Message from the President

In this, my second letter to the Asian Art Council, I want to highlight our programming by thanking those who have taken the lead in organizing a number of our very successful events.

We closed 2016 with a progression of wonderful and thought-provoking programs. In October, Janet and Richard Horwood organized our third lecture and dinner at the Casino club. Edward Wilkinson from Bonham’s, Los Angeles, engaged the audience in the topic of collecting Himalayan art. In November, Madhuvanti Ghose initiated a program featuring acclaimed artist Jitish Kallat. Anuradha and Arjun Aggarwal hosted a wonderful dinner for the artist and our Gold and Silver level members, allowing time for stimulating discussion. In December, Madhuvanti introduced Gil Stein, the director of the Oriental Institute and professor of Near Eastern archaeology at the University of Chicago. A great crowd assembled for his inspiring lecture “Art in the Shadow of the Taliban: Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan.” Closing our year, the Trapp Lecture attracted a large audience with Dr. Timon Screech traveling from the University of London to speak with us about “The Royal Cult of the Shoguns—Nikkô and the Deification of Tokugawa Ieyasu.” Our thanks to Carol and Mack Trapp for making this an annual tradition!

After we ushered in 2017, Gay-Young Cho arranged a delightful dinner at Intro featuring the culinary expertise of Executive Chef Stephen Gillanders. It was the highest attended Art of Asian Cuisine dinner to date. An excellent time was had by all!

As this newsletter is mailed, Gold and Silver level members of the AAC are joining Sustaining Fellows in a weekend trip to San Francisco with Tao Wang, executive director of initiatives in Asia, Pritzker Chair of Asian Art, and curator of Chinese art. We plan to visit the finest Asian and modern art treasures the city has to offer, and we hope to extend future travel opportunities of this caliber to upper-level patron members.

Coming in April, Charles Harper is leading the charge for the AAC’s next “Encounters with Asia” series. This program will focus on personal adornment pertinent to Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Islamic cultures, with four lectures each followed by lunch. The kickoff lecture is scheduled for Wednesday, April 5, and more information is included within this newsletter. We offer our sincere thanks to the Bank of China for its sponsorship of the lecture series.

The efforts of all these and other individuals are essential to the programming that the AAC provides. Simply put, we couldn’t do it without them. Bravo to all!

Finally, I want to salute all members of the AAC—you—as this year has seen record attendance at our programs, as well as a record number of new members. We have seen significant growth in our Silver and Gold patron levels, which is essential to our support of the work of the Asian Art Department, notably in the areas of acquisitions and exhibition research. Your membership in the AAC is making a difference. I hope to see you at our future events and, in particular, at the AAC’s annual meeting on May 4. This will feature a conversation between Richard Horwood and Charles H. Mottier, both Asian art collectors and AAC Gold level members. Please be sure to mark your calendars for our April Encounters lectures and the annual meeting on Thursday, May 4.

Very truly yours,

Ann Grube
Starting on April 21, Asian art enthusiasts will want to visit the textile galleries (57–59) to see a varied display of Javanese batik textiles from the museum’s impressive holdings and a local private collection. Though many Asian countries produce textiles dyed in the wax-resist technique known as batik, the Indonesian island of Java is famous for developing the most sophisticated process and result.

In batik, a liquefied wax compound is drawn on the surface of the cloth over areas of pattern or over the background, thus preventing the dye from affecting that area. Multiple colors require multiple dye baths, and wax may be added or scraped away each time in order to extend the palette. The main implement for applying the wax, called a canting, has a reservoir connected to a narrow tube that allows for very precise drawing.

Extant batiks date from the 19th and 20th centuries and were made primarily to serve as garments. The 19th-century examples reflect the conservative styles of the local courts in central Java, where the modern batik was developed, with patterns and motifs drawn primarily from local and Hindu sources. Examples from the 20th century display the brighter colors and diverse patterns—Chinese, Arabic, and Western—favored by various immigrant communities on the north coast of the island.

