. The deep political undercurrents and the critique of social mundanity are obvious, and exist within a silent brooding existential framework. 'I am often asked this question, but I never define my work. I never explain why I do this work. I believe when an audience enters the exhibition they have their own understanding. My work is not really about any specific things,' he said.

Although currently obsessed with his sculptural project, he confessed to not having turned his back on painting, or video art. 'I feel I still have a lot of possibilities. Yesterday I spoke with a curator from Pompidou Shanghai'. (Centre Pompidou Shanghai opened in Shanghai the week we spoke.) He continued, 'She was curious about whether I would ever go back to painting. You never know in the future, I told her. But for now I will continue this sculpture series. Also I want to do some sound installations, maybe mixed with lighting. I already have something solid in my mind, and soon I am thinking that I will make a new video work. I will think carefully about this'. Peili was also thinking of a new form of teaching institution, but it is early days yet.

How did he feel when he held his marble skull in his hands? It was a tantalising thought, but he skated around the question. 'The most exciting moment for me was when I understood I could actually create this project. Before that moment, I was not sure what was possible. Until then everything had been experimental,' he remembered.

Peili dismissed the suggestion that his bone sculptures had been driven by contemplation of his own mortality. He insisted it was not a vanity project. He reflected quietly before replying. 'After 2001 there were several unexpected deaths in my family. My father passed away, then my best friend, and then his mother. My uncle and aunty passed, too. All unexpectedly. One by one they all went. One day I decided to go to the temple to see the master to talk about death. He said, we had to have a peaceful mind regarding death. He said that when a baby is born it is a time of birth, which will ultimately lead to death. It is a normal part of life. Do not try and block out death, the master said. Since then my attitude to death changed. Everything becomes dust. This is the way,' Peili stated with chilling finality.

In many ways The Annual Report Card of OCD was the ultimate three-dimensional selfie. In the darkened gallery, I felt as though I had stumbled on to the set of an absurdist drama, where the main denouement was an existential reckoning that pointed to the absurdity of life in general. Peili might prefer to call it the aesthetics of boredom – which he often defines as a central trope in his work – but by then I felt I had reached the limits of his endurance and he seemed more than ready to step out into life's absurd reckoning, among the children playing outside, the motorbikes purring, and the old men shouting. As he walked off he clutched his Chinese ID card firmly in his hand, en route to the station and the high-speed train that would propel him at 300 kilometres an hour to his home in Hangzhou. Which, in Peili's grand scheme of things, is no time at all.

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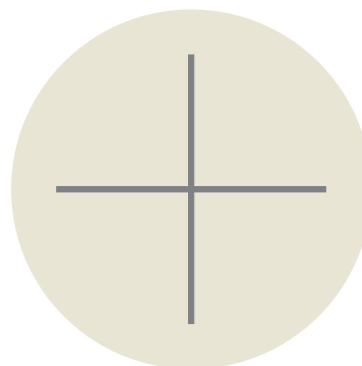

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Al Madam, about 40 minutes from Dubai, was a village built as late as the 1970s/80s, however, people left very quickly because of the harsh climate. The main residents of the now ghost village were part of the Al Kutbi tribe, UAE

JAMES KERWIN

by Xenobe Purvis

James Kerwin is a photographer of hidden and abandoned architecture, whose artful, eerie images tell stories of absence and neglect. Past projects have seen Kerwin photograph derelict palaces and churches across Europe, and he has recently travelled widely in Georgia. Last year, Kerwin made a trip to Lebanon for *Lebanon: A Paradise Lost,* a series which documents Beirut's wide-ranging architecture and the devastation wrought on the city during the Lebanese Civil War.

He is now in the middle of shooting a series called *Uninhabited,* in which he photographs abandoned towns such as Al Madam in the UAE, Kolmanskop in Namibia, and Kayaköy in Turkey. He also runs photography tours and workshops in Georgia, Armenia and Lebanon. The global cessation of travel caused by the coronavirus has put a temporary stop to Kerwin's photography expeditions. He is currently based in Tbilisi.

Asian Art Newspaper: How did you first come to photography as a medium?

James Kerwin: It has always been through travel – travel and photography always go hand-in-hand. I was made redundant in 2008-9, during the credit crunch. I worked for a railway company and went off to travel for about 17 months. I went to Southeast Asia for the first time, and then into Australia. It was while I was working in Melbourne that I came to live with a couple of Germans who were really good at photography. Living with them, I took an interest in it. So it was about 10 years ago, which is not really that long, actually.

AAN: Have you always been interested in architecture?

JK: I went back to the UK and – as loads of photographers do to start with – I ended up doing weddings. Getting into architecture did not really happen until about 2013. Again, not that long ago. I started seeing articles about places that were abandoned, hidden, and remote destinations.

> *Travel and photography always go hand-in-hand*

AAN: How do you research for an expedition and find places to photograph? Could you describe your process?

JK: There is a place, for instance, called Abkhazia; it is a *de facto* sovereign state to the west of Georgia – a region that is occupied and is recognised by most other countries as an autonomous republic of Georgia. I went there for the first time in 2018, and I went back in 2019. Before we went the first time, it took about 18 months to research where places were and what was going on. It was during that trip that I actually started researching Lebanon. When we arrived in Lebanon, having planned a two-week trip, it ended up being a month. A month gives you time to do a lot of research on the ground.

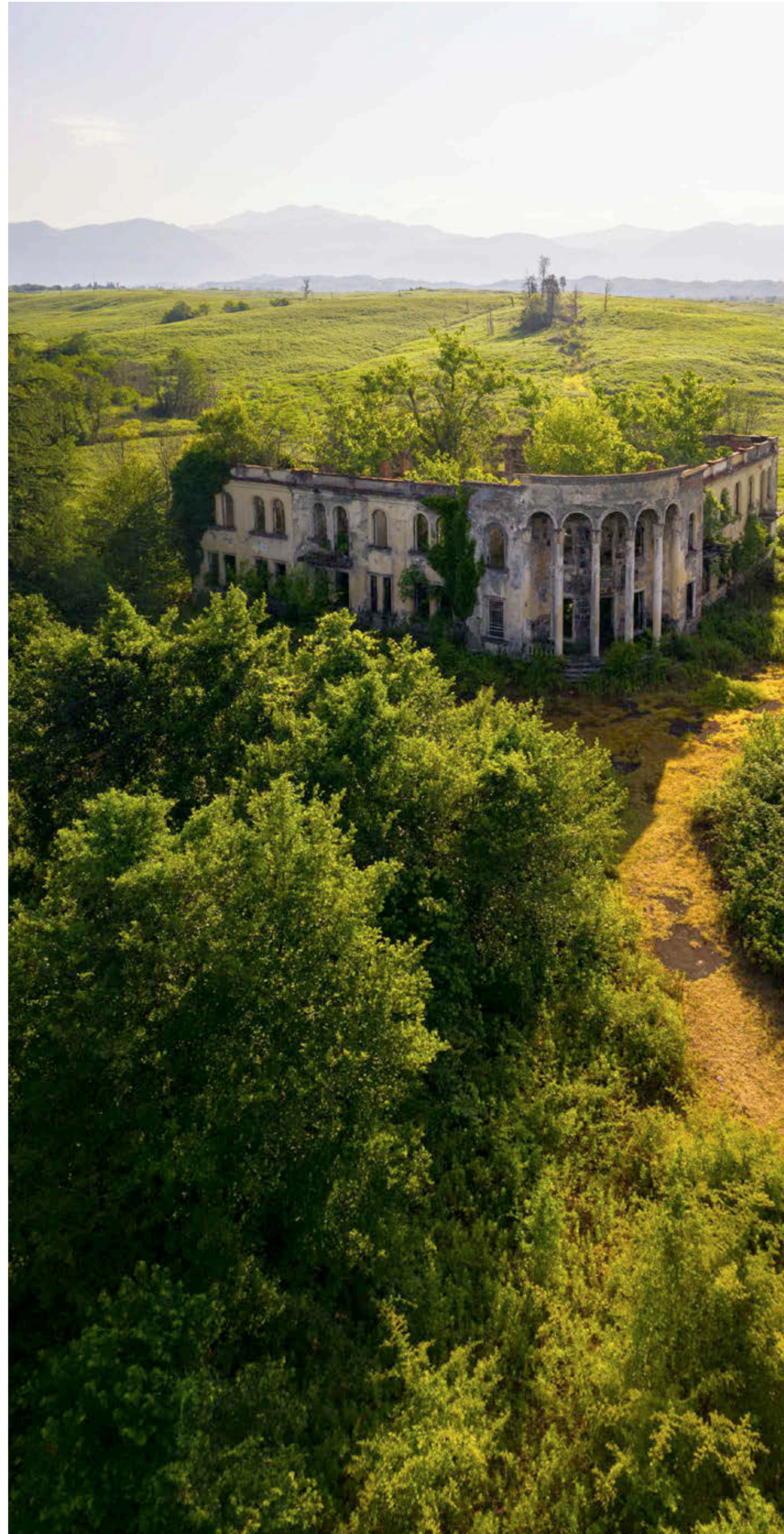
AAN: How did you alight on Lebanon as the subject for your recent series and what did you discover about the variety of architecture there?

JK: In 2018, I had come to Georgia, and my interest in Lebanon grew at the same time. There had been a war a long while ago, but it is safer to go there now. I knew there would be ruins. Ruins are easier to photograph than abandoned buildings, where you have to find your way in through windows or doors. I knew there would be landowners from whom I could get permission, so that appealed. It fitted within a genre that I am currently looking at. I knew the architecture would be different to anything I had photographed before. There is a huge variety – I barely touched the surface in those four weeks. I was itching to get back.

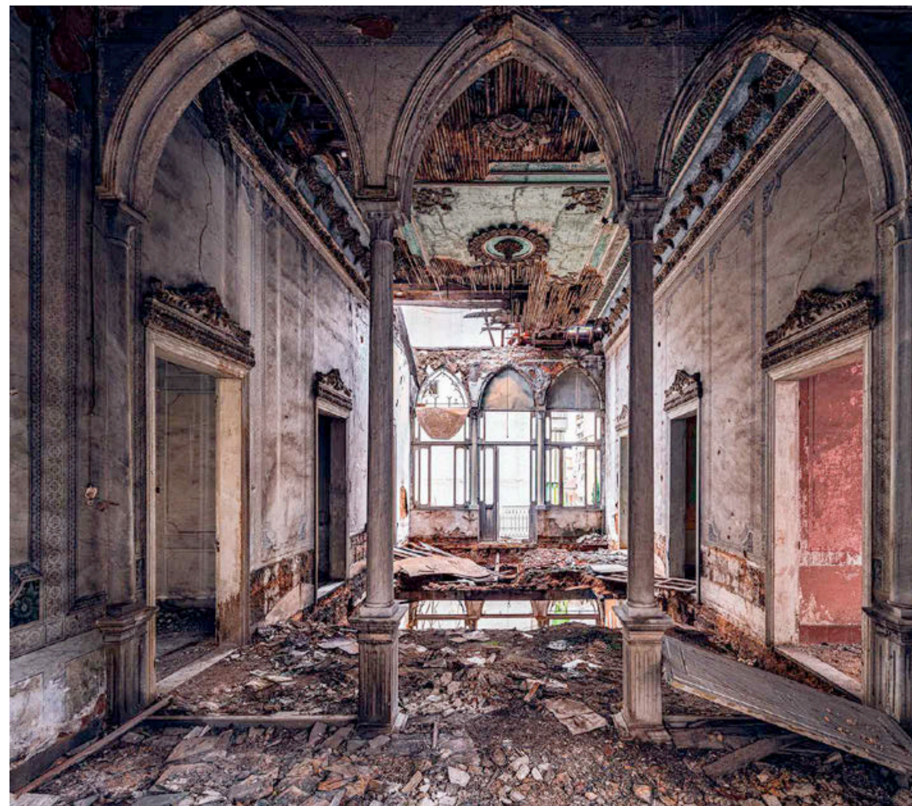
During the first couple of days in Beirut we were 'wowed'. It is a fascinating city, there is so much hustle and bustle, and then there are the buildings... It is kind of overwhelming, especially as I could drive around, too. In places like Lebanon and Georgia, people are much more open and welcoming – they want to show you their culture.

AAN: Can you describe the process behind capturing one of your images, from conception to post-production?

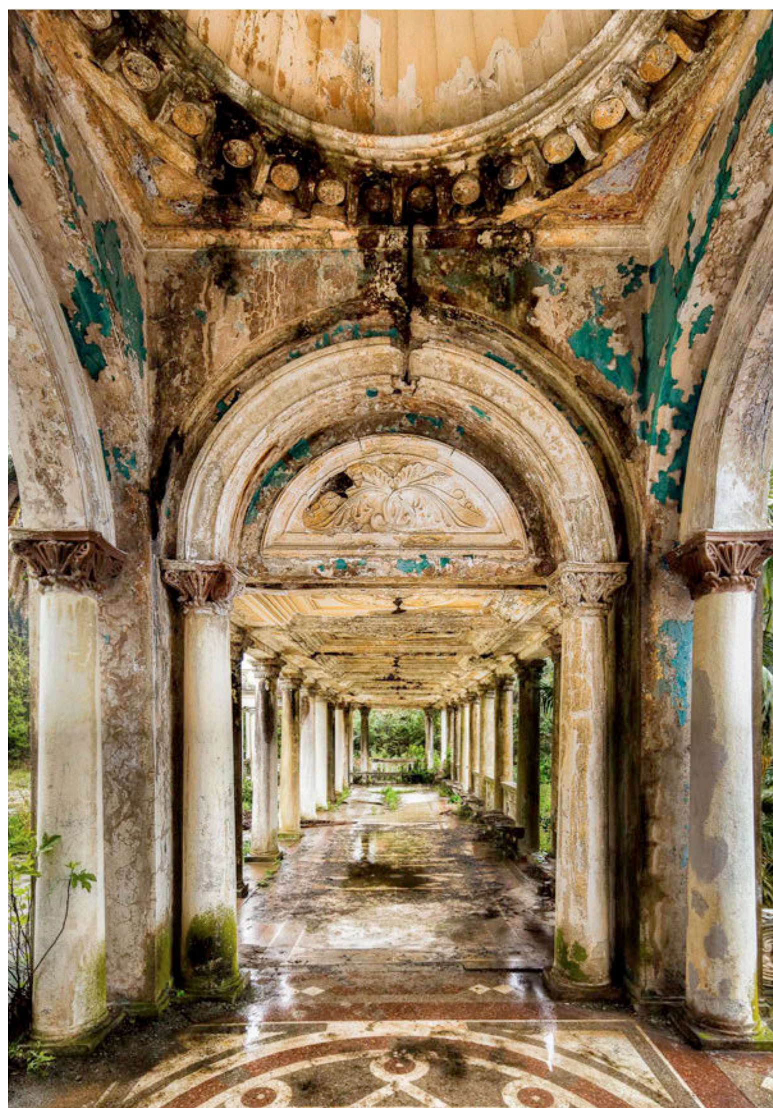
JK: I try and get my composition and camera right. I do not tend to change much afterwards on that.



