

News



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EMPERORS' TREASURES: CHINESE ART FROM THE NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM, TAIPEI

Magnificent artworks fit for (and made by) kings make their North American debut at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco



SAN FRANCISCO, May 2, 2016 — The centerpiece of the Asian Art Museum's 50th anniversary year, *Emperors' Treasures: Chinese Art from the National Palace Museum, Taipei*, presents nearly 150 imperial masterworks, many of which are making their North American debut. Visitors will discover a trove of exquisite paintings, ceramics, jades and more from one of the world's greatest collections of Chinese art.

On view June 17–Sept. 18, 2016, *Emperors' Treasures* offers audiences a chance to behold the prized possessions of eight emperors and an

empress, passed from dynasty to dynasty and once sheltered in Beijing's Forbidden City. A glimpse into the artistic life inside an imperial palace, the exhibition showcases how family collections were refined over generations, showcasing rare pieces created by emperors themselves in private moments of inspiration.

"This is the absolute 'best of the best' of Chinese imperial art," says Jay Xu, director of the Asian Art Museum. "By exploring how artistic taste was cultivated and evaluated — which created standards of beauty and elegance across Chinese culture — the exhibition reflects the museum's mission of connecting audiences today with the great arts and traditions of Asia."

The meticulously crafted public identities and carefully guarded private lives of each ruler will be told in a story narrated by the artworks of their eras, from the dignified Song to the bold yet subtle Yuan, from the celebrated brilliance of the Ming to the last

Meat-shaped stone, appr Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Stone: jasper; stand: gold. *National Palace Museum, Taipei*, Guza 000178 Lü-413. Photograph © National Palace Museum, Taipei.

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days of the dazzling Qing dynasty. “Gazing upon rulers’ treasure troves, we get a sense not only of how their tastes influenced the creative endeavors of their time, but also how they wielded art as a tool to shape history,” Xu explains.

Objects never before seen in the U.S. make their debut, offer fresh perspectives



While the National Palace Museum, Taipei, is renowned among Chinese art enthusiasts, historically its collection has not been widely accessible to the American public. Displays have traveled to the U.S. only a handful of times: in the 1960s and again in 1995–1996 for an exhibition presented by both the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Asian Art Museum — an exhibition that Xu also participated in organizing during his time as a junior research fellow there.

“It’s exactly 20 years later,” Xu notes. “However, there are many works that haven’t been seen outside Asia before. In terms of the objects and time periods, it’s a fresh perspective for American audiences since the imperial court surrounded itself with the most important, avant-garde works of its time.”

Organized around the lives of nine rulers — eight emperors and one empress who reigned from the early 12th through the early 20th centuries — the exhibition will explore how taste and connoisseurship as both personal virtues and statements of political power evolved over 800 years.

By examining the distinct contributions of each subject, the rich styles and the variety of craftsmanship they prized, the exhibition outlines how Chinese art developed and flourished under Han Chinese, Mongol and later Manchu regimes. Through this exceptional selection of objects, *Emperors’ Treasures* presents a unique occasion for audiences to connect with powerful historical figures through their most cherished belongings, relating to them on an intimate, human scale that only art can express.

Exhibition highlights shifts in imperial tastes, global inspiration

Emperors’ Treasures unfolds chronologically, allowing audiences to gauge how imperial tastes evolved from within China or due to external pressures, looking backward to ancient examples or blazing forward with new ideas.

The exhibition flows through four galleries on the museum’s first floor. Opening in the large Osher Gallery, audiences are introduced to the Song emperors (960–1279),

Kublai Khan as the first Yuan emperor, Shizu. Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). Album leaf, ink and color on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, 000324-00003. Photograph © National Palace Museum, Taipei.

celebrated for leading a renaissance in Chinese art more than 800 years ago. Here, visitors will discover the masterful landscapes and calligraphy of Emperor Huizong, recognized for his distinctive, influential “slender-gold” script.

