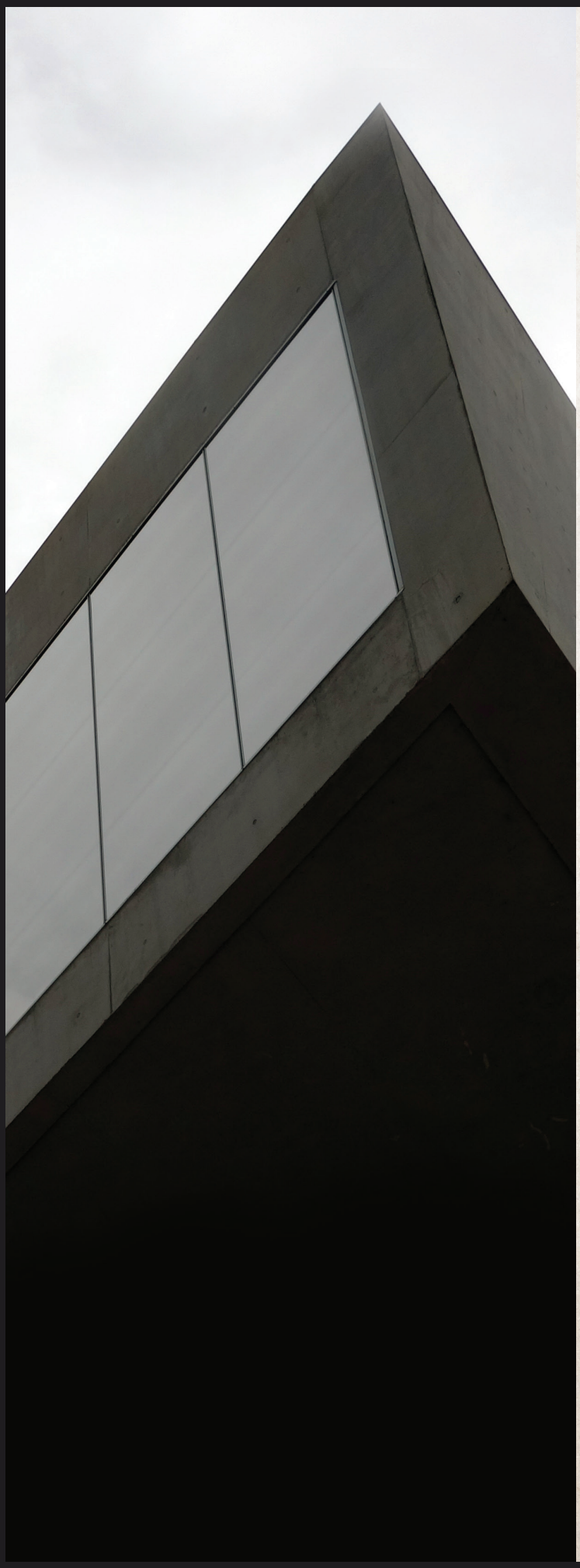


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South, East and Southeast Asia

192. Great Stupa at Sanchi

Dr. Karen Shelby



Stupa 3, 1st c., Sanchi, India (photo: Nagarjun Kandukuru, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/aGVpvn>

Can a mound of dirt represent the Buddha, the path to Enlightenment, a mountain and the universe all at the same time? It can if its a stupa. The stupa ("stupa" is Sanskrit for heap) is an important form of Buddhist architecture, though it predates Buddhism. It is generally considered to be a sepulchral monument—a place of burial or a receptacle for religious objects. At its simplest, a stupa is a dirt burial mound faced with stone. In Buddhism, the earliest stupas contained portions of the Buddha's ashes, and as a result, the stupa began to be associated with the body of the Buddha. Adding the Buddha's ashes to the mound of dirt activated it with the energy of the Buddha himself.

Early stupas

Before Buddhism, great teachers were buried in mounds. Some were cremated, but sometimes they were buried in a seated, meditative position. The mound of earth covered them up. Thus, the domed shape of the stupa came to represent a person seated in meditation much as the Buddha was when he achieved Enlightenment and knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. The base of the stupa represents his crossed legs as he sat in a meditative pose (called padmasana or the lotus position). The middle portion is the Buddha's body and the top of the mound, where a pole rises from the apex surrounded by a small fence, represents his head. Before images of the human Buddha were created, reliefs often depicted practitioners demonstrating devotion to a stupa.

The ashes of the Buddha were buried in stupas built at locations associated with important events in the Buddha's life including Lumbini (where he was born), Bodh Gaya (where he achieved Enlightenment), Deer Park at Sarnath (where he preached his first sermon sharing the Four Noble Truths (also called the dharma or the law), and Kushingara (where he died). The choice of these sites and others were based on both real and legendary events.

"Calm and glad"

According to legend, King Ashoka, who was the first king to embrace Buddhism (he ruled over most of the Indian subcontinent from c. 269 – 232 B.C.E.), created 84,000 stupas and divided the Buddha's ashes among them all. While this is an exaggeration (and the stupas were built by Ashoka some 250 years after the Buddha's death), it is clear that Ashoka was responsible for building many stupas all over northern India and the other territories under the Mauryan Dynasty in areas now known as Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.

One of Ashoka's goals was to provide new converts with the tools to help with their new faith. In this, Ashoka was following the directions of the Buddha who, prior to his death (parinirvana), directed that stupas should be erected in places other than those associated with key moments of his life so that "the hearts of many shall be made calm and glad." Ashoka also built stupas in regions where the people might have difficulty reaching the stupas that contained the Buddha's ashes.



One of the most famous stupas, The Great Stupa (Mahastupa), was built at the birthplace of Ashoka's wife, Devi, daughter of a local merchant in the village of Sanchi located on an important trade route in the state of Madya Pradesh, India (photo: Nagarjun Kandukuru, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/aGV7dt>

Karmic benefits

The practice of building stupas spread with the Buddhist doctrine to Nepal and Tibet, Bhutan, Thailand, Burma, China and even the United States where large Buddhist communities are centered. While stupas have changed in form over the years, their function remains essentially unchanged. Stupas remind the Buddhist practitioner of the Buddha and his teachings almost 2,500 years after his death.

For Buddhists, building stupas also has karmic benefits. Karma, a key component in both Hinduism and Buddhism, is the energy generated by a person's actions and the ethical consequences of those actions. Karma affects a person's next existence or re-birth. For example, in the *Avadana Sutra* ten merits of building a stupa are outlined. One states that if a practitioner builds a stupa he or she will not be reborn in a remote location and will not suffer from extreme poverty. As a result, a vast number of stupas dot the countryside in Tibet (where they are called *chorten*) and in Burma (*chedi*).

The journey to enlightenment

Buddhists visit stupas to perform rituals that help them to achieve one of the most important goals of Buddhism: to understand the Buddha's teachings, known as the Four Noble Truths (also known as the dharma and the law) so when they die they cease to be caught up in *samsara*, the endless cycle of birth and death.

> The Four Noble Truths:
> life is suffering (suffering=rebirth)
> the cause of suffering is desire
> the cause of desire must be overcome
> when desire is overcome, there is no more suffering (suffering=rebirth)

Once individuals come to fully understand The Four Noble Truths, they are able to achieve Enlightenment, or the complete knowledge of the dharma. In fact, Buddha means "the Enlightened One" and it is the knowledge that the Buddha gained on his way to achieving Enlightenment that Buddhist practitioners seek on their own journey toward Enlightenment.

The circle or wheel

One of the early sutras (a collection of sayings attributed to the Buddha forming a religious text) records that the Buddha gave specific directions regarding the appropriate method of honoring his remains (the *Maha-parinibbāna sutra*): his ashes were to be buried in a stupa at the crossing of the mythical four great roads (the four directions of space), the unmoving hub of the wheel, the place of Enlightenment.

If one thinks of the stupa as a circle or wheel, the unmoving center symbolizes Enlightenment. Likewise, the practitioner achieves stillness and peace when the Buddhist dharma is fully understood. Many stupas are placed on a square base, and the four sides represent the four directions, north, south, east and west. Each side often has a gate in the center, which allows the practitioner to enter from any side. The gates are called *torana*. Each gate also represents the four great life events of the Buddha: East (Buddha's birth), South (Enlightenment), West (First Sermon where he preached his teachings or dharma), and North (Nirvana). The gates are turned at right angles to the axis mundi to indicate movement in the manner of the arms of a svastika, a directional symbol that, in Sanskrit, means "to be good" ("su" means good or auspicious and "asti" means to be). The *torana* are directional gates guiding the practitioner in the correct direction on the correct path to Enlightenment, the understanding of the Four Noble Truths.



Great Stupa, 1st c., Sanchi, India (photo: Nagarjun Kandukuru, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/aGVgk2>

A microcosm of the universe

At the top of stupa is a *yasti*, or spire, which symbolizes the *axis mundi* (a line through the earth's center around which the universe is thought to revolve). The *yasti* is surrounded by a *harmika*, a gate or fence, and is topped by *chattras* (umbrella-like objects symbolizing royalty and protection).

The stupa makes visible something that is so large as to be unimaginable. The axis symbolizes the center of the cosmos partitioning the world into six directions: north, south, east, west, the nadir and the zenith. This central axis, the axis mundi, is echoed in the same axis that bisects the human body. In this manner, the human body also functions as a microcosm of the universe. The spinal column is the axis that bisects Mt. Meru (the sacred mountain at the center of the Buddhist world) and around which the world pivots. The aim of the practitioner is to climb the mountain of one's own mind, ascending stage by stage through the planes of increasing levels of Enlightenment.