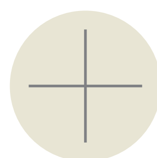
The College, Abkhazia, from the De Facto series, portraying Soviet-period architecture. Abkhazia is a de facto sovereign state that is recognised by most countries as an autonomous republic of Georgia, in the South Caucasus



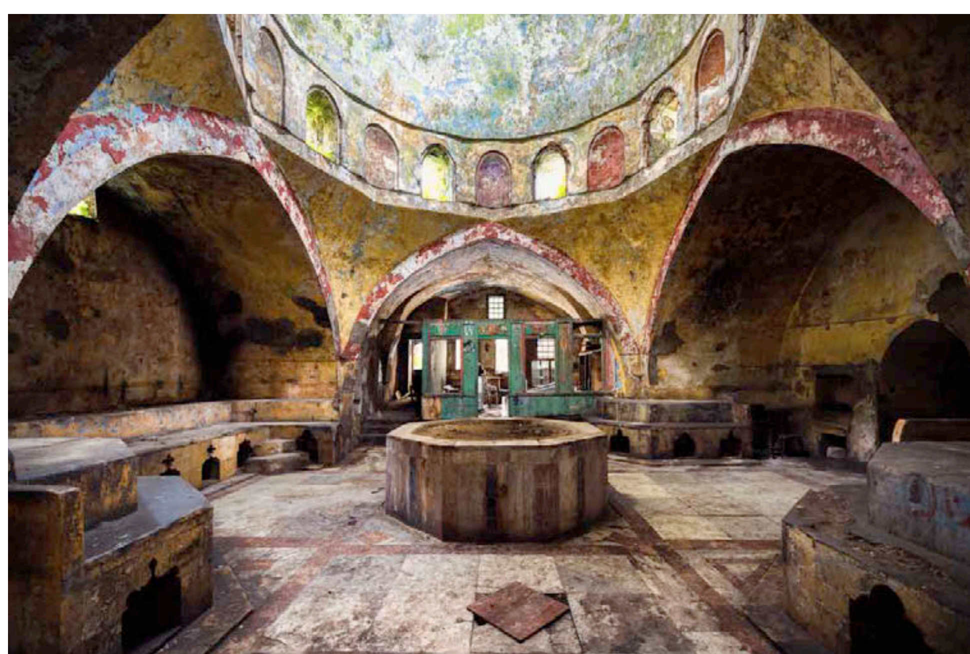
Paris by Design, an abandoned mansion in Lebanon



From the De Facto series, Abkhazia



WATCH James Kerwin's projects on his YouTube channel



Exfoliate, Lebanon. Since the 16th century, Turkish bath houses, known as hammams, had been popular places to wash and relax in Lebanon, but 30 years ago, due to the civil war most of them shut down

The mosque of Al Madam, UAE

I tend to take a number of brackets in my composition using different exposures, really because some buildings are darker than others. It depends on how open it is. In places like Lebanon there is a lot of strong light outside and darker corners inside. You tend to need two or three exposure brackets to be able to blend those together in post-processing. Once you have done that you have got the final result that you can apply your style of editing to. It is a technique that a lot of photographers use – they blend exposures together. The key is to keep it natural. That can be difficult – there are certainly times when I do not publish images because they do not look right.

AAN: And you occasionally use a drone for aerial shots?
JK: A drone is something I have been trying to use more and more. Over the last couple of years they have progressed to the point where you can easily edit images, whereas before they were very low quality. Some of my photos taken with a drone were in Abkhazia, because one of the lenses in my main camera was broken so I used the drone quite a lot.

AAN: I wanted to ask how you try and make your work different to that of others working in your field.
JK: That is a really good question – there are times when you and somebody else have been in exactly the same building and the composition looks basically the same. Sometimes you go into places and there are only two or three compositions, and so if you take all three of them the likelihood is that you could have a very similar photograph. It can happen; I try not to worry about it too much.

The only way you can get away from that is maybe using a drone, maybe using different processing techniques. There are always going to be ways to make your images look different to other people's. It is probably one of my favourite things about photography – everybody's photos do look different, really. Nobody processes in the same way.

In my area of interest, a lot of people either photograph in one of two ways. They either do the film style look, the 'airy' look, using low shadows and de-saturated colours, or they go down the route of just shooting for the light; basically that means that you go into the building, photograph where the light falls, just exactly how it is, with one composition, and then you end up with a very dark interior. It is kind of spooky looking and a bit 'haunted'. These methods never really appealed to me, I always went to these places to photograph the architecture, so I made sure I have got the lenses that allow me to photograph the ceiling properly, for example – tilt-shift lenses allow you to reach higher. Small things make the difference.

AAN: There seems to be a growing appetite for this kind of photography. Why do you think this genre has become so popular?
JK: It is funny that we are talking about this during this weird apocalyptic time! When I first got into it, it was just about finding peace and quiet. Now that sounds like a stupid thing to say. I was always a bit mischievous as a boy, and when adult life came, going off on the weekend with a camera and having a purpose felt decent – it was a way to go out on the weekend, get away from the crowds, turn off your mobile phone and be in a place that no one knows where you are. That was the original appeal. I feel this genre has grown because it looks at things differently. People are bored of the same kind of imagery. There are so many travel blogs out there now who do 'off the beaten path' – it is those kinds of people who eventually get into this type of photography. I think that is why the abandoned genre has taken off in the way that it has done over the last five years.

AAN: I believe your current project is a series of images of abandoned towns in Turkey, Namibia, and the UAE. Please can you describe the series, and talk a little about what you hope to address through it?
JK: I want to move away from chateaux in the middle of France. I want to appeal to a bigger audience. I want to be able to take tour groups – at a later date – to these kinds of places, which are a bit more accessible. These places are stunning and unique.

Obviously, my latest series has now been heavily delayed, but there are hundreds of sites around the world. I discovered Al Madam in 2015/2016, for the first time, and I was desperate to go there.

I timed it right, as there is graffiti starting to appear there now. I first went on a Saturday afternoon and it was packed full of tourists. People want that experience.

I went back at 5:30 on Monday morning to catch the sunrise, and there was nobody there. It should be looked after – regulated in some way by the government, maybe by the issue of permits. It is beautiful, but now you get 4x4s going up there for rally driving sessions.

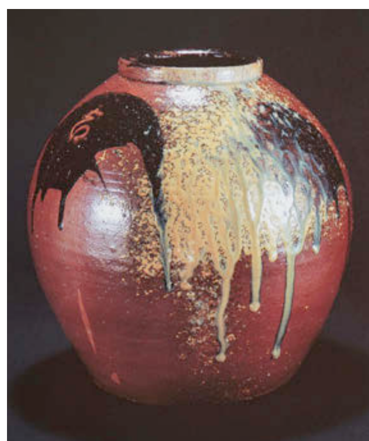
AAN: Do you have any advice for photographers aspiring to work in your field?
JK: Be careful. Some of the places in my portfolio are quite dangerous, and I would not recommend starting in such places. Start in sites like Al Madam in the UAE – you can venture out from there. A lot of people might struggle to travel, and want to go out locally, but local is always a little controversial – you start upsetting your neighbours if you are doing things illegally! Check local laws. It is important to know what you are dealing with. In some countries stepping over a fence is worth a prison sentence, in others it is not. So check local laws and safety. And have fun!

Photography-wise, I always use a tripod. Check out resources – there are plenty out there. Do your research. Tours are a great way of getting into this kind of exploring – and you are doing it with the correct permissions.

If anyone is thinking of coming to Georgia, drop me an email!

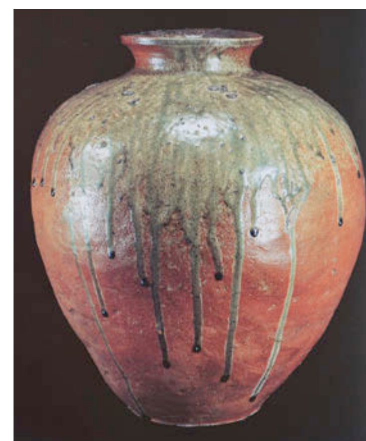
⊕ Contact James by email

Tamba ship's saké bottle, Edo period, 17th century, Old Tamba Pottery Museum. Sasayama


Tamba oil jar, Edo period, 17th century, Old Tamba Pottery Museum, Sasayama

Tamba water jar, Momoyama period, 16th century, Old Tamba Pottery Museum, Sasayama

Tamba storage jar, Kamakura period, 13th century, height 43.2.cm, Old Tamba Pottery Museum, Sasayama


Tamba storage jar, Nanbokucho period, 14th century, height 46 cm, Old Tamba Pottery Museum, Sasayama

POTS AND PERFORMANCES

The Cultural Legacy of Tamba-Sasayama

by Michael Dunn

Even though it is located within easy access from Kyoto, Osaka or Kobe, the Tamba-Sasayama area in the bucolic countryside of central Hyogo Prefecture remains largely unknown to most visitors despite its many attractions. Blessed with high-quality rice and pure water, it is famous for superb *saké,* as well as a rich history and culture one would expect to find in its castle town that was a major centre for regional *daimyo* war-lords throughout the Edo Period (1603-1868). Nearby is the site of the Tamba kilns (one of the celebrated Six Ancient Kilns along with Echizen, Shigaraki, Bizen, Seto and Tokoname), that has been producing ceramics since at least the 12th century – a tradition still continuing today. Designated as a National Heritage Site in Japan, the area is well-preserved yet free of the interference one associates with so many cultural sites around the world doomed to mismanagement by more well-known international organisations. As such, the area still remains a delightful place to visit for a day or two and well worth including in the visitor's itinerary.

Central as the power-base for the area throughout the Edo period is Sasayama Castle, remarkably built within just six months in 1609, on a natural hill by Takatora Todo, the famous daimyo warlord and master castle-builder, in order to strengthen the political aims of the *shogun* and power-broker, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616). Unlike most castles in Japan, it was constructed without an inner keep, yet it is fully fortified with stone walls and two moats and could be easily defended. The main building known as the *Oshoin* – a luxurious residence for the incumbent warlord – survived until it was destroyed in a WWII air-raid. Most of the other original castle buildings were demolished during the late-19th century after the feudal system had been replaced with a modern Western-style parliamentary system of government, however the Oshoin was rebuilt in 2000 and now provides an insight for us today into the lifestyle of a warlord.

Noh mask Hannya, 17th century, early Edo period, 17th century, Museum of Noh Artifacts, Sasayama

Noh mask Okasshiki, Momoyama period, late 16th century, Museum of Noh Artifacts, Sasayama

Noh Mask Shojo, Early Edo period, 17th century, Museum of Noh Artifacts, Sasayama

Throughout most of the castle's history Japan was unified in peace allowing élite culture to flourish under daimyo patronage – and gradually in time to filter down the rather proscribed Edo class system. Pre-eminent were Tea Ceremony and *Noh* drama, both unique to Japan and much influenced by Zen and its focus on meditation, intuition, and the editing-out of all that is extraneous. These virtues, along with rigorous ascetic practices and discipline resonated with the *mushin* ideals, (simply: strike, do not think) of *samurai* warriors, led to a widespread acceptance and following of Zen and its later profound influence on almost all aspects of Japanese culture from painting to cookery.

The Noh drama evolved out of ancient song-dances traditionally performed at Shinto shrines that were transformed and codified into more-or-less their present form by Kan'ami Kiyotsuya (1333-1384), and even more so by his famous son Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443). Zeami caught the eye and patronage of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408), and in addition to composing a large number of Noh plays, also wrote a text explaining the aesthetic principles, stage layout and performance that became the standard classic for subsequent performers.

The drama is performed on a raised wooden stage constructed of bare cypress wood, slightly over six metres square, covered with a roof similar to those found on shrines. Behind is a wooden wall painted with a large pine (and sometimes bamboo), and to the left side, a covered walkway leading to the dressing room from which the performers emerge. Traditionally, large stoneware pots are half-buried in the earth under the stage to reverberate the sound of foot-stamping during a dance. All performers are men and also consist of musicians playing flutes and drums at the rear of the stage, a chorus of chanters on the right-hand side providing a recitative of the story, and one or two actors who move around the stage. The leading protagonist is known as the *shite* and is supported by one or more attendants to adjust his costume and attend to stage props, while his deuteragonist, known as the *waki,* holds the other side in the play's dialogue. In most Noh plays, the shite will wear a mask to indicate the persona of the actor's role – those of a young beautiful princess, the ghost of a fallen warrior, or a terrifying demon being particularly expressive – together with a glorious costume for the last part of a play when the climax is emphasised with a stylised dance. As he approaches the stage with barely perceptible footsteps the actor's appearance seems magical and almost unbelievable, like a moving sculpture gliding over the floorboards and slowly coming to life.

Such dry description can convey but little of the otherworldly atmosphere of a Noh performance, especially when seen by firelight at a country shrine where ancient stages can still be found. The drama is best appreciated subjectively and intuitively, as keeping up with the libretto and its layered depths of meaning would presume an intimate familiarity with, and understanding of, Chinese and Japanese religion and mythology. Such knowledge was once a standard part of a well-born warrior's classical education, but is lost to almost all but the dedicated scholar today.

A complete literal understanding is hindered further by the use of certain words having double – often equally profound – meanings, so that the story will present different facets and interpretations depending upon one's choice. It is easy to envisage that the same play might be perceived in a widely different manner depending upon the viewer's age, experience and knowledge – and by extension – the same person might have very different perceptions of the same play when seen as a youth, during middle age, or when approaching death.