Alongside these elegant works are the robust art pieces and an imposing portrait demanded by the mighty Yuan-dynasty (1271–1368) ruler Kublai Khan. Also in this gallery are legendary Ming porcelains (1368–1644), the pinnacle of ceramic art in China. Highlights include a rare cloisonné vessel; one of only two surviving blue-and-white Ming vases depicting West Asian entertainers; and the “holy grail” of Chinese porcelains — a wine cup with a cock and hen design like the example recently sold at Sotheby’s for more than \$36 million.

The adjacent Hambrecht Gallery features an overview of illustrious Qing-dynasty accomplishments (1644–1911). During this period, a dozen imperial workshops across the Chinese Empire were opened to fulfill the Forbidden City’s relentless appetite for lacquers, enamels and carved jade, like the paper-thin hibiscus-shaped bowl from the early 1700s, sculpted from a single piece of glowing, nut-brown agate.

Next door is the Lee Gallery, which paints an intimate portrait of the 18th-century Qianlong Emperor, known as the “Old Man of Ten Perfections” and admired as the most prolific poet-monarch in Chinese history. Through a selection of paintings, carvings and other treasures, audiences will see how a single ruler caused a seismic shift in the creative output of China.



While many of the masterworks remain quietly breathtaking in their elegance, others certainly call out to the interests of today. The *White Falcon* hanging scroll by Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione introduces visitors to an intriguing European figure who spent decades in the Qing court, serving under Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong. Having his Chinese name as Lang Shining, Castiglione’s collaboration on court portraits and paintings underscores a tradition of East-West cultural exchange that continues in the current globalized art arena.

The exhibition concludes in the museum’s Resource Room with a focus on the Empress Dowager Cixi, a Manchu concubine who rose to become the long-ruling power behind the final Qing emperors. Cixi recruited female artists to her “Studio of Great Elegance,” where, under her personal direction, the coterie combined traditional symbols and patterns with botanical study, setting a foundation for modern Chinese aesthetics.

White Falcon, by Lang Shining (Giuseppe Castiglione; Italian, 1688–1766). Qing dynasty, reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736–1795). Hanging scroll, color on silk. *National Palace Museum, Taipei*, Guhua 000958. Photograph © National Palace Museum, Taipei.

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Imperial treat, the “Meat-shaped stone” stars in sumptuous summer programs

An icon of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, the celebrated Qing-dynasty “Meat-shaped stone” will also be traveling to the U.S. for the first time. The stone — a hunk of jasper carved and dyed to resemble a portion of braised pork belly fresh from the pot — exemplifies how the enduring appeal of traditional Chinese cooking has long inspired devotion. When on view in Japan in 2014, the stone was seen by an average of 6,000 people a day and generated a mini-boom in *dongpo rou*, the classic dish it closely resembles.

In honor of the stone’s unusual appeal, a special edition of the Asian Art Museum’s popular Thursday evening programs will feature innovative new dishes inspired by the Meat-shaped stone and prepared by four local chefs. Their dishes — from street carts to haute cuisine — will be presented to the public on July 7.

Additionally, from June 17–July 18, more than a dozen San Francisco chefs, both up-and-coming and established, will feature versions of the mouthwatering, slow-simmered “priceless pork belly” in their restaurants. Details on participating hotspots to be announced in May. Another take on the delicious dish developed by Melinda Quirino, chef at the museum’s own Cafe Asia, will be available for visitors to enjoy throughout the exhibition’s run.

“*Emperors’ Treasures* is about looking forward and starting the museum’s next 50 years on the right note,” says Xu. “We not only share and present exceptional works of art, but we help people understand their context, significance and relevance.”

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

Emperors’ Treasures was made possible by a generous grant from Presenting Sponsor, The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. “This important support from The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation enables the Asian Art Museum to curate and present *Emperors’ Treasures*, which will expose a global audience to the beauty and depth of Chinese art and culture,” said Xu.