New Acquisitions

Dragon and Tiger by Kishi Ganku (1835)
Janice Katz, Roger L. Weston Associate Curator of Japanese Art

On one side of a pair of folding screens, the muscular form of a tiger seems to emerge from a rock formation. He snarls at the dragon on the other screen, whose head and claws pierce through thick clouds. This is the classic pairing of East Asian painting—the tiger and dragon, depicted with a dynamism rarely encountered and further enhanced by the bold contrast of monochrome ink on gold ground.

Such a composition, and the skill to execute it, could only come from the mind and brush of Kishi Ganku, one of the most creative artists of his generation, who worked in the Edo period (1615–1868) at a time when the most talented and experimental artists were making their name. His brushstroke brims with energy and tension; wet ink drips on the smooth gold surface, perfectly controlled, creating depth and volume. Dated 1835 by inscription, this painting is Ganku’s last known tackling of the dragon and tiger subject before his death in 1838.

This important new acquisition to our collection of Japanese art has been made possible by the generous contributions of Roger Weston, George and Roberta Mann, Ann and John P. Grube, Charles Mottier, and Frances and Edward M. Blair, Jr. The department wishes to extend our extreme gratitude to all who made this acquisition a reality.


Kishi Ganku (Japanese, 1749–1838). Dragon and Tiger, 1835. Pair of six-panel screens; ink and gold on paper.
Reviews

Lecture by Timon Screech: The Royal Cult of the Shoguns—Nikkō and the Deification of Tokugawa Ieyasu
December 8, 2016
Janice Katz, Roger L. Weston Associate Curator of Japanese Art

In his lecture on December 8, 2016, Timon Screech noted how Nikkō, the site of the shogun’s mausoleum, while often visited by tourists today, was also a popular pilgrimage site in the 17th century. He discussed how it had been especially configured with the goal of offering a pleasing journey. The layout and elaborate decoration of the buildings are filled with symbolism of the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu’s place in the spiritual life of the Japanese in premodern times. As the deification of Ieyasu after his death included his association with the medicine Buddha and therefore with healing, visitors not only pay their respects but pray for the healing of themselves or their loved ones, and perhaps take a dip in the hot springs as well. Then, to ensure that these pilgrims continued to feel cleansed and purified both spiritually and physically on their return to Edo, the journey was laid out in such a way that took advantage of the sun, keeping its healing light and warmth on the traveler’s faces.

Lecture by Gil Stein: Art in the Shadow of the Taliban—Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan
December 1, 2016
Marion Covey, research associate and Bronze level member

Gil Stein, director of the Oriental Institute (01) of the University of Chicago, summarized several key points about rescuing and preserving the much-damaged cultural heritage of Afghanistan. He began by highlighting the importance and diversity of Afghanistan’s artistic legacy, citing its geography at a “crossroads of cultures,” intersected by the Silk Road, where the civilizations of the Near East, Central Asia, South Asia, and China met.

Almost There by Manjunath Kamath (2016)
Madhuvanti Ghose, Alsdorf Associate Curator of Indian, Southeast Asian, Himalayan, and Islamic Art

The recent acquisition Almost There by Indian artist Manjunath Kamath demonstrates how the Art Institute of Chicago has begun to collect tradition-based contemporary art from India. At first glance, this work looks to be a large circular whorl of fire with its center hollowed out. Closer inspection reveals that it is composed of many smaller works, individually framed and painstakingly painted in the style of tradition-based Indian painting with echoes from Persian miniatures and Tibetan thangkas as well.

Emerging from the flames of the energy are sections of Buddhist deities, horse’s hooves and headquarters flailing in the air, fragments of clouds, and what look to be sections of a Buddhist mandala. This work was clearly inspired by traditions of painting going back to the caves of Ajanta and Buddhist painted scrolls and thangkas. This is seen not only in the imagery but in the technique of gouache on silk and the use of the mandala form itself; the hollowed center refers to the concept of emptiness (shunyata), a very important strand of Indian philosophical thought, and at the same time to the golden womb (hiranyagarbha) and the beginning of the universe and infinity itself.