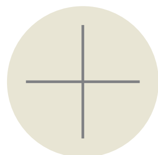
Each Noh performance commences with the sound of high-pitched flutes, unmelodic and unearthly as if to underscore a departure from the everyday and an entry to the otherworld of spirits – much as the *torii* entrance to a shrine marks the passing from the ordinary domain of mortals to that of deities. Throughout the play, supporters on the stage emit strange whoops while tapping small shoulder-drums as if to punctuate the actor's words and add resonance to their meaning. The pervading influence of Zen is apparent in an economy of movement so that a single step onstage can signify a long journey, or a raised, slightly trembling sleeve convey deep and endless grief. In Noh, the role of a young princess is likely to be taken by a senior, more experienced member of the troupe, perhaps far at odds in shape and voice from the subject of his act, but the actor will keep his deep tone, not try to imitate a woman as in the popular *Kabuki* plays where the *onnagata* (male actor taking a female role) will affect every female mannerism in strained falsetto. The mask he wears is allusion enough to his adopted persona.

In Japanese, the aesthetic terminology of Noh all but escapes clear interpretation. The word *yugen* is one most often heard and suggests a beauty that is hinted at, elusive and half-hidden, as if glimpsed in a brief parting of mist – a beauty that by its distance and transience leaves a sense of bittersweet sadness. It is by his ability to conjure this ethereal quality – tilting his mask to catch the firelight, or by holding a pose during which aeons of time seem to pass – that the skill of a Noh actor is judged.

Because of its profound ideals and strong connection with Zen's practice of using intuition as a route to understanding, the Noh drama attracted a strong following among the 200-or-so *daimyo* warlords in their fiefdoms throughout Japan. In time, all of them maintained a stage and a troupe of performers within their own

Kyogen costume with a design of hanko seals, linen, Museum of Noh Artifacts, Sasayama

Kyogen costume with adesign of a willow-tree and kemari footballs, linen, Museum of Noh Artifacts, Sasayama


WATCH the Kashu-juku Noh Theatre perform at Japan Society New York

households together with masks and a wardrobe of lavish costumes – all for the entertainment of illustrious visitors – and it was a mark of cultural attainment for the warlords to be able to memorise and recite Noh chants themselves.

At first it was common practice to give costumes to favourite actors in appreciation of their performance and so there was no difference between luxurious aristocratic attire made from silk and that worn on stage. However by the late 16th century, costumes were being made purely for stage use, mostly by the textile artisans in the Nishijin area of Kyoto – and still are today. All troupes kept a collection of costumes and masks from which the shite would choose depending upon the season, the temperature and the actor's mood, and so for aficionados, part of the attraction of Noh is that no two performances are ever the same.

All Noh performances are structured around relatively simple stories, mainly based on medieval epics such as those of *Genji* and the *Heike*, or on classical Chinese mythology, with the shite taking the part of an otherworldly deity or ghost. All of these are rather profound and serious and in order to provide a little levity and contrast, a farce or comic performance known as *Kyogen* is usually staged after or between Noh plays for light-hearted relief. These usually feature actors playing roles of country bumpkins or animals caught in comic situations. Masks are sometimes worn and costumes are usually simpler, made of cotton or linen and decorated with more prosaic designs of country plants, animals, insects, or objects of daily rural life.

With warlord patronage and associated wealth, the accoutrements of Noh and Kyogen: masks, costumes, drums etc, were made to the highest standard of craftsmanship and are seen as unique works of art. Masterpieces can be seen in major museums and in the old town of Sasayama, a small but fine selection can be seen at the Museum of Noh Artifacts.

A completely different but far older craft tradition can be found at the nearby Tamba kilns that have been making pottery – mainly stoneware – since the 13th-century Kamakura period. Old *sueki* sites, where immigrant Koreans were making stonewares as early as the 6th century, have been uncovered in the area. They brought new techniques of ceramic production especially the use of an *anagama* tunnel kiln in which temperatures up to 1300 degrees centigrade could be reached so that clay particles melt to form a glass-like, waterproof material. Many potters still use wood-fired kilns today, favouring – for better or worse – the unexpected results achieved by surrendering to the 'god of the kiln' rather than the near-perfect control of a modern electric or gas-fired equivalents

Most wares dating from this early

Noh costume with a design of books, birds, and Nanten plants, silk and gold leaf, Hatakeyama Memorial Museum of Fine Art, Tokyo

period are storage jars with a flared lip and dribbles and splashes of a distinctive grass-green glaze formed by particles of molten ash that fell when the kiln reached a high temperature and contrast with the rust-red colour of the body. The earliest pots were carefully smoothed, but later examples reveal hastily-applied comb-marks suggesting that the potter was in a hurry to finish his work on time. The likely explanation for this is that large numbers of pots were seasonally in demand to safely store rice-seeds through the winter for planting in the following Spring.

Tamba wares changed very little throughout the medieval period. A tendency to making the mouth of the pot more rounded rather than flared can be seen, as well as the shaping of more rounded shoulders and a less-tapered body. The customers for Tamba wares were largely farmers who needed pots that were reasonably priced, sturdy, and practical. Located in what was then a rather isolated area of Japan, the Tamba potters had few opportunities to see what was happening in other areas, to catch up with newer tastes or to fall under their influence. This quiet stagnation came to an end during the early 17th-century, when a new type of climbing, multi-chamber kiln was introduced by Korean potters – that was capable of reaching even higher temperatures. This led to experimentation with glazes and forms and the production of new products such as tableware and flower containers. As communication with other parts of the country became less restricted, Tamba potters discovered a wider market for their wares, began to flourish, and still do today.

Excellent examples of historic Tamba wares can also be seen in Sasayama town at the Old Tamba Pottery Museum, close to the Museum of Noh Artifacts. Both of these house collections have been built up over three generations by the same Nakanishi family.

Old Tamba Pottery Museum
(Tamba Kotokan), 185 Kawaramachi, Tanbasasayama-shi, Hyogo 669-2325

Museum of Noh Artefacts
(Nohgaku Shiryoukan)

Sasayama Information in English

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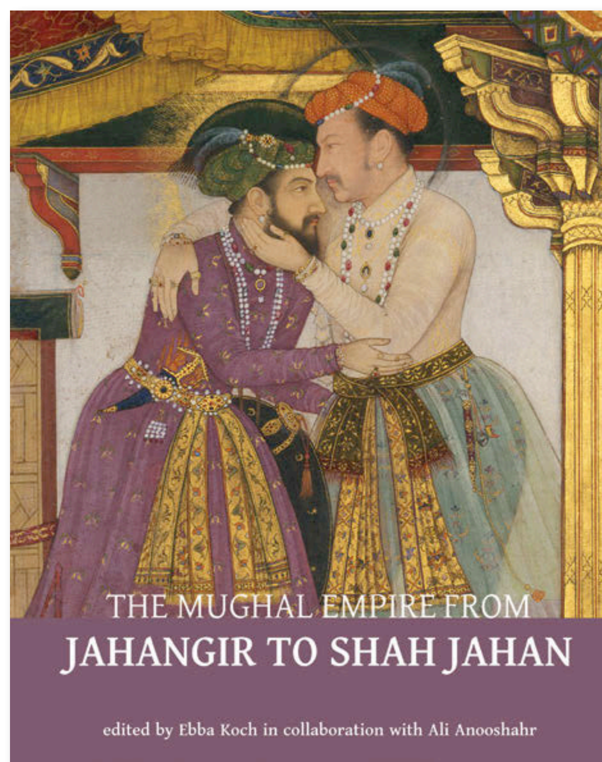

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Installation view
Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk,
Victoria and Albert Museum

KIMONO
KYOTO TO CATWALK

by Juliet Highet

Earlier this year Europe's first major exhibition on *kimono* opened at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), which has had to temporarily close, but the exhibition will be on view, hopefully in the autumn in Europe, and later travel to Canada. *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* is a revelatory show, since the *kimono* is usually considered as timeless and unchanging, the ultimate symbol of Japan, 'an iconic garment' as Anna Jackson, curator of the exhibition at the V&A and Keeper, Asian Department, describes it. She writes in the accompanying book: 'The aim is to present the kimono as a dynamic and fashionable item of dress'. As the show's title declares: From 'Kyoto' (the traditional cultural hub of Japan, and once its capital) 'to Catwalk', on which kimono's sensational reinventions now strut, as well as on the streets of Japanese cities, have been created by a new wave of contemporary designers, both Japanese and international.

The late 19th-century European passion for Japonisme and simultaneous import of Japanese woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*) depict people in traditional dress – kimono, such as ones created in Kyoto between 1800-1830 in the show. Its long 'swinging sleeves', *furisode*, broadcast the fact that it was created for a young, unmarried woman.

In the early 20th century, kimono exerted a radical influence on the transformation of European fashion. Emilie Flöge (1874-1952), part of the Viennese Art Nouveau's avant-garde, created a black and white striped kimono-style coat, with really extraordinary sleeves, one much longer than the other. Why the emphasis on sleeves? Kimono simply means: 'the thing to wear', and was in the Heian period (794-1185) known as *kosode,* meaning 'small sleeves'. Over time these small Heian tubular sleeves were replaced by longer ones, emblematic of a garment that did evolve, just as a *haiku* evokes the seasonal passing of cherry blossom. As Anna Jackson describes: 'Sleeves *(sode)* had great significance in Japanese dress … Classical Heian poetry is full of references to sleeves, from the smell of blossom on them that recalls a lost love, to heightened emotions expressed through tear-soaked sleeves. *Tagasode*, meaning 'whose sleeves', refer to a beautiful woman, who is sadly absent'.

The word kimono first appears in documentary sources of the 13th century, as a general term for clothing. During the Edo period, 1615-1868, use of the word kimono probably became more widespread, but it was not until the Meiji period (1868-1912) that it completely replaced kosode. 'The most distinctive characteristic of kimono is that they are straight-seamed garments constructed with minimal cutting from a single bolt of cloth. Kimonos are worn wrapped left side over right from a single bolt of cloth, and secured around the waist with a sash, an *obi*,' writes Jackson.

In Japanese dress, the shape of the body is essentially irrelevant. The way the kimono is constructed creates a continuous flat plane that provides a platform for decorative design. It is through the choice of fabric, colour, pattern and technique that a wearer expresses their gender, wealth and taste. The fact that the surface is the most important aspect in Japanese dress explains why the kimono has changed so little in shape, if not in design, over its long history – until recently.

In the late 12th century, the aristocracy's political influence waned, with power shifting to the samurai class. Dress styles were simplified, and what had been the undergarment of the Heian court, the kosode, became an everyday garment, although the elite *samurai* wore richly decorated silk kosode. However, though their lives were very constrained and restricted, high-ranking samurai-class women were not oblivious to fashion trends.

Parading courtesan, woodblock print, Katsukawa Shunsen, 1804-18, Edo (Tokyo), Japan
© Victoria and Albert Museum

Fashionable brocade patterns of the Imperial Palace, woodblock print by Utagawa Kunisada, 1847-1852, Japan
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

A wealthy merchant class emerged in the early 16th century, and by the Momoyama period (1573-1615), this level of society, too, adopted kosode – similar to the samurai. Dress was the perfect means by which the merchant class could proclaim their affluence, confidence and taste, despite the strict hierarchy imposed by the samurai at the top of the pile, and which dismissed merchants as merely the distributors of the labour of others. However, merchants and their families provided the greatest stimulus for increased textile production with their desire for the latest styles. The development of woodblock printing spread the enticing reach of the fashion of urban Japan to the provinces, frequently depicting courtesans and actors who were popular style icons.

Leading *kabuki* actors were famous celebrities, so much so that their dress styles, including the very colours and patterns of their kimono, on and off stage, were eagerly anticipated and emulated. One of them wore a chequerboard obi, kick-starting an instant fashion craze. Another wore a stage costume with the design of a sickle (*kama*), a circle (*waa*) and the character for *nu*, which together spelt the word *kamawanu*, shouting out 'I don't give a damn'. Courtesans, too, were fashion icons. In contrast to Western art in which a woman's appearance, particularly her face, are as important or even more so than her clothes; for Japanese women historically it was the detail of her kimono, not her face, which exuded her personality.

Throughout the various historic shifts of power in Japan, Kyoto, the home of the emperor, remained until 1868 the centre of aristocratic tradition, which required luxury production of kimono for the court. One of its most important elements was silk fabric, woven in Kyoto's district of Nishijin. In the early 18th century, it was estimated that 7,000 looms were spinning away, providing employment for tens of thousands of artisans. Kyoto's elite creative ethos fused effectively with nearby Osaka, a major trade depot.

During the Edo period (1603-1868), the conspicuous consumption of the prosperous merchant class and wives was flaunted in unofficial fashion contests. Such competitions did not always go well. In 1681, the *shogun* Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, when visiting Ueno, noticed a certain merchant Rokubei displaying far too much affluence by flouting the dress codes and wearing extravagant

Kimono for a young woman (furisode), 1905–20, probably Kyoto, Japan © Khalili Collection

Outer-kimono for a young woman. Probably Kyoto, 1800-1830 Courtesy of the Joshibi Art Museum

Kosode with gabions and cherry trees, silk crepe, resist dye and embroidery, 1700 – 1750 Courtesy of the Joshibi Art Museum

Staircase, December (1935) by Kobayakawa Kiyoshi (1899-1948), hanging scroll, ink and colours on paper

clothes above their station. Deeming such a profligate display inappropriate and disrespectful, Rokubei's houses and lands were confiscated, and the family was banished from the city.

Imported fabrics first began to influence kimono production in the 16th century, at first from China. *Rinzu*, a satin silk similar to damask and *chirimen*, a crimped matt crepe fabric, were the background materials for elaborate dying, weaving, and embroidery. Three fabulous examples in the exhibition are made of crepe silk (chirimen), and another of satin silk. They were all treated with freehand paste-resistant dyeing (*yuzen*).

In 1609, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) set up a trading post, or 'factory', in Hirado, near Nagasaki, followed by the English East India Company in 1613. The Dutch imported brightly patterned cotton from India, known as *sarasa*, which they also took back to Europe, where it was known as *chintz*. In both locations it was immensely popular, and so were the kimono that the Dutch shipped to Europe, at first in small quantities during the Edo period.

