

The Asian Art Museum Mobile Guide

Masterpieces

An Acoustiguide Tour

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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.”)

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.”

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.

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.")

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).”)

25. THE BUDDHIST DEITY SIMHAVAKTRA DAKINI (B60S600)

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, armlets, 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.

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.”)

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.”)

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.

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].”)

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.”

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.

**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.

LAYER: 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.

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.