Manju Kamath was born in Mangalore, India, and while noted for his drawing skills, continues to work in various media. He was trained in India and abroad and had a solo exhibition, As Far As I Know, at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Museum in 2015–16. We hope to install Almost There in the Alsdorf galleries soon. Acquiring works that show the continuity of living painted traditions across Asia is an important goal of the department.
He continued by recounting the history of devastation waged on archaeological Buddhist sites, including the colossal Bamiyan Buddhas; the Bagh-i Babur (Babur’s Garden); a 16th-century Mughal garden in Kabul; and even the National Museum of Afghanistan (NMA) in Kabul.

Most importantly, he detailed past and current projects to preserve, restore, and protect Afghanistan’s remaining cultural heritage. The Oriental Institute (OI) of the University of Chicago and the NMA have been in a four year partnership (2012–16) with specific goals to protect the 57,000 remaining objects (of an estimated 140,000). These include completing an inventory of the museum’s holdings, developing a computer database, assessing conservation priorities, and rehousing the objects.

In addition, the OI mapped all archaeological sites via satellite and documented the looting. Lastly, in a post-Taliban era, the NMA is working toward restoring a sense of national identity through focusing on Afghanistan’s precious remaining trove of objects.

Upcoming Events

Encounters with Asia
Dressing Up: Ceremony and Celebration

Wednesdays, April 5–26, at 11:00
Suzie Oppenheimer, coordinator of programs and events

The fifth annual Encounters with Asia series, hosted by the Asian Art Council, will feature speakers who consider various aspects of “dressing up” in China, Japan, India, and the Islamic world. Each lecture will be followed by a luncheon, featuring a food and wine pairing distinctive to the culture highlighted.

Celebrating Japan’s Enduring Kimono
Wednesday, April 5 at 11:00
Sharon S. Takeda, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)

The kimono was an essential part of everyday Japanese life until the end of the 19th century. In her lecture, Takeda explores its rich history, including its aristocratic beginning and adaptation by the rising samurai class, and shows a variety of pictorial designs as well as the techniques used by the lower classes to subvert and transform the kimono in response to governmental regulations.

How Much Does a Chinese Hairpin Weigh?
Wednesday, April 12 at 11:00
Eugene Y. Wang, Harvard University

Though a Chinese hairpin may not weigh much physically, it carries a lot of conceptual weight. It serves a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood and signifies class status. It is a key part of many ceremonies. More than ornament, Daoist occultists regard it as a magical wand and artists encrypt it with poetry. Wang discusses the hairpin in terms of all these meanings and more.
Symbols of Power: Islamic Lands Dressed Up
Wednesday, April 19 at 11:00
Louise W. Mackie, Cleveland Museum of Art (retired)

Luxury textiles were symbols of power, wealth, and status in Islamic lands, where they set standards of beauty and drove economies, fueling prosperity and urbanization. In this lecture, Mackie considers how Islamic dress incorporated distinct regional styles.

Embroidered Surcoat, Khalat, 1800s. Uzbekistan, Shakhr-i Sabz. Silk; cross-stitch embroidery. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Wade 1916.1412.

Dressing Up the Gods in India
Wednesday, April 26 at 11:00
Madhuvanti Ghose, Alsdorf Associate Curator of Indian, Southeast Asian, Himalayan, and Islamic Art

In temples across India, Hindu deities are worshipped daily with elaborate attention paid to dressing, feeding, and entertaining them, with ever more attention given on special occasions. In this lecture, Ghose examines the Pushtimarg sect’s rituals of seva (loving service) and shringar (adornment) of Shrinathji, the child manifestation of the Hindu god Krishna.

Asian Arts Council Annual Meeting
Collectors in Conversation: Charles H. Mottier in Conservation with Richard Horwood
Thursday, May 4 at 5:30
Gay-Young Cho, programming chair

For our annual meeting, Richard Horwood will interview Charles H. Mottier to learn how he developed one of the most comprehensive collections of 20th-century Japanese prints in private hands over the course of three decades. Gain insight into Mottier’s own experience acquiring and learning about prints, and how and why collectors collect. The program includes a reception and meeting.