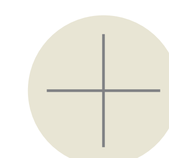
The Dutch were given the honour of regular audiences with the shogun, to whom they gave presents of 'Chinese, Bengal and other silks', recorded a German doctor serving with the VOC. These fabrics were much appreciated in Japan, and in the 17th century became a major part of the international textile trade, as Japanese kimono and obi became highly fashionable in Europe. Later, in the 18th century, French silk brocade was even more coveted in Japan.

Towards the end of the 17th century cotton textiles from South and Southeast Asia became popular with all levels of Japanese society, particularly those from India featuring stripes and checks. Various examples of kimono and obi are depicted in woodblock prints, one worn by a woman in a checked kimono, returning from the bathhouse – with an obi probably from Gujarat. Another famous erotic print (*shunga*) by Kitagawa Utamaro shows lovers beneath a cherry tree. The woman wears a block-printed Rajasthani kimono; while in another print a parading courtesan's under-kimono and obi probably came from the Coromandel Coast.

A curious and fascinating change in kimono design began to take place in the second half of the 18th century, when large-scale often singular motifs began morphing into small-scale patterns, scattered over the kimono. These understated and elegant garments contrasted vividly with the opulent, richly embroidered kimono of the merchant class, culminating by the end of the Edo period in kimono of pale mouse-grey (*nezumi-iro*). The shift from bravura to understatement gave birth to *iki*, a new style aesthetic, in which subtlety was more stylish than sumptuous drama.

Edo-period peace came abruptly to an end in 1853, when American warships arrived off Japan's coast, forcing the country to open its ports to foreign trade dominated by unequal treaties. The historic feudal system was banished, and in 1868

Kimono for export, probably Kyoto, Japan, 1905-15 © Victoria and Albert Museum



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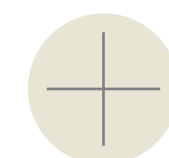


READ, OR DOWNLOAD The Use of Imported Persian and Textiles in Early Modern Japan by Kamada Yumiko

the new Emperor announced at his coronation that the era just beginning would be called Meiji, meaning 'enlightened rule.' The imperial court was moved to Edo, renamed Tokyo.

One of the most visible signs of change was in dress styles, with the word kimono, 'the thing to wear' becoming the name to wear. Despite this, Western dress became, particularly with men, increasingly popular, symbolising modernity. However, urban married women did stop shaving their eyebrows and blackening their teeth. And some elite women wore Western clothing for formal occasions, also carrying Western handbags. But the majority continued to favour kimono.

Anna Jackson writes about developments in the Meiji period, including changes in textile technology. 'Luxury silk weaving in Kyoto was dealt a heavy blow when the imperial capital was moved to Tokyo … The city recovered by embracing the new, rather than rejecting it, and delegations were dispatched to Europe to learn about Western techniques. The jacquard loom and other apparatus that were brought back to Japan revolutionised weaving practices. The introduction of aniline dyes, used for prints as well as textiles, also had a profound effect on textile production.' (Aniline dyes are synthetic, mainly developed from coal tar.) The new dyes, used for woodblock prints, as well as textiles, were viewed as the 'colours of progress'.

In 1875, the *Somedono*, or Dyeing Palace, was established in Kyoto to teach artisans new skills, including the use of synthetic dyes. Jackson continues: 'Weavers and dyers thus adapted European methods to suit local production in the creation of Japanese, rather than Western style textiles and dress. Utilising such advances, silk kimono were made in greater quantities and for lower prices than ever before, meaning that many women could afford to buy them for the first time'. And by the end of the Meiji period, Japan was exporting 10,000 tons of raw silk, which combined with the finished fabrics it sold abroad, enabled it to be the largest silk exporter in the world. And by the end of the 19th century, in Europe, social and political views were rejecting formerly fashionable dress achieved through the use of corsets, now viewed as ugly as they were unhealthy.

London's Liberty and Harrods stores in particular were in the vanguard of Britain's new Oriental look. Harrods advertised 'their chic kimonos and wraps' in their 1909 catalogue illustrating the dramatic – and therapeutic – transfer from tightly corseted and wasp-waisted silhouettes to a strikingly looser and more comfortable shape, in tune with the gathering impact of the Suffragette movement. From 1875 onwards, Liberty had been selling looser, more draped 'tea gowns', but also cropped kimono described as 'tea jackets'. The celebrity actress Ellen Terry dressed herself, and her children, in kimono.

Department stores began to spring up in Japan around 1904, selling both Japanese and western-style clothes. Kimono designs too evolved, delicate small-scale patterning of the late 19th century giving way to bold, dramatically coloured early 20th-century bands, often produced by a discharge method in which bleach, or other chemicals, remove colour from the fabric. Japanese exports also offered sash belts as easier to use than obi, and reflecting the more bosomy build of Western women, being swathed lower around the waist. Colours too, tended to be paler for export garments than those for local demand, which were more vivid and dramatic. Akiko Fukai, Curator of Fashion and Textile Arts, writes: 'With the focus on simple forms and straight lines, the impact of kimono on fashion relates to the evolution of Art Deco and the later, more abstract, language of modernism'.

Later, from the 1920s onwards, Japanese design motifs evolved, symbolising its modernity, including aeroplanes and high-rises. Building up to the Second World War, designs of passenger planes and luxury liners developed into much more aggressive and patriotic images, such as battleships and fighter jets. And the influence of the kimono on fashion continues today, with popular designers such as Hanae Mori, John Galliano, Issey Miyake, Akira Isogawa and many more.

● The exhibition travels to the Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden from 19 September 2020 until 10 January 2021, the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, from 12 February to 9 May 2021, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts from 12 June to 17 October 2021

● A catalogue accompanies the exhibition, ISBN 978185177 9925

Read Anna Jackson's blog on Japanese Meisen Dyeing

KOREA

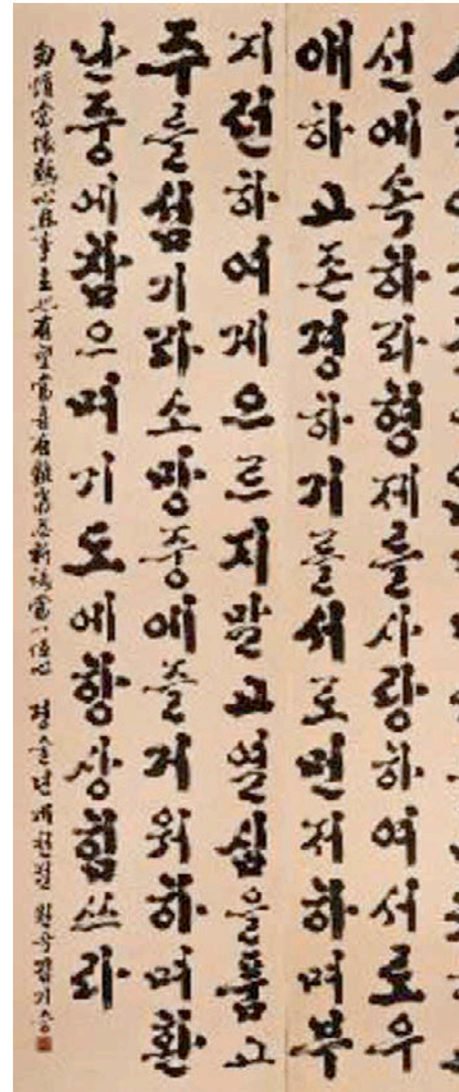
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY KOREAN WRITING

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) is exploring the beauty of calligraphy through works from the 1920s to modern era. Calligraphy was once highly appreciated as art and this exhibitions aims to break the stereotype of calligraphy as dull and old-fashioned among younger generations and to show how it has played a significant role as art in Korea's modern and contemporary art. The exhibition features 300 artworks from Korean calligraphers from the modern and contemporary eras, including calligraphy, engravings, paintings, sculptures, ceramics and media art.

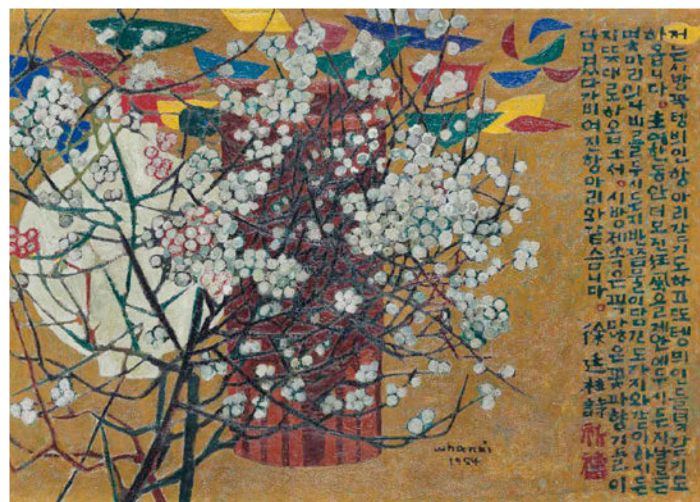
Highlights include an important work by Hyeon Jung-wha (1907-1997), titled *When Drunk, I Become a Daoist Hermit*, which demonstrates the beauty of lines – the three letters which means what the title implies look as if they are dancing like a crane. Another masterpiece by Kim Whan-ki (1913-1974) is called *A Jar and a Poem*, showing how the artist contributed to modernising the literati painting by using oil instead of ink, which was traditionally used for calligraphy and by using vivid colours in his work.

● Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, mmca.go.kr

Rock and Bamboo: Branches in the Wind and Dewy Leaves Have no Dust or Dirt (1989) by Song Seongyong



Love Must Be Sincere, from Romans 12:9-12 (1975) by Kim Ki-seung



A Jar and a Poem by Kim Whan-ki (1913-1974)

Untitled by Kim Ki-chang, circa 1950s

SACRED DEDICATION
A Korean Buddhist Masterpiece

A single object – a gilt-wood sculpture of Gwaneum, the bodhisattva of compassion – and the most popular deity in Korean Buddhism – is the focus of a loan exhibition from the National Museum of Korea. Carved in the late Goryeo period (918–1392), this crowned image is now known to be the oldest surviving gilded wood figure in an informal pose. Its posture, with one leg raised and the other lowered, is associated with the deity's dwelling place, where he sits calmly on rocks above the crashing waves of the sea. The same subject in a similar pose was common in devotional paintings, such as the hanging scroll of *Suwol Gwaneum bosal* (Water-Moon Avalokiteshvara) now in the collection of the Freer Gallery.

Sacred texts and potent symbolic objects were sealed inside this hollow religious sculpture when it was first used for worship in the 13th century. The practice of adding dedication material to a Buddhist sculpture during consecration ceremonies was believed to transform it into a living body. Recent research conducted by the National Museum of Korea provides new information about this rare sculpture, its hidden contents, and the special rituals that surrounded image consecration in Korea centuries ago.

Crown, Goryeo dynasty, circa 1220-1285, gilt wood and gilt copper and iron, National Museum of Korea, Seoul

The wood used to carve this image of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Gwaneum) has been identified as fir, a member of the pine family. Further analysis of the wood reveals the sculpture most likely dates from 1220 to 1285, indicating it was made during the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392). The naturalism of the sculpture in addition to the applied jewellery: large earrings, bracelets and armlets, and jewelled strands criss-crossing the body are other characteristics of bodhisattva sculptures from the Goryeo period.

The sculpture is constructed from 15 different pieces of wood in the 'joined block' technique. The crown was crafted separately from sheets of iron and copper that were later gilded. Decorative ribbons hanging from the crown were also carved from wood.

The Yi Royal Family Museum (*Iwanga bangmulgwan*) bought the sculpture from Aoki Bunshichi on 18 November, 1908, for the price of 110 yen. A century later, the National Museum of Korea, the current owner of the sculpture, conducted an extensive examination of the sculpture. Three bundles of dedication materials (*bokjangmul*) were found inside: one in the head and two others in the lower body. The dedication materials in the head were likely put in place at the time of production and before the face was fixed to the head.

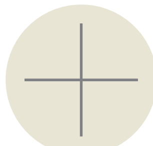
Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Gwaneum), Goryeo dynasty, mid-14th century, hanging scroll mounted as a panel, ink, colours, and gold on silk, follows the same Chinese prototype as numerous other surviving examples executed in Korea during the late Goryeo period

Materials found in the lower body are likely associated with a subsequent rededication since they include objects that date some two centuries later. It is not known why the sculpture was opened, but it might have been damaged and required repair. The dedication cavity inside the lower body was accessed and its contents disturbed more recently. The votive inscription is missing and the wooden piece that covers the opening in the bottom (*bokjanggong*) is newly made. This disturbance may

A Rain of Flowers, the Eunhaesa gwaebul, Buddhist hanging scroll, 1750, 11 metres long, Eunhaesa Temple, National Treasure No 1270

Eunhaesa Temple, Cheongtong-myeon, Yeongcheon, on the eastern slopes of Palgongsan (Palgong Mountain), in southeastern South Korea

The Bongwonsa Amita Gwaebul, on display during a festival at Yongamsa Temple in Seoul



EXPLORE Eunhaesa Temple and Buddhist painting

A RAIN OF FLOWERS
Buddhist Hanging Scroll at Eunhaesa Temple

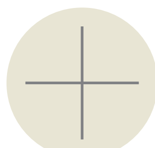
A Rain of Flowers: Buddhist Hanging Scroll at Eunhaesa Temple is an exhibition to celebrate the Buddha's birthday and introduces an 18th-century *gwaebul* (large-scale Buddhist hanging scroll for outdoor rituals) enshrined in Yeongcheon at Eunhaesa Temple, head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism and founded in 809, a retreat often shrouded in layers of silvery fog cresting like ocean waves.

With spring in the air, during the fourth month of 1750, the production of a large-scale Buddhist painting was completed – it was created to be hung at outdoor rituals at Eunhaesa Temple at the eastern foot of Palgongsan Mountain. When the more than 11-metre long hanging scroll was unrolled, crowds of people came to observe this Buddha standing alone amidst a shower of flowers. Who was this Buddha that people encountered that day? It is believed to be Shakyamuni Buddha preaching a sermon at Vulture Peak. The Vulture Peak (Sanskrit: *Gadhrakuta*), also known as the Holy Eagle Peak, was the Buddha's favourite retreat in Rajagaha (now Rajgir, Bihar, in India) and the scene for many of his discourses.

