

ASIAN ART MUSEUM  
Chong-Moon Lee Center  
For Asian Art & Culture  
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## News



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## HIDDEN GOLD: MINING ITS MEANING IN ASIAN ART

***Asian Art Museum marks its 50th anniversary with an exhibition exploring the artistic significance of gold***

SAN FRANCISCO, February 8, 2016—In celebration of its golden anniversary, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco is mining its world-renowned collection to unearth the artistic significance of a metal that has captivated mankind since ancient times.

On view from March 4–May 8, 2016, *Hidden Gold: Mining Its Meaning in Asian Art* presents approximately 50 artworks that feature gold in a variety of artistic contexts. Spanning 1,500 years of history and diverse Asian cultures, the exhibition investigates the universal regard for this precious metal and the unique physical and symbolic aspects that make it suitable for so many artistic purposes.

“Being both ductile and malleable, gold can be stretched into thin sheets and spun into long wires, meaning that a little can go a long way,” says Jeff Durham, assistant curator of Himalayan art and curator of the exhibition. “And as you’ll see in *Hidden Gold*, it also does a lot of symbolic heavy lifting.”

Through fascinating objects ranging from a Qu’ran manuscript to a Daoist ceremonial robe to a Mongolian Buddha, the exhibition reveals how gold’s luster and longevity have been leveraged by artists to suggest immortality, power, divinity and more.

“With so many exquisite gold-worked objects in our collection, the range on view in *Hidden Gold* is truly impressive — as is the depth of insight into this alluring metal,” says museum director and CEO Jay Xu. “We also consider the legacy of the Gold Rush, which brought so many Asian immigrants to this country and is a timeless link between California and Asia.”

Table screen depicting the Taoist deity Doumu and her entourage, approx. 1500–1700. China. Gilded bronze. Courtesy of Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of Frances Campbell and the Society for Asian Art, 1991.83. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

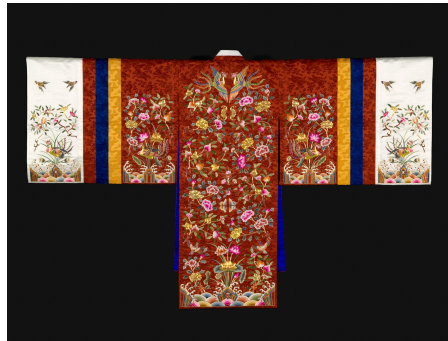
As a nod to the Gold Rush and its impact on the state's history, *Hidden Gold* boasts a large raw nugget. Showcased alongside Asian coinage, this innovative installation shares how gold is transformed into money.

To complement *Hidden Gold*, the museum also presents *Extracted*, an exhibition by local artist Ranu Mukherjee that layers Asian art, local history, mythology and contemporary culture to consider the legacies of the California Gold Rush in a new light. *Extracted* explores alternative ideas about traditional art and tells the story of gold's impact on natural resources, labor and shifting international economic power. Curated by Marc Mayer, senior educator of contemporary art, *Extracted* is on view in Gallery 18 on the second floor through Aug. 14, 2016.

### ***HIDDEN GOLD PRESENTATION***

Within the museum's Hambrecht Gallery, *Hidden Gold* is organized into three sections, each focused on one aspect of gold's multi-faced symbolism: Home and Family; Palace and Power; and Precincts of the Sacred.

#### **Home and Family**



Upon entering the exhibition, visitors will first encounter gold-worked art from household and family contexts, with a special emphasis on objects connected to wedding ceremonies. Gold has long been used as a symbol for the everlasting bond of two people united in marriage, as it does not tarnish or fade with time. A Korean wedding robe featured in *Hidden Gold*, for example, uses imagery woven with gold thread to express the themes of unity and eternity.

Gold-worked objects are also markers of social status; they articulate a hierarchy both inside the home and outside the family. Japanese screens decorated with gold leaf, including those on view in this exhibition, performed just such a function, as only the wealthy could afford them. These screens not only reflected light into a living space but also suggested that their owners possessed the resources to sustain themselves over time.

#### **Palace and Power**

(2004.46) The Mughal emperor Arangzeb (reigned 1658-1707) approx. 1690-1700. Northern India. Opaque watercolors and gold on paper.

Throughout history, political leaders have used golden artwork to suggest that they possess the divine qualities associated with the luminous, everlasting metal. In this



Bridal robe, 2002, by Han Sang-soo (Korean, b. 1934). Silk embroidered with silk and gold thread. Courtesy of Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Acquisition made possible by David and Margo Buchanan, 2005.65.a-b. © Han Sang-soo. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

MORE

section, you'll find objects crafted to give sacred legitimacy to secular authorities.

For example, the intertwining of royalty and divinity is explicit in a Mughal painting from India that depicts Emperor Aurangzeb with a gold nimbus around his head. This imagery presents the emperor as radiant, glowing and all but divine. An Indonesian crown takes this idea even further, not just imagining a ruler with a nimbus, but actually providing him with one. A stunning royal Chinese robe employs gold thread to weave imagery that places its wearer at the very center of the cosmos, the place at which the world was created and from which its course is directed..

### **Precincts of the Sacred**

Here you'll find gold-worked objects intended for use in religious contexts. Even religious art designed to represent the eternal falls victim to time, but gold can transform an otherwise time-bound object into one that symbolically evokes the everlasting.



(1988.12)Dedicatory plaque. Approx. 600-800.  
Probably Cambodia. Gold alloy

Here, a foundation plaque from Cambodia uses gold-worked imagery to represent the virtual center of the cosmos. The lotus of creation sits at the center of the plaque, surrounded by 32 figures that represent the constellations. It was believed that once placed under a building, this golden imagery magically transformed ordinary space into a cosmic space.

In many Buddhist cultures, aging artworks may be revitalized through the ritual application of gold. The Svayambhu Stupa on display in this exhibition is a model of an actual monument in Nepal that is ritually renovated by application of gold at regular intervals.

*Hidden Gold: Mining its Meaning In Asian Art* is on view concurrently with *Extracted: A Trilogy* by Ranu Mukherjee, an exhibition of the artist's textiles, works on paper and signature hybrid films are featured alongside objects from the museum's collection. With a neo-futurist perspective, Mukherjee creates a geographical framework blending empirical fact, hearsay and broader imaginings to describe features of the heavens and earth. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, an ancient Chinese mythological text, inspired the artist to excavate unknown histories of the Gold Rush, from Chinese mining sites along the Yuba River to the implications of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first significant law restricting immigration into the United States. *Extracted* invites viewers into a landscape where strange creatures dwell and historical events manifest in the eternal present of mythical time.

### **EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION**

*Hidden Gold: Mining Its Meaning in Asian Art* is organized by the Asian Art Museum of San

Francisco. Presentation is made possible with the generous support of Bonhams, The Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Fund for Excellence in Exhibitions and Presentations, and Fred M. Levin and Nancy Livingston, The Shenson Foundation.

*Extracted: A Trilogy by Ranu Mukherjee* is organized by the Asian Art Museum.

### **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](http://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 starting Feb. 26 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 is \$10.

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.

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