Circumambulation

The practitioner does not enter the stupa, it is a solid object. Instead, the practitioner circumambulates (walks around) it as a meditational practice focusing on the Buddha's teachings. This movement suggests the endless cycle of rebirth (samsara) and the spokes of the Eightfold Path (eight guidelines that assist the practitioner) that leads to knowledge of the Four Noble Truths and into the center of the unmoving hub of the wheel, Enlightenment. This walking meditation at a stupa enables the practitioner to visualize Enlightenment as the movement from the perimeter of the stupa to the unmoving hub at the center marked by the *yasti*.

This video/animation <https://youtu.be/_FDZoXA_-Gc> shows the perspective of someone circumambulating the Mahastupa in Sanchi, the soundtrack plays monks chanting Buddhist prayers, an aid in meditation. Circumambulation is also a part of other faiths. For example, Muslims circle the Kaaba in Mecca and cathedrals in the West such at Notre Dame in Paris include a semicircular ambulatory (a hall that wraps around the back of the choir, around the altar).

The practitioner can walk to circumambulate the stupa or move around it through a series of prostrations (a movement that brings the practitioner's body down low to the ground in a position of submission). An energetic and circular movement around the stupa raises the body's temperature. Practitioners do this to mimic the heat of the fire that cremated the Buddha's body, a process that burned away the bonds of self-hood and attachment to the mundane or ordinary world. Attachments to the earthly realm are considered obstacles in the path toward Enlightenment. Circumambulation is not veneration for the relics themselves—a distinction sometimes lost on novice practitioners. The Buddha did not want to be revered as a god, but wanted his ashes in the stupas to serve as a reminder of the Four Noble Truths.

Votive Offerings

Small stupas can function as votive offerings (objects that serve as the focal point for acts of devotion). In order to gain merit, to improve one's karma, individuals could sponsor the casting of a votive stupa. Indian and Tibetan stupas typically have inscriptions that state that the stupa was made "so that all beings may attain Enlightenment." Votive stupas can be consecrated and used in home altars or utilized in monastic shrines. Since they are small, they can be easily transported; votive stupas, along with small statues of the Buddha and other Buddhist deities, were carried across Nepal, over the Himalayas and into Tibet, helping to spread Buddhist doctrine. Votive stupas are often carved from stone or cast in bronze. The bronze stupas can also serve as a reliquary and ashes of important teachers can be encased inside.

This stupa clearly shows the link between the form of the stupa and the body of the Buddha. The Buddha is represented at his moment of Enlightenment when he received the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths (the dharma or law). He is making the earth touching gesture (*bhumisparsamudra*) and is seated in *padmasan*, the lotus position. He is seated in a gateway signifying a sacred space that recalls the gates on each side of monumental stupas.



Votive Stupa, Bodhgaya, 8th century, stone, 78 x 44 x 35 cm (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

193. Terracotta warriors from mausoleum of the first Qin emperor of China

Dr. Asa Simon Mittman



Army of the First Emperor of Qin in pits next to his burial mound, Lintong, China, Qin dynasty, c. 210 B.C.E., painted terracotta (photo: scottgunn, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/UMXTf4>

Background: the first emperor of China

The first emperor of China was Qin Shi Huangdi. First, he became king of the Qin (pronounced "Chin") state at the age of thirteen. Eventually he defeated the rulers of all the competing Chinese states, unifying China and declaring himself "First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty" (Qin Shi Huangdi). He began the construction of his vast tomb as soon as he took the throne, and it took 38 years to finish, even with a reported 700,000 convicts laboring for the last 13 years of construction. These great numbers are, themselves, displays of the tremendous power of the emperor, and the work clearly bears the imprint of their astounding labors.

As emperor, he was repressive—banning and burning Confucian books and executing the scholars who wrote and studied them. Not surprisingly there were at least two attempts to assassinate him.

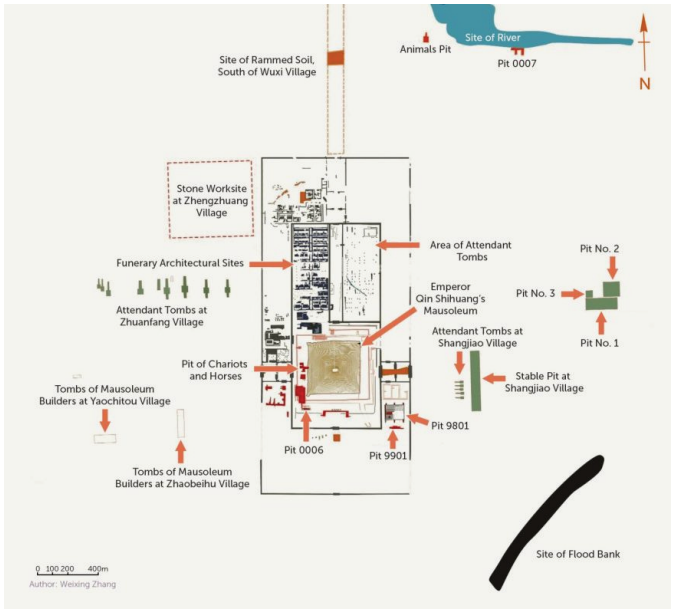


Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi today (photo: CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/yyptcw9p>

Visual elements

When the tomb was completed, it was covered in grass and trees, so that it would appear like a natural part of the landscape.

Today, from the outside, Qin Shi Huangdi's burial mound looks like a hill. This explains how the huge tomb could have remained hidden until 1974 when rural villagers accidentally discovered it while digging a well. It blended into its surroundings, looking like a foothill of the Li Mountains.



Plan of the tomb complex, Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (diagram Weixing Zhang)

As the plan of the tomb complex shows, the tomb itself was surrounded by a large number of other burials, including three pits containing warriors made from terracotta (which are known today as the "Terracotta Army") There was also a pit filled with the remains of exotic animals, and the graves of followers executed at the time of the burial.

So far, approximately 7,000 figures made from terracotta and 100 wooden chariots have been discovered in Pits 1, 2 and 3.



Pit 1, Army of the First Emperor, Qin dynasty, Lintong, China, c. 210 B.C.E., painted terracotta (photo: mararie, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8HTu25>

When we look at the vast rows of the 6,000 soldiers of the army in Pit 1 (the largest yet found) we see a view that no one had seen for more than two thousand years — from the time that the tombs were sealed until the excavations of the 1970s. The figures were set into paved channels of earth, reinforced with wooden planks and then buried.

The soldiers are arranged in battle formation, with a vanguard of archers surrounding the bulk of the army. The hands of the archers are now empty, but they originally held wooden bows, of which some traces survive. These wooden bows, along with bronze weapons held by other soldiers, would have given the soldiers a more naturalistic appearance.



Front and back view of Kneeling Archer, Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi

Pattern and repetition

As a whole, the layout and design of the army emphasizes pattern and repetition. The soldiers are all of very similar size — slightly larger than life-— and are standing in repeated poses. They are arranged in consistent rows, which establishes a very regular pattern. It also creates a sense of unity, which is an ideal generally sought by real armies. These soldiers are clearly, through their unified appearances, collectively working to express, enforce and protect the power of the emperor, even as he lies in his grave. There is, though, variety throughout the army, enlivening the whole with small, humanizing differences in features and costume.

Scale

The scale of the project is hard to comprehend. This is not a token set of guards around the imperial tomb, but a complete army, from foot soldiers and cavalrymen to generals. To get a sense of these figures, we will look first at an archer from Pit 2. The archer wears a long robe and armor over his torso and shoulders and kneels on his right knee. He originally held a bronze crossbow, a weapon that shot heavier arrows faster and farther than bows.

His armor is quite detailed. The immensity of the labor required to produce the thousands of figures is stressed by viewing the figure from the back, revealing the attention paid even to the sole of his shoe. It bears three different patterns in the tread, to differentiate heel, center and toe. The care taken over such a minor detail emphasizes the power of the patron, and the vastness of his wealth.

Still, while there is great attention to detail, which suggests the individuality of the figures, there are also techniques used to grant the whole composition its consistent and impressive unity. The most obvious method used to create a sense of unity is the depiction of their armor: since they are an army, they are dressed in very consistent uniforms. There are, though, subtler techniques used to suggest that the figures are not actually individual portraits but slightly differentiated versions of a generalized, idealized soldier. The folds of the archer's clothing, for example, are stylized: we know that the heavy cuts into the surface of the terracotta represent folds in heavy cloth, but they do so in a generalized way, rather than seeming like each was carefully copied from reality.

Individualized but abstracted and idealized

The figure's face is also at once individualized and slightly abstracted. Its sense of individuality does not come from intense verism, from the rendering of every wrinkle and imperfection, but from the lively and alert expression. All of the features are smoothed out, made angular. Some of the figures bear bushy moustaches and beards or thick eyebrows, but this figure's features are all more minimally presented. The halves of his moustache are flat planes, and his eyebrows are smooth ridges.

All of the artist's efforts here seem to be focused on his watchful state. The figure, like all of the thousands at the site, is idealized. The archer appears to be youthful and strong. His face is highly symmetrical, though this is humanized by his off-center top-knot of hair. He, like all those around him, is an ideal soldier to serve in the emperor's imposing army.



War Chariot, Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, c. 210 B.C.E. (photo: Tiffany, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6t58GU>

Chariots

Equally impressive are the great chariots, including the war chariot. These were found just outside the actual burial of Qin Shi Huangdi (which remains unexcavated at this time). Two bronze chariots were found, one considered a war chariot and the other a peace chariot. Both chariots were found in fragments but have been restored. They are about half life-size, and intricately designed. The war chariot contains gold and silver embellishments on the canopy pole and the horses' bridles, as well as other parts of their tack.

