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GIFT OF 140 JAPANESE INK PAINTINGS ENHANCES ASIAN ART MUSEUM COLLECTION

San Francisco Philanthropist and Sports Entrepreneur George Gund III's Bequest Includes Rare and Important Works by Major Edo-period Artists

SAN FRANCISCO, Mar. 16, 2016 – The Asian Art Museum has received a gift of 140 Japanese works in ink from the renowned collection of San Francisco philanthropist George Gund III (1937–2013), sports entrepreneur, supporter of world cinema and connoisseur of East Asian art. The bequest comprises a diverse survey of ink paintings created mostly during Japan's Edo period (1615–1868) — including

calligraphy, landscapes and images of legendary Buddhist figures — by many of the period's most important and celebrated artists.

A small selection of paintings from the Gund bequest will go on view in the museum's Japanese painting gallery beginning July 18.

"This gift significantly enhances our holdings of Japanese paintings, adding to the depth and breadth of our collection," said Jay Xu, director of the Asian Art Museum. "We're honored to be home to such fine work and deeply appreciative of Mr. Gund's generosity."

The core of the bequest consists of *zenga*, ink paintings and calligraphic works by Zen monks, brushed with religious maxims and a pantheon of characters that express Buddhist teachings. Acclaimed monk-painters Fugai Ekun, Sengai Gibon and Jiun Onko are among the artists represented. Eleven works by the renowned

Bodhidharma, by Hakuin Ekaku (Japanese, 1685–1768). Ink on paper. *Asian Art Museum, Gift from The Collection of George Gund III*, R2015.38.130. Photograph © Asian Art Museum.

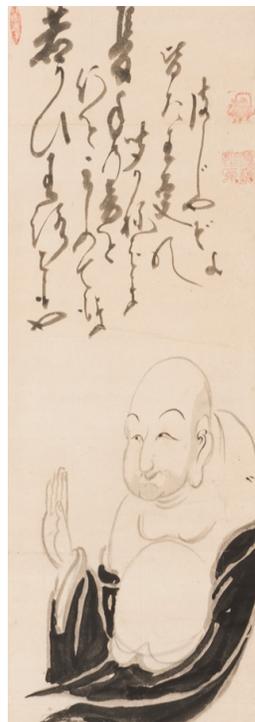
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Hakuin Ekaku illustrate that master's assertive yet humorous approach to Zen themes.

There are also a number of landscapes by luminaries of 18th- and 19th-century "literati" painting, such as two scrolls by Kyoto master Ike Taiga. Other significant pieces are works in ink by notable professional artists affiliated with Zen temples.

"The bequest includes superlative examples of works by major masters in the ink tradition, many of whom were not previously represented in our collection," said Laura Allen, curator of Japanese art and interim chief curator. "The *zenga* are particularly noteworthy for their directness and expressive power."

Gund, Allen said, had a good eye and was a discerning collector. "He had a clear appreciation for the artists' skills and fondness for the humor of many of the later Zen paintings — some of which are quite playful," she added.



That's no surprise, considering the unique personality of the man who selected the paintings. Known for his zest for life, Gund, the son of a prominent Cleveland banker, pursued diverse and seemingly incongruous interests, including cowboy poetry, Native American history and world cinema (he was an expert on Eastern European film and the longtime chair of the San Francisco Film Society). He was best known as a sports entrepreneur; he owned the San Jose Sharks and several other hockey teams, and, at one time, the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team.

Gund first discovered his passion for Japanese ink painting when serving in Japan after having enlisted in the Marines in 1955. The diverse and important body of work he amassed over the years captured the attention of former museum director Emily Sano, who arranged to borrow 20 pieces for the 2001 exhibition *Zen: Painting and Calligraphy, 17th-20th Centuries*. The exhibition was a hit with audiences and critics alike, deemed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* "the best survey of its type in a decade."

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Gund was thrilled, Sano said, with the positive reviews and high attendance, and was deeply fulfilled by the museum's appreciation of his connoisseurship. While Sano said it was an "extraordinary surprise" that the museum received such a significant bequest from Gund, she added that it was in keeping with his "exceeding generosity" and fondness for the museum.

Hotei with one raised hand, by Hakuin Ekaku (Japanese, 1685–1768). Ink on paper. *Asian Art Museum, Gift from The Collection of George Gund III, R2015.38.18*. Photograph © Asian Art Museum.

“He knew that we did not have a focus on Japanese ink paintings and calligraphy, and that his collection would substantially add to ours,” Sano said. “It was also significant to him that the art be enjoyed by the public forever — and in that way his passion would continue to live on.”

Earlier works in Gund’s collection went to the Cleveland Museum of Art, located in his hometown, which had also previously exhibited pieces from his collection. The bequest to both museums was made in late summer 2015.

Gund Collection Highlights

The 140 works received by the Asian Art Museum constitute a carefully curated survey of later ink painting that includes important pieces by the most notable calligraphers and painters of the Edo period. A core part of the collection are the ink paintings and calligraphic works known as *zenga*: scrolls by Edo-period Zen monks. Included are signature works by Fugai Ekun (1568–1654), Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768), Sengai Gibon (1750–1837) and Jiun Onko (1781–1804), all acclaimed monk-painters of the time.



Other highlights include calligraphic works by notable monks affiliated with the Obaku Zen headquarters at Manpukuji Temple, and paintings by professional artists with ties to Zen monasteries. A charming example in the latter category is a depiction of Hotei with children, one of two known versions of the theme by the individualist master Ito Jakuchu (1716–1800). Another is a depiction of Bodhidharma by the early Rinpa master Tawaraya Sotatsu (?–1643), bearing an inscription by the Rinzaï Zen monk Isshi Bunshu (1608–1646). The gift also includes notable works by members of the Kano, Kaiho, and Unkoku painting lineages, among others.

An impressive group of ink landscapes by Ike Taiga (1723–1776) are included in the gift, as well as pieces by Taiga’s fellow literati painter Yosa Buson (1716–1783) and his eccentric contemporary Soga Shohaku (1713–1781). A large and ambitious landscape by Uragami Gyokudo (1745–1820) demonstrates the expressive abilities of the literati masters active in the early 19th century.

About George Gund III

George Gund III was born in Cleveland in 1937 and spent his youth in northeast Ohio. At age 18, Gund joined the Marine Corps, which brought him to San Francisco, where he would spend most of his life.

Scholar’s pavilion by a stream, by Uragami Gyokudo (Japanese, 1745–1820). Ink on paper. *Asian Art Museum, Gift from The Collection of George Gund III*, R2015.38.28. Photograph © Asian Art Museum.

In addition to the business and sports entrepreneur activities mentioned above, during his lifetime Gund was also deeply involved in the Sundance Institute, and produced films as president of Caipirinha Productions. Along with his wife, filmmaker Iara Lee, Gund founded the Iara Lee and George Gund III Foundation; he was also a member of the boards of many arts and philanthropic organizations, including the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

George Gund III died on January 15, 2013, at the age of 75.

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: www.asianart.org or 415.581.3500

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

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