

Press Release

Brooklyn Museum

The Brooklyn Museum Presents Its Newly Installed Arts of China and Arts of Japan Collections, Featuring Historical Masterworks and Significant Contemporary Acquisitions

The presentations are part of a major reinstallation of the Arts of Asia galleries.

Following a multiyear renovation and the reopening of the Arts of Korea collection, the Brooklyn Museum is pleased to unveil two new galleries highlighting its important and diverse collection of works from China and Japan. Opening on October 25, the Arts of China and Arts of Japan galleries will feature masterworks as well as rarely seen or never-before-shown treasures from the Museum's collection of Asian art. Both galleries will also highlight new acquisitions and contemporary works, connecting centuries of artistic practice through common themes and mediums. These galleries have been closed since 2013; the first phase of the reinstallation was unveiled in 2017, when the gallery for Korean art reopened, and will later be followed by galleries for arts of South Asia, Buddhism, Southeast Asia, and the Himalayas. This ambitious reinstallation project celebrates the immense diversity that has long existed within Asia while also demonstrating the exchange of goods and ideas across national boundaries.

The installation of the Brooklyn Museum's Arts of China collection is organized by Susan L. Beningson, Assistant Curator, Asian Art. The installation of the Arts of Japan collection is organized by Joan Cummins, Lisa and Bernard Selz Senior Curator, Asian Art.

"The Brooklyn Museum is excited to present our Arts of China and Arts of Japan galleries, the newest in our ambitious reinstallation of our Asian art collection," said Anne Pasternak, Shelby White and Leon Levy Director of the Brooklyn Museum. "Through historical masterworks and newly acquired contemporary pieces, we look forward to reshaping the ways in which visitors think about the long histories of artistic practice in China and Japan."



Wine Jar with Fish and Aquatic Plants, China, Yuan dynasty, 1279–1368, Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration, 11 15/16 x 13 3/4 in. (30.3 x 34.9 cm). Brooklyn Museum, The William E. Hutchins Collection, Bequest of Augustus S. Hutchins, 62.87.1. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

The **Arts of China** gallery highlights 5,000 years of Chinese artistic accomplishments, including bronzes, ceramics, painting, and selections from the Museum’s unrivaled collection of cloisonné enamels. The installation will include more than 130 works, many of which have not been on view in decades. Unique to this encyclopedic display of Chinese artworks is the inclusion of contemporary art. Since 2014, the Brooklyn Museum has acquired over fifty contemporary paintings and sculptures by artists of Chinese descent, including Sun Xun, Zheng Chongbin, Peng Wei, Tai Xiangzhou, Zhang Jian-Jun, and Bingyi, among others. The experimental ink paintings by these artists challenge and transform China’s traditional artistic practices, using them to respond to present day concerns such as urbanization, environmental degradation, and the rapid pace of China’s modernization. The contemporary works will be highlighted in a special presentation held in conjunction with the reopening of the Arts of Asia collection, with works from the collection rotating into the galleries on a regular basis.

On display in the main China gallery will be historical masterworks from the Museum’s collection, including the Yuan dynasty *Wine Jar with Fish and Aquatic Plants*, widely regarded as one of the finest examples of blue-and-white porcelains in the Western hemisphere; the Shang dynasty bronze ritual vessel (*gong*), whose design illustrates the spiritual transformation the ancient Chinese believed occurs when communicating with ancestors; and cloisonné enamels. The collection of cloisonné enamels, donated to the Museum as part of a major gift in 1909, is one of the finest of its kind in the world. The gallery is organized by thematic sections: Ancient China, Journey to the Afterlife, Reinventing the Past, Hidden Messages and Wordplay, Later Ceramics and Decorative Arts, and Art of the Scholar.