The horses are depicted in much the same style as the terracotta figures, with a delicate balance between naturalism and stylization. Their heads and bodies are somewhat generalized, so that we do not see veins or tendons standing out beneath the hide, for example, and yet they are still quite lively. Their ears are perked up as if with attention, their heads tossing as they bite their bits. They were originally painted white, with red tongues, which would have granted them an even more lively appearance.

The horses, like the soldiers, are each individualized, and yet clearly all part of a cohesive team. They are all of the same size, and wear similar gear, but they differ in subtleties of the nostrils and eyes, for example. A crossbow hangs within easy reach of the driver, elaborately decorated with patterns. A quiver containing 54 bronze arrows of two different types — diamond-shaped and flat tipped — was found hanging from the inside of the chariot's rail. Once the emperor died and his dynasty was quickly disintegrating, mobs plundered the tomb and took the weapons because they could be used.

Cultural context

The burial of Qin Shi Huangdi reflects the worldly power of the emperor. In ancient China, very elaborate burials were standard features of imperial court practice, and were copied by lesser members of the aristocracy, as well. In the earlier Shang Dynasty (c. sixteenth-eleventh century B.C.E.), rulers were buried with lavish possessions (as well as with their servants — human sacrifices were also common in the Shang Dynasty, and continued through successive periods).

By the time that Qin Shi Huangdi commissioned his elaborate tomb, these practices were already ancient, and set the precedent for his ritual specialists to follow. Sima Qian's *Shiji (Historical*

Records) provides an account of the tomb (Sima Qian is considered the first major historian of China; he wrote during the Han Dynasty that succeeded the Qin). His description attests to the continued practice of human sacrifices, as well as the to great measures taken to secure the tomb against raiders seeking its riches.

He tells us:

> The tomb vault was dug through three underground streams and the coffins were cast in copper. Palaces were built within the burial mound and the burial chamber itself was a rich repository full of precious and rare treasures. Artisans were commanded to contrive gadgets controlling hidden arrows so that if tomb robbers approached they would be bound to touch the gadgets and so trigger the arrows. On the floor of the vault mercury representing the rivers and seas was kept flowing by mechanical devices. The dome of the vault was decorated with the sun, moon and stars, and the ground depicted the nine regions and five mountains of China. … At the entombment the Second Emperor decreed that it was not fitting that the childless concubines of the First Emperor should be allowed to leave the imperial palace and should all be buried with the Emperor. Thus the number of those who died was very great. *As quoted in Zhang Wenli, The Qin Terracotta Army: Treasures of Lintong (London: Scala Books, 1996), 14-16.*

Like most imperial burials in China, Qin Shi Huangdi's burial chamber remains sealed, and so this early account of its vaults and surroundings has not yet been confirmed (though there are heavy concentrations of mercury in the soil around it, suggesting at least some accuracy).

But why would an emperor wish to be buried with a terracotta army, with bronze chariots and teams of horses, and even with his concubines?

In ancient China, death was seen not as the complete end to an individual but rather, a new stage in life. Therefore, the army was intended not only to demonstrate the emperor's power in this life, but also to extend that same power into the world of the dead.

Admittedly biased Confucian historians of later dynasties describe Qin Shi Huangdi as paranoid, though the two documented attempts on his life suggest that some fear would not have been irrational. Desiring to preserve his power eternally, he had the ideal army constructed, and placed to the east of his tomb — the direction of his enemies in life.

This massive project should be seen in the context of Qin Shi Huangdi's other efforts, including the beginning of the Great Wall of China, built to keep out northern invaders in the world of the living. The first emperor gained unified control over China through military force, censorship of information and ideas, and a strong defense against outside forces. Having accomplished this, he then worked to ensure that he would continue to hold such worldly power — even after his death.



Horses, Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (photo: Erwyn van der Meer, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6MwR9X>

194. Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui)

Dr. Jennifer McIntire



Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui), 2nd century B.C.E., silk, 205 x 92 x 47.7 cm (Hunan Provincial Museum)

Maybe you *can* bring it with you…if you are rich enough. The elite men and women of the Han dynasty (China's second imperial dynasty, 206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) enjoyed an opulent lifestyle that could stretch into the afterlife. Today, the well-furnished tombs of the elite give us a glimpse of the luxurious goods they treasured and enjoyed. For instance, a wealthy official could afford beautiful silk robes in contrast to the homespun or paper garments of a laborer or peasant. Their tombs also inform us about their cosmological beliefs.

Marquis of Dai, Lady Dai, and a son

Three elite tombs, discovered in 1972, at Mawangdui, Hunan Province (eastern China) rank amongst the greatest archeological discoveries in China during the twentieth century. They are the tombs of a high-ranking Han official civil servant, the Marquis of Dai, Lady Dai (his wife), and their son. The Marquis died in 186 B.C.E., and his wife and son both died by 163 B.C.E. The Marquis' tomb was not in good condition when it was discovered. However, the objects in the son's and wife's tombs were of extraordinary quality and very well preserved. From these objects, we can see that Lady Dai and her son were to spend the afterlife in sumptuous comfort.



Nesting coffins of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui), 2nd century B.C.E., wood, lacquered exteriors and interiors, 256 x 118 x 114 cm, 230 x 92 x 89 cm and 202 x 69 x 63cm, from tomb 1 (Hunan Provincial Museum)

In Lady Dai's tomb, archaeologists found a painted silk banner over six feet long in excellent condition. The T-shaped banner was on top of the innermost of four nesting coffins. Although scholars still debate the function of these banners, we know they had some connection with the afterlife. They may be "name banners" used to identify the dead during the mourning ceremonies, or they may have been burial shrouds intended to aid the soul in its passage to the afterlife. Lady Dai's banner is important for two primary reasons. It is an early example of pictorial (representing naturalistic scenes, not just abstract shapes) art in China. Secondly, the banner features the earliest known portrait in Chinese painting.



Diagram of Funeral Banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui), 2nd century B.C.E., silk, 205 x 92 x 47.7 cm (Hunan Provincial Museum)

We can divide Lady Dai's banner into four horizontal registers (see diagram above). In the lower central register, we see Lady Dai in an embroidered silk robe leaning on a staff. This remarkable portrait of Lady Dai is the earliest example of a painted portrait of a specific individual in China. She stands on a platform along with her servants–two in front and three behind.

Long, sinuous dragons frame the scene on either side, and their white and pink bodies loop through a bi (a disc with a hole thought to represent the sky) underneath Lady Dai. We understand that this is not a portrait of Lady Dai in her former life, but an image of her in the afterlife enjoying the immortal comforts of her tomb as she ascends toward the heavens.



Lady Dai and her attendants (detail), Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui), 2nd century B.C.E., silk, 205 x 92 x 47.7 cm (Hunan Provincial Museum)



Lady Dai and her attendants (detail), Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui), 2nd century B.C.E., silk, 205 x 92 x 47.7 cm (Hunan Provincial Museum)

In the register below the scene of Lady Dai, we see sacrificial funerary rituals taking place in a mourning hall. Tripod containers and vase-shaped vessels for offering food and wine stand in the foreground. In the middle ground, seated mourners line up in two rows. Look for the mound in the center, between the two rows of mourners. If you look closely, you can see the patterns on the silk that match the robe Lady Dai wears in the scene above. Her corpse is wrapped in her finest robe! More vessels appear on a shelf in the background.



Body of Lady Dai with mourners (detail), Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui), 2nd century B.C.E., silk, 205 x 92 x 47.7 cm (Hunan Provincial Museum)

In the mourning scene, we can also appreciate the importance of Lady Dai's banner for understanding how artists began to represent depth and space in early Chinese painting. They made efforts to indicate depth through the use of the overlapping bodies of the mourners. They also made objects in the foreground larger, and objects in the background smaller, to create the illusion of space in the mourning hall.

The afterlife in Han dynasty China

Lady Dai's banner gives us some insight into cosmological beliefs and funeral practices of Han dynasty China. Above and below the scenes of Lady Dai and the mourning hall, we see images of heaven and the underworld. Toward the top, near the cross of the "T," two men face each other and guard the gate to the heavenly realm. Directly above the two men, at the very top of the banner, we see a deity with a human head and a dragon body.



Heavenly realm (detail), Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui), 2nd century B.C.E., silk, 205 x 92 x 47.7 cm (Hunan Provincial Museum)

On the left, a toad standing on a crescent moon flanks the dragon/human deity. On the right, we see what may be a three-legged crow within a pink sun. The moon and the sun are emblematic of a supernatural realm above the human world. Dragons and other immortal beings populate the sky. In the lower register, beneath the mourning hall, we see the underworld populated by two giant black fish, a red snake, a pair of blue goats, and an unidentified earthly deity. The deity appears to hold up the floor of the mourning hall, while the two fish cross to form a circle beneath him. The beings in the underworld symbolize water and earth, and they indicate an underground domain below the human world.



Outer coffin within the central coffin chamber surrounded by four side boxes, tomb 1, 672 x 488 x 280 cm

Four compartments surrounded Lady Dai's central tomb, and they offer some sense of the life she was expected to lead in the afterlife. The top compartment represented a room where Lady Dai was supposed to sit while having her meal. In this compartment, researchers found cushions, an armrest, and her walking stick. The compartment also contained a meal laid out for her to eat in the afterlife. Lady Dai was 50 years old when she died, but her lavish tomb—marked by her funeral banner —ensured that she would enjoy the comforts of her earthly life for eternity.

This essay was written with the assistance of Dr. Wu Hung.

