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Message from the President

With this message, I want to report several transitions, thank those who have actively participated in developing the programs offered by the Asian Art Council (AAC), and welcome the Friends of Indian and Islamic Art, many of whom are already AAC members.

First, Janice Katz, Roger L. Weston Associate Curator of Japanese Art, gave birth to a beautiful daughter, Dawn Rebecca Lee, on November 9, 2015 (see Meet the People, page 7). Janice has returned from maternity leave and participated in our trip to New York for Asia Week in mid-March.

Second, Betty Seid, an officer and board member of the AAC, has resigned as editor of the AAC newsletter. Betty has been our editor for more than 10 years and has transformed the newsletter from a four-page, one-color flyer to its current eight-page, full-color, glossy-paper publication. Indeed, many members have commented that the newsletter just gets better and better. I hope that I can persuade her to continue to assist the council as editor emeritus.

Ed Horner, whom many of you know through our membership solicitations, has taken a new job in California and has resigned as membership chair. Fortunately, he remains on the AAC board. Although you may not see Ed’s name on as many letters from AAC, I hope to persuade him to continue to advise on membership issues.

I also want to thank our programming committee co-chairs, Heather Black and Keven Wilder, who have consulted with Virginia Gerst, Chuck Harper, Richard Horwood, Barbara Kipper, George Mann, and Betty Seid. Along with the curatorial staff, they have put together a tentative program for the 2016–17 season that brings recognized experts and accomplished speakers to Chicago. Please stay tuned for details.

Lastly, the department has decided that Friends of Indian and Islamic Art will formally merge into AAC later this year. It is the goal of those involved—the board of AAC; Chuck Harper, President of Friends of Indian and Islamic Art; and all of the curators—that this transition be seamless. If anyone has questions concerning the benefits of AAC membership, I encourage them to contact me directly.

I look forward to seeing each one of you at forthcoming programs (see Calendar, back cover) and at our annual meeting on Thursday, May 12.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Mottier
Events

Encounters with Asia: Masterpieces of Indian Art
—Heather Black, Asian Art Council Program Chair

This April, Asian Art Council, Friends of Indian and Islamic Art, and Sustaining Fellows of the Art Institute of Chicago jointly present the annual Encounters with Asia luncheon-lecture series.

The focus of this year’s series is the rich and varied artistic history of India. Objects, methods, and periods significant to the development of India’s distinctive heritage will be presented.

On April 6, Madhuvanti Ghose of the Art Institute of Chicago began the series with a discussion of the museum’s collection of South Indian Chola bronzes, masterpieces that were used in temple rituals. Next, John Seyller of the University of Vermont will talk about Mughal painting and the imperial atelier. Amin Jaffer of Christie’s will discuss the gems and jewels of the Indian maharajas, exploring the role royal jewelry played in expressions of royal power. And the series will conclude with Karin Zitzewitz of Michigan State University, who will examine how 20th-century Indian artists grappled differently with sacred imagery within the profoundly secular discourse of modernist art.

These luncheon-lectures take place on the following Wednesdays from 11:00–1:00.

April 13  The Mughal Artist at Work  
John Seyller, University of Vermont

April 20  Love, Power, and Fashion: The Role of Gems and Jewels in Princely India  
Amin Jaffer, Christie’s

April 27  The Secular Icon: Modernist Art and the Sacred Image in Independent India  
Karin Zitzewitz, Michigan State University

$60 members of Asian Art Council, Friends of Indian and Islamic Art, and Sustaining Fellows; $80 general public

RSVP by contacting the Office of Sustaining Fellows at (312) 443-3735. Space is limited.

Trapp Japanese Art Lecture: Kimura Kenkado, Prodigious Patron of the Arts

Felice Fischer, Luther W. Brady Curator of Japanese Art and Senior Curator of East Asian Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art

November 19, 2015

—Elinor Pearlstein, associate curator of Chinese art

In detailing the endeavors and achievements of Kimura Kenkado (1736–1802)—“patron, painter, poet, publisher, polymath”—Felice Fisher brought to life one of Japan’s true Renaissance men. She set the backdrop for his extraordinary biography by describing the political, economic, and cultural milieu of his native city of Osaka, where wealthy merchants—including Kenkado’s family of sake brewers—boldly embraced the introduction of Chinese literati ideals into Japanese society. These were expressed in a new, self-consciously individualistic style of painting known as Nanga, or Bunjinga.