The background of the painting against which the Buddha is set is painted with flowers and colourful birds, something more reminiscent of Amitabha Buddha's joyful paradise. The flowers depicted in the Eunhaesa gwaebul appear like offerings sprinkled about in admiration of Shakyamuni's teachings, or perhaps the 'flower rain' that is said to fall from the sky of Amitabha's paradise.

Another painting, *Shortcut to Rebirth in the Pure Land by Chanting the Name of Amitabha*, which illustrates Amitabha Buddha and his pure land, is also on show in the Buddhist Painting Gallery until August this year, during this 15th gwaebul presentation at the national museum.

• National Museum of Korea, Seoul, museum.go.kr



WATCH The video label of the Sculpture of Gwaneum, the bodhisattva of compassion and most popular deity in Korean Buddhism

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Gwaneum), Goryeo dynasty, circa 1220-1285, gilt wood and gilt copper and iron with crystal inlays, National Museum of Korea, Seoul

19th or early 20th century, when the sculpture was removed from active religious worship.

Korean religious paintings made during the 13th and 14th centuries feature the same deities seen in Goryeo Buddhist sculpture. Commissioned by aristocrats and members of the Goryeo royal court, these highly detailed paintings were enlivened with ink, rich mineral pigments, and gold. Few survive today due to their fragility. Only 16 of these works are in museum collections in the US. The online catalogue *Goryeo Buddhist Paintings: A Closer Look* brings these 16 paintings together for in-depth comparison complemented by text in English and Korean.

• National Museum of Asian Art, Washington DC, asia.si.edu

⊕ View a consecration in a Korean monastery

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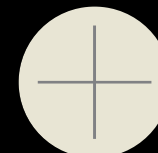

CHINA
Standing Bodhisattva, Northern Qi Period, 550-577 CE
Limestone with Gilt and Polychrome, H: 47 in.

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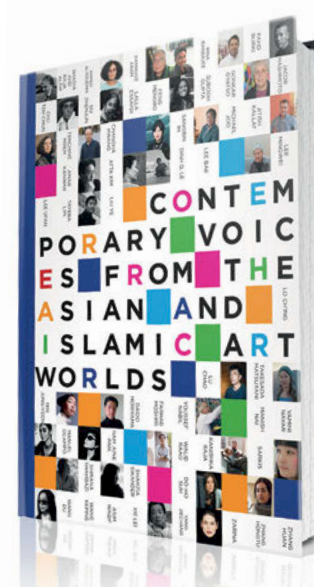

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Wedding Gown, Joseon dynasty, late 1800s, satin weave silk, silk embroidery, paper edging on neck and sleeves, overall 114.3 x 174 cm

Wedding Fan, Joseon dynasty, mid-1800s, copper alloy, satin weave silk, silk and metal thread embroidery, and paper, diam. 25.6 cm

GOLD NEEDLES
Embroidery Arts from Korea

This exhibition celebrates anonymous women artists and their inventive creations that triumphed over the conventions of the patriarchal Joseon society. Using examples of embroidery and patchwork, this exhibition explores Korean embroidered works of art as tools of empowerment to overcome social and cultural constraints.

Most of the loaned pieces – ceremonial robes, folding screens, gift-wrapping cloth, and wedding fans – were on loan from the Seoul Museum of Craft Art and formerly belonged to Mr Dong-hwa Huh (1926-2018) and Ms Young-suk Park (b 1932). The couple shared a passion for preserving Korean textiles and presenting their artistic distinctions to the world and donated their entire collection to the Seoul Museum of Craft Art in May 2018. The exhibition honours the couple's lifelong collecting legacy and philanthropic bequest.

Sooa McCormick, Associate Curator of Korean Art, has written about the exhibition for the museum's journal explaining that embroidery arts flourished in the Korean Peninsula long before the Joseon period (1392-1987). Ancient texts such as the *History of the Three Kingdoms* inform us that embroidery was a luxury deployed to display wealth, taste, high social status for royalty, and around the 800s, embroidered silk robes were also worn and enjoyed by commoners. However, many such earlier materials did not survive the devastating foreign invasions of Korea and the Korean War (1950–53).

The earliest known embroidery work in the collection of a Korean museum is a late 14th-century Buddhist hanging scroll now in the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art that depicts the image of Amitabha Buddha.

Many of the works on view include wrapping cloths, *bojagi*, which demonstrate women's bold and exuberant aesthetics. Featuring stunning colours and striking arboreal and geometric patterns, wrapping cloths were used to pack and store items as small as little pouches and as large as clothing.

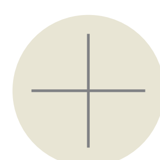
An embroidered bridal gown (*hwarot*) is a central anchor piece in this exhibition, accentuating women's distinctive aesthetic sensibilities. In contrast to monochrome ink painting done by male élites — the most prominent male-centred art form — the red silk surface of the gown is lavishly embellished with various decorative images in colourful silk threads: peonies, butterflies, lotus flowers, a pair of white cranes and phoenixes. Yet the bridal gown does not attest to material extravagance. On the contrary, many traces of repairs, trimmings, and patchwork reflect women's commitment to valuing a frugal and modest lifestyle. This gown is the one acquired in Korea in 1915 by Langdon Warner (1881–1955), who served as the field agent for research in Asia on behalf of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Given its current condition, it must have served for up to thirty years as an important resource for a working-class community.

By the final decades of the 19th century, embroidery no longer belonged exclusively to women. To respond to the growing demand for large-scale embroidered folding screens, many men organised professional workshops, particularly in the city of Anju in Pyeongan province. While the artistic language of Anju male embroiderers — bold compositions and bright colour schemes — was deeply indebted to the one established by women artists, they reached new heights of artistic sophistication with thick, multi-layered stitches, achieving the desired effect of voluminous textured surfaces.

● Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, clevelandart.org. Temporarily closed

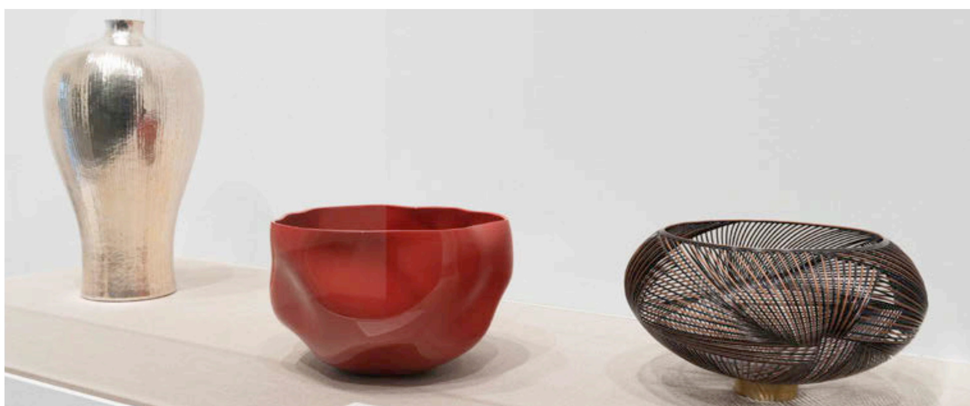
● An English-Korean bilingual gallery guide,including essays and illustrations, accompanies the exhibition

Box with painted oxhorn, Joseon dynasty, 1800s, painted wood with flattened ox-horn inlay, 16.5 x 28.6 cm



LISTEN To Dr Young Yang Chung discuss Korean embroidery

Tray for sewing tools, Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), 1800s, lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay, diam. 33.1 cm. All images Cleveland Museum of Art



Installation view, (centre) red lustre bowl (2008) by Chung Haecho (b 1945), lacquer, 10 x 12 x 12 inches; (right) Fill and Empty 0317 (2017) by Woosun Cheon (b 1976), copper, brass, iron, (left) silver vase by Sang-Hyeob Lee, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2020

MADE BY HAND
Contemporary Korean Craft

These featured artists find inspiration in Korea's acclaimed tradition of handmade objects and add their own visual language to the rich mix of techniques, materials, and forms. The works in the gallery show how the past and the present come together in contemporary Korean craft. The featured artists find inspiration in Korea's acclaimed tradition of handmade objects and add their own visual language to the rich mix of techniques, materials, and forms. For example, ceramicist Kang-hyo Lee (b 1961) favours a decorative method developed in the 1300s that combines white slip (liquid clay) with a grey clay body, but he transforms these ceramics through his inventive shapes, motifs, and textures. Lee is world-famous for mastering the traditional Korean technique called *Onggi* - a technique that allows him to make enormous, often man-sized pots. You can watch him in the video constructing three of these giant Onggi pots over a five-day period, culminating in an exciting explosion of glaze and colour as Lee sets about decorating them in his inimitable fashion. Set against the backdrop of his South Korean studio, it gives an insight into the spiritual journey that plays a vital part in his artistic practice.

Jihoon Ha (b 1972) and Sang-Hyeob Lee similarly focus on art practices from the past, but revive them through surprising modern components. Ha's round tray tables, a traditional Korean household item, become cutting-edge with anodised aluminium feet. Lee's silver vase reproduces an understated, elegant shape typical of vessels produced in the 1100s but replaces their characteristic celadon (translucent blue-green) glaze with a metallic brilliance. Combinations of ancient and present-day approaches appear throughout this celebration of Korean craftwork.

Installation view (at left) bowl (1999) by Kang-hyo Lee, stoneware with white slip decoration, buncheong ware, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2020

A *soban* (small table) was one of the most important pieces of furniture during the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). As there was no separate dining room in a traditional Korean house, the soban was used as a tray to carry the meal from the kitchen to wherever the diner sat. Meals were often served on individual tables for men from affluent families while larger tables were shared by women. Made of wood, those tables showed shapes and decorative motifs that varied according to regions. A *wonban* (round table) is a type of soban, fashioned from one single piece of wood using a lathe. The log had to be wider than the table, and a significant amount of material was wasted to hollow the foot and make the table light.

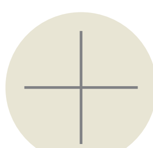
Ha revisits the wonban's structure and separates the table top from its foot in order to ease the manufacturing process and reduce unnecessary waste. Varnished pinewood provides a sturdy and waterproof table top while anodised coloured-aluminium sheet works as a light and playful foot, with grooves left from its making process that visually echo the grooves left on the wonban by the lathe.

Sang-Hyeob Lee's work has explicit Korean influence: his major pieces are silver versions of the classic ceramic vase shapes from the Joseon dynasty.

The museum's collection of contemporary Korean craft has grown fast in the past decade, brought on, in part, by the annual Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show.

● Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, philamuseum.org

Installation view of Made by Hand: Contemporary Korean Craft, including (at centre and right) small tray, large tray, and box with lid (2017) by Jihoon Ha, carbonised oak, anodised aluminium, 4 x 7 7/16 inches, 6 7/8 x 13 7/16 inches, and 15 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 8 3/4 inches respectively, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2020. The museum is temporarily closed.



WATCH Kang-hyo Lee: Onggi Master made by the Goldmark Gallery

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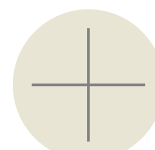

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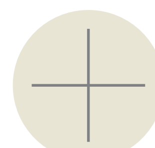

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Bowl, Iran, probably Shiraz, mid-14th century, cast brass inlaid with gold and silver, max diam. 24 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum fur Islamische Kunst

Wine Cup, Iran, late 16th/early 17th century, metal alloy, height 8.7 cm, diam. 19.5 cm, Museo Civico Correr, Venice

Mosque lamp, Cairo, Egypt, 1329-35, height 35.56 cm, diam. 23.89 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Bowl, Iznik, Turkey, last quarter of 16th century, underglaze painted fritware, height 18.5 cm, width 44 cm, Museum Civico Correr, Venice

VENICE
AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD 828–1797

In 1494, the Milanese priest Pietro Casola recorded his awestruck reaction to the wealth of merchandise in the Venetian marketplace: 'Who could count the many shops so well furnished that they also seem to be warehouses, with so many cloths of every make – tapestry, brocades and hangings of every design, carpets of every sort, camlets (woven cloth) of every colour and texture, silks of every kind; and so many warehouses full of spices, groceries, and drugs, and so much beautiful white wax!' Many of the produces that caught Casola's eye came from the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, brought to Venice by her merchants. No other city was more adept at cultivating this Levantine trade, and as the Byzantine Empire gradually gave way to Islamic sultanates in the region, Venetians came increasingly into contact with Islamic ideas, culture and way of life.

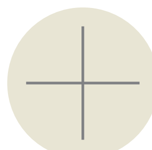
The exhibition focused on the relationship between Venice and its principal Islamic trading partners: the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria; the Ottomans of Turkey; and the Safavids of Iran over a 1,000-year period, focusing on artistic and cultural ideas that originated in the Near East and were channelled, absorbed, and elaborated in Venice, a city that represented a commercial, political, and diplomatic magnet on the shores of the Mediterranean.

The underlying theme of the exhibition focused on the reasons why a large number of Venetian paintings, drawings, printed books, and especially decorative artworks were influenced by and drew inspiration from the Islamic world and from its art. Orientalism in Venice was based on direct contact with the Islamic world, which brought about new technological, artistic, and intellectual information. These Venetian objects are studied vis-à-vis works of Islamic art, providing an immediate, comparative visual reference. A continuous thread throughout the exhibition dealt with the works of Islamic art that entered Venetian collections in historical times and explores the nature of the artistic relationship between Venice and the Mamluks in Egypt, the Ottomans in Turkey, and the Safavids in Iran.

Firman including a treaty granted by Suleyman the Magnificent to the Republic of Venice, Istanbul, October 2,1540, ink, gold and blue, green, and red colours on paper lined with red silk, 507 x 35.5 cm, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris

The exhibition started in 828, the year two Venetian merchants stole Saint Mark's body from Muslim-controlled Alexandria and brought it to Venice and ends in 1797, when the Venetian Republic fell to the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte. The first half of the 9th century sees the dawn of Venice's complex relationship with the Islamic Near East develop. The city needed good diplomatic relationships, especially with the Mamluks and the Ottomans, in order to survive, yet at the same time it could not relinquish her role as one of the defenders of Christendom in Europe which represented the dominant force in Venice's economy. The continuous presence of Venetian diplomats and the long-term residence of her merchants in the main cities of the Near East that gave Venice her distinctive cosmopolitan character based on trade. The most frequent ports of call used by the Venetian merchants were Istanbul, Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, Trebizond and Alexandria.