195. Longmen caves (China)

Dr. Jennifer McIntire



Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China (photo: Kevin Poh, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6sfFLB>

Northern Wei Dynasty



Location of the Longmen caves in China

Imperial patronage

Worship and power struggles, enlightenment and suicide—the 2300 caves and niches filled with Buddhist art at Longmen in China has witnessed it all. The steep limestone cliffs extend for almost a mile and contain approximately 110,000 Buddhist stone statues, 60 stupas (hemispherical structures containing Buddhist relics) and 2,800 inscriptions carved on steles (vertical stone markers).

Buddhism, born in India, was transmitted to China intermittently and haphazardly. Starting as early as the first century C.E., Buddhism brought to China new images, texts, ideas about life and death, and new opportunities to assert authority. The Longmen cave-temple complex, located on both sides of the Yi River (south of the ancient capital of Luoyang), is an excellent site for understanding how rulers wielded this foreign religion to affirm assimilation and superiority.

Most of the carvings at the Longmen site date between the end of the fifth century and the middle of the eighth century—the periods of the Northern Wei (386–534 C.E.) through early Tang dynasties (618–907 C.E.). The Northern Wei was the most enduring and powerful of the northern Chinese dynasties that ruled before the reunification of China under the Sui and Tang dynasties.

The Wei dynasty was founded by Tuoba tribesmen (nomads from the frontiers of northern China) who were considered to be barbaric foreigners by the Han Chinese. Northern Wei Emperor Xiao Wen decided to move the capital south to Luoyang in 494 C.E., a region considered the cradle of Chinese civilization. Many of the Tuoba elite opposed the move and disapproved of Xiao Wen's eager adoption of Chinese culture. Even his own son disapproved and was forced to end his own life. At first, Emperor Xiao Wen and rich citizens focused on building the city's administrative and court quarters—only later did they shift their energies and wealth into the construction of monasteries and temples. With all the efforts expended on the city, the court barely managed to complete one cave temple at Longmen—the Central Binyang Cave.



Entrance to Central Binyang Cave, 508–523 C.E. Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China (photo: Maite Elorza, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/agqG5P>

Central Binyang Cave

The Central Binyang Cave was one of three caves started in 508 C.E. It was commissioned by Emperor Xuan Wu in memory of his father. The other two caves, known as Northern and Southern Binyang, were never completed.

Imagine being surrounded by a myriad of carvings painted in brilliant blue, red, ochre and gold (most of the paint is now gone). Across from the entry is the most significant devotional grouping—a pentad (five figures).

The central Buddha, seated on a lion throne, is generally identified as Shakyamuni (the historical Buddha), although some scholars identify him as Maitreya (the Buddha of the future) based on the "giving" mudra—a hand gesture associated with Maitreya. He is assisted by two bodhisattvas and two disciples—Ananda and Kasyapa (bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have put off entering paradise in order to help others attain enlightenment).

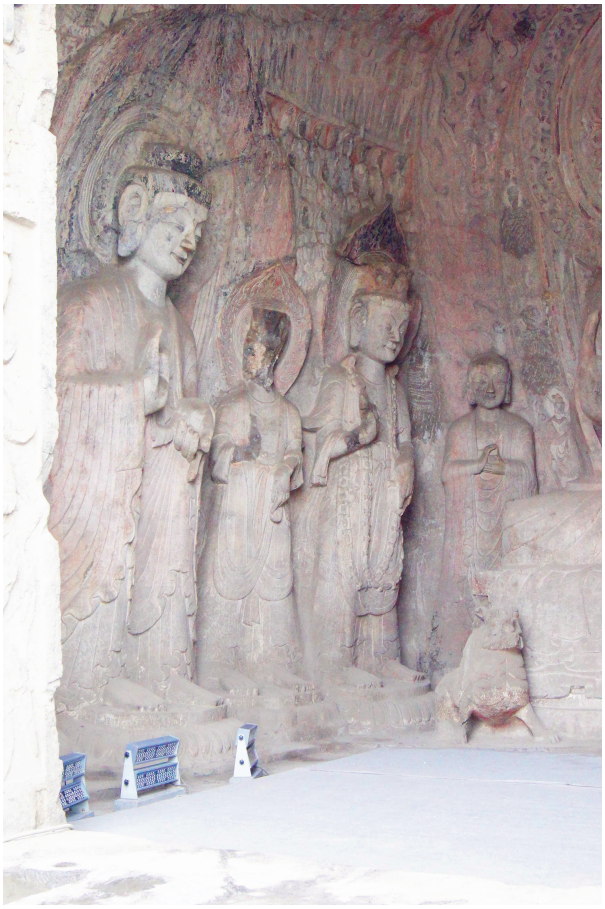


Pentad, Central Binyang Cave, 508–523 C.E., Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China (photo: Miguel Discart, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/ewn353>

The Buddha's monastic robe is rendered to appear as though tucked under him (image above). Ripples of folds cascade over the front of his throne. These linear and abstract motifs are typical of the mature Northern Wei style (as also seen in this gilt bronze statue <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/museums/mg/mgchina119.jpg> of Buddhas Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna, from 518 C.E.). The flattened, elongated bodies of the Longmen bodhisattvas are hidden under elaborately pleated and flaring skirts. The bodhisattvas wear draping scarves, jewelry and crowns with floral designs. Their gentle, smiling faces are rectangular and elongated.



Drapery, central Buddha (detail), Central Binyang Cave, 508–523 CE. Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China (photo: Dennis Kruyt, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Bodhisattvas and disciples, Central Binyang Cave, 508–523 C.E., Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China, (photo: jordan pickett, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/dS72s1>

Low relief carving covers the lateral walls, ceiling, and floor. Finely chiseled haloes back the images. The halo of the main Buddha extends up to merge with a lotus carving in the middle of the ceiling, where celestial deities appear to flutter down from the heavens with their scarves trailing. In contrast to the Northern Wei style seen on the pentad, the sinuous and dynamic surface decoration displays Chinese style. The Northern Wei craftsmen were able to marry two different aesthetics in one cave temple.



Lotus Ceiling with celestial deities (detail), Central Binyang Cave, Northern Wei Dynasty, First Quarter of the 6th Century

Two relief carvings of imperial processions (below) once flanked the doorway of the cave entrance. The emperor's procession is at the Metropolitan Museum, while the empress's procession is at the Nelson-Atkins Museum. These reliefs most likely commemorate historic events. According to records, the Empress Dowager visited the caves in 517 C.E., while the Emperor was present for the consecration of the Central Binyang in 523 C.E.



Emperor Xiaowen and His Court, c. 522-23, China, Northern Wei dynasty, limestone with traces of pigment, 82″ x 12′ 11″ / 208.3 x 393.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Offering Procession of the Empress as Donor with Her Court, c. 522 C.E., fine, dark-gray limestone, 80″ x 9′ 1 1/2″ / 203.2 x 278.13 cm (Nelson Atkins Museum)

These reliefs are the most tangible evidence that the Northern Wei craftsmen masterfully adopted the Chinese aesthetic. The style of the reliefs may be inspired by secular painting, since the figures all appear very gracious and solemn. They are clad in Chinese court robes and look genuinely Chinese—mission accomplished for the Northern Wei!

Tang Dynasty

The Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.) is considered the age of "international Buddhism." Many Chinese, Indian, Central Asian and East Asian monks traveled throughout Asia. The centers of Buddhism in China were invigorated by these travels, and important developments in Buddhist thought and practice originated in China at this time.



Central Vairocana Buddha surrounded on either side by a monk, bodhisattva, heavenly king, a Vajrapani (thunderbolt holder), 673–75 C.E., Tang dynasty, limestone, Luoyang, Henan province, (photo: Kevin Poh, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6syPwC>

Fengxian Temple

This imposing group of nine monumental images carved into the hard, gray limestone of Fengxian Temple at Longmen is a spectacular display of innovative style and iconography. Sponsored by the Emperor Gaozong and his wife, the future Empress Wu, the high relief sculptures are widely spaced in a semi-circle.

The central Vairocana Buddha (more than 55 feet high including its pedestal) is flanked on either side by a bodhisattva, a heavenly king, and a thunderbolt holder *(vajrapani).* Vairocana represents the primordial Buddha who generates and presides over all the Buddhas of the infinite universes that form Buddhist cosmology. This idea—of the power of one supreme deity over all the others—resonated in the vast Tang Empire which was dominated by the Emperor at its summit and supported by his subordinate officials. These monumental sculptures intentionally mirrored the political situation. The dignity and imposing presence of Buddha and the sumptuous appearance of his attendant bodhisattvas is significant in this context.



Vaiśravana, one of The Four Heavenly Kings, is on the left (indicated by the stupa in his right hand). Vajrapāṇi (on the right) are spiritual beings that wield the thunderbolt, 673-675 C.E., Tang dynasty, limestone, Luoyang, Henan province (photo: Sanjay P. K, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/azXfrA>



Vairocana Buddha, monks and bodhisattvas, 673–75 C.E., Tang dynasty, limestone, Luoyang, Henan province, (photo: Sanjay P. K., CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/azXfwh>

The Buddha, monks and *bodhisattvas* display new softer and rounder modeling and serene facial expressions. In contrast, the heavenly guardians and the vajrapani are more engaging and animated. Notice the realistic musculature of the heavenly guardians and the forceful poses of the *vajrapani.*

Kanjing Temple

Tang dynasty realism—whether fleshy or wizened, dignified or light-hearted—is displayed in the Kanjing cave Temple at Longmen. Here we see accurate portrayals of individuals. This temple was created from about 690-704 C.E. under the patronage of Empress Wu.



