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News

SFMOMA
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GORGEOUS

Exhibition explores the extremes of beauty, combining exceptional artworks from the acclaimed collections of the Asian Art Museum and SFMOMA to challenge preconceptions of what constitutes the gorgeous.

SAN FRANCISCO, June 17, 2014— A selection of 72 stunning artworks, drawn from the collections of the Asian Art Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), challenges visitors to confront the extremes and ambiguities of beauty in the special exhibition *Gorgeous*. On view June 20 through Sept. 14, 2014, at the Asian Art Museum, the exhibition is organized in partnership with SFMOMA as part of SFMOMA's [On the Go](#) program, an ambitious multiyear off-site programming effort presented while its building is closed for expansion construction.

Featuring an extraordinary mix of objects, *Gorgeous* spans more than 2,200 years and dozens of cultures to bring together artworks that, in a variety of ways, extend beyond conventional notions of beauty. Presenting these paintings, sculptures, photographs, design objects and drawings in new and unexpected contexts, the exhibition encourages viewers to examine their own ideas of what it means for something to be gorgeous by stimulating them to engage the objects in a personal way.

As a starting point, the curators have suggested fluid groupings in which the artworks might be assembled. Those groupings are titled “Seduction,” “Dress Up,” “Pose,” “In Bounds,” “Danger,” “Beyond Imperfection,” “Reiteration,” “Fantasy,” “Evocation” and “On Reflection.” But many works could fit under more than one heading, and the unexpected groupings on view represent just a few of the limitless possibilities.

Left: *Strut*, 2004–2005, by Marilyn Minter (American, b. 1948). Enamel on metal. Collection SFMOMA, Accessions Committee Fund purchase: gift of Johanna and Thomas Baruch, Charles J. Betlach II, Shawn and Brook Byers, Nancy and Steven Oliver, and Prentice and Paul Sack, 2005.187. Courtesy of the artist, SFMOMA and Salon 94, New York.

Right: Torso of a female deity (detail), 1400–1600. Southern India. Stone. Asian Art Museum, The Avery Brundage Collection, B63S3+. © Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

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The objects in *Gorgeous* are not easily categorized, and embracing their resistance to classification is an essential part of the project. Rather than providing a contrast between “East” and “West” or focusing on centuries of scholarly debate concerning beauty, the exhibition aims to engage visitors in an ongoing conversation about personal reactions to what makes something not merely beautiful but gorgeous.

Many of the artworks push boundaries. They balance on the tipping point between the seductive and the repulsive, the comforting and the disturbing, the earnest and the ironic, the serene and the obsessive. The depictions of people range from opulently adorned figures to frank portrayals of the human form. The exhibition also encompasses historical objects such as a silver elephant seat from India and a Chinese lacquered imperial chair as well as contemporary objects, including the first-generation iPhone and a gold-plated coke spoon by Tobias Wong and Ju\$t Another Rich Kid. Visitors will encounter works of fantastical elaboration and triumphs of conceptual elegance, serene sacred objects and luxury consumer goods. As part of the educational experience, visitors can curate their own exhibition using reproductions of artworks in a tactile interactive display.

Highlights of the exhibition include paintings, sculptures and photographs from SFMOMA’s holdings by Marcel Duchamp, Jeff Koons, Marilyn Minter, Joan Miró, Chris Ofili, Meret Oppenheim, Robert Mapplethorpe and others. From the Asian Art Museum, the exhibition features works spanning the extent of Asia, including a 1,000-year-old Indian sculpture of the Hindu deity Durga victorious over the buffalo demon; a gilded and jeweled Burmese Buddhist bowl; a Korean textile artwork with complex geometric designs; a decorated Qur’an from 16th-century Persia; a set of silk scrolls by the artist Chobunsai Eishi (1756–1829), “Three types of beauties in Edo;” and Hua Yan’s (1682–1756) gold-surfaced ink paintings “Summer gatherings in mountain villas,” along with other works in a variety of mediums.

