

ASIAN ART MUSEUM
Chong-Moon Lee Center
For Asian Art & Culture
www.asianart.org



200 Larkin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
T 415.581.3711
pr@asianart.org

News



PRESS CONTACTS:
Tim Hallman
415.581.3711
pr@asianart.org

Annie Tsang
415.581.3560
annietsang@asianart.org



ASIAN ART MUSEUM ANNOUNCES SPRING EXHIBITIONS TO KICK OFF GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

Three diverse exhibitions will showcase Islamic art, rare maps, and golden treasures

SAN FRANCISCO, Sep. 29, 2015—The Asian Art Museum kicks off its golden anniversary in 2016 with three intriguing exhibitions showcasing an array of Asian art and culture. Highlights include a jeweled rifle, the “impossible black tulip” of maps and a California gold nugget, offering something special for every visitor.

Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts

The museum’s golden anniversary begins with an international loan exhibition of striking artworks from the Islamic world. On view Feb. 26 through May 8, 2016, *Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts* emphasizes the role of human relationships in inspiring and sustaining artistic creativity during three great empires of the pre-modern Islamic world. In short, it addresses the question “Who’s behind the art?” Covering a geographic span from India to Turkey, from the 16th to the 18th century, the exhibition pivots around a main protagonist at three royal courts. Through 74 exquisite artworks, including an eye-catching bejeweled rifle, the exhibition tells the stories of a writer in 16th-century Mughal India, a painter in 17th-century Safavid Iran and a patron in 18th-century Ottoman Turkey.

China at the Center: Rare Ricci and Verbiest World Maps

A second exhibition showcases two rare 17th-century maps, including *A Complete Map of the Ten Thousand Countries of the World*, created by Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci and his Chinese colleagues at the Ming court in 1602. Monumental in size (roughly 5 feet by 12 feet), and called the “impossible black tulip” because of its rarity, the map will be presented in *China at the Center: Rare Ricci and Verbiest World Maps*. On loan from the James Ford Bell Trust, the Ricci map is one of six

Gold bowl with mythical figures, 1920–1921. Thailand. Gold. *Courtesy of Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of the family of Helen King Gethman, 2008.91. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.*

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complete copies in the world today and the oldest known Chinese map to depict the Americas. Ferdinand Verbiest, another Jesuit, made his 1674 *A Complete Map of the World* for the Chinese court. On loan from the Library of Congress, this copy of the Verbiest map has never been exhibited. These two maps are among the earliest, rarest and largest woodblock-printed maps to survive from the period. Both maps tell captivating stories about the world of the 17th century and illustrate how Europe and Asia exchanged new ideas about geography, astronomy and the natural sciences. Paired with the maps will be two vibrant 55-inch interactive displays, allowing visitors to read translations of the fascinating information contained within them as well as get an up-close view. The exhibition is on view Mar. 4 through May 8, 2016.

Hidden Gold: Mining Its Meaning in Asian Art

To commemorate its golden anniversary, the Asian Art Museum has organized *Hidden Gold: Mining Its Meaning in Asian Art*, an exhibition of 50 artworks that together reveal the unique physical and symbolic aspects of gold—qualities that make this precious metal so important in the history of both Asian art and California. Ranging from a Qur'an manuscript to a Daoist ceremonial robe to a Mongolian Buddha bronze sculpture, the artworks reveal specific aspects of gold production and usage across Asia. In addition, an innovative installation including both California gold nuggets and Asian coinage explores how gold is extracted and transformed into money. San Francisco's position on the world stage—as well as the prominence of Asia and Asian culture in California—stems from the area's Gold Rush legacy. It's a history that continues to inform today's culture in the Golden State. *Hidden Gold* is also on view Mar. 4 through May 8, 2016.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts was organized by the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, in partnership with the Asian Art Museum. This exhibition has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor; a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services; and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Presentation at the Asian Art Museum is made possible with the generous support of The Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Fund for Excellence in Exhibitions and Presentations, Anne and Timothy Kahn, and Judy Wilbur. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Art and the Humanities.

China at the Center: Rare Ricci and Verbiest World Maps is organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco in partnership with the University of San Francisco. Presentation is made possible with the generous support of The Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Fund for Excellence in Exhibitions and Presentations, Penelope L. Wong and S. Timothy Kochis, and Maura and Robert Morey.

The Ricci Map is owned by the James Ford Bell Trust, held at the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, and has been loaned to the Asian Art Museum.

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.

For more information, go to www.asianart.org.

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