

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF ANCIENT CHINESE BRONZE VESSELS
ON DISPLAY AT THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Museum Only Western Venue for

Ancient Chinese Bronzes from the Shouyang Studio: The Katherine and George Fan Collection

Major Exhibition On View November 7, 2010–January 2, 2011

Some of the oldest objects in the Art Institute of Chicago's permanent collection are Chinese bronzes, most of which are vessels that were commissioned by China's ruling elite for the preparation and offering of food and wine in ceremonial banquets. Never before, however, has the museum had the opportunity to present as many as can be seen in the exhibition ***Ancient Chinese Bronzes from the Shouyang Studio: The Katherine and George Fan Collection***, on view **November 7, 2010, through January 2, 2011**. This presentation, drawn from the world-renowned private collection assembled by Chinese American collectors Dr. and Mrs. George Fan of New York, features 72 bronzes acquired by the Fans over more than two decades. The exhibition was initially co-organized by the Shanghai Museum and the Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and was shown at both museums in 2009. The Art Institute will be its last and exclusive Western venue.



Ancient Chinese Bronzes from the Shouyang Studio, presented chronologically, is a multi-faceted exhibition that provides artistic, historical, archaeological, and technical perspectives on the Chinese Bronze Age. The first gallery focuses on the Shang (c. 1700-c. 1050 B.C.) and

succeeding Western Zhou (c. 1050-771 B.C.) dynasties—a millennium during which the earliest ritual bronzes evolved from fragile but skillfully cast pouring vessels to an impressive range of masterful forms and compelling imagery; and the second and third gallery on the late Western Zhou and subsequent Spring and Autumn period (770-476 B.C.). The latter features large and stately food vessels. The most powerful originate in the northwestern state of Qin, which later became China's first true empire under the rule of the self-proclaimed First Emperor, best known for his consolidation of the Great Wall. These are followed by elegant bronzes of the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.) and Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 9), when most became attributes of wealth and prestige rather than symbols of authority and instruments of ritual.

The collection is especially notable for the great number of bronzes cast with inscriptions, which range from simple pictographs to brief ancestor dedications to detailed historical narratives that identify the honorees for whom and events for which the objects were commissioned. Spiritually as well as physically integral to the works in which they were cast, these words would have been recognized in ritual ceremonies by all participants, both living and dead. Whether naming an honoree, recounting a military campaign, or declaring an imperial edict, inscriptions preserve firsthand, if highly formulaic, records of their time. Inscribed bronzes also present us with some of the earliest evidence for China's most prized cultural possession—its written language. As the ancestors of modern Chinese script, inscriptions are integral to any study of the origin and evolution of Chinese calligraphy. An internationally renowned scholar, Dr. Edward L. Shaughnessy, Professor of Early Chinese Studies in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, has provided the first English translations of these inscriptions. These are included in all labels, together with ink impressions (rubblings) of the original inscriptions and of many surface designs taken directly from the bronzes. A special feature of the exhibition is a complete set of ceramic models that reconstructs, step by step, the process of piece-mold casting unique to ancient Chinese foundries. These models have been generously provided by the Shanghai Museum.

The Fan collection's honorific title, Shouyang Studio, follows a venerable tradition in East Asia in which scholar-connoisseurs have for centuries adopted or been honored with studio names that convey admirable human qualities and interests. Recognizing the Fans' commitment to historical research and their conviction that the most important bronzes should be reserved for cultural institutions in China, scholars there have honored them with the studio name Shouyang, recorded

in anecdotal histories as the site where two righteous brothers of the 11th century B.C. starved to death rather than serve a conquering regime. In respect for their national heritage, in November 2009, the Fans donated to China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage nine bronze vessels that it deemed of greatest historical importance. China's Ministry of Culture has generously authorized their loan to this exhibition.

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies *Ancient Chinese Bronzes from the Shouyang Studio: The Katherine and George Fan Collection*. Bilingual in Chinese and English, the catalogue is available at the Art Institute's Museum Shop for \$26.

On Thursday, November 18, 6:00–7:00 pm, Dr. Shaughnessy will present a lecture, "Newest Sources of Early Chinese History: Inscribed Vessels That Have Appeared in the Last Decade." This lecture, sponsored by the Art Institute's Asian Art Council and open to the public, will take place in the Art Institute's Morton Auditorium.

Ancient Chinese Bronzes from the Shouyang Studio: The Katherine and George Fan Collection is organized by the Shanghai Museum in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago. The Chicago presentation is curated by Elinor Pearlstein, Associate Curator of Chinese Art at the Art Institute of Chicago.

IMAGE: *Cauldron*, Late Western Zhou dynasty, first half of 9th century B.C. China. Gift of Katherine and George Fan to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China.

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10:30 am–5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

10:30 am–8:00 pm Thursday, Friday

10:30 am–5:00 pm Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREE THURSDAY EVENINGS AFTER 5:00 pm

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

ADMISSION

Adults \$18.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Children 14 and over, students, and seniors \$12.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Chicago residents receive a \$2.00 discount with proof of residency

Children under 14 always free

Members always free

Free Evenings are free to all. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Museum Passport" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago.