

The Asian Art Museum Mobile Guide

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An Acoustiguide Tour

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NO COLOR = NEW STOPS (AS OF 2018)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE HIGHLIGHTS TOUR

JAY XU (MUSEUM DIRECTOR):

Welcome to the Asian Art Museum. I'm museum director Jay Xu.

Asia ... a land mass of more than 17 million square miles that has long been home to more than half of the human population. Those who share this vast area are remarkable in their diversity of languages, cultures, and religions. How, then, do we encompass the art of such a varied cross-section of peoples under one roof?

In 1959, Chicago industrialist Avery Brundage agreed to donate the first part of his vast collection of Asian art to San Francisco on the condition that the city build a new museum to house it. The challenge was met, and the Asian Art Museum was born, opening its doors for the first time in 1966.

Since then, a desire to connect diverse communities has been part of our mission. The Asian Art Museum seeks to inspire new ways of thinking about and exploring the array of cultures we have represented here through our world-class collection, exhibitions, and programs.

On this tour, you'll find collections arranged in multiple galleries devoted to South Asia, the Persian World and West Asia, Southeast Asia, the Himalayas and the Tibetan Buddhist World, China, Korea, and Japan. Throughout, you'll find certain masterpieces highlighted by special designs and colors, accompanied by a variety of media, allowing you to explore further. Each space celebrates the artistic accomplishments—in all their variety—of the many different peoples of Asia. We hope you enjoy the tour.

NARRATOR:

This is an Acoustiguide production.

2. INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH ASIA GALLERIES

NARRATOR:

Welcome to the South Asia Galleries, featuring artwork created in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh over a period of two thousand years. Within these galleries you will find artworks made by people who spoke numerous languages, observed various cultural traditions, and practiced many different religions.

The first gallery provides an overview of the religious traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism, concepts that will be revisited in subsequent galleries. Masterpieces are highlighted in Galleries 2 and 4, where you'll find an important Buddha image and a magnificent sculpture of the Hindu deity Shiva. Each artwork reveals something about these unique cultures.

Forrest McGill, Wattis Senior Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art.

FORREST MCGILL:

Many of them are narrative; many of them are telling the myths associated with deities. And our labels and other materials that are around the artworks tell those stories. And I really urge you to have a look, because the stories are very engaging and interesting.

NARRATOR:

Qamar Adamjee, Malavalli Family Foundation Associate Curator of Art of the Indian Subcontinent.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

My favorite artworks in the galleries are usually the paintings. The paintings are further down in Gallery 5. And that is a space that I keep calling my playground.

NARRATOR:

Often, a group of paintings hangs in Gallery 5. Each of these light-sensitive works is

displayed for eight months before returning to storage for preservation. This frequent rotation creates a sort of mini-exhibition space.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

They're usually focused around a particular theme or a subject and it allows for some really close looking as well as a variety of topics that can be explored.

3. ORIGINS OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a body of ideas, attitudes, and forms that originated in northeast India some 2,500 years ago, when the Buddha, that is, the Enlightened One, attained supreme wisdom. He became known as the Buddha Shakyamuni, the Buddha of our world-age.

Shakyamuni spent many decades traveling and teaching. After his death, he freed himself from future rebirths and passed into the condition of blissful nonexistence known as nirvana—setting in motion beliefs and practices that would spread throughout Asia and take on many forms of practice.

By a thousand years ago, Buddhism was found in virtually all parts of Asia—except West Asia and Iran. Many variations exist. Some schools focus primarily on the Buddha Shakyamuni. Others pay homage to other buddhas, to savior-like bodhisattvas, and to various other deities, including female ones.

In January 2000, the *New York Times* reported that Buddhism is now identified as a mainstream American religion.

4. THE BODHISATTVA MAITREYA (B60S597)

This ancient Buddhist figure's princely garments suggest that he is a bodhisattva, a spiritual being who has compassionately vowed to achieve Buddhahood but has not yet done so. Bodhisattvas have deferred this aspiration in order to liberate all creatures in the universe from suffering.

In his left hand is a bottle for water used in rituals, indicating that this image represents the bodhisattva Maitreya. When the time is right, this powerful spiritual being will be born on earth in human form, and become the next Buddha.

This seventeen-hundred-year-old sculpture comes from the ancient region of Gandhara. Gandhara covered parts of today's Pakistan and Afghanistan. The work is made of a fine-grained stone called schist, which—as exemplified here—can be carved in small, sharp detail.

The naturalistic modeling of the deeply carved drapery and the facial features are reminiscent of Greco-Roman sculpture. Maitreya wears a multi-strand bead necklace with an amulet box, an object worn as a form of prayer or protection.

It's supported by two centaurs, half-human/half-horse creatures that derive from Greek mythology. Sculptures like this one exemplify Gandhara's strong contact with cultures from the West. More than five hundred years before this work was created, Alexander the Great and his armies had reached the area, after conquering Persia.

5. ONE-FACED LINGA (B6S15)

NARRATOR:

Shiva is one of the most complex deities in the Hindu tradition. He embodies contradictions,

and is variously depicted as creator and destroyer, an ascetic and a lover, the greatest of yogis and a teacher. But one representation—called the linga—is found at the very center of temples to Shiva. This center, the inner sanctum, is called a womb, thus imagining the temple as a human body.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

In that center of the temple, the devotional image of Shiva is always an abstract form which is a column-like element.

The lingam, as nonrepresentational as it might appear, nonetheless is a direct relationship to the body of the god. So even in this kind of abstraction, the body is being referenced.

NARRATOR:

In this phallic form as the linga, Shiva is depicted as creation and the beginning of life, the cosmic pillar that supports the entire universe.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

He represents all totality, the oneness of existence, the oneness of the cosmos, the oneness that exists between heaven and the earth.

NARRATOR:

In some cases, as in this sculpture, the linga includes the face of Shiva, which always includes the god's recognizable features.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

His hair is in a topknot of matted locks, which represents his ascetic detachment from worldly things. His eyes are downcast in meditation and compassion. His mouth is gently smiling. He has extended earlobes and prominently on the center of his forehead is his third eye ... the third eye that dispels all illusions, and is able to see reality as it is.

6. THE BUDDHA TRIUMPHING OVER MARA (B60S598) (L)

NARRATOR:

This 10th-century stone sculpture features an image of the Buddha rendered in exquisite detail. The array of heart-shaped leaves and branches at the top of the object represents the Bodhi Tree, under which the Buddha-to-be sits in meditation on the threshold of enlightenment. The sculptor imbued this Buddha-image with both humanity—using details like the softly rounded belly—and spirituality. There are many signs pointing to the Buddha-to-be's special qualities. Curator Forrest McGill.

FORREST MCGILL:

He has a lump on the top of his head, and that symbolizes his extra insight. And then on the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet, he has special symbols, and both are marks of a special kind of a being who's more advanced, more powerful, than a regular human being.

He's actually sitting on a throne here, there's a cross bar and uprights that make up the throne with a pair of mythical creatures on each side. And then what he's touching with his right hand is the base of the throne, but we understand that symbolically to be touching the Earth.

Below him there's a lion and the lion is facing us head-on, and has this very powerful upper body, and the Buddha image too has this very powerful upper body, a lion-like torso, showing his spiritual power and accomplishment.

NARRATOR:

The face relays a combination of emotions, from serenity to strength and perhaps sadness, reflecting the Buddha-to-be's realization that life is full of suffering.

In the large halo above and behind the figure's head a statement appears in Sanskrit. It reads: *The Buddha has explained the cause of all things that arise from a cause. He, the great monk, has also explained their cessation.*

FORREST MCGILL:

It gives this fundamental statement of Buddhism and infuses the actual Buddha image with the message of the Buddha.

NARRATOR:

The Buddha is said to have achieved enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, in northeastern India, where this sculpture was made.

(Tap “More” to see the video “Bodhgaya: Center of the Buddhist World.”)

7. THE HINDU DEITY CHAMUNDA (B62S39+)

NARRATOR:

This fierce Hindu deity is Chamunda, also known as Kali. She is brought forth by Durga the warrior goddess to overcome the demons Chanda and Munda, representations of egotism and ambition. Chamunda's name combines theirs as a sign of her victory.

In her twelve arms, Chamunda carries a variety of weapons, some given to Durga by male gods who had failed to defeat the demons. Qamar Adamjee.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

Starting from the top, she holds a corpse above her head, a shield, a skull-top staff, a bow. And then we come down and she has a skull cup, and when we move to the other side of her body, she holds a knife, a trident, a spear, and a drum. Ferocity and fierceness is inscribed in her body. We see her with bulging eyes, we see her with fangs, her mouth smiling, but smiling in a dangerous way.

NARRATOR:

Though she is emaciated, skeletal, and frightening, she's also lithe and agile.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

There is a tension in the image which is at once beautiful and scary. She's in this accentuated dance-like position which reflects her gracefulness, despite that ferocity. Chamunda and other fierce deities reflect human behavior, human emotions in their totality.

NARRATOR:

Used in the right way, even negative emotions and experiences can be transformative.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

Chamunda uses the frightening powers of human nature, of cosmic nature, to overcome that

which is negative, that which is obstructive. It's about creating balance. It's about recognizing the line between destruction and creation, because it's really part of the same continuum.

8. THE HINDU DEITY VISHNU IN THE FORM OF A BOAR (B62S15+)

NARRATOR:

In Hinduism, Vishnu is seen as creator of the universe and preserver of order. He comes down to earth on ten occasions when forces of chaos threaten the world; each descent is called an avatar. This sculpture shows Vishnu in his third avatar, as a boar, coming to rescue the earth itself. Qamar Adamjee.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

The earth, personified as the goddess Bhudevi, has become trapped at the bottom of the primordial ocean. There is no solid ground for humans to dwell on, and there is a crisis about the survival of human life.