Arhats, Kanjing Temple, Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China



Arhats (detail), Kanjing Temple, Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China

In the images of arhats (worthy monks who have advanced very far in their quest of Enlightenment), who line the walls, the carver sought to create intense realism. Although they are still mortal, arhats are capable of extraordinary deeds both physical and spiritual (they can move at free will through space, can understand the thoughts in people's minds, and hear the voices of far away speakers). Twenty-nine monks form a procession around the cave perimeter, linking the subject matter to the rising interest in Chan Buddhism (the Meditation School) fostered at court by the empress herself. These portraits record the lineage of the great patriarchs who transmitted the Buddhist doctrine.

Sovereignty and iconography

Foreign rulers of the Northern Wei, yearning for assimilation and control, made use of Buddhist images for authority and power. Tang dynasty leaders thrived during China's golden age, asserting their sovereignty with the assistance of Buddhist iconography. Today you can visit the stunning limestone remains in Luoyang, New York City, and Kansas City.

The author would like to thank her teacher, Professor Angela Howard.

196. Gold and Jade crown

Dr. Kristen Chiem



Crown, Silla kingdom, second half of 5th century, gold and jade, excavated from the north mound of Hwangnam Daechong Tomb, 10 3/4″ / 27.3 cm high (Gyeongju National Museum, Korea, National Treasure 191) (photo: Gary Todd, CC0 1.0) <https://flic.kr/p/tqEqLP>

All that glitters was gold in ancient Korea. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the Korean peninsula was divided between three rivaling kingdoms. The most powerful of these was the Silla kingdom in the southeast of the peninsula. Chinese emissaries described the kingdom as a country of gold, and perhaps they had seen its crowns adorned with shimmering gold and jade.

Although their fragile gold construction initially led some to believe that these crowns were made specifically for burial, recent research has revealed that they were also used in ceremonial rites of the Silla royalty during the Three Kingdoms Period (57 B.C.E. – 676 C.E.). Prior to the adoption of Buddhism, Koreans practiced shamanism, which is a kind of nature worship that requires the expertise of a priest-like figure, or shaman, who intercedes to alleviate problems facing the community. Silla royalty upheld shamanistic practices in ceremonial rites such as coronations and memorial services. In these sacred rituals, the gold crowns emphasized the power of the wearer through their precious materials and natural imagery.

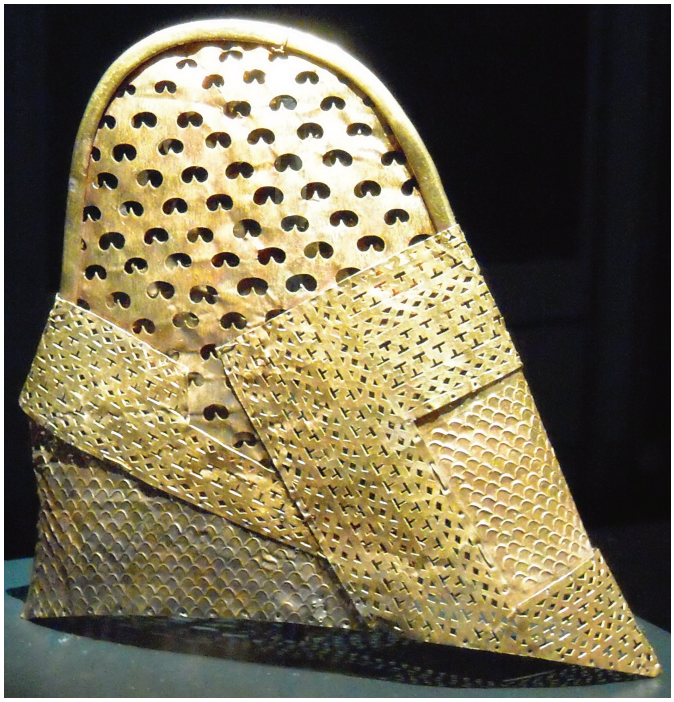
Worn around the forehead, this tree-shaped crown (*daegwan*) is the headband type found in the south in royal tombs at the Silla capital, Gyeongju. Between the fifth and sixth centuries, Silla crowns became increasingly lavish with more ornamentation and additional, increasingly elongated branch-like protrusions. In this crown, three tree-shaped vertical elements evoke the sacred tree that once stood in the ritual precinct of Gyeongju. This sacred tree was conceived of as a "world tree," or an axis mundi that connected heaven and earth. Two additional antler-shaped protrusions may refer to the reindeer that were native to the Eurasian steppe that lies to the north of the peninsula. Attached to the branch-like features of the crown are tiny gold discs and jade ornaments called *gogok*. These jade ornaments symbolize ripe fruits hanging from tree branches, representing fertility and abundance. With sunlight falling on its golden discs, the crown must have been a luminous sight indeed.



Crown (detail), Silla kingdom, second half of 5th century, gold and jade (Gyeongju National Museum, Korea, National Treasure 191) (photo: Gary Todd, CC0 1.0) <https://flic.kr/p/toWrwb>



Map showing the Silla kingdom in the latter half of the sixth century (graphic: Historiographer, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/yxdxcoqa>



Conical Cap, Silla kingdom, 5th–6th century, gold, found in the Cheonmachong (Flying Horse) Tomb (Gyeongju National Museum, Korea, National Treasure 189) (photo: Neil Noland, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/9n6Xrz>



Illustration of Silla envoy wearing a conical cap with wing-shaped ornament, detail of a mural in the Tomb of Li Xian, 706 C.E., Qianling, Shaanxi province (China)

A second type of crown, the conical cap (*mogwan*), was found throughout the peninsula. Although it was initially thought to be an internal component of the headband crown, mural paintings show that it was worn independently over a topknot to proclaim the rank and social status of its wearer. The cap was secured to the head with double straps under the chin, as indicated by the small holes along either side of the cap. Appendages in the shape of wings, feathers, or flowers often were used to accessorize the crown, and those ornaments tended to be geographically specific to each kingdom.

Eurasian connections

The Silla crown demonstrates cultural interactions between the Korean peninsula and the Eurasian steppe (thousands of miles of grassland that stretches from central Europe through Asia). Scytho-Siberian peoples of the Eurasian steppe created golden diadems similar to the Silla crown, such as a crown from Tillya Tepe (an archaeological site of six nomad graves that contained objects known as the "Bactrian Hoard") in modern-day Afghanistan. With five tree-shaped projections, flower ornaments and reflective discs, the Tillya Tepe crown can be compared with the natural imagery and radiant gold of the Silla crown. Though separated by many miles and by centuries, both crowns attest to shamanic beliefs prevalent among the nomadic cultures of the Eurasian steppe.



Gold crown, Tillya Tepe, 1st century C.E. (National Museum of Afghanistan) © Thierry Ollivier / Musée Guimet

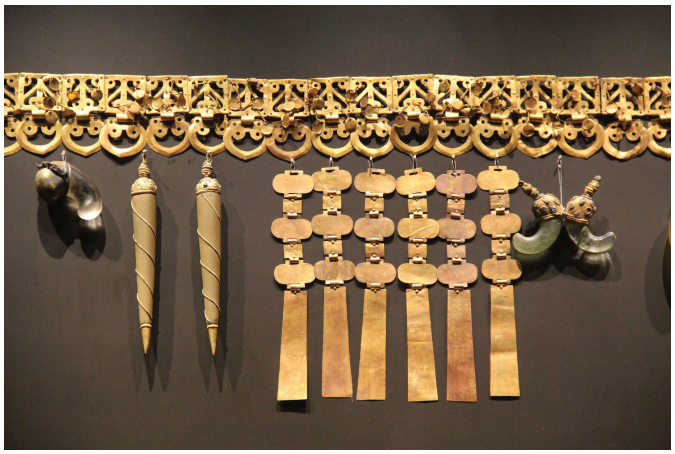
Burial customs in the Three Kingdoms Period

Though their use of gold and practice of shamanism related to the northern steppe cultures, the Silla royalty adopted the burial customs of the Chinese by burying their elite in mounded tombs. In Chinese burials, objects that were important in life were often taken to the grave. Similarly, power objects like the Silla gold crowns were used both above ground and below, and their luxurious materials conveyed the social status of the tomb occupant in the afterlife.



Belt with pendant ornaments. Korea, Silla kingdom, second half of 5th century, gold, excavated from the north mound of Hwangnam Daechong Tomb. 47 1/4″ / 120 cm long (Gyeongju National Museum, Korea, National Treasure 192)

In addition to crowns, belts, earrings, other jewelry were placed in Korean tombs during the Three Kingdoms era to represent the rank and identity of the wearer. This gold belt, for instance, was made for the burial of a Silla king. It was like a tool belt or charm bracelet, with pendants that dangled from its band of interlinked square plates and entwining dragon openwork. Some objects were practical, such as knife sheaths and needle boxes, which evoked nomadic life on the Eurasian steppe. Others were symbolic, such as the comma-shaped ornaments seen on the Silla crown or miniature fish, which may have been charms to avert evil. The materials of the belt also corresponded to social status; for example, tombs of the Silla royalty had gold belts, while the nobility in other regions of the peninsula had silver or gilt-bronze belts.



Detail, a belt with pendant ornaments, Korea, Silla kingdom, second half of 5th century, gold (Gyeongju National Museum, Korea) (photo: Gary Todd, CC0 1.0) <https://flic.kr/p/rZdXYF>

Korea and the Silk Road

Stretching from the Mediterranean to the Silla kingdom at the tip of the Korean peninsula, the Silk Road connected a vast terrain of ancient cultures. While the Silla kingdom shared shamanism with the Eurasian steppe and burial customs with China and Japan, the Silk Road was a main route for conveying materials, techniques, and ideas from as far away as Rome. Luxury objects in tombs of the Silla elite, such as these earrings, are made of gold and decorated with stylized foliage that resembles the Silla crown. Two tiers of leaf-shaped ornaments dangle from double loops adorned with floral motifs, continuing the imagery of the sacred world tree.