Generous support for this reinstatement has been provided by the Freeman Foundation, a prominent advocate for East Asian arts education in the United States. Funding provided by

the Freeman Foundation has enabled the development of a teaching toolkit designed to complement New York City third grade units in World Geography, specifically supplementing the China unit. This toolkit provides teachers with in-classroom pre- and post-Museum visit workshops to contextualize curricular themes and relate them to Chinese artworks on view. Included in the toolkit is a set of touch materials for students, as well as object-based lesson plans that incorporate art-making.



Head of a Guardian, Japan, Kamakura period, 13th century, Hinokki cypress wood with lacquer on cloth, pigment, rock crystal, metal, 22 1/16 x 10 1/4 x 13 15/16 in. (56 x 26 x 35.4 cm), Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alastair B. Martin, the Guennol Collection, 86.21. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

The **Arts of Japan** gallery will trace over 2,000 years of innovation in Japanese art, including Buddhist temple sculptures, Ukiyo-e prints, paintings, and lacquerware. Among the masterworks on display is an oversized painted wood head of a guardian figure from the thirteenth century, with bared teeth and glinting crystal eyes, that was meant to ward off enemies in a Buddhist temple. It features the energy and exaggerated musculature that typify the best sculptures of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Also on display is a pair of gilded folding screens depicting fishnets hanging out to dry on an abstracted, grassy shoreline. Closely related to screens in the Japanese Imperial Household Collection, this pair has been recognized by the Japanese government, which sponsored its conservation in 1995. Upgrades to the gallery’s climate control and casework make it possible to show this important but fragile seventeenth-century painting in Brooklyn for the first time since it was restored.

The presentation will also feature contemporary ceramics that represent the cutting edge of ceramic achievement in Japan. By placing these contemporary pieces next to ancient works, the reinstatement illuminates points of continuity throughout the country’s ten-thousand-year history of advancements in ceramics. The Japan gallery is also organized by thematic sections: Ancient Japan, Temple Sculpture in Wood, Tea Taste in Japanese Ceramics, Ash

and Clay, Contemporary Japanese Ceramics, Lacquerware, Art of the Ainu People, and Woodblock Prints.

The Arts of Japan gallery features a uniquely large display of Ainu artifacts. The Ainu people were an indigenous group that lived in northern Japan, where they developed a distinct culture and language from that of central and southern Japan. The Brooklyn Museum has a collection of Ainu wood carvings and costume elements that is unparalleled outside of Japan. Highlights include a handsome robe made from pieces of cotton imported from southern Japan. While the extensive use of cotton distinguishes this robe from the more common clothing made from elm bark, the network of spiraling decorative motifs is typical of Ainu ornamentation. The Museum hopes the presence of the Ainu collection inspires conversations about the ethnic and linguistic diversity within Japan, a diversity that is often overlooked by Western scholars.

The Brooklyn Museum has collected Japanese works of art since the early 1900s. Since its important holdings of Ainu objects were acquired in 1912, the Museum has continued to be a pioneer in the collecting of Japanese folk art and ceramics created by living masters. The Museum's Arts of Japan collection is one of the largest sub-collections within the larger holdings of Asian art, consisting of roughly 7,000 objects. In order to provide greater access to these objects, as well as to protect the light-sensitive paintings, prints, lacquered objects, and textiles from extended exposure, displays will be changed on a regular basis. Visitors are encouraged to return to the galleries regularly to see new masterworks and experience the depth of the collection.

The reinstatement of the Arts of China collection is made possible by leadership support from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and the Freeman Foundation. Additional support for the Arts of Asia collection reinstatement is provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The reinstatement of the Arts of Japan collection is made possible by leadership support from Alan L. Beller, Collie and Charles Hutter, Karl and Jennifer Hutter, Katherine and Eric Mason, Claudia and Wilson Langworthy, and Barbara F. and Richard F. Moore. These generous gifts, and others, were made in honor of longtime Brooklyn Museum Trustee Leslie Langworthy Beller (1951–2017). Additional support for the Arts of Asia collection reinstatement is provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.