NARRATOR:

In his avatars, Vishnu assumes the physical form best suited to resolve the mythic problem at hand. Here, as Varaha, he appears with boar-like tenacity, strength, and speed.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

Vishnu as a boar uses the sense of scent to locate the earth goddess. Uses his tusks to lift her from the depths of the ocean and to bring her back. He is supporting the earth goddess, who appears very tiny in comparison to Vishnu himself. She is a monumental entity in and of herself. But Vishnu is far greater. The whole figure is just surging with energy and movement.

If one were to think of god as being everything everywhere, the human body could be thought to be a very limiting and inadequate vessel for representing the divine. On the other hand, if god is indeed all-encompassing, then why can it not take on the form of a human or an animal or anything? These animal forms become symbols of strength or powers that exist not only in the human world but in the animate world.

9. THE HINDU DEITY SHIVA (B69S14 (L))

NARRATOR:

Shiva is one of the three most important Hindu deities. We can identify him here by his adornments: the dreadlocks bound together; the tiny crescent moon on the left side of his headdress; and the river goddess, Ganga, high up in his dreadlocks to the right.

On this device, as well as on the tablet nearby, you can see enlarged images of the crescent moon and the river goddess.

Around the perimeter of the gallery you'll notice stone sculptures of several Hindu deities, including Shiva. These heavy pieces would have been permanently displayed in a place of worship.

FORREST MCGILL:

And that's part of their symbolism, that they are eternal and unmoving inside the shrine of the temple.

NARRATOR:

But the sculpture before you had a different purpose. Senior Curator Forrest McGill.

FORREST MCGILL:

Bronze images like the one of Shiva that you're looking at now were made to be carried in procession. You can't really see it, but underneath the lotus, there's a bronze extension that has holes in it that would have allowed it to be attached to a ceremonial chariot that would be either pulled or carried through the streets in procession. This is the mobile form of the deity that comes out into our world and can communicate with us, and we can see the deity and feel close to it.

NARRATOR:

Shiva would be elaborately decorated in silk textiles, gold jewelry, and flowers for such events. The video playing nearby will give you a better sense of what these decorations and a traditional procession look like.

You can also view the video on this device by tapping “More.”

10. ELEPHANT THRONE (HOWDAH) (2001.12.a-c) (L)

This throne, or howdah, once sat atop an Indian elephant. In South Asia, elephants are revered and are closely associated with rulership. Countless kings rode on simpler howdahs during hunts and battles, and on opulent ones like this example on state and ceremonial occasions.

Thrones like this one were symbols of status in the princely courts of South Asia. In the South Asian tradition, the regal lions that appear on this throne are associated with gods, religious figures, and rulers. And the peacocks in the side-panel medallions are emblems of royalty.

The profuse detailing recalls the splendor in India's princely courts, even under British colonial rule. This howdah also incorporates specific elements that point to the interchange between Europe and South Asia during the British period. The coat of arms on the front, and flower-filled urns on the sides, are British-derived decorative motifs.

By the late 1700s, at least a century before this throne was fashioned, the British dominated much of the subcontinent. Indeed, India was called the jewel in the British crown. The British only departed India in 1947.

(Tap "More" to see the video "How to Dress an Elephant.")

11. CUP WITH CALLIGRAPHIC INSCRIPTIONS (B60J619) (L)

NARRATOR:

A calligraphic inscription surrounds the body of this jade cup, dating to the 15th-century Timurid dynasty.

Associate Curator Qamar Adamjee reads a translation of this Arabic script:

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

The sultan son of the sultan, Ala ud-Daulah Bahadur Khan, may God perpetuate his kingdom, ordered the completion of this container.

NARRATOR:

The Timurid family of rulers controlled an extensive region across Central Asia. Founded by Amir Timur, the Timurids were known for their political power but also for being refined patrons of the arts. That legacy continued after their rule ended, and was still felt from Turkey to India.

It was in India, 175 years later, that a second inscription was added in Persian around the cup's rim by a descendent of the Timurids, the Mughal emperor Jahangir, which has been translated as follows:

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

This life-prolonging jade container belongs to Jahangir Shah, son of Akbar Shah. For as long as the angels' celestial sphere revolves, may the world remember Jahangir Shah.

NARRATOR:

Jade, a very hard and brittle stone, is not carved. Instead, it is ground down using a rotary tool and wet abrasive paste.

This second inscription is delicate, minute, and difficult to see with the naked eye. It would have been a challenging to create.

Why risk damaging an existing artwork made from a rare material like white jade?

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

The Mughals, at many periods of their history, kept looking back to their Timurid ancestry. And one way of doing that, especially for Emperor Jahangir, was by collecting artworks and objects that once belonged to a member of the Timurid family. It becomes a historical document of sorts.

NARRATOR:

Tap “More” to hear a reading of the inscriptions in Arabic and Persian and to view a video on working jade.

12. WINE CUP IN THE SHAPE OF A TURBAN GOURD (B60J485)

NARRATOR:

The walls of this cup are so thin, and the surface so smoothly finished, that it is almost translucent. And notice the precise working of the ribs between the lobes. Such fine craft exemplifies the skill of jade working under the Mughal emperors, the most powerful Muslim dynasty to emerge in South Asia. The Mughal Empire lasted from the early 1500s until the mid-1800s, and at its height, encompassed much of present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India.

This vessel was shaped into the form of a turban gourd cut in half. On the base are five overlapping leaves. Jades took on such naturalistic forms under the patronage of the early-17th-century Mughal emperor Jahangir. Like his forefathers, Jahangir was an avid collector of jade objects.

Along the rim is the inscription *Drink at the order of god*—indicating the cup’s probable use for drinking wine. Despite Islamic prohibitions against alcohol, wine was consumed heavily at Mughal courts.

Jahangir wrote about his own drinking habit in his memoirs. It began in his youth, when he was advised that a beaker of wine would relieve exhaustion:

ACTOR:

“I drank, and liked the feeling I got. Over nine years, it increased to twenty phials of double-distilled spirits. Things got so bad that in my hangovers my hands shook so much I had to have others help me drink.

I summoned the court physician, who said that soon things would be beyond remedy. Since his words were spoken in benevolence, and life is precious, it made a great impression on me.”

NARRATOR:

In the 18th century, when examples of Mughal jades like this one were presented to the emperor of China, he was so impressed that he composed poems in their praise and ordered the imperial Chinese workshop to imitate them.

13. SIKHISM

NARRATOR:

Sikhism arose in Punjab, a region now divided between India and Pakistan. Its followers consider themselves disciples of ten esteemed gurus, or teachers. The first of these was Guru Nanak, Sikhism's historical founder. He was born in 1469, into a Hindu family, but disavowed the Hindu caste system and emphasis on ritual. Nor did he remain uncritical of what he saw as limitations within Islamic practice. His teachings preached the unity of religion, placing particular emphasis on ethical conduct and the equality of all people before a universal god.

14. DECORATED BOX (not on view) (L)

NARRATOR:

This late-17th-century jewelry box is skillfully crafted in wood inlaid with ivory and tortoiseshell, with overlaid carved ivory panels. The bold geometric patterns and vegetal designs exemplify north Indian decorative motifs of the period.

Lord Ellenborough, Governor-General of India, acquired this box in 1842, when Kabul, a city now in Afghanistan, fell to the British. He was told it had belonged to Ranjit Singh, founder of the first united Sikh kingdom, who had died in 1839. Ranjit Singh's court in Lahore, in present-day Pakistan, was extremely wealthy and demanded both superb antique objects like this box and the finest luxury items of the day.

Now walk to your left, to the freestanding case where you'll find a 19th-century Sikh warrior's helmet. Its unusual shape accommodated the wearer's uncut hair, which was rolled in a topknot inside it. In the 17th century, when Sikhs were facing religious persecution, they adopted uncut hair as one of five emblems of their solidarity. Traditionally associated with South Asian ascetics, uncut hair emphasized Sikh religious devotion. It signaled their belief in an egalitarian religion—and still remains an important symbol of the Sikh faith today.

(Tap "More" to see an image of the inside of the decorated box owned by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.)

15. INTRODUCTION TO THE PERSIAN WORLD AND WEST ASIA GALLERY

NARRATOR:

Welcome to the Persian World and West Asia. This collection covers an expansive geographic territory from Afghanistan to Turkey, including Iran, Uzbekistan, and Iraq. It also encompasses a vast time period.

Ceramics dating from early human settlements in the ancient Persian world make up some of the oldest artworks in the Asian Art Museum's collection. Other pieces were created in later centuries as Islam spread across the region.

You'll find ceramics and metalwork along with functional objects—from everyday dishes, to architectural tiles that adorned interior and exterior walls, to Qur'an manuscripts.

Associate Curator Qamar Adamjee.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

Within all of these different types of objects, what comes across very strongly is the element of beauty. They're all meant to be beautiful, even though they are meant to be used. And they are also reflective of a great deal of artistic skill and talent, as well as a combination of mastery over material and embedded knowledge of science that goes into making the glazes or making the pottery. And of course, artistic creativity within the medium.

NARRATOR:

You'll see these qualities of artistic creativity and skill within many of these objects, especially in the form of elegant writing, or calligraphy.

QAMAR ADAMJEE:

The beauty of the written form of the word, as well as the content of the word, make the objects speak, and they enhance their beauty and add additional meaning to them.

16. CHEEKPIECE OF A HORSE BRIDL IN THE FORM OF A MYTHICAL CREATURE (B60B17+)

NARRATOR:

This ancient bronze object comes from a region of western Iran known as Luristan. The stylized, fantastic creature resembles a kind of sphinx. It has horns or a horned headdress, and the head of some predator reaching out from the tip of what looks like its wing. And it's trampling an antelope-like victim.

There could be a connection with the human-headed winged bulls seen in the art of ancient Assyria. But we don't have any information about the ethnicity, language, or religious beliefs of the people who made such pieces. So we can only guess at the possible meaning of the imagery.