Lecture on Contemporary Asian Art by Alexandra Munroe
Thursday, September 14
Patricia Erens, board director, newsletter editor

Since the turn of the century, contemporary Asian art and artists have come into their own, thanks to groundbreaking exhibitions, rising auction prices, and a presence in the media. Artists like the Chinese provocateur and political activist Ai Weiwei have become household names. One of the leading authorities on Asian art is Alexandra Munroe, the Samsung Senior Curator for Asian Art and Senior Advisor of Global Arts at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation.

We are pleased to have Munroe address the Asian Art Council in September to speak about her initiatives on behalf of contemporary Asian artists and the exciting directions that the field will take in the future. This is a great opportunity for our members and their guests to learn more. The event will be followed by a dinner for those who wish to attend.

The Way We Were

Yamanaka and Company
Elinor Pearlstein, associate curator of Chinese Art

When Yamanaka & Company opened its elegant shop at 846 N. Michigan Avenue in the spring of 1928, its name held a premier place in East Asian art. Founded in Osaka by Yamanaka Sadajirō (1866–1936), the family firm had established major galleries in New York (1895), Boston (1899), and London (1900). The rapidly developing area of North Michigan Avenue was a natural extension, especially as affluent Chicagoans comprised a familiar clientele. Since the early 1920s, Yamanaka had sold important Japanese prints to Frank Lloyd Wright and Clarence Buckingham (Fall 2012 newsletter) and Chinese ceramics and Buddhist sculpture to Kate Buckingham (Spring 2016 newsletter) as well as to financier Guy Mitchell.

In the absence of interior views or other archival records, one can only speculate that the Chicago store had a dual personality. Whereas its newspaper ads and store windows promoted an array of mass-produced personal luxuries and decorative furnishings, objects of true historical and aesthetic importance were less conspicuous, featured only in a few special exhibitions and local auctions. Both the popular and rare appear to have been predominantly Chinese, imported from Yamanaka’s offices in Beijing and Shanghai. Although purchased at the more established Boston and New York galleries, the museum’s major acquisitions clearly accelerated after the Chicago opening. These included many of Kate Buckingham’s ancient Chinese bronzes as well as the large 8th-century Buddhist stone triad that dominates Gallery 101, together with a wide range of Chinese ceramics acquired by Russell Tyson (Spring 2014 newsletter).

For a firm that had promoted its role of arbiter of East Asian education, culture, and taste, the consequences of Pearl Harbor were traumatic. All American galleries were permitted by the U.S. government to sell only their current inventories; in 1944, remaining works were consolidated and publicly auctioned. That year, the Chicago store finally closed. A young Yamanaka employee, Nagatani Hisazo (Nagatani Toshizo, d. 1994), then founded his own gallery on Michigan Avenue, which remained open through the 1970s.

Today, this department’s acquisitions from Yamanaka & Company continue to represent many of our most beautiful and historically significant objects.
Calendar of Asian Art Events

EXHIBITIONS

The Art Institute of Chicago
Natural Allusions
Through April 30, 2017
Gallery 134

Provoke: Photography in Japan between Protest and Performance, 1960–75
Through April 30, 2017
Galleries 1-4 and 10

Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Through May 14, 2017

Inventing Utamaro: A Japanese Masterpiece Rediscovered
Freer and Sackler at the Smithsonian
April 8–July 9, 2017

Encounters with Asia
Lecture Series
Dressing Up: Ceremony and Celebration
Wednesdays, April 5–April 26, at 11:00
Nichols Trustees Suite
Public event
Patron Level Event (Silver and Gold)

Chinese Paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago
Chair and curator Tao Wang and Yu Hui, curator of Chinese painting at the Palace Museum
Wednesday, April 12 at 2:00
South Mezzanine Storeroom
Patron Level Event (Silver and Gold)