Kenkado collected, exhibited, and otherwise championed works by Nanga artists, most prominently the master Ike Taiga (1723–76). Fisher described other areas of Chinese literati culture advocated by Kenkado, whether in ambitious publishing projects or in private gatherings of his tightly knit intellectual and social community. Notable among the latter were those devoted to Chinese poetry and to tea ceremonies that introduced brewed, Chinese-style tea to a practice traditionally devoted to the frothy, whipped tea native to Japan.

Fisher then turned to Kenkado’s scientific passions: geography, evidenced in his own sketches as well as many paintings that he collected; cartography, reflected in his extensive assemblage of maps; and botany, for which Kenkado transformed his home into what Fisher termed “a veritable natural history museum.” The opening of Japan to the Dutch by the shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune in 1720 not only facilitated the integration of Western studies in all of these areas, but also stimulated the interest of Japanese artists in Western painting techniques and Western subjects. Fisher described Kenkado’s purchase of some of these “Western pictures” as among his boldest initiatives.

Fisher concluded by underlining Kenkado’s seemingly limitless capacity for learning, for friendship, and for generosity in sharing his collections and his resources with artists, scholars, and poets—an extraordinary cultural legacy for the son of a sake brewer.

Vanishing Beauty: Asian Jewelry and Ritual Objects from the Barbara and David Kipper Collection
June 19–August 21, Regenstein Hall

—Madhuvanti Ghose, Alsdorf Associate Curator of Indian, Southeast Asian, Himalayan, and Islamic Art

This summer’s Regenstein Hall exhibition, Vanishing Beauty: Asian Jewelry and Ritual Objects from the Barbara and David Kipper Collection, invites visitors to take a trip through the rich cultures of some of Asia’s most remote regions. The exhibition comprises more than 300 Asian jewelry and ritual objects collected by photographer and Art Institute benefactor Barbara Levy Kipper and generously gifted to the Art Institute of Chicago from the Barbara and David Kipper Collection. Among them are a vast collection of Tibetan and greater Himalayan Buddhist ritual objects and adornments, Islamic silver jewelry from the nomadic tribes of Turkmenistan and city-states of Uzbekistan, folk jewelry spanning the breadth of South Asia, personal ornaments from the Indonesian archipelago, and the monumental jewelry of Southwest China’s ethnic minorities. All of these objects are brought together to tell stories of the disappearing nomadic cultures of Asia.

Visitors will be introduced to the objects through an immersive exhibition experience that includes music and video installations throughout the galleries. Vanishing Beauty: Asian Jewelry and Ritual Objects from the Barbara and David Kipper Collection brings dispersed cultures to life, flowing through five geographic regions—the mountaintop monasteries in the Himalayas; the Central Asian steppes marked by grand, blue-tiled mosques, madrasahs, and mausolea; the pastoral regions and deserts of South Asia; the most remote islands of Indonesia; and the river valleys in China’s mountainous Guizhou province.

If the ephemeral nature of Western video art often leaves the nonspecialist in search of context, its frame of reference in China may seem even more perplexing. For AAC members, Kate Grube had intriguing historical insights to provide.

Beginning in 1976 with artistic movements that followed the end of the repressive Cultural Revolution, Grube’s chronicle of the origin and significance of that distinctive medium in China was all-embracing. Examining government-sanctioned images of patriotism, she led us through sympathetic portrayals of endurance that challenged communist ideology in the late 1970s, the liberal introduction of international culture in the early 1980s, and the reassertion of political control in late 1984.

Grube then turned to the emergence in 1985 of national avant-garde movements and the role of performance in enabling young artists to embark upon daring modes of expression. For the First Experimental Exhibition in Guangzhou (1986), performers sheathed themselves in white leotards, appearing to merge body and material in highly formalized pose and gesture. Organized by the Southern Artists Salon, its leader, Wang Du (born 1956), skillfully directed the video documentation of this performance for broadcast on local TV.