We do know that objects similar to this one usually come in pairs. When they're not dismantled, they are connected to a rod through the circular hole you see here in the chest. It has been surmised that this rod was a horse bit and that these objects are cheekpieces which attached it to a bridle. As such, they are reminders of the important role of horses in the seminomadic societies of Central and West Asia.

17. INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERIES

NARRATOR:

Welcome to the Southeast Asia Galleries, featuring art from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Burma, or Myanmar, as it's called today. The galleries are arranged chronologically, beginning in Gallery 8, with the oldest artworks to have survived the region's tropical climate. We end in Gallery 11, with more recent works of art. Senior Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art Forrest McGill.

FORREST MCGILL:

It's worth having a special look at the designated masterpieces. The first one you'll come to is an over-life-size image of the Hindu deity Vishnu that would have been in a royally-sponsored temple in the ancient Cambodian capital of Angkor. The next one you'll see is a fantastic 19th-century Burmese throne shrine, enshrining a Buddha image. It's very large, it's gilded, and it's got very intricate designs that are really worth spending some time looking at.

NARRATOR:

The image of Vishnu and the throne shrine are stops on this tour. Natasha Reichle, Associate Curator of Southeast Asian Art, points out that all of the galleries are full of artistic treasures to be discovered.

NATASHA REICHLER:

I don't really like to direct people to a specific piece; I like people walking into a space and just finding the object that draws them toward it. For me it's often stone sculpture; for other people it might be a textile or a beautiful bronze. I can't play favorites 'cause I really love so many pieces in the collection.

18. THE HINDU DEITY VISHNU (940–965, B65S7) (L)

NARRATOR:

This is Vishnu, one of the three supreme Hindu deities. He is identified here by the crown and four arms. He holds a round shape in his right hand, representing the earth. The handle remains of what was once a club in his left, symbolizing might in battle. A video on the nearby monitor and on this device depicts a full reconstruction of the figure.

Vishnu, the preserver, protects humans and restores order to the world. Senior Curator Forrest McGill.

FORREST MCGILL:

He's also associated with kingship, because kings have the same role, at least theoretically, of establishing order and maintaining order so that the rest of the world can proceed in an orderly, prosperous, healthy way.

This sculpture would have been in the center of a royally sponsored temple. He's got his shoulders back, his forearms arrayed in this very symmetrical way. His face is very stern-looking. Notice his very straight, horizontal brow ridge. Everything about this sculpture reinforces the idea of stability, order, reliability, permanence.

NARRATOR:

Walk around this sculpture and look at the back of the elaborate crown. It copies a real ancient crown, which would have been assembled of components made of sheet gold. Around the tiered headdress there would have been a sort of tiara, which was tied at the back. By looking at how crowns are designed and decorated, scholars are able to determine the relative age of sculptures from the Cambodian kingdom of Angkor.

(Tap "More" to see the videos "Vishnu Reconstructed" and "Vishnu's Crown Restored.")

19. THE HINDU DEITIES SHIVA AND PARVATI (B66S2, B66S3)

NARRATOR:

Hindu beliefs and practices at one time spread from India throughout Southeast Asia and Nepal, and Hindu gods are found in the art of all these areas. These two sculptures from Cambodia represent the Hindu deity Shiva and his wife, the goddess Parvati.

Shiva is shown in numerous manifestations, including the abstracted cylindrical phallic form called the linga. Here, we see Shiva in his benevolent aspect, as a young man and loving husband.

Parvati is often depicted together with Shiva, either standing next to him, as she is here, or sitting on his knee while he embraces her. The couple is also portrayed with their two children, Skanda, god of war, and Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity of new beginnings.

Scientific study has shown that the rock used to carve both these pieces comes from the same quarry. The darker stone of Shiva was apparently excavated from lower in the quarry.

In contrast to India, where Hinduism was found at all social levels, in Cambodia, it was largely limited to the elite. These two figures can thus be seen as parallel to the king and his consort. Unlike Indian deities, usually presented in high relief, they are freestanding and wearing Cambodian attire. They were fashioned by Cambodian sculptors of the empire of Angkor, the most powerful state in mainland Southeast Asia from the 800s to the 1300s. Huge temples survive today, revealing that Angkor was extensive, rich, and varied. The art found there combines elements of local beliefs in sacred mountains, ancestors, and nature spirits with Hindu and Buddhist beliefs adopted from India.

You've been listening to music recently recorded at Angkor.

20. PAIR OF DOOR GUARDIANS (1997.6.1, 1997.6.2)

NARRATOR:

Dvarapalas, or door guardians, are a tradition across the Hindu-Buddhist world. They were found in the earliest times flanking the entranceways to temples and other holy places in Central and East Java.

This pair would have flanked the entranceway of a Hindu temple in the kingdom of Majapahit, which existed from approximately 1300 to 1500. After its fall, much of Indonesia embraced Islam, with Hindu culture surviving today primarily on the island of Bali.

It may seem like these two sculptures are mirror images of each other, but a closer look reveals subtle distinctions. Natasha Reichle, Associate Curator of Southeast Asian Art.

NATASHA REICHLE:

For instance, the way the hands wrap around the big club that the guardian holds over his shoulder are different on each figure. The snake cord which wraps diagonally across the body is a little bit different in the way that the head of the snake peers up around the shoulder. Figures like these would have been used to ward off evil spirits but also could serve as a metaphor of the way that we try to destroy our inner obstacles in our search for higher personal growth.

NARRATOR:

The earliest examples from Indonesia were more peaceful-looking, but between the 8th and 14th or 15th centuries a shift took place. The result was an increase in demonic imagery thought to be associated with rising tantric religious beliefs.

NATASHA REICHLE:

Therefore you see the fangs, you see these wide eyes, which in Indonesian artistic traditions are thought to express demonic forms. Also the hair, when it gets long and really curly, is

another indication of demonic characteristics.

We're not talking demonic in a Western sense, but a frightening force that, in this case, is working for good. It's frightening and scary so that it can keep away evil from the sanctuary and protect and purify a sacred space.

21. INDONESIAN ROD PUPPETS (L)

NARRATOR:

You're looking at some of the characters who tell the stories in the traditional art of *wayang golek*, the three-dimensional puppet theater of Java. Puppets like these reappear in plays people attend throughout their lives. They express a wide range of gestures and can be friendly, heroic, cowardly, or sinister. The complex stories come from both Hindu and Islamic literature.

They are brought to life by the *dalang*, or puppet masters, who are a storehouse of knowledge of story cycles and mystic lore passed down over centuries. The *dalang* performs all the narration and dialogue, manipulates the many puppets, directs the accompanying musical ensemble—and usually carves the figures.

Kathy Foley, Professor of Theater Arts at the University of California, Santa Cruz, who studied for many years to become a *dalang*, conveys the atmosphere and significance of a *wayang golek* performance:

KATHY FOLEY:

“A performance takes place from 9 o'clock at night until 4 or 5 in the morning. The atmosphere is a bit like going to the circus. There's all the excitement of the side show—people gambling, food stalls set up. There's a wedding or a circumcision going on ... all the relatives, everybody is cooking. The music starts up and people keep on talking. Eventually, the puppeteer comes on stage and can hold his audience with scenes of joy, romance, and laughter. A *wayang golek* performance is meant for everyone. A kind of blessing comes to the event.

There will be episodes that are philosophical and deep for the elders. Portions of the story are laughing, and the kids are running around and looking at everyone. There are scenes of love, as the young men come out and check out the girls, and vice versa. It's a kind of performance

you engage in at your own level and depth.

At the very end of a *wayang* performance, you say ‘The flower has been picked. May its fragrance spread.’ And that means the seed has gone from me to you, the viewer, and hopefully, it will take root and grow in the community.”

NARRATOR:

You have been listening to a field recording of gamelan music, which traditionally accompanies such performances. It was recorded by Henry Spiller, Luce Assistant Professor of Asian Music and Culture at Kenyon College.

(Tap “More” to see the video “Indonesian Rod Puppets.”)

22. THRONE FOR A BUDDHA IMAGE (AND BUDDHA IMAGE) (2006.27.1.A-T)
(L)

NARRATOR:

This elaborate wood and gilded lacquer shrine is a masterpiece among the Asian Art Museum's collection. It is a throne, but not for an earthly king. Senior Curator Forrest McGill.

FORREST MCGILL:

It's a mountain, symbolically. And it's the vertical axis that connects the underworld to the world we live on, to the heavens above.

NARRATOR:

Like the heavens, this throne shrine appears to float above the ground. This was achieved by setting the legs further back under the skirt of the structure. If you look closely at the carving on either side of the Buddha and throne, you'll discover at least four crowned celestial figures worshipping the Buddha, hidden among the intricate floral carvings.

The Buddha sits at the center on a throne reminiscent of Burmese royalty. He's adorned in a crown and royal jewelry ... the Buddha in the form of a king. But why?

FORREST MCGILL:

At one point, when the Buddha was living on earth, a very arrogant earthly king came to him and was boasting and bragging about being the greatest king, the greatest power on earth. And so the Buddha did a magical manifestation of himself in a royal palace in a royal capital in the greatest grandeur and royal pomp and circumstance to awe this king. Then the Buddha favored the king with a sermon about uselessness of earthly riches and power, and the superiority of the Buddha's way of renunciation and spiritual quest.

NARRATOR:

The throne shrine, and the grouping of sacred objects around it, suggest what you would have seen walking into a Southeast Asian Buddhist temple 150 years ago. We invite you to spend some time with this rare masterpiece ... the only one of its kind in the United States.

(Tap “More” to see the video “Installing the throne shrine for a Buddha image (and Buddha image).”)

23. INTRODUCTION TO THE HIMALAYAN GALLERIES

JEFF DURHAM:

I'm Jeff Durham, the Associate Curator of Himalayan Art at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, and I'd like to welcome you to the Himalayan galleries.