Gallery Tour of Contemporary Asian Art
Miwako Tezuka, Reversible Destiny Foundation and formerly of the Japan Society, New York
Monday, April 24 at 3:30

The Art Institute of Chicago
Natural Allusions
Through April 30, 2017
Gallery 134

Provoke: Photography in Japan between Protest and Performance, 1960–75
Through April 30, 2017
Galleries 1-4 and 10

Batik Textiles of Java
April 21–September 21, 2017
Galleries 57–59

The Formation of the Japanese Print Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School
April 22–July 23, 2017
Gallery 107

The Chinese Modernists: Xugu and Huang Binhong
May 6 –August 20, 2017
Gallery 134

Painting in India Modern: The Bold Vision of MF Husain
July 14, 2017–March 4, 2018
Aldsof Galleries

California

Tomb Treasures: New Discoveries from China’s Han Dynasty
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
Through May 28, 2017

Contemporary Japanese Ceramics from the Kemper and Stein Collection
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
Through June 4, 2017

A Billion Buddhas: The Awakened Cosmos of Himalayan Buddhism
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
Through April 9, 2017

Chinese Ceramics
Los Angeles Museum of Art (LACMA)
Through July 22, 2017

Massachusetts

New Women for a New Age: Japanese Beauties, 1890s–1930s
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Through August 20, 2017

Minnesota

Embroidering an Ordered Cosmos: Chinese Daoist Priest Garments of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)
Minneapolis Institute of Art
Through September 3, 2017

New Jersey

Musical Arts of Asia
Newark Museum
Through February 26, 2018

New York

Secrets of the Sea: A Tang Shipwreck and Early Trade in Asia
Asia Society
Through June 4, 2017

A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints
Japan Society
Through June 11, 2017

Age of Empires: Chinese Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties
Metropolitan Museum of Art
April 3–July 16, 2017

Rei Kawakubo / Comme des Garçons
Metropolitan Museum of Art
May 4–September 4, 2017

Teiji Furuhashi: Lovers
Museum of Modern Art
Through April 16, 2017

Sacred Spaces: Himalayan Wind and the Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room
Rubin Museum of Art
Through June 5, 2017

Gateway to Himalayan Art
Rubin Museum of Art
Through June 27, 2017

The World Is Sound
Rubin Museum of Art
June 16, 2017–January 8, 2018

Texas

The Keir Collection of Islamic Art Gallery
Dallas Museum of Art
April 18, 2017–April 28, 2019

Washington, D.C.

Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Through May 14, 2017

Inventing Utamaro: A Japanese Masterpiece Rediscovered
Freer and Sackler at the Smithsonian
April 8–July 9, 2017

AAC Events

Encounters with Asia Lecture Series
Dressing Up: Ceremony and Celebration
Wednesdays, April 5–April 26, at 11:00
Nichols Trustees Suite
Public event
Patron Level Event (Silver and Gold)

Secrets of the Sea: A Tang Shipwreck and Early Trade in Asia
Asia Society
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June 16, 2017–January 8, 2018

Annual Meeting (AAC Members)
Collectors in Conversation: Richard Horwood in Conversation with Charles H. Mottier
Thursday, May 4 at 5:30
Event includes reception, meeting, and program
Nichols Trustees Suite
Patron Level Event (Bronze, Silver and Gold)
Tour and Reception with Zhang Peili, Chinese Video Artist
Thursday, May 11 at 3:30
Patron Level Event (Silver and Gold)
Architectural Tour of Chicago’s Islamic Influences
Led by Daniel Walker, Christa Thurman Chair of Textiles and Curator of Islamic Art
Sunday, May 21
Kickoff Party (AAC Members)
Lecture on Contemporary Asian Art
Alexandra Munroe, Guggenheim Museum
Thursday, September 14
Location and time to be finalized
Followed by a reception
Trapp Japanese Art Lecture Series
Lecture by Joe Earle, Bonham’s London
Thursday, November 16
Location and time to be finalized

Interested in becoming a member of the Asian Art Council? Contact the coordinator of the Asian Art Council at aac@artic.edu or (312) 443-7282.