Textile fragment with a Mamluk (1250-1517) emblem, wool, plain weave and appliqué, Egypt, circa 1468-96, 22.9 x 30.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



EXPLORE The Met's essays on this topic with active links, Venice and the Islamic World: Commercial Exchange, Diplomacy, and Religious Difference

As Deborah Howard points out, in the accompanying catalogue, unlike Spain and Sicily, Venice was never ruled by any Islamic caliphate. Originally an outlying colony of the Byzantine Empire, the Republic gradually established its cultural and political independence. After the First Crusade in 109, the Venetians lost no time in establishing trading bases in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, based on the model of their trading privileges in Constantinople since 1082. Thus, from the era of the Crusades onwards, Venice enjoyed a network of trading posts, known as 'colonies' in the Levant and Central Asia, including Damascus and Tabriz. Venetian commerce depended on the maintenance of smooth relations with Muslim trading partners.

Venice's economic and diplomatic relationships with these eastern Mediterranean regions were tied principally to the Mamluk (1250-1517), the rulers who halted the advance of the Mongols west of Iraq and expelled the last of the Crusaders from the Holy Land in the second half of the 13th century. The Mamluks inherited from the Fatimids (circa 910-1171) and the Ayyubids (1171-1260) the role of middlemen between South and Southeast Asian and Europe in the valuable spice trade and in the movement of other goods by land and sea via Damascus and the Red Sea. Venice consistently sought privileges from the Mamluks and ultimately became their main European trading partner. Several cities under Mamluk control had permanent Venetian diplomatic representatives with regular access to local authorities. Ties between the Venetian oligarchy, nobility, and merchant class and the Mamluk courts and its retinue were strong.

Luxurious, exotic goods were available for anyone who could afford to buy them. Sumptuous textiles – silks, velvets and carpets – are amongst the most portable of all the arts, and large numbers of Islamic examples were imported to Venice from an early date. However, the backbone of Venetian trade was not simply the acquisition of personal wealth and luxury objects to their palaces on the Grand Canal. The Republic's commercial supremacy depended first and foremost on the city's role as an entrepôt. These imports included spices, dyes, aromatics, silks, carpets and gems, as well as cargoes of cotton and sugar.

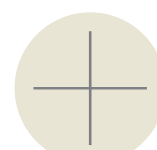
The presence of Islamic art in Venice can be documented from the Middle Ages. The earliest objects to arrive in the city, relief-cut glass and rock-crystal vessels from Fatimid Egypt, are still in the Treasury of St. Mark's Basilica. Over the centuries, merchants and diplomats developed a taste for Islamic ceramics, textiles, arms and armour, metalwork and manuscripts and displayed them in their homes alongside European works of art.

These luxury imported objects found their way in to all walks of Venetian life. Even fabrics embroidered in Arabic, which were incomprehensible to average Venetians, were popular in the city and were often found in churches. Metalwork inlaid with silver and gold was a speciality in Damascus and Cairo under the Mamluks. By the early 15th century, however, new shapes and decorative styles had developed in response to European tastes and inscriptions in Latin could sometimes be found on Islamic metalwork along with Arabic calligraphy. By the end of the 15th century, trade with the Mamluks amounted to 45 per cent of all Venetian investment in overseas commerce, according to Eliyahu Ashtor in his book *The Jews and the Mediterranean Economy (10th-15th Centuries)*, published in 1983.

Portrait of Sultan Mehmet II by Gentile Bellini (1429-1507), oil on canvas, 65 x 52 cm, Istanbul, 1480, 65 x 52 cm, The National Gallery, London

Detail of the 'Presentation Carpet', silk pile knotted on silk warp and weft, probably Kashan, Iran, later 16th century, approx. 258 x 181 cm, one of five such items given to the Doge through diplomatic gifts, Procuratoria di San Marco, Venice

Loom-width piece of velvet fabric, probably Bursa,Turkey, late 16 century, silk velvet with voided areas brocaded with silver-gilt and silver-wrapped thread, 162 x 65 cm, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence



WATCH
How Venetian velvet is made

By the end of the Mamluk era, Venice was recognised as Europe's principal source of Oriental spices and luxury goods. Prominent wealthy Florentines would procure Chinese porcelain and Syrian blue-and-white ceramics in Venice. The Venetian Republic's long symbiosis with the Mamluk sultanates not only reflected the mercantile acumen and maritime adventurousness of its traders. The long-lasting partnership also demonstrated the value of constant diplomatic effort to smoothe over difficulties – whether overt hostilities or misunderstandings. On the whole, diplomacy was highly ritualised. The detailed documentation that accompanied every diplomatic exchange and the prominence of the office gifts that oiled the wheels of the trading treaties, assured the transmission of both written and visual information from East to West. Venetian diplomats also used the wealth of luxury oriental goods found in the city to acquire goods for embassies elsewhere in Europe. A collection of Damascus carpets were given as a gift to Cardinal Wolsey (1473-1530), archbishop and statesman to Queen Elizabeth the first.

Luxury imported objects found their way into all walks of Venetian life

One of the most famous episodes of artistic exchange between Venice and the Islamic world came when Gentile Bellini, the official painter to the Venetian Republic, went to work at the court of Sultan Mehmet II in Istanbul from 1479 to 1481. This diplomatic mission followed a bitter 16-year conflict between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, as by this time, Mehmet II had developed an appetite for portraits of himself by Italian artists.

Unlike the carpet trade, which appears to have been almost exclusively in an east-to-west direction, textile commerce between Venice and the Islamic Middle East was distinguished by the flow of textile goods in both directions, writes Walter B Denny in the catalogue. Venice in the 16th century was a major producer of silk luxury textiles: the raw silk itself was produced in Gilan and Mazandaran on the Caspian shore of northern Persia, and was purchased in the Middle East by Venetian merchants after being transhipped overland through Bursa in Turkey (then the capital of the Ottoman Empire) and later through northern Syria, from whence it was taken by ship to Venice. Venetian luxury silks achieved a high reputation in Europe, and even, enjoyed a flourishing demand in the Ottoman Empire of the 16th century. Early Venetian velvets seem to have had a profound impact on Ottoman velvet design, which apparently during the later 15th century moved from relatively small-scale repetitive designs, often employing the characteristic paired wavy band and three balls known collectively as *cintamani,* to larger-scale ogival compositions.

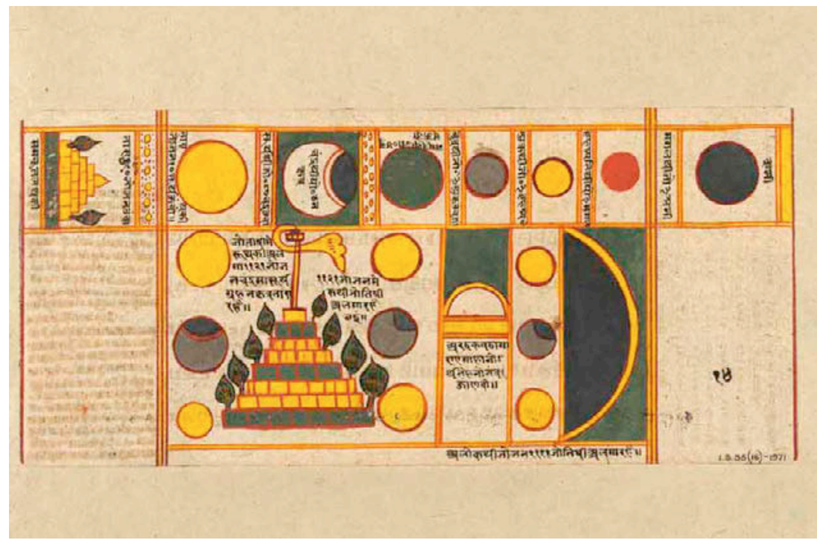
Venice also had developed strong trading links with the Ottoman Empire (1281-1924). At the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries, it encompassed Anatolia, the Middle East, parts of North Africa and much of southeastern Europe. No other Muslim power in history has rivalled its longevity and extent. Because so many of the major commercial centres in the Mediterranean came within is empire – Bursa (in 1326), Constantinople (1453) and Damascus (1516) – Venetians needed to develop both commercial and diplomatic relations with the Ottomans. 'Being merchants', the Venetian ambassador to the Sublime Porte wrote in 1553, 'We cannot live without them'.

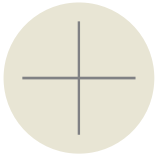
Apart from territorial disputes in the 15th and 16th centuries, both sides generally sought a peaceful coexistence. In the 16th century, the vogue for portraits of Ottoman sultans continued in both Venice and Istanbul. Few figures stirred the Venetian imagination as much as Suleiman the Magnificent, and his likeness could be found in many Venetian portraits, medals, ceramics and prints.

By the time the Republic of Venice fell to Napoleon in 1797, Venice was still famous for its refinement, but no longer played a major role in international politics or commerce. In the final two centuries of its existence, its merchants and diplomats paid more attention to the expansion of the Venetian territories in northeast Italy, whilst at the same time, countries such as Portugal, England and Holland were developing sea routes to China and India, bypassing Venice altogether.

- The exhibition was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from March to July 2007, metmuseum.org
- Catalogue available, Venice and the Islamic World 828-1797, ISBN 9780300123409

Read East Meets West in Venice by Richard Covington





WATCH Beauty and Enlightenment: Looking at Jain Art Phyllis Granoff, Lex Hixon Professor of World Religions, Yale University Professor Granoff produced by the San Diego Museum of Art

Depiction of Mt Shatrunjava and Palitana temples. According to Jain scripture, Shatrunjaya Hill, in Gujarat, was the site where Adinath, the first Tirthankar, achieved enlightenment. There are in total 863 temples from base to the peak of the Shatrunjaya hill. The construction of temples began in the 11th century. The path is climbed through 3950 steps spanning 3.5 km
Samavasarana, the Holy Assembly of Jinas, circa 1825–1875, ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper 23 x 20 in. On loan from the collection Dr Siddharth K Bhansali, New Orleans Museum of Art
Trailokya dipi, Samgrahanisutra or Samgrahaniratna, Jain manuscript, Rajasthan, 18th century, from the exhibition held at the V&A in 2012 © V&A

THE PURSUIT OF SALVATION

Jain Art from India

The Jain faith is currently the subject of an exhibition at the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) in Louisiana and explores the religion which has been continuously practised in India since at least the 6th century BC. Non-violence, a respect for all living beings, and the belief in the existence of a permanent soul whose true nature is obscured by accumulated *karma* are core principles of the faith.

Jainism encourages personal meditation, following a strict ethical code along with the practice of *ahimsa*, non-violence, and kindness toward every living creature.

Jainism constitutes one of India's three classical religions, the others being Buddhism and Hinduism. Though older than Buddhism by a generation, Jainism has much in common with it. Both arose and were first spread in northeastern India. Both aim to lead their followers away from the painful cycle of endless rebirths (*samsara*) and toward the liberation from all suffering (*nirvana*). Both also rejected many of the practices and ideas of early Hinduism, particularly the religion's ritual sacrifice of animals, preaching instead a doctrine of non-violence. Today, the commitment to an ethic that regards all living entities as inviolate continues to be at the heart of Jain practice and belief. The goal of ending the cycles of rebirth is accomplished in the Jain faith through rigorous devotion to ascetic practices and the elimination of human passions and attachments. By severing the chain of rebirth, the believer can achieve a state of liberation known as *kaivalya, moksha*, or *nirvana*.

The faith's name derives from the word *jina*, meaning conqueror, or liberator. Each Jina is also known as a *tirthankara*, or 'forder', who fords the gulf between samsara and liberation. The twenty-third Jina, Parshvanatha, who is thought to have lived in the 7th century BC, founded a Jain community based on renunciation of the world. Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last Jina to appear in this age, is traditionally thought to have lived from 599 to 527 BC, but some scholars believe he was a contemporary of the Buddha in the early 5th century BC.

Most Jains are laypersons who follow the ideal of well-being rather than seeking complete liberation. This path incorporates the 'three jewels', the three fundamental tenets for a Jain: right knowledge, right faith, and right conduct. While liberation is possible only for those who as monks or nuns have renounced the world, wealthy Jain merchant families have been the mainstay of the religious community throughout history, supporting monks and donating temples and images.

The major centres of Jainism are located in India, mainly in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan in western India, Madhya Pradesh in central India, Maharashtra in the Deccan and Karnataka in the south. Particularly well-known are the white-marble temples found in Rajasthan.

Over time, two primary sects emerged in Jainism: the Shvetambara, whose monks wear white robes, and the Digambara, whose monks reject all possessions, including clothing. When craftsmen created representations of the jinas, they clearly identify the figure's affiliation, and the figures are represented in one of only two positions: seated in meditation, or standing in the *kayotsarga* (body abandonment) pose. The latter is a visualisation of the Jina's liberation from human attachments and emotion.

In NOMA's exhibition, the works were created over a period of more than 1,500 years (2nd to the 19th centuries) and include sculptures, paintings, and manuscripts from the collection of Dr Siddharth Bhansali. These works aim to illuminate iconographic and stylistic change, as well as regional variations.

Jinas, despite having achieved liberation from the world in which we live, are believed to be accessible to humans as objects of devotion. Thus many worship images of the Jinas and believe that they can be found in different sacred spaces throughout the universe. They are found as religious sculptures, or created as part of the architecture in temples to be worshipped.

Their life stories are told in illuminated manuscripts and the places where they are revered are portrayed in detailed pilgrimage maps and diagrams of the vast Jain cosmos. These diagrams afford a glimpse of a complex universe of multiple continents and encircling oceans, whose outermost reaches harbour temples containing images of the Jinas. The study, recitation and veneration of sacred scriptures are a primary religious focus of the Jains. Important sermons, canonical texts and commentaries were transmitted orally long before being committed to writing. Exactly when Jain texts began to be illustrated is uncertain; the oldest surviving examples date from around the 10th-11th century, but many state that they were copied from earlier texts that presumably were decaying.