NARRATOR:

This space contains artwork from across the Tibetan Plateau, including Nepal, Bhutan, China, Mongolia, and Tibet itself. The cultures represented here are united by a shared religious system known as Vajrayana; literally, the "Lightning Vehicle" of Esoteric Buddhism. Art plays a crucial role in Vajrayana meditative and ritual systems.

JEFF DURHAM:

Tibetan artworks really are quite unique in that they're understood by practitioners of the tradition as capable of doing something almost magical, and that is producing liberation merely by being seen.

NARRATOR:

In Tibetan Buddhism, seeing a sculpture of the deity White Tara, for example, and visualizing the sacred figure's form in the mind's eye, is understood to transform negative impulses into positive states of awareness. It fuels liberation from negative experiences as the practitioner absorbs the peace and compassion her form symbolizes.

JEFF DURHAM:

While you're visiting these galleries, don't miss the ritual equipment that you will see in the cases in the center of the gallery. Here you'll find a fascinating bone skirt worn by ritual specialists in fierce rites.

NARRATOR:

Also in the center of the gallery, you'll find the Svayambhu Stupa. This sculpture represents

the Great Stupa on top of Svayambhu Hill in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. A monumental reliquary on one hand, but it's also a cosmogram ... a map of the entire cosmos, as understood in Buddhist thought.

24. THE BUDDHIST DEITY WHITE TARA (B60S22+)

NARRATOR:

According to the first Dalai Lama, great teacher of the Gelug order of Tibetan Buddhism, White Tara is said to be “the wisdom, compassion, and enlightened activity of all Buddhas, arising in the form of a beautiful goddess.”

Here, the youthful, serene-looking White Tara sits with her feet in the posture of meditation. Her right hand is in the gesture of gift-granting, indicating her gift to disciples of spiritual attainments and Buddhahood. Her left is in the gesture of dispelling fear, showing that she protects her disciples from all danger, calamity, and disaster. The eyes incised on her palms and the soles of her feet show her mastery of the four doors of Liberation, whereby she frees all beings from misery. She is also one of three deities of Tibet who grant longevity.

The glistening surface of this gilt-copper sculpture expresses Tara’s radiance. It was achieved using a process called mercury gilding. Gold is dissolved in mercury, applied to the surface of metal, and then heated to evaporate the mercury and leave the gold adhering to the surface. The rich effect is enhanced by the goddess’s headdress and jewelry, which are inlaid with turquoise, lapis lazuli, and crystals.

This work was created in the 15th century by the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, the Himalayan country between India and Tibet. The Newars excelled in mercury gilding. Famed in the Himalayas since the 700s, they traveled far and wide, decorating the temples of Tibet.

In the 13th century, they even worked for the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan in present-day Beijing—thus introducing Nepalese art to China’s imperial court.

25. THE BUDDHIST DEITY SIMHAVAKTRA DAKINI (B60S600) (L)

JEFF DURHAM:

This is Simhavaktra Dakini. Simhavaktra means “lion faced” or “lion headed,” and a Dakini is a sky walker. She’s an inhabitant of the realm of the sky in the mind.

NARRATOR:

Though this figure comes from 18th-century China, it is rendered in Tibetan style, reflecting cross-cultural and religious influences. To fully appreciate the sculpture’s stunning details, it helps to understand a bit about Tibetan Buddhism. Jeff Durham, Curator of Himalayan Art.

JEFF DURHAM:

In Tibetan Buddhism, there are two forces that lead towards enlightenment. And they must be in proper balance. One is wisdom or knowledge of reality, and the other is compassion. And one of the things that impresses me most about this object is that balance of compassion and ferocity is reflected in the posture that the dakini takes, balanced perfectly on her left leg while she raises her right arm towards her flaming hair.

It can look frightening, it can look ferocious, but we have to remember what that ferociousness is directed towards in the Tibetan tradition. And these are obstacles to enlightenment such as lust, anger, ignorance, this kind of thing.

NARRATOR:

Every aspect of the statue contains deep meaning. For example, the intricate garment that she wears.

JEFF DURHAM:

The garment is actually the flayed skin of a human being. This is a symbolic device that indicates the stripping away of the veil of illusion from perception.

NARRATOR:

In other words, she has transcended the limitations of the human condition. She also wears bracelets, armllets, anklets, and a necklace representing the five different elements and the five Buddhas. Taken together, they symbolize both the cardinal directions of the cosmos—four directions plus central axis—and the components of ordinary human psychology: lust, hatred, delusion, pride, and jealousy.

JEFF DURHAM:

And if you'll look right on Simhavaktra's forehead, you'll see a wonderful, gleaming third eye that indicates that she's able to see past the illusion of lust, hatred, and delusion.

LAYER: THE ENLIVENED IMAGE

JEFF DURHAM:

One of the most important things to understand about Tibetan Buddhist sculptures is that we're not looking just at an art object here. We're also looking at what the Tibetan Buddhists understand as a presence.

If you look on the back of Simhavaktra Dakini, you'll see that there is a cavity. It has been possible for our conservators at the museum to insert a small camera. We've been able to look inside Simhavaktra's flaming head and up there is what differentiates this object from any other sculpture.

This is a consecration deposit, and it consists most probably of scrolls of sutras that have been inserted into her head. This sort of procedure in combination with a specific ritual apparatus transforms Simhavaktra from a representation into a living image.

26. THE BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI (1994.131)

NARRATOR:

In the art of Mongolia and Tibet, the alms bowl depicted in this figure's left hand and the earth-touching gesture of his right one identify him as the Buddha Shakyamuni. This gesture of his right hand recalls the moment when the Buddha called the Earth as a witness during his victory over the demon Mara, indicating that he is at the moment of his enlightenment. The alms bowl and the patched monk's robe he wears are reminders of the Buddha's renunciation of worldly possessions.

This 18th-century bronze image was made in Mongolia, where Tibetan Buddhism became a powerful force on the arrival of the third Dalai Lama in 1577.

The style of this Buddha and the high pedestal on which he sits exemplify the work of the lama-sculptor Zanabazar, who lived from 1635 to 1723. He was the first leader of the Gelug order of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia—and among his many accomplishments, he invented two types of Mongolian alphabets.

A steel plate under the pedestal is inscribed with the name of a British soldier, identified as a quartermaster during the China Campaign in 1860. During this campaign, part of the Opium War, the imperial palace in Beijing was looted. The inscription is evidence that this bronze was among the objects taken.

Like most Tibetan sacred art, this Buddha may be used in meditation, as an aid to visualize one's enlightenment.

27. INTRODUCTION TO THE CHINA GALLERIES (3RD FLOOR)

NARRATOR:

Welcome to the third-floor China galleries. The Asian Art Museum's renowned collection of Chinese art covers a wide variety of materials and time periods. Here, artworks are generally arranged by medium and function, as well as chronologically around the themes of ritual and worship. Fan Jeremy Zhang, Senior Associate Curator of Chinese Art.

FAN ZHANG:

They include a treasure house of jade, China's oldest ceremonial and decorative art form.

NARRATOR:

Gallery 13 is dedicated to Chinese jade. Besides being used for personal ornaments, jade was used for objects meant to communicate with the heavens, deities, and ancestors. In Gallery 14, you'll find ancient bronzes that carried similar ritual functions. And in adjacent galleries you will find funerary artworks in metal and ceramics, as well as Buddhist and Daoist sculptures in stone and wood. These galleries contain some of the oldest and most important pieces in our collection, with dates ranging over thousands of years.

Chinese art is one of the oldest continuous traditions in the world, providing a glimpse into the rich history of the country's peoples and their societies.

FAN ZHANG:

For instance, you can see many products and technologies that originally developed in China, such as silk, porcelain, tea, paper, and woodblock printing, were pursued by cultures far beyond China's borders.

NARRATOR:

At the same time, representatives from distant lands trading spices, gemstones, horses, and silver left their mark on China. They introduced new materials not only to the elites but to the

general population.

FAN ZHANG:

So we can see this kind of exchange of ideas and trades really contributed to the development of Chinese art.

28. JADE TREASURES/SHAKYAMUNI AS AN ASCETIC (B60J13) (L)

NARRATOR:

You're now in a special installation of jade treasures, showcasing highlights of the museum's vast collection of over one thousand Chinese works. The Chinese word for jade refers to two distinct stones, jadeite and nephrite. This image of the fasting Buddha Shakyamuni in meditation is made of greenish nephrite. It recalls the period in his life when he joined a group of ascetics who practiced extreme forms of self-mortification.

You might want to look at some of the other objects in this gallery as you listen to a description of the method of working jade and a summary of jade's significance in the history of China.

Because jade is such a hard material, it cannot be carved with chisels or other traditional tools of stonework. Maybe as long as seven thousand years ago, Chinese artists began using the technique of abrasion, which has remained the basic method of working jade. Sands and available technologies are used to saw open the rough stone and divide it into useful blocks. The jade is cut into a shape like that of the desired form and then cut into the final rough form. If the object is to be a container, the interior is drilled out. If the surface is to be decorated, grinding, drilling, and other methods of abrasion are used. Finally, the surface is polished.

The importance of jade is ongoing in China, continuing over thousands of years--longer than anywhere else in the world. It had great ritual significance as early as seven thousand years ago. About 2,600 years ago, long before Buddhist images were created in China, the famous philosopher Confucius said of jade:

CONFUCIUS (ACTOR):

"Its perfect compactness and extreme hardness represents the sureness of intelligence. Its angles, which do not cut, although they seem sharp, represent justice. The pure and profound

sound it gives when struck represents music. Its color represents loyalty; its interior flaws, always revealing themselves through its transparency, call to mind serenity.”

(Tap “More” to see the video “Working Jade.”)

29. RITUAL VESSEL IN THE SHAPE OF A RHINOCEROS (B60B1+) (L)

NARRATOR:

Jay Xu, Director of the Asian Art Museum.