However, a closer look at the thick, upper loop of each earring reveals the technique of granulation. Metalworking techniques, such as granulation (a technique whereby a surface is covered in spherules or granules of precious metal) and filigree—seen in the Mediterranean—appear to have traveled along the Silk Road. Silla tombs also contained other objects, such as Roman glass bowls and ewers, which reveal the extent to which luxury materials traveled via the Silk Road. These prized imports clearly inspired new forms of Korean-made luxury goods for use in both life and death.



Pair of earrings. Korea, Silla kingdom, second quarter of 6th century, excavated from Bomun-dong Hapjangbun Tomb, gold, 3 3/8″ / 8.6 cm long (left), 3 3/8 in. / 8.75 cm long (right) (National Museum of Korea, National Treasure 90)

197. Todai-ji (Japan)

Dr. Deanna MacDonald



Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall), Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan, 743, rebuilt. c. 1700 (photo: author, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Built to impress, twice

When completed in the 740s, Tōdai-ji (or "Great Eastern Temple") was the largest building project ever on Japanese soil. Its creation reflects the complex intermingling of Buddhism and politics in early Japan. When it was rebuilt in the twelfth century, it ushered in a new era of Shoguns and helped to found Japan's most celebrated school of sculpture. It was built to impress. Twice.

Buddhism, Emperor Shomu and the creation of Tōdai-ji

The roots of Tōdai-ji are found in the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the sixth century. Buddhism made its way from India along the Silk Route through Central Asia, China and Korea. Mahayana Buddhism was officially introduced to the Japanese Imperial court around 552 by an emissary from a Korean king who offered the Japanese Emperor Kimmei a gilded bronze statue of the Buddha, a copy of the Buddhist sutras (sacred writings) and a letter stating: "This doctrine can create religious merit and retribution without measure and bounds and so lead on to a full appreciation of the highest wisdom."



The Great Buddha (Daibutsu), 17th century replacement of an 8th century sculpture, Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan (photo: author, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Buddhism quickly became associated with the Imperial court whose members became the patrons of early Buddhist art and architecture. This connection between sacred and secular power would define Japan's ruling elite for centuries to come. These early Buddhist projects also reveal the receptivity of Japan to foreign ideas and goods—as Buddhist monks and craftspeople came to Japan.

Buddhism's influence grew in the Nara era (710-794) during the reign of Emperor Shomu and his consort, Empress Komyo who fused Buddhist doctrine and political policy—promoting Buddhism as the protector of the state. In 741, reportedly following the Empress' wishes, Shomu ordered temples, monasteries and convents to be built throughout Japan's 66 provinces. This national system of monasteries, known as the Kokubun-ji, would be under the jurisdiction of the new imperial Tōdai-ji ("Great Eastern Temple") to be built in the capital of Nara.

Building Tōdai-ji

Why build on such an unprecedented scale? Emperor Shomu's motives seem to have been a mix of the spiritual and the pragmatic: in his bid to unite various Japanese clans under his centralized rule, Shomu also promoted spiritual unity. Tōdai-ji would be the chief temple of the Kokubun-ji system and be the center of the national ritual. Its construction brought together the best craftspeople in Japan with the latest building technology. It was architecture to impress—displaying the power, prestige, and piety of the imperial house of Japan.

However, the project was not without its critics. Every person in Japan was required to contribute through a special tax to its construction and the court chronicle, the *Shoku Nihon-gi*, notes that, "…the people are made to suffer by the construction of Tōdai-ji and the clans worry over their suffering."

Bronze Buddha

Tōdai-ji included the usual components of a Buddhist complex. At its symbolic heart was the massive *hondō* (main hall), also called the *Daibutsuden* (Great Buddha Hall), which when completed in 752, measured 50 meters by 86 meters and was supported by 84 massive cypress pillars. It held a huge bronze Buddha figure (the *Daibutsu*) created between 743 to 752. Subsequently, two nine-story pagodas, a lecture hall and quarters for the monks were added to the complex.

The statue was inspired by similar statues of the Buddha in China and was commissioned by Emperor Shomu in 743. This colossal Buddha required all the available copper in Japan and workers used an estimated 163,000 cubic feet of charcoal to produce the metal alloy and form the bronze figure. It was completed in 749, though the snail-curl hair (one of the 32 signs of the Buddha's divinity) took an additional two years.



The Great Buddha (Daibutsu), 17th century replacement of an 8th century sculpture, Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan (photo: throgers, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

When completed, the entire Japanese court, government officials and Buddhist dignitaries from China and India attended the Buddha's "eye-opening" ceremony. Overseen by the Empress Koken and attended by the retired Emperor Shomu and Empress Komyo, an Indian monk named Bodhisena is recorded as painting in the Buddha's eyes, symbolically imbuing it with life. The Emperor Shōmu himself is said to have sat in front of Great Buddha and vowed himself to be a servant of the Three Treasures of Buddhism: the Buddha, Buddhist Law, and Buddhist Monastic Community. No images of the ceremony survive but a Nara period scroll painting depicts a sole, humbly small figure at the Daibutsu's base suggesting its awe-inspiring presence.



Great Buddha, lotus petal (detail), 17th-century replacement of an 8th-century sculpture, Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan

The Daibutsu sits upon a bronze lotus petal pedestal that is engraved with images of the Shaka (the historical Buddha, known also as Shakyamuni) Buddha and varied Bodhisattvas (sacred beings). The petal surfaces (image left) are etched with fleshy figures with swelling chests, full faces and swirling drapery in a style typical of the elegant naturalism of Nara era imagery. The petals are the only reminders of the original statue, which was destroyed by fire in the twelfth century. Today's statue is a seventeenth-century replacement but remains a revered figure with an annual ritual cleaning ceremony each August.

Chogen and the rebuilding of Tōdai-ji in the Kamakura Era (1185-1333)

The Genpei Civil War (1180-85) saw countless temples destroyed as Buddhist clergy took sides in clan warfare. Japan's principal temple Tōdai-ji sided with the eventually victorious Minamoto clan but was burned by the soon-to-be defeated Taira clan in 1180.

The destruction of this revered Temple shocked Japan. At the war's end, the reconstruction of Tōdai-ji was one of the first projects undertaken by Minamoto Yoritomo who, as the new ruling Shogun, was eager to present the Minamoto as national saviors. The aristocracy and the warrior elite contributed funds and the Buddhist priest Shunjobo Chogen was placed in charge of reconstruction. Tōdai-ji again became the largest building project in Japan.



Nandaimon (Great South Gate), end of the 12th century ,Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan

Chōgen was unique in his generation in that he made three trips to China between 1167-1176. His experience of Song Dynasty Buddhist architecture inspired the rebuilding of the temples of Nara, in what became know as the "Great Buddha" or the "Indian" style.

The key-surviving example of this style is Tōdai-ji's Great South Gate—Nandaimon—which dates to 1199. An elaborate bracketing system supports the broad-eaved, two-tiered roof. The Nandaimon holds the 2 massive wooden sculptures of Guardian Kings (Kongō Rikishi) by masters of the Kei School of Sculpture.



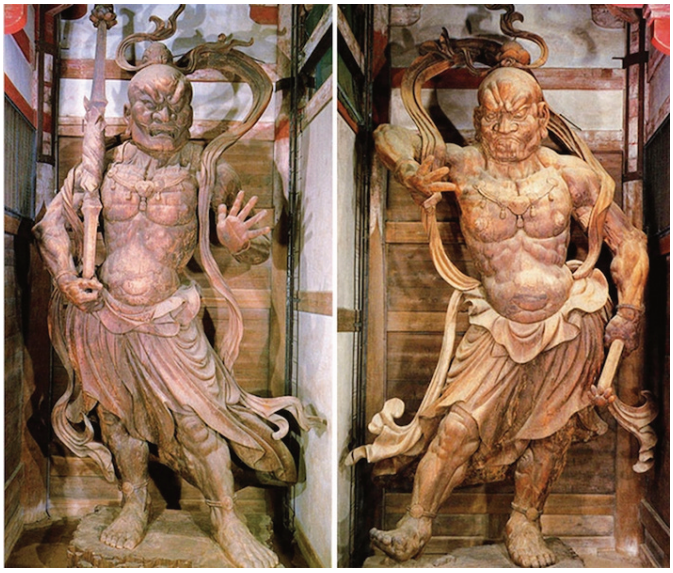
Brackets, Nandaimon (Great South Gate), end of the 12th century , Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan (photo: author, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Kei School of Sculpture

The large scale rebuilding after the Genpei Civil War created a multitude of commissions for builders, carpenters and sculptors. This concentration of talent led to the emergence of the Kei School of sculpture—considered by many to be the peak of Japanese sculpture. Noted for its austere realism and the dynamic, muscularity of its figures, the Kei School reflects the Buddhism and warrior-centered culture of the Kamakura era (1185–1333).

Unkei is considered the leading figure of the Kei school, with a career spanning over 30 years. His distinctive style emerged in his work on the refurbishment of the many Nara temples/shrines, most particularly Tōdai-ji. Unkei's fierce guardian figure Ungyō in the Nandaimon is typical of Unkei's powerful, dynamic bodies. It stands in dramatic contrapposto opposite the other muscular Guardian King, Agyō, created with Kaikei and other Kei sculptors.

Both figures are fashioned of cypress wood and stand over eight meters tall. They were made using the joint block technique (*yosegi zukuri*), that used eight or nine large wood blocks over which another layer of wooden planks were attached. The outer wood was then carved and painted. Only a few traces of color remain.