True Chinese video, Grube explained, both developed from and reacted to the emerging television culture. In 30 x 30 by Zhang Peli (born 1947), only the lower half of the artist’s cross-legged, seated body and latex-gloved hands were visible as he methodically broke a mirror, painstakingly glued it together, broke it again, and repeated the exercise. By the artist’s own account, he undertook this mundane regimen, conceived for the 1988 Huangshan Conference, as a comment on habitual professional routine; he wanted the assembled artists and critics to “feel time.” 30 x 30 has been acclaimed as the first true video artwork produced in China.
The Edinburg Bequest: An Unparalleled Vision
—Elinor Pearlstein, associate curator of Chinese art

The intrepid collector and generous benefactor Dorothy Braude Edinburg (1920–2015) holds a special place in the history of the museum and this department. Long-standing AAC members may well remember her animated spirit as well. In 2013, her passions for Chinese and Korean ceramics, Japanese illustrated books, and pan-Asian gold together culminated in a remarkable gift of more than 300 works of Asian art. These complemented her even-more-extraordinary contribution of more than 800 Western prints and drawings. She subsequently augmented all of these gifts as opportunities arose (see AAC newsletters, spring 2009, fall 2013, and spring 2015).

This January, Mrs. Edinburg’s remarkable legacy was further enhanced with the announcement of her bequest exceeding $35 million—the largest bequest of funds in the museum’s history. Under the terms of her trust, this bequest will become a Major Acquisition Fund, to be used primarily to enrich the departments of Asian Art and Prints and Drawings. These funds may also be applied to conservation, publications, and other areas of scholarship.

A New York art dealer perhaps put it best when she observed that Mrs. Edinburg had never stopped looking for new works to acquire. To this we might add that she never stopped looking on behalf of the Art Institute of Chicago. During almost every visit to the Department of Asian Art, she requested an inspection tour of our galleries and storerooms to search for gaps that she might fill or areas that she might further enrich. Now, in the words of former director Douglas Druick, “we will use this incredible funding to carry Dorothy’s vision forward—to inspire, educate, and delight future generations through the collection and preservation of exceptional art.”

Acquisitions

Recent Acquisition of Contemporary Art from India: Two Works from Yugal Kishor Sharma’s Meghdoot (Cloud Messenger) Series
—Madhuvanti Ghose, Alsdorf Associate Curator of Indian, Southeast Asian, Himalayan, and Islamic Art

A pair of tradition-based Indian paintings by Indian artist Yugal Kishor Sharma (born 1959) from Udaipur are our most recent acquisitions in the field of Indian art. They are part of his Meghdoot (Cloud Messenger) series, inspired by the famous fifth-century classical Sanskrit lyric poem by Kalidasa, Meghdutam. It is the lament of an exiled yaksha, or nature spirit, who is pining away for his lover. When, at the beginning of the monsoon season, he sees a lonely cloud hovering over the hilltop, he requests that it carry a message back to his beloved. The yaksha then describes the many beautiful sights the black monsoon cloud will encounter on his way.

The poem is divided into two parts, Purvamegha and Uttaramegha. The artist has painted each part of Meghdoot separately in this pair of paintings, showing the monsoon cloud in anthropomorphic form. Purva-megh is dark, composed of rain-bearing, heavy black clouds and a fiery red border indicative of the yaksha’s longing and passion for his wife, from whom he was exiled. Since, in Indian miniatures, the border is also treated as a part of the composition, he inscribes the first introductory line of Meghdoot at the top. The cloud messenger carries a lotus symbolizing the yaksha’s message for his beloved as it floats over the landscape below with forests, mountains, birds, and animals. Uttar-megh, in contrast, depicts the clouds after rainfall in a lighter gray color as it floats over the great city of Ujjain, the house of his beloved below. The lake, golden lotuses, and flying geese all symbolize the return of the cloud messenger. The lightning in his hand reflects the yaksha’s happiness that his exile is about to end.