JAY XU:

We are looking at an ancient Chinese bronze vessel dating from around early 11th century BCE, and it is extraordinary. No other museum or private collection that I know of has such a wonderful work of art in the shape of a rhino.

NARRATOR:

This ritual vessel may have held a fermented beverage, and the oval opening may have been covered with a now-missing lid that would conform to the contours of the animal.

Very few Chinese vessels made during the Bronze Age were in the form of animals, and those that were, featured surface decorations of linear patterns and other animals, like tigers or dragons. This one is rare for its undecorated surface. Please look at the sculpture as Jay Xu describes some details of this figure.

JAY XU:

This rhino is the only one depicted entirely in its own natural state. One may even notice the folds of the very thick skin, and it gives you a sense of what the real rhino's hide looks like. The rhino's snout looks very powerful. It has two horns. The ears stand up and expand outwards, indicating a state of alertness. Each foot has three toes. And the belly of the rhino droops down to give you a sense of what the weight of the real rhino is.

Another important piece of information about the rhino is the inscription in the bottom. Cast at the same time as the rhino itself, it records a Lesser Minister by the name of Yu, who received a royal gift in the form of cowry shells.

NARRATOR:

The inscription notes that this honor took place during the fifteenth year of the king, the same year that he embarked on a campaign against one of his enemies, named Renfang.

JAY XU:

Because of this information, scholars could date the vessel to the last king of the Shang dynasty, in the early 11th century BCE. The next vessel, which happens to be in the shape of a rhino, was made in China one thousand years later.

NARRATOR:

In other words, this ritual vessel is one of a kind.

(Tap “More” to see an image of the underside of the rhino and the videos “Ritual vessel in the shape of a rhinoceros” and “The Piece-mold Casting Process.”)

30. MONEY TREE (1995.79.a-dd) (L)

NARRATOR:

Money trees like this one were placed in tombs in west China nearly 2,000 years ago, during the Eastern Han dynasty. They embody various beliefs, including the desire for eternal wealth and the promise of immortal life in a heavenly realm.

The ceramic base of this intricate object—covered with an amber lead glaze—represents the earth. It's shaped like a mountain with three levels, and portrays lively hunting scenes and various animals.

It was believed that the soul travels up the tree from this earthly realm. Six levels of branches—cast in bronze—face in four directions. Replicas of Han dynasty coins—symbolizing good fortune in the afterlife—hang from the branches. They were believed to pay the way to paradise for the soul of the tomb's occupant, and to ensure that he or she would have wealth when they reached this goal.

Ultimately, the tree does reach the paradise of Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West. A figure near the top represents this goddess, who emerged as a formidable deity in the Chinese pantheon more than two thousand years ago. She sits on a throne supported by two of her identifying attributes—a dragon and a tiger. Also on this tree are a number of winged immortals, the residents of her paradise.

This money tree comes from a period when there were many evolving and competing ideas about the afterlife and immortality. Toward the top is a seated Buddha. Buddhism was slowly entering China at this time, and as exemplified here, it was being folded into the existing local belief system. Images of Buddha blended well with devotional portrayals of Xiwangmu, whose heavenly realms incorporated all entities and belief systems.

(Tap “More” to see an image of Money Tree motifs.)

31. CAMEL (B60S95) (L)

NARRATOR:

A menagerie of real and imaginary pottery animals has been found in aristocratic tombs from the Han to the Tang period. This figure of a camel was made approximately 1,300 years ago.

His head held up and mouth open as if braying, this naturalistically modeled beast of burden marches along in full gait. He's of the two-humped variety, called Bactrian camels. He's so active that his humps sway in opposite directions.

Camels were indispensable for the caravans that carried heavy loads across the Silk Road between China and the outside world; they're well suited for the desert terrain that predominated the long and treacherous route.

Between his humps, this stalwart beast of burden balances a full load of goods, including a pilgrim's bottle, dried meat, and blankets. The bulging saddlebags are in the form of monster masks, with the truculent expressions of guardian figures who avert evil. Figures like this one are appropriate for a symbolic journey as well. In fact, they were made solely as grave goods and provided a symbolic continuance of the prosperity incurred by trade and cultural exchange along the Silk Road. The practice of including camels loaded for a journey in tombs originated in the 6th century and continued during the Tang dynasty.

Animal figures like this one appeared in art markets in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chinese antiquarians shunned them, fearing that to possess ancient grave goods would bring them generations of bad luck. Western collectors, however, have valued them for their human interest, insight into history—and for their sheer beauty.

(Tap “More” to see an image entitled “Conservation: Camel.”)

32. BUDDHA DATED 338 (B60B1035) (L)

NARRATOR:

Senior Associate Curator of Chinese Art, Fan Jeremy Zhang.

FAN ZHANG:

This gilded bronze Buddha is my favorite piece at the museum.

NARRATOR:

It is the earliest known dated Buddha object produced in China. The inscription mentions the date 338, a time when rulers from Central Asia used Buddhism, transmitted from the Indian subcontinent, to consolidate their rule in China.

FAN ZHANG:

The early date of 338 inscribed on the back of this piece marks a crucial moment when India-imported Buddhism became a state-sponsored widespread religion, after being a minority practice for nearly four hundred years in China.

NARRATOR:

With legs crossed beneath a draping robe, this depiction of the Buddha Shakyamuni in meditation resembles Buddhist objects from the ancient region of Gandhara, which included parts of present-day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. These images made their way to China via the Silk Road.

You can view a Buddhist sculpture from Gandhara on your screen now.

Yet this Buddha also demonstrates adaptations made by artists of the time to attract local believers. For instance, the facial features are stylistically different than that of Gandharan sculptures; and the overlapping, inward-facing palms reflect a Chinese Daoist gesture of reverence.

FAN ZHANG:

The stylistic adaptations seen on this statue also make it an important historical milestone in the development of Chinese Buddhist art. And with a very crucial date. This helps us to understand by that time, the Chinese already started to make innovations in Buddhist art.

NARRATOR:

Among the largest found of its kind, this sculpture would have been placed on an altar for personal devotion.

(Tap “More” to view the videos “Buddha Dated 338” and “Chinese Buddhist Cave Shrines.”)

33. THE RISE OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA

NARRATOR:

By the end of the Han dynasty, China already had a two-thousand-year history, with a strongly centralized civilization suspicious of all things foreign, and a strong state cult and religious practices based on ancestor worship. So why did Buddhism develop during the four centuries after the collapse of the Han? This was a time of crisis and chaos in China, and Buddhism was seen as a way to establish social order through the imposition of a religious structure that promised personal salvation, and otherworldly domains that offered consolation not found in native Confucian or Taoist beliefs. Indeed, the serene and gentle mood conveyed by the Buddha you've just seen would have brought a needed sense of peace and hope in those troubled times.

34. THE BODHISATTVA AVALOKITESHVARA (GUANYIN) (B60S24+)

NARRATOR:

Fan Jeremy Zhang, Senior Associate Curator of Chinese Art.

FAN ZHANG:

This 12th-century Chinese sculpture portrays Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion.

NARRATOR:

A bodhisattva is a spiritual being who vows to delay Buddhahood in favor of easing suffering for people on Earth.

This Water-Moon Avalokiteshvara, or *Shuiyue Guanyin* in Chinese, is dressed as an Indian prince in a long, fluidly carved garment. His chest is crisscrossed with sashes, scarves, and delicately rendered jewels. His right hand rests on a bent knee and the left extends in a gift-granting gesture as he gazes downwards. He sits in contemplation of the moon reflected in the water, which illustrates the illusory and temporal nature of all phenomena in the human world—a subject upon which Buddhist believers meditate.

This impressive wooden sculpture of the compassionate bodhisattva would have originally been placed high in a temple, where worshipers could see him gazing down at them from above.

FAN ZHANG:

It is very important to have some kind of a gaze exchange with the bodhisattva. So, if you can look at the statue at the front in a lower position, you are going to feel this kind of calmness, confidence, benevolence, and also get some kind of religious impression to believe the almightiness of this Buddhist deity, which was believed to be more approachable than the Buddha. That's why so many believers came to this deity and asked for help and blessings.

NARRATOR:

Beginning in the middle Tang dynasty, spanning the years 618 to 907, portrayals of Guanyin—from physical attributes to clothing—suggest compassionate qualities that, in some interpretations of Chinese thought, were considered feminine. This artistic treatment may have led to prevalent worship among female devotees who sought Guanyin's blessings in their efforts to become mothers, as well as for safety and prosperity for themselves and their children.

35. COSMIC BUDDHA (B61S66)

NARRATOR:

In this remarkable Chinese sculpture in limestone, the Buddha's robes are parted to show us the cosmos, represented by the triangular mound at the Buddha's chest.

This is Mount Meru, which marks the center and summit of the cosmos. A reptilian being holds up Mount Meru, and below it appears another image of Buddha. He is lying on his right side, indicating that he is near death. Below the dying Buddha are mourners, and below them, a series of gates. Jeff Durham.

JEFF DURHAM:

These are gates into the lowest realm of the cosmos, understood in Buddhist thought to be a series of hells. That's what you see in the arrow-shaped element between the Buddha's legs. Here you'll find many denizens of hell undergoing torments, the judge of the dead, and then at the bottom-right, a horned figure stirring a pot in which the souls of the damned endure the torments that they have incurred because of their negative karma.

NARRATOR:

Not only is the Buddha represented multiple times; the cosmos appears twice, as well.

JEFF DURHAM:

The pedestal on which the Buddha is seated is a representation of the very same Mount Meru on the Buddha's chest. Thus, the Buddha himself is seated on the same Mount Meru that is inside of him. This is the entire cosmos contained within the Buddha. And in fact the Buddha himself is contained within the Buddha.

NARRATOR:

In some schools of Buddhism, this vision comprises enlightenment.

