

ASIAN ART MUSEUM  
Chong-Moon Lee Center  
for Asian Art & Culture

200 Larkin Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
T 415.581.3500



**Asian**  
Art  
Museum

PRESS CONTACT:

Zac T. Rose

415.581.3560

[zrose@asianart.org](mailto:zrose@asianart.org)

## Japanese Master Tanabe Chikuunsai IV Weaves Together Past and Present with a Spectacular Bamboo Installation at Asian Art Museum



San Francisco, April 2, 2019—The Asian Art Museum invites visitors to experience the grandeur and artistry of *Connection*, a soaring, site-specific bamboo sculpture that pushes the limits of this art form. Open May 31 to August 25, *Connection* will be only the second U.S. installation ever — and the largest— made by Tanabe Chikuunsai IV, who magnifies the scale of traditional Japanese basket-making

techniques, weaving together past and present into astonishing, gallery-sized organic shapes that have captivated audiences across the globe.

Chikuunsai IV (pronounced, “Chee-kuh-oon-sye, the fourth”) creates dramatic, immersive environments that evoke the bamboo forests where these works began their lives. For this commissioned project at the Asian Art Museum, the artist and three apprentices from his studio in Japan will spend two weeks weaving strips of bamboo into a complexly textured, twisting shape that climbs to the gallery ceiling.

Born Tanabe Takeo in 1973, Chikuunsai comes from a renowned family of Japanese bamboo artists. He learned the techniques of bamboo weaving from his father Chikuunsai III and grandfather Chikuunsai II and the playful spirit of his art from his mother. He was bestowed with the artist name Chikuunsai, meaning “master of the bamboo clouds,” in 2017, securing the legacy of his family’s renowned mastery of bamboo. The title of this new sculpture, *Connection*, honors the deep bond he feels with his family lineage of bamboo artists.

*Connection: Origin*, 2017, by Tanabe Chikuunsai IV (Japanese b.1973). Installation at Pierre Marie Giraud Gallery, Brussels, Belgium. Photograph by Tadayuki Minamoto. Courtesy of Chikuunsai IV.

“Bamboo is more than a traditional craft material in Japan,” says Maya Hara, Japan Foundation Curatorial Assistant in Japanese Art at the Asian Art Museum and the curator of this exhibition. “It has figured prominently across the country’s art and literature for centuries. Bamboo’s ability to bend in the wind without breaking, while marking the subtle changes of nature over time, make it a cultural symbol of deep meaning.”

Chikuunsai IV’s artistic process for his installations begins when he selects the best stalks of rare tiger bamboo (*torachiku*), which grows only in the remote mountains of Kochi prefecture. He then cuts and splits the stalks into strips, which he bends and plaits into towering installations. Later he dismantles the works, carefully cleaning the bamboo strips to recycle into a new sculpture: the bamboo at the Asian Art Museum will be drawn from previous works in Paris (Musée Guimet), New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) and São Paulo, Brazil (Japan House). “By reusing the material, I wanted to express nature’s cycle of birth, that we are co-existing with nature,” explains Chikuunsai.

*Connection* also recognizes Chikuunsai’s long relationship with the Asian Art Museum and Lloyd Cotsen (1929–2017), a champion of Japanese bamboo art who generously donated his extensive collection to the museum in 2006. It was a competition sponsored by Cotsen in the early 1990s that solidified Chikuunsai’s resolve to follow in his family’s footsteps to become an artist. Although he did not win top prize that year, in 2007 he was awarded the Lloyd Cotsen Bamboo Prize. “In this way, San Francisco and the Asian Art Museum represent a starting point for me,” says the artist.

“In the midst of our major capital campaign and expansion project, *Connection* captures the essence of a transformed Asian Art Museum — at once innovative, immersive and intimate,” says museum Director and CEO Jay Xu. “The grand scale of the artwork, its abstract forms and the creative ingenuity underlying it contrasts powerfully with the natural materials and the artist’s references to age-old craft traditions. *Connection* shows what it truly means to ‘connect’ the past to the present in a way only our museum can.”

The public is invited to stop by the museum between May 18 and 25 for a possible glimpse of *Connection* taking form in the first-floor Lee Gallery. Join the artist for a presentation about his work on Thursday, May 30 from 7–8:30 p.m. (free with museum admission) before the official opening on May 31.

## **Exhibition Organization and Publication**

*Tanabe Chikuunsai IV: Connection* is organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Presentation is made possible with the generous support of Ken Lamb, Alexandra and Dennis Lenehan, and the James M. Gerstley Fund for International Exhibitions. This exhibition is a part of *Today’s Asian Voices*, which is made possible with the generous support of Salle E. Yoo and Jeffrey P. Gray.

## About the Asian Art Museum

Through the power of art, the Asian Art Museum brings the diverse cultures of Asia to life. Located in the heart of San Francisco, the museum is home to one of the world's finest collections of Asian art, boasting more than 18,000 awe-inspiring artworks ranging from ancient jades and ceramics to contemporary video installations. Dynamic special exhibitions, cultural celebrations and public programs for all ages offer rich art experiences that unlock the past and spark questions about the future.

**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 February through September. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

**Museum Admission:** FREE for museum members and children (12 & under). \$25 for adults and \$20 for seniors (65 & over), youth (13–17) and college students (with ID). On Target First Free Sundays and on Thursday evenings, 5–9 PM, admission to the museum is \$10. Please check website for updates.

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

Never miss a moment: @AsianArtMuseum

###