The earliest Jain illuminated manuscripts are inscribed and painted on prepared palm-leaves and bound with cords passing through holes in the folios. The folios are encased in wooden covers that are often decorated with religious or historical themes. Book covers continued to be made in later centuries.

After the introduction of paper into western India from Iran around the 12th century, Jain texts were increasingly written on this new and more versatile medium. The use of paper permitted larger compositions and a greater variety of decorative devices and borders, although the format of the palm-leaf manuscript was retained. By the end of the 14th century, deluxe manuscripts were produced on paper, brilliantly adorned with gold, silver, crimson and a rich ultramarine derived from imported lapis lazuli.

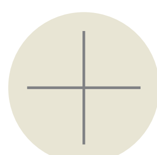
The major centres of Jain manuscript production were Ahmedabad and Patan in Gujarat. Other centres included Jaisalmer, Gwalior and Delhi. The patrons were mainly Svetambara Jains, who considered the commissioning of illustrated books and their donation to Jain temple libraries (*bhandars)* to be an important merit-making activity.

Dr Phyllis Granoff, the Lex Hixon Professor of World Religions at Yale University commented on an earlier exhibition of Jainism at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York: 'Although akin to Buddhist and Hindu forms, Jain art is unique. The images of the Jinas are meant to convey their invincible strength and infinite knowledge. These powerful images are the visual counterparts of one poet's metaphor that the Jina could no more be moved by the passions than the cosmic Mount Meru could be shaken by a breeze. Some images, made from highly reflective stone or metal, or surrounded by circles of flames, vividly depict the brilliance of the knowledge of the Jina, which illumines the entire universe, and the heat of his asceticism that burns away all sin.'

The Victoria and Albert Museum, along with the Institute of Jainology and King's College London, created the JAINpedia project in 2012, to digitise Jain manuscripts in the UK. The database went online later that year and provides information in English, Hindi and Gujarati.

The British Library is also involved in the project, as the library contains some of the most important Jain manuscripts and artefacts outside of the Indian sub-continent – and holds significant holdings of Jain material in a number of South Asian languages, (Sanskrit, Prakrit, Hindi and Gujarati), including several illuminated manuscripts, as well as rare palm-leaf manuscripts. Treasures held at the British Library exemplifying Jain religious and artistic heritage include illuminated manuscripts of Jain religious texts such as the *Kalpasutra,* narrative works such as the *Sripalakatha*, a Jain invitation scroll and rare palm-leaf manuscripts from western India. From the collections of Prints & Drawings, paintings on cloth depicting Jain diagrams of the universe, as well as numerous images from the rich photographic collections, gathered by British explorers and scholars during the late 18th century and early 19th centuries.

Tirthankara, marble, Ranakpur temple in Rajasthan, one of the largest and most important temples in the Jain faith



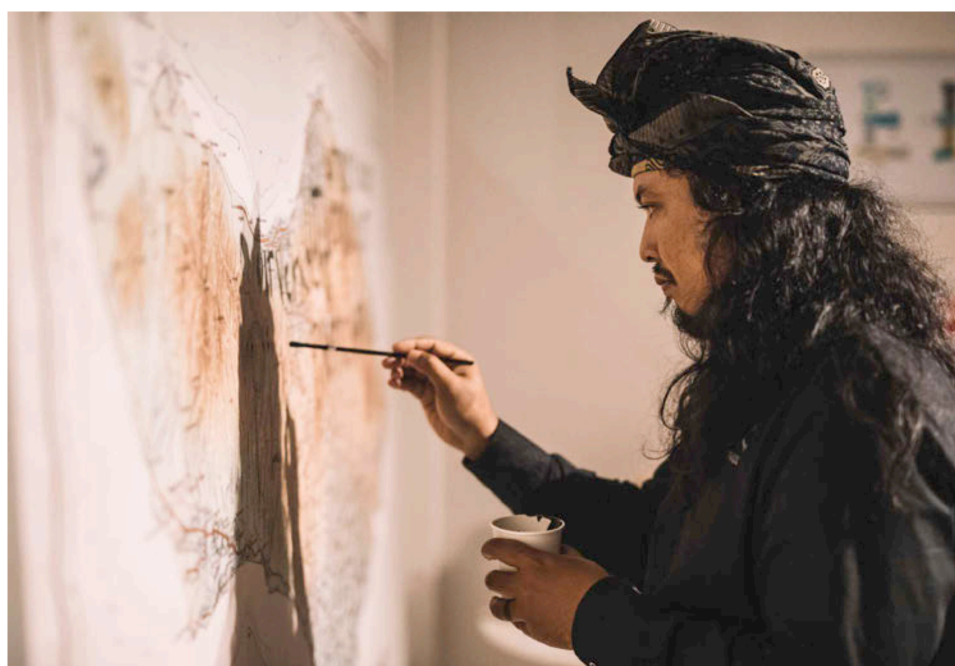
WATCH Conserving and Studying the Jain Shrine at the Nelson Atkins Museum

- The Pursuit of Salvation: Jain Art from India, New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana, noma.org
- For more information on JAINpedia, visit jainpedia.org
- You can find the Institute of Jainology at jainology.org

The V&A has a section of the website devoted to Jainism

BALI BEHIND THE SCENES

The Secret Sanghyang Dance for Ibu Pertiwi (2017) by Made Bayak


The artist Made Bayak at work. Photo: Kirsten van Santen

WATCH
The Met's documentary about the rituals, myths, and traditions of Indonesia

The Tropen Museum has taken their exhibition *Bali Behind the Scenes* online to explore not only Bali's image as a tourist destination, but also to take a deeper look at the island's unique culture. Featuring some 250 objects from the museum's Indonesia collection alongside works by contemporary Balinese artists and the personal testimonies of island residents, the exhibition shows how this paradise is under pressure, but also the resilience of local culture.

Traditional Balinese life is all about ritual. Hinduism is the major religion on the island of Bali. Their belief in reincarnation permeates life and if the right rituals are enacted after death, the soul will return to earth and one's family will be blessed with a new member. Each new phase in life goes hand in hand with its own particular ritual for the soul. Parents are charged with the rituals that accompany their children's birth, transition to adulthood and marriage. Following the death of their parents, children must take care for the accompaniment of their souls. The exhibition features objects and video fragments explaining the various Hindu rituals, including that of filing the teeth.

The exhibition devotes a section to the jewellery, ritual clothing and other ceremonial objects used in the lives of the Balinese. The most striking of these is the huge coffin in the form of a bull, that could only be used by royals and those of high nobility. A winged lion was the designated coffin for lower nobility, while ordinary people were cremated in a *Gajah Mina* (a fish with an elephant's head).

Portrait of a Legong dancer from Bali, circa 1910-1940

As the exhibition explores contemporary life, there is also a section on the importance of daily markets – one for fresh produce and household goods and the other for buying all the accoutrements for the daily offerings to the gods. Each day these offerings are assembled anew and include carefully arranged flowers, palm leaves, food and incense. In Bali, traffic comes to a halt as a procession goes by and all onlookers can watch and enjoy these special rituals. The Balinese usually visit the market at night and in the early morning, whilst tourists tend to visit later in the morning and in the evening, strolling by market stalls displaying textiles, wood carvings, bags and paintings in search of souvenirs (*oleh oleh*) to take home. In the exhibition you can listen to the stories of a Balinese stallholder and his dilemma around plastic, watch the souvenir saleswoman at work and learn what you need to make a religious offering.

The exhibition proves that Balinese culture is as vibrant as ever. Palace treasures from the former kingdoms of Badung, Tabanan and Klungkung tell the story of Dutch colonial rule on the island. And from the early 20th century, posters and photographs trace the way in which the image of Bali as an island idyll of peaceful village life, richly decorative temples and wonderful rice fields was carefully created and curated to appeal for the emergence of the tourist market.

Dance vest, seized during the Klungkung Puputan (revolt), velvet, gold, circa 1850-1900, Klungkung. Collection of the National Museum of World Cultures Foundation

Also on display are contemporary works of art and videos to show the determination and optimism of the Balinese people and their dedication to their culture. In this section, Balinese artist and activist Made Bayak draws attention to the problems of plastic waste with his 'plasticology' art, the Hindu priest Ida Dalem Parama Diksita shows how he seeks to preserve long-standing traditions and rituals, and I Dewa Ayu Putu Evayanti, who works in the tourist industry, talks about how she sees the future of an island where the rice paddies look set to disappear.

Barely on the map as a travel destination in the early 19th century, Bali is now bursting at the seams. Despite the prosperity that tourism generates, behind the scenes it has massively impacted the quality of life, this exhibition aims to show that impact through the eyes of the Balinese.

● Tropen Museum, Amsterdam, tropenmuseum.nl, until January 2021
● The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are re-releasing videos from their archives in a series entitled From the Vaults

CHIHARU SHIOTA
Inner Universe

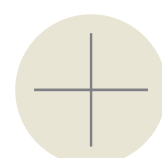
With *Inner Universe*, Chiharu Shiota (b 1972, Japan) is presenting two new site-specific installations, as well as several sculptures. Known for her spectacular oversized woven yarn installations, she addresses the issue of our own mortality, the becoming of our body, our cells, our soul, and how to imagine the universe beyond our terrestrial life.

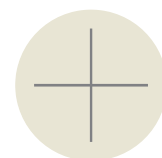
Chiharu Shiota is a firm believer that our terrestrial life is part of a larger sequence towards an endless dimension. Referring to her own personal story, she has included body parts cast in bronze of her own body as well as her family's. Beyond the notion of endlessness, the exhibition also looks at our being and body at a smaller scale: on the walls, woven webs reconstitute our skin whereas blown glass refers to our cells. Chiharu Shiota is highlighting both, her inner universe when it comes to her physical body, but also her inner universe as to her thoughts when it comes to tapping into the unknown, life after death. Through the over-dimensional size of the installation, her inner universe becomes ours as we immerse ourselves in it.

Olivia Sand

● On show at Galerie Templon, Paris, until 25 July
● The artist's work is also the subject of a travelling retrospective: at the Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art in Australia (27 June to 5 October) and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN), in Indonesia (21 November to 21 February 2021)

In the Hand (2020) by Chiharu Shiota, bronze and metal wire, 13,5 x 21,5 x 29,5 cm. Courtesy Galerie Templon, Paris - Brussels © Adagp, Paris, 2020


WATCH
A video of Shiota's work, The Soul Trembles, shown at The Busan Museum of Art, Korea


VISIT
The artist's website

MEETING TESSAI
Japanese Art from the Cowles Collection

Asian painting existed pre-Tang, of course, but it had been limited to funerary objects and not, *per se*, to art in the modern sense. One of the pre-eminent examples of painting as real art is manifested in an imperial 8th-century handscroll by the artist, Han Gan from the Imperial Collection, a portrait of a Ferghana horse. Because of its extreme rarity and long imperial provenance, it was obviously one of the handscrolls and jades smuggled out of the Forbidden City by Prince Pu Jie, the emperor's brother, as monetary insurance; it would appear that it travelled with him to Manchuria, captured by Chinese army and sold after WW2 to the Fujita Museum that sold it at auction on 17 March, 2017, at Christie's New York, for US$17,479,500.

By the Five Dynasties period (901-960) or Early Northern Song (920-1127) the Chinese style of painting, such as small paintings of birds, etc, had reached Japan and China had an influence on Japanese paintings off and on until the last century. During the Muromachi period (1336-1573), Southern Song and Yuan Chinese influence reared its head with the sudden popularity of *karamono,* or 'Chinese things', particularly items for the Tea Ceremony. This would include the Chinese style small scrolls of misty, serene landscapes that usually included a body of water in the foreground and mountains in the distance, a style perfected in China by Su Shi and Mi Fu. In Japan, the style was sometimes referred to as *Muromachi suibaku*. It has become the iconic Japanese image ever since and was taken up with enthusiasm by early artists such as Hasegawa Tohaku, Soami, Kano Motonobu, Toyo Sesshu and Tensho Shubun.

Throughout the Edo period (1603-1868)in Japan the Chinese influence continued and morphed over time into the schools founded by these early artists. At the same time, a new school began to appear in early Edo, referred to as *ukiyo-e,* or 'pictures of the floating world', centred on the street life and public entertainments subjects. As opposed to the ukiyo-e subjects, a new and totally different school appeared in the 18th century, mainly in Kyoto and Osaka. It was called *Nanga* (southern painting), or *Bunjinga* (literati /scholar painting), and was founded by Sakaki Hyakusen (1697-1752), whose status as founder was only realised relatively recently. The principal members of the school are well-known to scholars, museums, dealers and collectors: Yosa Buson, Uragami Gyokudo, Ike no Taiga and Okada Beisanjin.

What is so outstanding about this school is that it was founded on the first, direct-style, influence from China since the Song. Since the beginning of the Edo period (1603-1868) and the Tokugawa shogunate, Japan was sealed off from the rest of the world, with the exception of the short-lived Spanish and Portuguese presence and that of the Dutch which lasted until the 1870s. Essentially, no one in and no one out – with the exception of printed or painted material through the port of Nagasaki near Osaka and

Blind Men Appraising an Elephant by Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924), Japan, Taisho era, 1921, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, The Mary and Cheney Cowles Collection, Gift of Mary and Cheney Cowles, Freer Gallery of Art

Fox-Priest Hakuzosu, by Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924), calligraphy by Otagaki Rengetsu (1791–1875), Meiji era, 1867, hanging scroll, ink and light colour on paper, The Mary and Cheney Cowles Collection, Gift of Mary and Cheney Cowles, Freer Gallery of Art

Su Dongpo in a Borrowed Hat by Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924), Taish era, 1912, hanging scroll, ink and light colour on paper, The Mary and Cheney Cowles Collection, Gift of Mary and Cheney Cowles, Freer Gallery of Art

Kyoto and far from Edo in the way north. Such items included Dutch prints, which introduced the rules of perspective drawing, and Chinese books and paintings which introduced the latest developments in artistic styles. The most revolutionary of these was the famous Painting Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden, *Chieh-tzu yuan hua chuan*. The style that most influenced these southern artists were the bold eccentricities and free styles appearing in the late 17th century among Ming-dynasty loyalists. The most obvious of these was Bada Shanren, in fact a relative of the Ming imperial family. He became a monk in order to save his life from the squads of Qing executioners who swarmed the countryside. The southern Japanese artists had already been looking to the outside world for potential influences and this new and radically different style answered their search. This was in the early 18th century and thrived throughout that century, but by the 19th century, it had become more subjective and had lost much of its verve.