JEFF DURHAM:

Because the cosmos is inside the cosmos, and the Buddha is inside the Buddha, everything in the cosmos is connected with everything else. Nothing can be separated. And under these conditions, even the ultimate truth, nirvana, enlightenment, is present throughout the cosmos as well.

36. INTRODUCTION TO THE CHINA GALLERIES (2ND FLOOR)

NARRATOR:

The China galleries on the second floor cover four imperial dynasties: Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing, ranging from 960 to the present. Artworks are grouped by theme, with each case dedicated to a topic such as auspicious symbols and popular motifs, court life, and urban culture, as well as the pursuits of the educated elite.

During this period in China, arts were fueled by a growing urban culture and marketplace. What once was driven by the whims of aristocratic patrons became broader and more inclusive: those in the lower classes became actively involved in leading popular taste and fashion. Fan Jeremy Zhang, Senior Associate Curator of Chinese Art.

FAN ZHANG:

So new forms, particularly in the decorative arts, used a rich vocabulary of symbols to delight the eye and inspire the mind.

NARRATOR:

As China's imperial dynasties dramatically flourished and faded over the past two millenniums, their stories were captured in the art they left behind. Li He, Associate Curator of Chinese Art.

LI HE:

To study art is to learn about history. But how to use artwork to reflect the history is a challenge. We carefully selected objects that can tell stories about life or people, farmers, scholars, emperors, and cultural heroes. So there are layers and layers of stories behind this artwork. We just want everybody to be able to find something on display that is interesting, meaningful, or even just visually attractive.

37. LIDDED JAR WITH DESIGN OF A LOTUS POND (B60P78+) (L)

NARRATOR:

On this large, lidded jar, vibrant gold carp swim among a variety of aquatic plants, including lotus, caltrop, hornwort, and duckweed.

The brilliant coloration of this piece bucked the trend of subdued décor at the time. In fact, scholars and collectors shunned the ware when it was first made. This vibrant style only became popular through imperial support during subsequent eras.

This bold jar was probably commissioned by Emperor Jiajing's court in the first half of the 16th century for his palace in Beijing. It was made in an imperial workshop in Jingdezhen, the capital of Chinese ceramics production in southeast China. Li He, Associate Curator of Chinese Art.

LI HE:

This is one of the most important porcelain pieces of the Ming dynasty.

A great innovation by the Ming Imperial Workshop was to decorate porcelain with polychrome multicolor enamels, known as *wucai* in Chinese.

NARRATOR:

The multicolor decoration on this jar required multiple firings. First, cobalt-infused color pigments were painted directly on the clay body. The entire surface was then coated with clear glaze and fired. Additional colors were added over the glazed surface, before the piece was fired again. This process was extremely time-consuming and costly.

The size of this jar is also noteworthy. It would have been impossible to make this from a single piece. The seam between the upper and lower sections of the body indicates where the two halves were joined together.

During the mid-to-late Ming dynasty, the court ordered the Imperial Workshop to produce similar large jars that could be placed in royal palaces and resorts. Only perfect pieces that passed inspections were sent to the court—the number of jars that failed due to flaws was exceptionally high.

LI HE:

The huge pot required a superb quality of clay, while potting and shaping and high control of firing; otherwise, pieces would be cracking, out of shape, or broken during the firing process. Even for a modern factory, this is a challenge.

NARRATOR:

Tap “More” to view a video on porcelain production in Jingdezhen.

38. CHINESE PAINTING (L)

NARRATOR:

For thousands of years, China's cultural elite revered mountains and rivers, regarding nature as the source of supreme energy, or Qi. Natural beauty inspired Chinese artists, who reflected what they saw in paintings, first on rock and pottery, then bronze and lacquer, and later on textiles and paper.

The cultural elite considered landscape painting to be the highest visual art form in addition to calligraphy, while other subjects, such as bird-and-flower, figures, or architecture, were considered secondary. Li He, Associate Curator of Chinese Art.

LI HE:

For me, landscape is like a romantic poem. To read a poem is to feel and read the poet's mind. The landscape is paradise that the artist wanted to share with us, and we can learn so much about ink, its power and its magic nature, and how the artist manipulates ink to create the beauty in nature. So I do believe that visual materials and visual art are powerful tools making a strong impact on memory and emotion in a way that is sometimes more effective than books and words.

NARRATOR:

The practice of Chinese painting and calligraphy includes the use of the "Four Treasures," namely, paper and silk, brushes, ink and color pigments, and an ink stone. The works generally appear as hanging scrolls, handscrolls, album leaves, and folding fans. They are mainly rendered by brush on paper with the use of ink and mineral colors such as azurite blue and malachite green.

This room presents some of the best works from the museum's Chinese painting collection.

(Tap “More” to see the videos “Appreciating Chinese Calligraphy” and “Climbing Yellow Mountain [Huangshan].”)

39. INTRODUCTION TO THE KOREA GALLERIES

NARRATOR:

Welcome to the Korea Galleries. Some of the most celebrated pieces in the Asian Art Museum's distinctive Korean art collection include celadons from the Goryeo dynasty along with rare, unglazed stonewares from the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods. You'll also find a variety of paintings and the largest collection in the United States of mother-of-pearl lacquerwares from the Joseon dynasty.

Additionally, there's an impressive collection of *bojagi*, wrapping cloths made by sewing scraps of bright cloth together in an exciting design akin to modern abstract art. *Bojagi* were used in a number of ways, from covering tables to wrapping gifts. They also played a part in special events, like weddings and Buddhist rites.

Hyonjeong Kim Han, Associate Curator of Korean Art, explains how the gallery is organized.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

The objects are basically displayed in chronological order, but they are roughly organized by interesting themes such as art from tombs, Buddhist and Confucian art, ceramics, lifestyles of women and men during the Joseon dynasty, as well as contemporary artworks of various mediums.

NARRATOR:

Don't miss the blue-and-white jar featuring the design of a tiger and magpies. The cobalt color used was imported from West Asia through China. Written records indicate that during the Joseon dynasty, this material was more expensive than gold. But that's not all that makes this piece special.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

Korean children's stories or Korean folklore stories begin with this particular phrase, "Long,

long ago when the tiger smoked a pipe.” And it is exciting to discover the tiger on this jar is actually smoking a pipe.

40. VESSEL IN THE SHAPE OF A DUCK (B63P13+)

NARRATOR:

This earthenware vessel in the shape of a duck dates to about 300 during the Three Kingdoms and Gaya Federation period. With prominent openings in the back and tail, it would likely have been used to serve wine or pour purified water at special rituals and ceremonies.

Hyonjeong Kim Han, Associate Curator of Korean Art.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

Ancient Koreans believed birds were messengers to the spirit world because they could travel over land and water and through the sky. It was also believed that birds, specifically ducks, brought seeds in the spring ... wishing good harvest in the fall.

NARRATOR:

Within the last decade, many duck-shaped vessels like this have been discovered in tombs in the ancient regions of Gaya and Old Silla (in present-day Central and Southern Korea), suggesting the importance of the figure in those early cultures.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

When found in a tomb, birds, particularly ducks, are considered to be helping the dead to go the other world. Because they are in land and water, they can carry the spirit from this world to the other.

NARRATOR:

With that whimsical, playful face, it might seem to be an odd object to include in a tomb. Perhaps the piece is meant as a light-hearted reassurance about death ...

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

It's not the end of the world; there is something after life.

41. STANDING BUDDHA (B65B64)

NARRATOR:

Images like this 8th-century gilt-bronze Buddha from Korea encourage believers to approach and invoke his compassion and assistance. The Buddha stands on a double-lotus pedestal; his ample robes cascade down in what's called a wave pattern. His eyes look down; his expression is calm and meditative. He holds his hands in the gestures used most often in early Korean Buddhist images—the right one signifies dispelling fear; the left one, gift-granting.

Small gold and gilt bronze Buddhas like this one were often placed on altars at home or in private chapels, for private and family worship. They were also placed in pagodas as offerings for the well-being of the living and also for the eternal rest of family members or monks.

Look at the other standing Buddhas in this case, as you hear about the development of Buddhism in Korea:

Buddhism was introduced into Korea from China in 372 and was officially accepted by all three of the Korean Kingdoms by the middle of the 500s. The Buddhist images you see here were made in the 7th and 8th centuries, during the Three Kingdoms period and the Unified Silla dynasty. After defeating neighboring kingdoms, this dynasty launched a vigorous policy, which used Buddhism to strengthen the newly enlarged state. It became a great Buddhist nation, establishing contacts with China, Japan, India, and West Asia. The capital city of Gyeongju has been described as a place where the rooflines of Buddhist temples were lined up like a formation of flying geese, and the pagodas were as numerous as the stars.

42. EWER WITH LOTUS-SHAPED LID (B60P123+.A-.B) (L)

NARRATOR:

Celadons, as a medium, reached their pinnacle during the Goryeo dynasty, which lasted from 918 to 1392. The term *celadon* refers to the color of the glaze, a range of hues combining very subtle greens, grays, and blues.

The exquisite workmanship here suggests the ewer was made for a royal family or a very important Buddhist temple. Designed to hold liquid, this ewer could have been used for a tea ceremony or in a religious ritual. Look closely at how beautifully balanced it is. Hyonjeong Kim Han, Associate Curator of Korean Art.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

The body, with its sharply-angled shoulder, the handle with its crisp lines, and the slender mouth. They are all not decorated, and all very simple, but in contrast, the double lotus leaves decorating the top of the lid are soft and voluminous. I can see and feel the harmony between sharpness and softness; the harmony between yin and yang ... the two basic energies and forces in the world.

NARRATOR:

The pieces produced during this period are revered as the finest and most elegant pottery ever made.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

An eminent poet of the Goryeo dynasty, Yi Gyubo, when praising the celadon wares of his time, described the lustrous hue of the celadon as being the color of “pure jade.” In another poem, he describes the celadon as being the color of “clear water.” Chinese connoisseurs of the time also highly valued Goryeo celadons, especially because of their color. One Chinese connoisseur, Taiping Laoren, in the 13th century, even said, “Although potters of other areas imitate Goryeo celadons, none can achieve the same qualities.” And he described Goryeo

celadon the best under heaven.