Ted Lipman, CEO of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, noted: “This exhibition marks the third collaboration between the Asian Art Museum and The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. A key mission of the Foundation is to promote Chinese culture and the arts to Western audiences to increase understanding and appreciation of this ancient legacy. Nowhere does the 5,000 years of Chinese history manifest itself more beautifully and comprehensively than the exquisite imperial collection, which has been lovingly conserved and displayed at the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Through support for this significant exhibition, the Foundation seeks to provide visitors

with an unprecedented opportunity to witness China's vibrant cultural heritage first-hand."

Following the Asian Art Museum's presentation of *Emperors' Treasures*, the exhibition will travel to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (Oct. 23, 2016–Jan. 22, 2017).

Emperors' Treasures: Chinese Art from the National Palace Museum, Taipei, is co-organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Presentation is made possible with the generous support of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, Doris Shoong Lee and Theodore Bo Lee, Robert and Vivian Tsao, Diane B. Wilsey, The Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Fund for Excellence in Exhibitions and Presentations, East West Bank, United Airlines, Alphawood Foundation, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, BizLink Technology, Inc., Jamie and Steve Chen, Lee Chen, Christie's, C.M. Capital Corporation, Fred Eychaner, Winnie and Michael Feng, Doug Tilden and Teresa Keller Tilden, Taiwan Tourism Bureau, The American Friends of the Shanghai Museum, Julia K. Cheng, Cheng & Tsui Company, Fred M. Levin and Nancy Livingston, The Shenson Foundation, H. Christopher Luce and Tina Liu, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., Mary M. Tanenbaum Fund, Walter and Shirley Wang, Rita and Ricky Wong, Laurie Jue Ying and David Y. Ying, and anonymous donors. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Art and the Humanities. Media sponsors: ABC7, KQED, Sing Tao Daily, World Journal, Sina.

The exhibition is curated by Asian Art Museum Director Jay Xu and Li He, associate curator of Chinese art.

EXHIBITION PUBLICATION

A catalogue accompanies *Emperors' Treasures: Chinese Art from the National Palace Museum, Taipei*, edited by Jay Xu and He Li and featuring contributions by Jay Xu, Fung Ming-chu, Ho Chuan-hsin, Alfreda Murck, Tianlong Jiao, He Li and curators from the National Palace Museum, Taipei, and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (272 pages, paperback \$35.00, hard cover \$50.00). Available at the Asian Art Museum store: 415.591.3600, shop@asianart.org or store.asianart.org.

The *Emperors' Treasures* exhibition catalogue is made possible with the generous support of Bei Shan Tang Foundation, C.M. Capital Corporation, Winnie and Michael Feng, Julia K. Cheng, Doris and Ted Lee, and Ann Tanenbaum in honor of her mother Mary M. Tanenbaum.

ABOUT THE ASIAN ART MUSEUM

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture is one of San Francisco's premier arts institutions and home to a world-renowned collection of more than 18,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history. Through rich art experiences, centered on historic and contemporary artworks, the Asian Art Museum unlocks the past for visitors, bringing it to life while serving as a catalyst for new art, new creativity and new thinking.

Information: 415.581.3500 or www.asianart.org

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Hours: The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 AM to 5 PM. Hours are extended on Thursdays until 9 PM through Oct. 8. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

Special Exhibition Admission: FREE for museum members and children (12 & under). On weekdays, \$20 for adults and \$15 for seniors (65 & over), youth (13–17) and college students (with ID). On weekends, \$25 for adults and \$20 for seniors (65 & over), youth (13–17) and college students (with ID). On Target First Free Sundays, admission to the exhibition is \$10. Children under 12 free.

General Admission: FREE for museum members, \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors (65+), college students with ID, and youths (13–17). FREE for children under 12 and SFUSD students with ID. General admission on Thursdays after 5 PM is \$5 for all visitors (except those under 12, SFUSD students, and museum members, who are always admitted FREE). General admission is FREE to all on Target First Free Sundays (the first Sunday of every month).

Access: The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access: 415.581.3598; TDD: 415.861.2035.

Never miss a moment! *#EmperorsTreasures* *#PricelessPorkBelly*

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