Gorgeous is curated by Allison Harding, assistant curator of contemporary art at the Asian Art Museum, and Forrest McGill, Wattis senior curator of South and Southeast Asian art and director of the Asian Art Museum’s Research Institute for Asian Art, in association with Janet Bishop, curator of painting and sculpture at SFMOMA, and Caitlin Haskell, assistant curator of painting and sculpture at SFMOMA.

“Gorgeous has an underbelly, where beauty gets messy and unpredictable,” said Harding. “Through working on this exhibition, I found the artwork affected me in unexpected ways, allowing me to think about my personal definition of gorgeous. I look forward to the many conversations and debates about the gorgeous generated by this exhibition.”

“One of the most exciting aspects of bringing together these two collections is that even viewers who are very familiar with one collection or the other will find something exceptional that’s new to them,” said Haskell. “*Gorgeous* is above all an exploratory show, and we hope that visitors will take as much pleasure as we have in coming to know the works on view.”

The exhibition begins in Osher Gallery and continues in Hambrecht Gallery, Lee Gallery and Gallery 4, with sculptures activating North Court and Vinson Gallery.

Osher Gallery: Pose, Dress Up, Seduction, Reiteration

In Osher Gallery, seductive surfaces of objects act as a point of departure. The paintings, drawings and sculptures by Gerhard Richter, Jess, and Jeff Koons, on display in “Seduction,” attune our eyes to the numerous ways an object’s surface, or outward appearance, can complicate or enhance our experience of its subject. Unexpected materials and techniques, such as the glaze of a Korean **celadon** (approx. 1050–1150), spark an immediate visceral reaction that can entice you to look for deeper meanings beneath the surface.

The artworks in “Pose” invite viewers to interpret body language in a variety of objects and images. The works in this grouping explore the body’s many modes of expression and the resulting exchange between subject and viewer. A **Buddhist deity White Tara** sculpture (approx. 1400–1500) is positioned to emphasize her majestic power. The subtle sway of her torso and neck soften the formal symmetry of folded legs, floating scarves and budding lotus stems. This apparent sensuousness—presented in gilded copper with gemstones and glass—may emphasize or distract from the deity’s power, depending on our point of view.

Building on the themes explored in “Pose,” “Dress Up” considers the varieties of ways that appearance and adornment communicate meaning. Clothing is a montage of signs that are often as expressive as one’s words and can be used to quickly situate their wearer within a particular gender or class. In the painting *Portrait (Futago)* (1988), by Yasumasa Morimura, the artist recreates Edouard Manet’s 1863 painting *Olympia*, casting himself as both Olympia and her maid. Morimura strategically implicates viewers in their assumptions about beauty, gender and what it means to be the object of someone’s gaze.

“Reiteration” presents artworks that explore repetition as a creative strategy that can be both decorative and critical. In Andy Warhol’s painting *Two Jackies* (1964), the artist recreated and repeated photographs already in mass circulation to numb viewers to the image. As the artist famously acknowledged, “The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away.”

Hambrecht Gallery: Beyond Imperfection, Fantasy, Danger, In Bounds

Gorgeous is about probing the boundaries of beauty, and the artworks in Hambrecht Gallery employ multiple—even competing—definitions of “boundary” to a dazzling degree.

In “Beyond Imperfection,” artworks such as Bruce Conner’s *LOOKING GLASS* (1964) push viewers to find beauty in the breakdown of form. The edges of perfection and

deterioration wear away at one another until these two extremes become indistinguishable. Discarded materials, an eroded tomb figure: these works embody plays between beauty and its opposites. In Marilyn Minter's painting *Strut* (2004–2005), a grime-covered heel wears a bejeweled stiletto by the luxury fashion house Christian Dior. The stark contrast between the dirt and the stiletto triggers a sensory overload that points to the underside of glamour and desire.

Fusing reality with unbridled imagination, the stunning and supernatural artworks in “Fantasy” include the **Mythical bird-man** (approx. 1775–1850)—a handsome wood sculpture depicting a man's head and torso on top of a bird's body. These artworks, some of them embellished and exaggerated, bring the viewer closer to the world of dreams or altered states, and it depends on the imaginations of both creator and viewer to work its spell.