NARRATOR:

To view a video on the making of Korean celadon, tap “More.”

43. JAR WITH TIGER AND MAGPIE DESIGN (2001.9) (L)

NARRATOR:

Porcelain wares like this one—decorated with cobalt-blue under the glaze—were first made in Korea with cobalt imported from China in the second quarter of the 15th century. They are commonly known in the West as “blue and whites.”

This “blue and white” from the 19th century is decorated with two groups of tiger and magpie imagery, a motif popular in Korean folk painting. In the past, tigers were thought to embody the spirit of the mountains and have the power to ward off all evil and harm. Magpies were harbingers of good news.

Here, one of the two tigers depicted holds a smoking pipe in his mouth. This is a humorous reference to a familiar phrase used at the beginning of Korean children’s stories, which says: “Once upon a time, long, long ago, when the tiger smoked a pipe.”

Although, in reality, tobacco was introduced into Korea during the 16th century, this fanciful description is meant to conjure up a vision of a distant magical past.

Before leaving this gallery, you might want to enjoy the paintings and textiles in the area to the right.

(Tap “More” to listen to a story, “The Tiger Who Smoked a Pipe.”)

44. MOON JAR (B60P110+)

NARRATOR:

Hyonjeong Kim Han.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

Moon jars share the same round shape and white color, but each jar has its own distinctive characteristics. They were produced from the late 17th century until the early 19th century in Korea.

NARRATOR:

Known in Korean as *dal hang-ari*, these roughly spherical porcelain jars were revered for their white color and simplicity, suggesting Confucian virtues of purity, honesty, and modesty. Moon jars do not have surface decorations, though there are color variations. Some have bluish-white surfaces, while others are translucent white.

Though their specific function during the Joseon dynasty has not clearly been identified, they may have been used to store grain, such as rice, or liquid, including soy sauce or alcohol. Some could have been used as flower vases and others as objects purely for aesthetic appreciation.

Due to their size, moon jars could not be made in one piece on a potter's wheel. The clay, unable to sustain the height and width of the jar, would have collapsed. The upper and lower halves would have been created separately, then joined together in the middle. As a result, none are perfect spheres, and no two are exactly alike.

HYONJEONG KIM HAN:

They are so natural and sometimes look defective. But somehow, the potters during the Joseon dynasty transcended or freed themselves in producing ceramics. Contemporary artists are fascinated by these freedoms, naturalism, and transcended stage in art-making. When the

artworks of the past talk to today's people, it's always interesting and meaningful.

45. INTRODUCTION TO THE JAPAN GALLERIES

NARRATOR:

The Asian Art Museum boasts a significant collection of Japanese artworks dating from as early as 3,000 BCE all the way up to the 21st century. Among the fifty-five hundred pieces are ceramics, Buddhist sculpture, paintings, prints, tea-related artworks, and an extensive collection of Japanese bamboo baskets.

The collection is arranged largely in chronological order. Ceramics bookend the gallery, beginning with prehistoric wares and ending with our contemporary sculptural pieces.

Laura Allen, Curator of Japanese Art.

LAURA ALLEN:

In between, there's a focus on all sorts of objects that were excavated from 5th- and 6th-century tombs. There's a section of religious art made for Japan's Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. And in that area are the masterpieces Brahma and Indra, or Bonten and Taishakuten, which come from the 8th century.

NARRATOR:

You can learn more about that pair during the next stop on our tour.

LAURA ALLEN:

That section's followed by an area that focuses on the arts of daily life during the Edo period; that's 1615 to 1868. And in that area, we display some textiles from the period, beautifully decorated clothing and accessories such as the little carved Netsuke Toggles, and lacquered Inro. As well as weapons and armor that were made for members of the samurai class.

NARRATOR:

In Japan, artwork is often arranged and displayed temporarily to celebrate special occasions or to reflect the change of seasons. In a similar way, the museum regularly rotates the

artworks on view. In this case, it is to protect the many textiles, hanging scrolls, and painted screens that are light sensitive. As a result, each time you visit, you can discover something new.

46. HANIWA IN THE FORM OF A WARRIOR (B60S204)

NARRATOR:

This figure portrays a fully armed Japanese warrior, standing at attention, with both hands on his sword. He wears a helmet and pads that protect his neck, shoulders, and arms, and his belted armor flares like a tunic over puffy pantaloons, tied at his knees.

Cylindrical clay objects like this one, called haniwa, reflect the unique aristocratic burial customs of Japan before the advent of Buddhism. During the Kofun period, from 300 to 552, groups of haniwa were placed on top of, or in a circle around, huge above-ground burial mounds—the tombs of powerful leaders. One theory is that they were used to stabilize the mound of earth they encircled, or to demarcate it. Another says that their arrangement depicted ritual processions performed on the site for the spirit of the deceased.

The earliest haniwa were simple cylinders. By the 5th century, they had acquired figurative forms like this one, which indicate the economic power and social status of the interred. The custom of building large burial mounds—and with it, the use of haniwa—declined after the introduction of Buddhism into Japan in the middle of the 6th century. Devotion was now concentrated on building Buddhist temples and creating sculptures, paintings, and other works of art to embellish them.

**47. STANDING BRAHMA (BONTEN) AND STANDING INDRA (TAISHAKUTEN)
(B65S12, B65S13) (L)**

LAURA ALLEN:

These two figures represent Brahma and Indra, which are known in Japanese as Bonten and Taishakuten. They're originally Hindu deities that were incorporated into Buddhism fairly early on.

NARRATOR:

Laura Allen, Curator of Japanese Art.

LAURA ALLEN:

The figures date to the mid-8th century, so they're extremely early for Japanese sculpture, so they're important for their early date. But they're also very precious remnants of a rare technique, hollow dry lacquer that was used in Japan for only about one hundred years.

NARRATOR:

The hollow dry lacquer technique involved creating a clay core, which was then layered with lacquer-coated fabric. Once that outer shell hardened, the clay was removed through an opening in the back, leaving a lightweight, hollow figure.

LAURA ALLEN:

You can see how effective this technique is for modeling natural drapery folds.

The surface was then painted with mineral pigments. And these figures were probably restored more than once, but if you look at the back of Indra, on the left, you can see the traces of the kind of circular floral patterns that decorated costumes at the time for the elite.

NARRATOR:

In addition to dry lacquer, the typical sculptural mediums of this period were wood and

bronze. Japanese temples were also made of wood, and both the temples and the heavy wooden sculptures within were regularly destroyed by fire.

The museum's Bonten and Taishakuten were originally commissioned for Kofukuji, one of the most important temples in Nara. Being lightweight, the pair could easily be carried—a fact that enabled them to escape being destroyed several times. Today, sculptures made with this technique are rare, and in Japan most have been designated as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties.

You can view videos on the hollow dry lacquer technique and Kofukuji Temple on the nearby monitor or by tapping “More” on this device.

ADDITIONAL CONTENT: A HISTORICAL MYSTERY

NARRATOR:

These statues were among a number of items sold from Kofukuji Temple in 1906. Photographs of the temple's contents were taken at that time. You can view one of these photographs on your screen. Mark Fenn.

MARK FENN (ASSOCIATE HEAD OF CONSERVATION):

And these two figures occur in one of the photographs. But they don't have any hands, any feet, and one of them's missing half of his head. When Avery Brundage bought these figures in the early '60s, they were complete. So the question ever since then has been how much of each of these figures is restoration, and how much is original?

NARRATOR:

Many historians believed that the restored parts were 20th-century replacements, making the statues less important. But research conducted by a team of Japanese scholars and the Asian Art Museum indicates that many of those parts are original.

X-rays revealed a wooden framework inside the statues, as well as both ancient and modern nails used in the construction and repair of the figures. You can view these X-rays on your screen.

MARK FENN:

And then there are also places where pieces have been wired on. Some of the wires clearly are repairs, because they occur where there are cracks, and so on.

NARRATOR:

These wired repairs indicate where original parts of the statues have been reattached.

48. THE SEATED BUDDHA AMITABHA (B60S10+) (L)

NARRATOR:

This 12th-century carved-wood figure is Amitabha, in Japanese, Amida. Loving giver of comfort and hope, Amida is one of the most benevolent forms of the Buddha, who vowed to deliver the faithful to his pure land.

He sits cross-legged on a lotus pedestal, in deep concentration. His eyes are half closed, and his hands are in the gesture of meditation. Amida's simple monk's robe drapes in gentle folds over his left shoulder and his lower body and legs. The flowing, curving lines keep the viewer's eye moving over the surface, even as the calm facial features and the symmetrical triangular composition convey a feeling of serenity and stability.

Many images of Amida were made in Japan during the 11th and 12th centuries—as a direct result of the popularity of Pure Land Buddhism, which celebrates the glories of the Western Paradise, the Land of Bliss attainable through meditation and recitation of Amida's name. In ritual practice, Amida statues like this one were housed in temple complexes or in Image Halls dedicated to him. Toward the end of the Heian period, elaborate memorial services were held for the deceased, and New Year's services were conducted to assure their rebirth in Amida's Western Paradise.

The posture of meditation shown on this Amida figure is also used by later practitioners of Zen Buddhism, which became prominent in Japan over five hundred years ago. It focuses on the individual and his or her own effort to attain enlightenment. The heart of Zen monasticism is the practice of meditation, the feature that is well known among Zen practitioners in the West.

(Tap “More” to view the video “Zen Buddhism.”)