Left: Ungyō, right: Agyō, both c. 1203, Nandaimon (Great South Gate), Tōdai-ji Nara, Japan (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

Ecology, craftsmanship & early Buddhist art in Japan

The grand Buddhist architectural and sculptural projects of early Japan share a common material—wood–and are thus closely linked to the natural environment and to the long history of wood craftsmanship in Japan.

When Korean craftsmen brought Buddhist temple architecture to Japan in the sixth century, Japanese carpenters were already using complex wooden joints (instead of nails) to hold buildings together. The Korean's technology allowed for the support of larger, tile-roof structures that used brackets and sturdy foundation pillars to funnel weight to the ground. This technology ushered in a new, larger scale in Japanese architecture.

Monumental timber framed architecture requires enormous amounts of wood. The wood of choice was cypress, which grows up to forty meters tall and has a straight tight grain that easily splits into long beams and is resistant to rot.

The eighth-century campaign to construct Buddhist temples in every Japanese province under Imperial control (mostly in the Kinai area, today home to Osaka and Kyoto) is estimated to have resulted in the construction 600-850 temples using three million cubic meters of wood. As the years progressed Kinai's old growth forests were exhausted and builders had to travel farther for wood.

By far the most prestigious and wood-demanding project was the Imperial monastery of Tōdai-ji. Eighth-century Tōdai-ji had two 9-storey pagodas and a 50 x 86 meter great hall supported by 84 massive cypress pillars that used at least 2200 acres of local forest. After Tōdai-ji's destruction in 1180, it was rebuilt under the supervision of the monk Chogen, who solicited aid from all over Western Japan. Builders had to travel hundreds of kilometers from Kinai to find suitable wood. Whole forests were cleared to find tall cypresses for pillars, which were then transported at great cost: 118 dams were built to raise river levels in order to transport the massive pillars. And that was only the pillars—wood for the rest of the structure came from at least ten provinces.

Tōdai-ji's reconstructed main hall was only half the size of the original and its pagodas several stories shorter. The availability or scarcity of quality local wood was a major factor in the design and evolution of architecture in Japan. For example, the growing scarcity of cypress of structural dimensions led to innovations that allowed carpenters to work with less straight-grained woods, like red pine and zelkova.



Model, Nara-era (8th century) Tōdai-ji

198. Borobudur (Indonesia)

Robert E. Gordon



Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Claire André, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/i2N9Up>

Borobudur and the concept of path in Buddhism

Paths have been pervasive in human civilization. We are all familiar with the streets, trails, and lanes along which we routinely travel. Ancient Roman roads are utilized in some places even today. In contemporary computer culture, we follow "paths" on webpages as we find our way to the information or experience we are searching for or find unexpectedly. There are simulated paths in complex first-person virtual reality video environments, where role-playing games formulate their content around the path to be conquered. The idea of a path is an important concept in Buddhism and is essential in understanding the meaning and purpose of one of the most remarkable and impressive monuments in the world: Borobudur.

Located on the island of Java in Indonesia, the rulers of the Śailendra Dynasty built the Temple of Borobudur around 800 C.E. as a monument to the Buddha (exact dates vary among scholars). The temple (or candi in Javanese, pronounced "chandi") fell into disuse roughly one hundred years after its completion when, for still unknown reasons, the rulers of Java relocated the governing center to another part of the island. The British Lieutenant Governor on Java, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, only rediscovered the site in 1814 upon hearing reports from islanders of an incredible sanctuary deep within the island's interior.

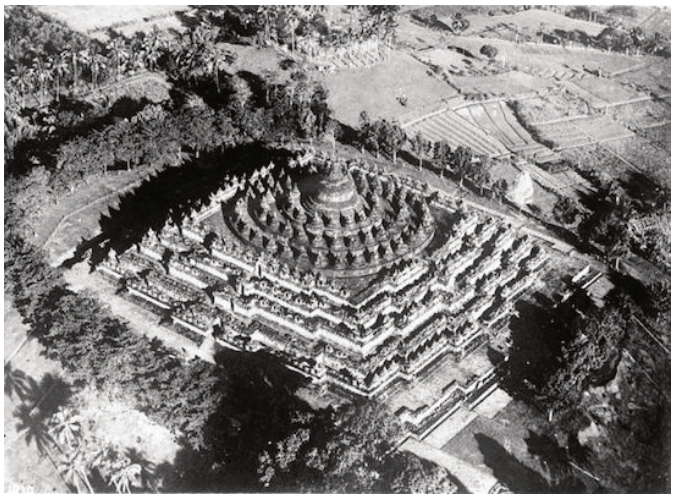
Candi Borobudur's design was conceived of by the poet, thinker, and architect Gunadharma, considered by many today to be a man of great vision and devotion. The temple has been described in a number of ways. Its basic structure resembles that of a pyramid, yet it has been also referred to as a caitya (shrine), a stupa (reliquary), and a sacred mountain. In fact, the name Śailendra literally means "Lord of the Mountain." While the temple exhibits characteristics of all these architectural configurations, its overall plan is that of a three-dimensional mandala—a diagram of the cosmos used for meditation—and it is in that sense where the richest understanding of the monument occurs.



Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Claire André, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/i2PcjF>



Bodobudur (photo: Wilson Loo Kok Wee, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/7QEfhZ>



Aerial photo of Borobudur (Tropenmuseum Collection)



Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Wilson Loo Kok Wee, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/7QEmjX>

The journey

Set high upon a hill vertically enhanced by its builders to achieve a greater elevation, Borobudur consists of a series of open-air passageways that radiate around a central axis mundi (cosmic axis). Devotees circumambulate clockwise along walkways that gradually ascend to its uppermost level. At Borobudur, geometry, geomancy, and theology all instruct adherents toward the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Meticulously carved relief sculptures mediate a physical and spiritual journey that guides pilgrims progressively toward higher states of consciousness.

The entire site contains 504 statues of the Buddha. 1460 stone reliefs on the walls and opposite balustrades decorate the first four galleries, with an additional 1212 decorative reliefs augmenting the path. The relief sculptures narrate the Buddha's teachings (the Dharma), depict various events related to his past lives (Jataka tales), and illustrate didactic stories taken from important Buddhist scriptures (sutras). Interestingly, another 160 relief sculptures adorn the base of the monument, but are concealed behind stone buttresses that were added shortly after the building's construction in order to further support the structure's weight. The hidden narrative reliefs were photographed when they were discovered in the late nineteenth century before the stones were put back to help ensure the temple's stability.



Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Gildardo Sánchez, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/s7uvR>



Borobudur, Indonesia, central stupa at the temple's apex in the distance (photo: pierre c. 38, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/fnHMkK>

Moving past the base and through the four galleries, the devotee emerges onto the three upper terraces, encountering 72 stupas each containing a three-dimensional sculpture of a seated Buddha within a stone latticework. At the temple's apex sits the large central stupa, a symbol of the enlightened mind.[OB]

The experience of meaning

While the sheer size and scope of a mandala structure such as this makes the site worthy of admiration, it is important to understand how the experience of Borobudur relates to the philosophic and spiritual underpinnings of the Buddhist religion it reifies and commemorates. Since its inception, roughly 2500 years ago, Buddhism has directly engaged what it sees as the paradoxical nature of human existence. The most essential tenet the religion promulgates is the impermanent, transient nature of existence. Transcendental wisdom via the Dharma (the Noble Eight-Fold Path) hinges on recognizing that attachment to the idea of a fixed, immutable "self" is a delusion.

Enlightenment entails embracing the concept of "no-self" (*anattā*), understood to be at the heart of eliminating the suffering and dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) of sentient beings. This is the ultimate message expressed in the sacred scriptures that are solidified in artistic magnificence along the stone walls and railings of Borobudur. The physical movement of circumambulating the structure symbolizes the non-physical—or spiritual—path of enlightenment. In a real sense, then, the concept of path within Borobudur monumentalizes the impermanent. Like a river that is never the same from moment to moment, to physically move along the path while meditating on the spiritual message of the sutras is meant to help one fully embrace the Buddha's paradoxical message of impermanence.



From the Gandavyuha Sutra, Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Photo Dharma, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/e7jsg8>

The texts illustrated on the walls refer to pathways as well. For instance, the Gandavyuha Sutra forms a major segment of the temple's upper galleries. The last chapter of a larger text called the Flower Garland Sutra, it relates the story of Suddhana, a youth who commences a journey to meet fifty-three teachers while seeking the path to enlightenment. The concept of "path" is a central theme in the text. He eventually meets an enlightened being (bodhisattva) named Samantabadhra. Excerpts from the larger sutra illustrate the concepts under discussion:

> "I will lead those who have lost their way to the right road. I will be a bright light for those in the dark night, and cause the poor and destitute to uncover hidden treasures. The Bodhisattva impartially benefits all living beings in this manner.

> I vow to shut the door to evil destinies and open the right paths of humans, gods and that of Nirvana.
>
> Once any sentient beings see the Buddha, it will cause them to clear away habitual obstructions. And forever abandon devilish actions: This is the path traveled by Illumination.
>
> Sentient Beings are blinded by ignorance, always confused; the light of Buddha illuminates the path of safety. To rescue them and cause suffering to be removed.
>
> All sentient beings are on false paths—Buddha shows them the right path, inconceivable, causing all worlds to be vessels of truth…"
>
> The full text is available here <http://www.buddhasutra. com/files/avatamsaka_sutra.htm>.

From darkness into light

The idea of moving from the darkness into the light is the final element of the experience of Borobudur. The temple's pathway takes one from the earthly realm of desire (*kamadhatu*), represented and documented on the hidden narratives of the structure's earthbound base, through the world of forms (*rupadhatu*) as expounded on the narratives carved along the four galleries set at right angles, until one finally emerges into the realm of formlessness (*arupadhatu*) as symbolized and manifested in the open circular terraces crowned with 72 stupas.