This pair of works reflects the method, techniques, and aesthetics of the Nathdwara school, with its use of gouache and gold leaf on handmade paper. Yugal Kishor Sharma was born in a traditional Nathdwara artist family and is descended from the renowned late 19th/early 20th-century Nathdwara artist Sukhdev Kishandas (1853–1925). Today, Sharma continues to paint and teach in Udaipur and Nathdwara.
Sliding Doors (Fusuma-e) from the Phoenix Pavilion (Hooden) at the World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893
—Janice Katz, Roger L. Weston Associate Curator of Japanese Art

Recently, the Chicago Park District located sliding door paintings (fusuma-e) dating to 1893. They were originally installed in the Phoenix Pavilion (Hooden), erected for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The Art Institute has plans to conserve the paintings and display them along with the only other surviving parts of the building, the transom panels (ranma) already in our collection.

The Phoenix Pavilion was the main national pavilion of Japan at the fair. Situated on the coveted location of the Wooded Island in a lagoon in Jackson Park, it stood out against the extraordinary architectural consistency of the beaux-arts buildings—the so-called “White City,”—that dominated the majority of the fair. It was given as a gift from the government of Japan to the city of Chicago after the fair’s conclusion, but unfortunately two fires in 1946 lead to the demolition of the Phoenix Pavillion.

According to Chicago Park District records, the sliding doors were removed from the building in 1943, which fortunately spared them from the fires. They include three subjects: a pair of adult phoenixes with a chick underneath a tree branch, a phoenix perched on a pine tree, and the trunk of that tree. The latter two form a continuous composition that corresponds with photographs published in 1893, attributed to the celebrated artist Hashimoto Gaho (1835–1908).

These sliding doors are a very exciting discovery, and we are proud to be able to add them to the Department of Asian Art’s collection.

New Acquisition of Chinese Art
—Tao Wang, Pritzker Chair of Asian Art, curator of Chinese art

The meaning of this painting derives from the basic ideas of Chinese cosmology. Whereas Europeans conceived the cosmos philosophically, as created by a transcendent deity or as a battleground between spirit and matter, or scientifically, as a mechanism consisting of objects and their attributes, ancient Chinese thinkers viewed the world as a complete and complex “organism.” As the British scholar Joseph Needham writes, “Things behaved in particular ways . . . not necessarily because of prior actions or impulsons of other things, but because their position in the ever-moving cyclical universe was such that they were endowed with intrinsic natures which made that behaviour inevitable for them.” The cosmos continues to change, but there is a consistent pattern to that change discernible to human beings. Observation of the seasons and celestial realms, as well as methods such as dream divination and manipulating the hexagrams of the Classic of Changes, allow people to understand the pattern of the universe as a whole by focusing on the changes taking place in one of its meaningful parts. In this work, Tai tries to capture that principle of movement and change of the Qi, Yin, and Yang with precision and sensitivity to his material, naturally combining the modern and the traditional. The painting is spontaneous and mysterious and, ultimately, beautiful.

The artist Tai Xiangzhou began training in calligraphy and classical painting at a very young age. Though he has produced a number impressive works in the style of the 12th-century masters, of in recent years he has developed a very individual style, employing traditional brush, ink, paper, and silk (some exclusively made with 18th-century methods), but with highly expressive brushwork and abstraction painted in a monumental scale. In his own words, Tai believes that “to present landscape painting that meets modern tastes, we must start from the experience of modern society—by properly accessing the living spirit of art, researching the materials, techniques, medium, and modern time-space experience. In short, we should not only keep alive traditional art, but also the tradition of art.”

Kate’s most intrepid pursuits were decidedly Chinese. From an initial (about 1915) penchant for snuff bottles and miniature 19th-century porcelains, the latter purportedly acquired to please Lucy, her taste had broadened and matured by the early 1920s to include earlier works—stunning monochrome-glazed ceramics (11th–13th century); Buddhist sculptures in wood, stone, and gilt bronze (7th–12th century A.D.); and, most importantly, ancient ritual bronzes (13th century B.C.–2nd century A.D.). Whether developed on her own or encouraged by curators or dealers, these priorities were highly unusual for nonspecialists of her time.