That influence was spearheaded by the artist Tomioka Tessai (1837-1924), who injected new life into the ossifying Nanga School, giving it a firm, new direction, and renewed vigour. This was all due to his early interest in and studying of Confucianism, the Chinese and Japanese classics and ancient legends, Buddhism and especially the doctrines of the Chinese scholar, Wang Yangming (1472-1529), founder of what became known as neo-Confucianism and the mid-century Chinese artists, Chen Yuzhou and Xu Yuting.

Tessai was a true man of the past, leapfrogging his way away from the contemporary creative styles, rejecting all present-day artistic trends, and anything smacking of Western influence. These, he felt, were the cause of the sorry state of painting. His inspirations lay in another time and in another space, *`a la recherche du temps perdu*, as it were. The only Japanese artistic influence on him was the nun and political activist, Otagaki Rengetsu (1791-1875), a woman of whom it was said was 'humbled by life's blows as well as its beauty'. Twice-widowed and all of whose children had died, she became a Pure Land nun and turned to poetry and pottery as her outlet. She created small (and very small) pieces out of dull, grey clay, sometimes glazed, but almost always carved with her calligraphy, both in *hiragana* and in *sosho*. Her sosho was remarkably elegant and is highly sought-after today.

This is the first time in the US in over 50 years that Tessai has been the subject of an exhibition and this one has been created to concentrate on the significance of pan-Asian cultural influence in the works of Tomioka Tessai. This exhibition is the result of 20 years of collecting by Mary and Chaney Cowles, the donors of their major collection of early modern and modern Japanese painting and calligraphy to the Sackler. This exhibition highlights the biggest portion of artwork by a single artist in the Cowles Collection. The collection is incredibly extensive with over 550 works will be distributed across the Freer and Sackler, the Portland Art Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. With the inclusion of over 60 ceramics, paintings and drawings, this rarefied exhibition will open more minds about the generally unrecognised world of Asian cross-cultural traffic.

Martin Barnes Lorber

• The National Museum of Asian Art Washington DC, asia.si.edu

The museum is temporarily closed, the reopening will be posted online

Islamic Arts Diary

By Lucien de Guise

TEN OUT OF MORE THAN TEN

There have been a number of articles about the possible permanent closure of museums once the latest virus scare is over. Smaller museums are thought to be at the highest risk. Most vociferous is the Charles Dickens Museum in London. Never mentioned is the growing number of dedicated Islamic-art museums. These are mostly smallish and independent. The Islamic-art departments of large museums do not have so much to worry about. It is those that are focused solely on the art of the Islamic world that might be in jeopardy... or would be if they were not so well funded. Admirers of Charles Dickens do not have the same depth of pocket or commitment as those who support Islamic art.

As there is so little to put into the Diary while Coronavirus rules, here is a reminder of what we can look forward to when it is all over.

1 THE ISLAMIC ARTS MUSEUM Malaysia

At a youthful 21 years of age, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is still one of the oldest of the new generation of dedicated Islamic-art museums. Located in the greenest, most lush environment of museums of any sort around the world, it appeals greatly to tourists as well as Islamic-art lovers. This is a museum that has put on a phenomenal number of exhibitions over the years. Its most recent triumph is a rare collaboration with the British Museum – on equal terms. *Inspired by the East: How the Islamic World Influenced Western Art* was a joint exhibition that attracted considerable praise when it opened in London. Next stop is KL, although it is unclear exactly when. It should be even bigger and perhaps better the second time round. At least the words East and Western now have their very own upper case letters.

Aga Khan Museum, Toronto

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin

2 AGA KHAN MUSEUM, Toronto

At the opposite end of the age and climate spectrum is the Aga Khan Museum, which opened less than six years ago in Canada. The collection has existed for a very long time indeed, having belonged to various members of a family that is renowned as aesthetes and connoisseurs. It is a stunning building with a full programme of exhibitions. One of the most interesting, which will continue till at least the end of October is *Don't Ask Me Where I'm From*. It is a clever title for a show that fosters dialogue and understanding between cultures and communities. Illustrating the Aga Khan's enthusiasm for this is the less well-known Islamic-art museum that has borne his name in the Philippines since as long ago as 1963.

3 MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, Doha

The most famous of all the dedicated spaces, mainly because of the architect. IM Pei came out of retirement to help turn Qatar into the cultural sensation it was hoping to be. It is a remarkable building, with a collection built up in record time by the late Sheikh Saoud al-Thani. For sheer spectacle, this is essential viewing. The location could be problematic as Qatar has fallen out with so many neighbours. Covid-19 could bring them all back together again. The next exhibition is, by coincidence, about Sheikh Saoud. Not only was he one of the most prolific collectors in world history, his interests were highly diverse. This exhibition shows the full extent, in particular his passion for combining art with natural history.

Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo

4 DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYA, Kuwait

Although it is now a national collection, this started as a home-grown initiative by a high-profile couple in Kuwait. The Al-Sabah Collection has since been rehoused in the Kuwait National Museum. The contents were irresistible to Saddam Hussein. In 1990, the collection was looted by Iraqi forces. Jewellery was a prime target, including a 234-carat emerald. The problems did not end with the arrival of US armed forces. Much has been returned, including a dagger that was on the cover of a Sotheby's auction catalogue. Most of the DAI's exhibitions take the form of loans or travelling shows such as the most conspicuous of them all: *Treasury of the World* – the ultimate collection of Mughal collection. This started two decades ago at the British Museum and moved to most of the great names around the world. The last stop was the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia in 2010.

5 TAREQ RAJAB MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, Kuwait

Also in Kuwait, this remarkable institution is very much the vision of one man, Tareq Rajab, and his wife. It is not a state or royal collection. This is a labour of love by a former Head of Antiquities in Kuwait (and founder of an English school). It keeps on growing, without the grand premises occupied by many neighbours in the Gulf. It is hard to say what exhibitions come next, as publicity is not a top priority for this museum that attracts tourists and art lovers looking for substance over style.

6 SHARJAH MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION, UAE

This started in less imposing surroundings as long ago as 1996. In 2008, in keeping with the new ethos of Islamic art as something spectacular, it reopened in a building worthy of its Gulf setting. They even manage to make coins look interesting – although no touching of course. It's not entirely clear what's coming up next there. At least their renowned Sharjah Biennal will not be disturbed as it is not due until 2021.

7 MUSEUM FOR ISLAMIC ART, Jerusalem

Islamic art is not what visitors to Jerusalem are usually there for, but this is the third holiest city of Islam after all. It is an impressive museum that looks far beyond its Middle Eastern setting. The management committee offers some hope for conflict resolution in Israel, having a good mix of members from different backgrounds. Exhibitions to look forward to include *Al-Andalus*. Spain may be at the other end of the Mediterranean, but it was an Umayyad prince from Syria who made Al-Andalus the extraordinary apogee of Islamic culture that it became. Curiously, this museum also has one of the world's finest collections of watches.

8 MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, Berlin

A very old institution that is often overlooked because it was established so long ago. Also, it has not had the massive injections of cash and architectural cachet of some newer locations. Another factor is that is like a lodger in the larger Pergamon Museum complex. German scholars were among the first to explore Islamic art, so this is the place to visit for an understanding of how the field got going. It is not about showmanship. There are serious exhibitions to look forward to, including *Trans-cultural Relations, Global Biographies,* which examines the interconnectedness of Islamic art with many other traditions.

9 MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, Cairo

The oldest dedicated Islamic-art museum in the world. When it opened in the 19th century it was meant to be a museum of Arab art, but it was sensibly decided to cast the net wider. There are exhibits all the way from Spain to Iran. The imposing building has suffered some damage over the years, especially by a car bomb in 2014. The collection was also affected. With premises and a collection as grand as this, it is understandable that exhibitions are a lower priority. Most visitors to Egypt are more interested in pharaonic sightseeing anyway.

10 ISLAMIC MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

One of the newest Islamic-art centres in a continent that previously had none. The IMA has been around since 2014 and gives Melbourne the cultural edge in at least one respect. Among the temporary attractions that should still be open when visits happen again is *Boundless Plains*. It is an interesting new take on a subject that has been addressed before, mainly because it's Australia's entrée into the world of Islamic heritage. The 19th and 20th century 'cameleers' who opened up much of Australia's massive interior were mainly from what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan. The 'Gans', as they were known, are owed a large debt and at least that is being paid by different museums. Although there is a strong Antipodean message at this museum, it is also possible to see the works of art that make Islam a culture that cuts across national borders.

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

FORWARD THINKING

Just to bring us back to the present global predicament, I would like to highlight an art initiative that is doing good work in a part of the world that we tend to think of as being loaded.

The Ayyam Gallery, Lawrie Shabibi, Green Art Gallery and Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde are all part of the Alserkal Avenue's 'Pay it Forward' programme.

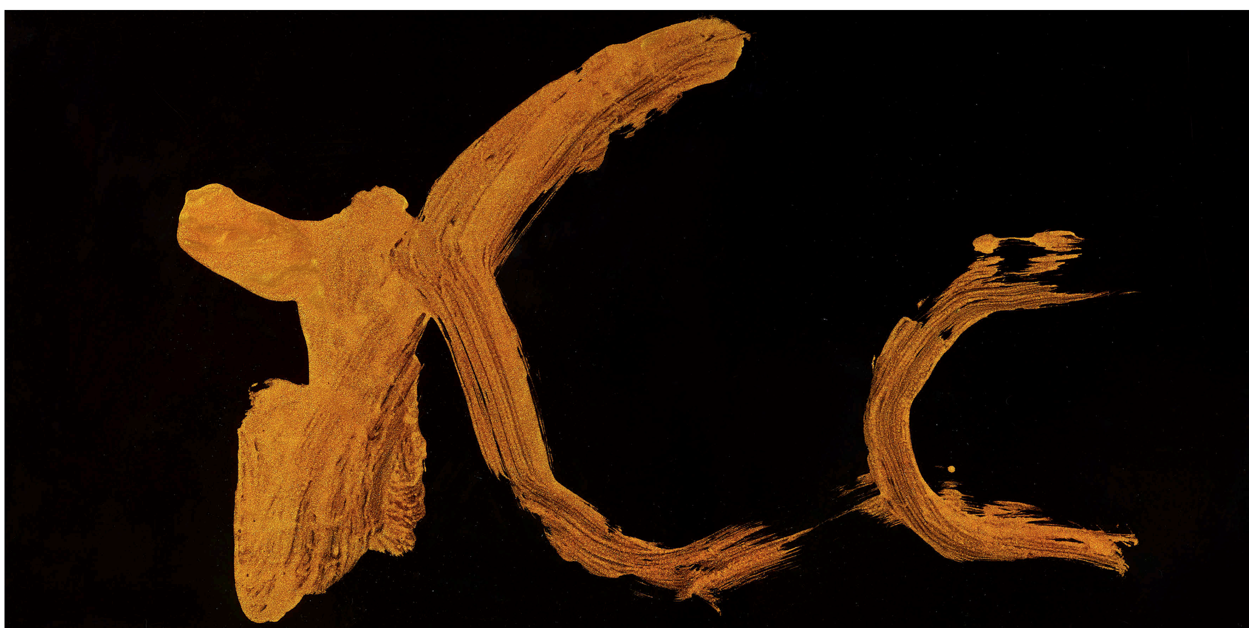
The initiative is to help tenants in the Dubai arts community apply for a subsidy after proposing ways to help each other, or members of the public.

The creative platform called INKED took on the challenge to work with its F&B partners and deliver meals to medics and people in need.

The latest step is asking people and businesses to buy front-line staff meals, which will be delivered by Dubai Food Bank for distribution, as well as with the Dubai Health Authority, to support the medical workers across several Dubai hospitals and clinics. This is getting back to the real world of art rather than the more rarefied bubbles of the 10 institutions above.

The First-Timer (2012) by Afshin Pirhashemi, archival print on cotton paper, edition 4 out of 10, 60 x 85 cm. Part of the Pay it Forward initiative at the Ayyam Gallery

ASIAN ART COLOGNE



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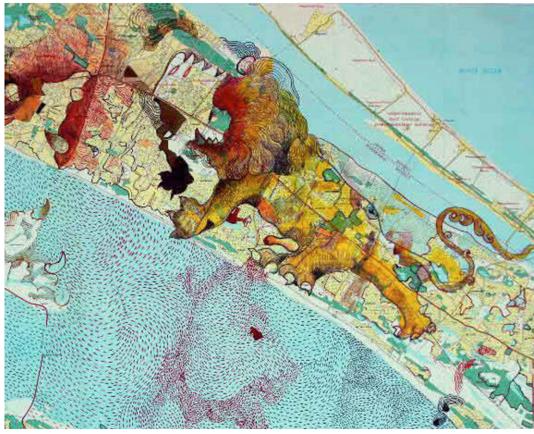
Two niô. Japan, Edo period, 18th/19th century. Wood, pair lokapala, with remains of old mount, H 115.6 cm
Morita Shiryû (1912 – 1998). The Character „Ju“ (wood, tree). 1989. Lacquered panel, paper label on the back with title in Kanji, size, date, artist and seal mark, 80 x 160 cm



SUMMER 2020

Welcome to the digital edition of Asian Art Newspaper

Over 23 years ago, we started life as a large-format art newspaper, which used the highest quality paper to print a feast for our readers' eyes. Times have changed.

The newspaper has moved with the explosion of technology on offer and now also produces this digital edition to support its elder sister. This new edition gives us the chance to add an extra dimension that can never be experienced in print – links to the online world with its amazing breadth of information – videos, podcasts, blogs, vlogs, virtual and AR exhibitions, as well as online catalogues and books.

I hope the same character and spirit in our print issue can be seen in this digital edition. The tool box, shown at the top of the page, allows you to view the contents and pages how you like to see them. You can add notes, add a book mark, or easily see the contents list.

We always welcome feedback and interaction with our readers. If you have any comments, suggestions, or ideas, please feel free to contact me. I wish you many hours of happy reading.

Sarah Callaghan
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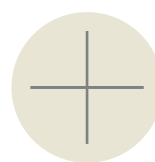

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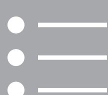 View contents menu

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