49. THE SAMURAI (L)

NARRATOR:

For more than six hundred years, military government ruled Japan. The emperor may have been the head of the country, with the Imperial court maintaining a ceremonial and symbolic presence in Kyoto, but it was the shogun, a military ruler, who wielded true power. Regional feudal lords called daimyo, answered to the shogun. Under the daimyo were warriors known as the samurai.

Yuki Morishima, Associate Curator of Japanese Art.

YUKI MORISHIMA:

The upper ranks of warriors displayed their power and wealth through their taste for splendor and refinement in items such as body armor, helmets, and swords. Made of luxurious materials, and meticulously crafted, these objects would have impressed both friend and foe.

NARRATOR:

Warrior rulers highly valued the balance between arms and culture. As such, they complemented their martial pursuits with cultural activities.

YUKI MORISHIMA:

Wealthy warriors became important art patrons and commissioned the creation not only of arms and armor but of paintings and sculptures which you may see in the adjacent galleries.

Most of the samurai-related art you see here in this gallery were made during the relatively peaceful Edo period, from 1615 to 1868. These pieces were probably used on ceremonial occasions rather than in actual warfare.

NARRATOR:

An example is the museum's collection of *tsuba*, or sword guards, which served to protect a

samurai's hand from his own blade. This once purely functional part of the sword became an ornate, lavishly decorated status symbol.

In the Edo period, under the rule of the Tokugawa government, the military role of the samurai gradually diminished. By the end of the Edo period, the samurai system was abolished, as rulership transferred from the shoguns back to the emperor and the Imperial Court.

View a video on samurai armor by tapping "More" on this device.

50. NETSUKE

YUKI MORISHIMA:

Netsuke are carefully carved miniature sculptures that are used as toggles to secure small personal items such as carrying cases and tobacco pouches.

NARRATOR:

Yuki Morishima, Associate Curator of Japanese Art.

YUKI MORISHIMA:

They are not only visually intriguing but also practical because kimono did not have pockets. Japanese people hung personal items from a cord slipped under a sash and secured with a netsuke.

Assembling a thematically consistent set of netsuke and carrying case was a kind of fashionable activity during the Edo period, which is from 1615 to 1868. And a good ensemble would have been a fun source of conversation among friends who often sought new and interesting designs.

NARRATOR:

Netsuke are typically made of ivory or wood, but many other mediums were used, including bamboo, ceramic, lacquer, metal, antlers, and narwhal or walrus tusks. Carvers chose a wide variety of subjects, like animals, ghosts, mythical creatures, and humans. There are different types of netsuke, with three-dimensional “sculptural” *katabori* netsuke, and flat, round *manjû* or “rice cake”-shaped netsuke being the most common.

The details in the craftsmanship are what make these pieces special. As you walk through the collection, look closely. You may find you can even see tiny fingernails on the hands of the human figures.

As the Japanese people began to wear Western-style clothing with pockets in the late 19th century, netsuke lost their function and declined in popularity.

51. JAPANESE PAINTING AND SCREENS (L)

NARRATOR:

The artworks showcased here in Gallery 28 highlight Japan's diverse artistic styles. Pieces are selected to represent a painting tradition or school, or on the basis of shared themes. Laura Allen, Curator of Japanese Art.

LAURA ALLEN:

Some of the screens that you might see in the galleries employ a technique that's characteristic of Japanese painting; that's the use of gold leaf background, sometimes in the shape of clouds, which are used to divide compositions, to reflect light, and to create a shimmering, dreamlike setting for the depiction of stories, landscapes, or genre subjects.

NARRATOR:

You may also see hanging scrolls, which would have been displayed one at a time within a traditional decorative alcove, or *tokonoma*. You can see an example of a hanging scroll in a *tokonoma* when visiting our Japanese tearoom in the next gallery.

At times, woodblock prints, known as *ukiyo-e*, or "pictures of the floating world," might be displayed. These prints include visions of courtesans, actors, and sumo wrestlers active in the 18th and 19th century in Edo, or modern-day Tokyo. At other times, modern and contemporary prints from Japan might be on view.

Due to the light sensitivity of traditional Japanese paintings and prints, this display changes every eight months.

LAURA ALLEN:

If you return again and again to the galleries, you'll see the amazing diversity of the Japanese painting tradition. Every time you come, there will be different stories told and different things to focus on. It's exciting to come and see how different the rotations are.

(Tap “More” to view the video “Japanese Scrolls and Screens.”)

52. CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE CERAMICS

NARRATOR:

Welcome to our rotating collection of ceramic art from Japan. The Ceramics Masterpiece Moment showcases work from historic kilns and the modern movements of the 20th century, as well as a deep dive into contemporary ceramic practices. Karin Oen, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art.

KARIN OEN:

The evolution of ceramics is not any one trajectory, and that's the beauty of this type of installation. It allows the diversity within ceramic arts to shine through.

We have traditions that are very rooted in the particular kind of clay and glaze that is related to specific areas. We see ash-based glazes that have a sort of rustic look and are actually quite difficult to predict how they will fire. And then we have extremely precise colored glazes that are applied in a very technically difficult and interesting way.

NARRATOR:

Pieces also vary depending on the firing processes, whether in a wood-fired kiln or an electric kiln, which offers more precise temperature control.

Visitors will notice another difference in form. Shape is sometimes purely sculptural and sometimes dictated by function, as a cup meant for drinking must hold liquid.

KARIN OEN:

But it's never as simple as that; there's always an element of composition and application of decoration to the form that needs to be taken into consideration. These types of works will be displayed alongside works of art that are distinctly not vessels, that cannot hold water or tea in the way a traditional vessel would. It's interesting to see what remains, what's common between the forms that are completely sculptural and the forms that are functional the way

traditional vessels are built.

53. BAMBOO BASKETS (L)

NARRATOR:

Basket making is one of the oldest crafts in history. Woven patterns have been found impressed on Japanese prehistoric pottery dating back some four thousand years. The museum received a gift of over eight hundred superb baskets from the collector Lloyd Cotsen. Here, you see a selection of these baskets.

The baskets date from the late 18th century to the present day. Some of them are traditional works in the classical form, such as functional containers for flower arrangements, made using highly disciplined traditional techniques. Others are contemporary works that are purely sculptural in form.

Over the past fifty years, Japan's basketry has become an expression of true Japanese sensibility and taste, attaining the status of an independent art form. Listen to the words of contemporary basket maker Shigeo Tanioka:

ACTOR:

"Bamboo is most beautiful and perfect when it is in nature. We break this perfection to give another life to bamboo. The goal of a bamboo artist is to show how well you can reconstruct the natural beauty of bamboo through your creativity, originality, and techniques of weaving and plaiting."

NARRATOR:

Functional baskets are often made to hold special flower arrangements for the tea ceremony. This gallery devoted to tea-related arts could include no better combination than these baskets and the teahouse we'll look at next.

(Tap "More" to view the video "Looking at Japanese Bamboo Baskets.")

54. JAPANESE TEAROOM (L)

NARRATOR:

Welcome to the Asian Art Museum's fully functioning tearoom, designed by architect Osamu Sato and constructed by a Kyoto firm renowned for traditional architecture. Maya Hara, Japan Foundation Curatorial Assistant of Japanese Art.

MAYA HARA:

When you enter the tearoom, the first thing you'll likely see is the tokonoma, the alcove. And in the alcove, seasonal flowers and a hanging scroll which set the theme for the tea gathering. In the colder months, when the vegetation is sparse, you may see a single camellia. In the warmer months, when flowers are abundant, you may find a bamboo basket filled with a variety of wildflowers.

NARRATOR:

The theme, which is often seasonal, is central to a traditional Japanese tea gathering. Hosts spend significant time thinking about how the various utensils used for preparing tea will reflect the season. In summer, they may choose shallow tea bowls that will more quickly dissipate heat and utensils that evoke a cool feeling. In autumn, *wabi-sabi*, or "rustic simplicity," is embraced, and utensils reflecting poetic or seasonal themes are favored. The same kind of intention went into creating the space before you, where the objects are changed up to four times a year, each occasion with a new theme in mind.

Another aspect of this traditional Japanese tea practice is architecture. For example, notice the different kinds of natural wood here in this tearoom. There's bamboo, red pine, Japanese cypress, cedar, and cherry ... all different colors, textures, and grains.

MAYA HARA:

Visually, when you have the different types of wood, even though it's very subtle, it lends to this sort of intricacy, it lends to this attention to detail that is very prevalent in tea practice. So

everything's very subtle, but if you look at it carefully, there's more depth to it.

NARRATOR:

Before leaving, step around back to your right to see the *mizuya*, the area where preparation occurs and utensils are stored.

Tap "More" to view a video on this tearoom.

55. COLLECTED LETTERS (L)

NARRATOR:

Collected Letters is composed of about 1,600 individual, handcrafted porcelain pieces. They are upper- and lowercase Latin letters or what are known as “radicals” ... components of Chinese characters that form words when combined.

The artist, Liu Jianhua, was inspired by this building’s original use as San Francisco’s Public Library, which opened in 1917. The installation was designed specifically for this space in our Loggia. Karin Oen, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art.

KARIN OEN:

He particularly wanted his installation to be sited in a part of the building that looked old, that looked like it was from 1917. And he was interested in the challenge of creating a contemporary work that would seem at home in this Beaux-Arts travertine architecture.

NARRATOR:

The artist compared the effect of these delicate, dangling pieces to gradually falling snow. The storm’s vortex at the top dissipates as pieces fall closer to earth. This, in his view, is the “visual experience of language” ... moving through history from the past to present.

KARIN OEN:

It’s a bit of an analogy to the way you can try to make sense of the world. You can collect books like a library, or you can collect works of art like a museum. And you can try to set them up in orderly categories. But at the end of the day, there’s always a certain amount of chaos based on the world, and how these things will never come together perfectly and neatly. And yet it’s still a really beautiful and honorable enterprise to try to create these spaces for learning and for exploring the world around you.

NARRATOR:

Tap “More” to view an interview with artist Liu Jianhua.