Kate left no diaries and very little correspondence, but her passport applications show her to have been an avid world traveler. One of her lengthiest excursions, if completed, would have taken her to China, Korea, and Japan in 1917. Described as reserved and brusque on the surface, she was also regarded by those who knew her well as astute, sensitive, and witty. Curator Charles Fabens Kelley (1885–1960; AAC newsletter, spring 2012) perhaps described her most incisively as “difficult to get to know, but worth the effort.” Kate Buckingham’s ongoing legacy resides in a generous endowment for major works of art in and beyond the Asian department. For these, she is finally and appropriately acknowledged.
Calendar of Asian Art Events

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The Art Institute of Chicago
The Inspired Chinese Brush
Gallery 134
Through May 2, 2016

Japan's Great Female Poets
Gallery 107
April 2–June 19, 2016

Vanishing Beauty: Asian Jewelry and Ritual Objects from the Barbara and David Kipper Collection
Regenstein Hall
June 19–August 21, 2016

New York

Nasreen Mohamedi
The Met Breuer, New York
March 18–June 5, 2016

Korea: 100 Years of Collecting at the Met
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Through March 27, 2016

In and Out of Content: Asia Society Celebrates the Collections at 60
Asia Society, New York
March 8, 2016–January 8, 2017

Genesis Breyer P-Orridge: Try to Altar Everything
Rubin Museum of Art, New York
March 11–August 1, 2016

In the Wake: Japanese Photographers Respond to 3/11
Japan Society, New York
March 11–June 12, 2016

Nepalese Seasons: Rain and Ritual
Rubin Museum of Art, New York
May 6, 2016–March 27, 2017

Kamakura: Realism and Spirituality in the Sculpture of Japan
Asia Society, New York
Through May 8, 2016

Massachusetts

Megacities Asia
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
April 3–July 17, 2016

China in Twelve Artworks
Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge
Through May 8, 2016

Ohio

Ji Yun-Fei: Last Days of Village Wen
Cleveland Museum of Art
February 12–July 31, 2016

Muhammad Shah’s Royal Persian Tent
Cleveland Museum of Art
Through June 26, 2016

Silent Poetry: Masterworks of Chinese Painting
Cleveland Museum of Art
Through April 24, 2016

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Through July 31, 2016

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Cleveland Museum of Art
Opens August 4, 2016

Washington

Journey to Dunhuang: Buddhist Art of the Silk Road Caves
Seattle Art Museum
March 5–June 12, 2016

Washington, D.C.

Heart of an Empire: Herzfeld’s Discovery of Pasargadae
Freer and Sackler Galleries
Through July 31, 2016

Body of Devotion: The Cosmic Buddha in 3D
Freer and Sackler Galleries
Through December 2016

Turquoise Mountain: Artists Transforming Afghanistan
Freer and Sackler Galleries
March 5, 2016–January 29, 2017

Symbolic Cities: The Work of Ahmed Mater
Freer and Sackler Galleries
March 19–September 18, 2016

Painting with Words: Gentleman Artists of the Ming Dynasty
Freer and Sackler Galleries
April 16–July 24, 2016

LECTURE SERIES

65th Annual A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts
Vidya Dehejia, Columbia University
National Gallery of Art East Building, Washington, D.C.
Sundays at 2:00

Shiva as “Victor of Three Forts”: Battling for Empire, 855–955
April 10, 2016

Portrait of a Queen: Patronage of Dancing Shiva, about 941–1002
April 17, 2016

An Eleventh–Century Master Sculptor: Ten Thousand Pearls Adorn a Bronze
April 24, 2016

Chola Obsession with Sri Lanka and the Silk Route of the Sea in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries
May 1, 2016

Worship in Uncertain Times: The Secret Burial of Bronzes in 1310
May 8, 2016

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California

Islamic Art Now, Part 2: Contemporary Art of the Middle East
Los Angeles County Museum of Art Ongoing

Cave Temples of Dunhuang: Buddhist Art on China’s Silk Road
The Getty Center, Los Angeles
May 7–September 4, 2016

Elephants without Number
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
Through June 26, 2016

Chinese Lacquerware
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
Through July 31, 2016

Extracted
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
Through August 14, 2016

Colorado

Samurai: Armor from the Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection
Denver Art Museum
March 6–June 5, 2016

Florida

Samurai: The Way of the Warrior
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota
Through April 17, 2016

Ink, Silk and Gold: Islamic Art from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota
February 5–May 1, 2016

Illinois

Suhasini Kjiriwal: Artist in Residence
Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago
May 8–June 30, 2016

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see www.hydeparkart.org for specific residency events
May 8–June 30, 2016