The artworks in “Danger” are double-edged swords; they exhibit a tension between surface beauty and latent danger that provokes the viewer in complicated ways. The **Buddhist deity Simhavaktra Dakini** sculpture (1736–1795) depicts an enlightened goddess of Tibetan Buddhism with hair ablaze and flayed human skin around her shoulders. Her fearless lion head might strike the viewer as both stunning and terrifyingly powerful.

A curtain of gold serves as a passageway between “Danger” and “In Bounds.” Artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres created *“Untitled” (Golden)* (1995) to be installed so that people are required to walk through the beaded barrier. The artwork creates a literal boundary, a passageway that divides the gallery space. Visitors will share the experience of walking through *“Untitled” (Golden)*, even as they attach personal meaning to the act. The artworks in “In Bounds” explore how constraints paradoxically free us to explore abstract or complex ideas.

Lee Gallery: Evocation

While Osher and Hambrecht Galleries focus on the surfaces of objects, the body and materiality, Lee Gallery emphasizes the potential of objects to evoke ideas beyond the works themselves. The artworks in “Evocation” have a particularly strong effect of provoking our imagination to make new stories or new settings. *Nonsite (Essen Soil and Mirrors)* (1969), both presents and transforms a pile of dirt from a German mining town, and can be seen in *Gorgeous* against the dreamlike Chinese painting *Hall of Green Wilderness* (1770). *The beach at Miho and Mt. Fuji* (1666) is a pair of six-panel Japanese folding screens, spanning more than 24 feet in length. The elegant detail of this vast painting masterfully draws the viewer in, but the voids left in the screens' compositions—expanses of clouds and fog, open swaths of landscape—leave room for the viewer's mind to wander.

Gallery 4: On Reflection

For some artworks, the full extent of the gorgeous is not immediately apparent but develops over time. “On Reflection” includes artworks that could be considered catalysts

of beauty that is enhanced through contemplation. Among the artworks in this gallery, viewers will encounter a **Tibetan mandala** (1650–1750), a geometric map of Buddhist visionary worlds, created to visualize the cosmos. For Buddhist practitioners, mandalas are not just images to view, but worlds to internalize in their mind's eye. Visitors can then experience the enveloping color of Mark Rothko's *No. 14, 1960* (1960), a painting whose scale and saturated hues create an immersive, and possibly even transformative, visual field.

North Court features Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917/1964), a silver **elephant seat** (1870–1920) from India, a **torso of a female deity** sculpture (1400–1600) from Southern India, Constantin Brancusi's sculpture *La Nègresse blonde* (1926) and more.

The Asian Art Museum is the only venue for this exhibition.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a glossy, magazine-style catalogue. In addition to full-color images of every object in the show, the catalogue features personal responses to the artworks in *Gorgeous* by the Asian Art Museum and SFMOMA curators, Harding, Haskell and McGill, as well as Pulitzer Prize nominee Lawrence Weschler (director emeritus of the New York Institute for the Humanities at NYU) and frequent *New York Times* contributor Christy Wampole (assistant professor of French at Princeton University). Available in paperback, \$24.95, at the Asian Art Museum store: 415.581.3600 or shop@asianart.org.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

This exhibition was organized by the Asian Art Museum in partnership with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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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. From Feb. 6 through Sept. 11, 2014, hours are extended on Thursdays until 9 PM. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

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 p.m. 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). A surcharge may apply for admission to special exhibitions.

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

ABOUT THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Founded in 1935 as the first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, SFMOMA is currently undergoing a major [expansion](#) project to open in 2016 that will significantly enhance gallery, education, and public spaces, enabling the museum to better showcase more of its expanded [permanent collection](#). While the museum is temporarily closed for construction, from June 3, 2013 to early 2016, SFMOMA is “[on the go](#)” with an extensive array of off-site programming across the Bay Area, including collaborative and traveling museum exhibitions, major outdoor projects and commissioned installations, and new education initiatives. For more information about SFMOMA, its off-site programming and its expansion project, visit sfmoma.org.

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