However, the symbolization of enlightenment these stupas represent is not intended to be merely aesthetic. Buddhist stupas and mandalas are understood as "spiritual technologies" that harness spiritual "energies" in the creation of sacred space. The repetition of form and the circumabulatory progress of the pilgrim mimic, and thereby access, the cosmological as a microcosm. The clockwise movement around the cosmic center reproduces the macrocosmic path of the sun. Thus, when one emerges from the dark galleries representing the realms of desire and form into the light of the "formless" circular open air upper walkways, the material effect of light on one's physical form merges concomitantly with the spiritual enlightenment generated by the metaphysical journey of the sacred path.

Light, in all its paradoxes, is the ultimate goal. The crowning stupa of this sacred mountain is dedicated to the "Great Sun Buddha" Vairocana. The temple sits in cosmic proximity to the nearby volcano Mt. Merapi. During certain times of the year the path of the rising sun in the East seems to emerge out of the mountain to strike the temple's peak in radiant synergy. Light illuminates the stone in a way that is intended to be more than beautiful. The brilliance of the site can be found in how the Borobudur mandala blends the metaphysical and physical, the symbolic and the material, the cosmological and the earthly within the structure of its physical setting and the framework of spiritual paradox.



Crowning stupa, Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Paul Atkinson, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6ETFSW>

199. The temple of Angkor Wat (Cambodia)

Dr. Melody Rod-ari



Aerial view, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: shankar s., CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/c7Bjc3>

A temple with a lost name

Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, Cambodia is the largest religious monument in the world. Angkor Wat, translated from Khmer (the official language of Cambodia), literally means "City Temple." As far as names go this is as generic as it gets. Angkor Wat was not the original name given to the temple when it was built in the twelfth century. We have little knowledge of how this temple was referred to during the time of its use, as there are no extant texts or inscriptions that mention the temple by name—this is quite incredible if we consider the fact that Angkor Wat is the greatest religious construction project in Southeast Asia.

A possible reason why the temple's original name may have never been documented is that it was such an important and famous monument that there was no need to refer to it by its name. We have several references to the king who built the temple, King Suryavarman II (1113-1145/50 C.E.), and events that took place at the temple, but no mention of its name.

Historical Context

Angkor Wat is dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu who is one of the three principal gods in the Hindu pantheon (Shiva and Brahma are the others). Among them, he is known as the "Protector." The major patron of Angkor Wat was King Suryavarman II, whose name translates as the "protector of the sun." Many scholars believe that Angkor Wat was not only a temple dedicated to Vishnu but that it was also intended to serve as the king's mausoleum in death.



Angkor Wat. Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: Benjamin Jakabek, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/p8kbog>

The construction of Angkor Wat likely began in the year 1116 C.E.—three years after King Suryavarman II came to the throne—with construction ending in 1150, shortly after the king's death. Evidence for these dates comes in part from inscriptions, which are vague, but also from the architectural design and artistic style of the temple and its associated sculptures.

The building of temples by Khmer kings was a means of legitimizing their claim to political office and also to lay claim to the protection and powers of the gods. Hindu temples are not a place for religious congregation; instead; they are homes of the god. In order for a king to lay claim to his political office, he had prove that the gods did not support his predecessors or his enemies. To this end, the king had to build the grandest temple/palace for the gods, one that proved to be more lavish than any previous temples. In doing so, the king could make visible his ability to harness the energy and resources to

construct the temple and assert that his temple was the only place that a god would consider residing in on earth.

The building of Angkor Wat is likely to have necessitated some 300,000 workers, which included architects, construction workers, masons, sculptors and the servants to feed these workers. Construction of the site took over 30 years and was never completely finished. The site is built entirely out of stone, which is incredible as close examination of the temple demonstrates that almost every surface is treated and carved with narrative or decorative details.

Carved Bas Reliefs of Hindu Narratives

There are 1,200 square meters of carved bas reliefs at Angkor Wat, representing eight different Hindu stories. Perhaps the most important narrative represented at Angkor Wat is the *Churning of the Ocean of Milk* (below), which depicts a story about the beginning of time and the creation of the universe. It is also a story about the victory of good over evil. In the story, *devas* (gods) are fighting the *asuras* (demons) in order reclaim order and power for the gods who have lost it. In order to reclaim peace and order, the elixir of life (*amrita*) needs to be released from the earth; however, the only way for the elixir to be released is for the gods and demons to first work together. To this end, both sides are aware that once the amrita is released there will be a battle to attain it.



Churning of the Ocean of Milk (detail), Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: John Brennan, CC BY-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/4tdRW5>

The relief depicts the moment when the two sides are churning the ocean of milk. In the detail above you can see that the gods and demons are playing a sort of tug-of-war with the Naga or serpent king as their divine rope. The Naga is being spun on Mt. Mandara represented by Vishnu (in the center). Several things happen while the churning of milk takes place. One event is that the foam from the churning produces *apsaras* or celestial maidens who are carved in relief throughout Angkor Wat (we see them here on either side of Vishnu, above the gods and demons). Once the elixir is released, Indra (the Vedic god who is considered the king of all the gods) is seen descending from heaven to catch it and save the world from the destruction of the demons.

Angkor Wat as Temple Mountain



Aerial view, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: Peter Garnhum, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/2dEbaK>

An aerial view of Angkor Wat demonstrates that the temple is made up of an expansive enclosure wall, which separates the sacred temple grounds from the protective moat that surrounds the entire complex (the moat is visible in the photograph at the top of the page). The temple proper is comprised of three galleries (a passageway running along the length of the temple) with a central sanctuary, marked by five stone towers.

The five stone towers are intended to mimic the five mountain ranges of Mt. Meru—the mythical home of the gods, for both Hindus and Buddhists. The temple mountain as an architectural design was invented in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian architects quite literally envisioned temples dedicated to Hindu gods on earth as a representation of Mt. Meru. The galleries and the empty spaces that they created between one another and the moat are envisioned as the mountain ranges and oceans that surround Mt. Meru. Mt. Meru is not only home to the gods, but it is also considered an axis-mundi. An axis-mundi is a cosmic or world axis that connects heaven and earth. In designing Angkor Wat in this way, King Suryavarman II and his architects intended for the temple to serve as the supreme abode for Vishnu. Similarly, the symbolism of Angkor Wat serving as an axis mundi was intended to demonstrate the Angkor Kingdom's and the king's central place in the universe. In addition to envisioning Angkor Wat as Mt. Meru on earth, the temple's architects, of whom we know nothing, also ingeniously designed the temple so that embedded in the temple's construction is a map of the cosmos (mandala) as well as a historical record of the temple's patron.



Gallery, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: fmpgoh, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Angkor Wat as a Mandala

According to ancient Sanskrit and Khmer texts, religious monuments and specifically temples must be organized in such a way that they are in harmony with the universe, meaning that the temple should be planned according to the rising sun and moon, in addition to symbolizing the recurrent time sequences of the days, months and years. The central axis of these temples should also be aligned with the planets, thus connecting the structure to the cosmos so that temples become spiritual, political, cosmological, astronomical and geo-physical centers. They are, in other words, intended to represent microcosms of the universe and are organized as mandalas—diagrams of the universe.

Angkor Wat Today

Angkor Wat continues to play an important role in Cambodia even though most of the population is now Buddhist. Since the fifteenth century, Buddhists have used the temple and visitors today will see, among the thousands of visitors, Buddhist monks and nuns who worship at the site. Angkor Wat has also become an important symbol for the Cambodian nation. Today, the Cambodian flag has emblazoned on it the silhouette of Angkor Wat.

World Monuments Fund at Angkor Wat: The Churning of the Sea of Milk Gallery <https://www.wmf.org/video-file/wmf-angkor-wat-churning-sea-milk-gallery>

At the magnificent temple of Angkor Wat, World Monuments Fund is restoring the *Churning of the Sea of Milk*Gallery. Rainwater and harmful salts have leaked through the roof of the gallery, which forms the southern half of Angkor Wat's prominent east façade, damaging the fragile surface of the frieze. Without treatment, the deterioration will increase at an alarming rate, risking the eventual loss of what most historians regard as the most ambitious and finely produced stone sculptures in Khmer art.

200. Lakshmana Temple (India)

Dr. Cristin McKnight Sethi

Ideal female beauty



Sculpture of a woman removing a thorn from her foot, northwest side exterior wall, Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India, dedicated 954 C.E. (image source <https://tinyurl.com/y4p6sop5>)

Look closely at the image below. Imagine an elegant woman walks barefoot along a path accompanied by her attendant. She steps on a thorn and turns—adeptly bending her left leg, twisting her body, and arching her back—to point out the thorn and ask her attendant's help in removing it. As she turns the viewer sees her face: it is round like the full moon with a slender nose, plump lips, arched eyebrows, and eyes shaped like lotus petals. While her right hand points to the thorn in her foot, her left hand raises in a gesture of reassurance.

Images of beautiful women like this one from the northwest exterior wall of the Lakshmana Temple at Khajuraho in India have captivated viewers for centuries. Depicting idealized female beauty was important for temple architecture and considered auspicious, even protective. Texts written for temple builders describe different "types" of women to include within a temple's sculptural program, and emphasize their roles as symbols of fertility, growth, and prosperity. Additionally, images of loving couples known as *mithuna* (literally "the state of being a couple") appear on the Lakshmana temple as symbols of divine union and *moksha*, the final release from *samsara* (the cycle of death and rebirth).[1]

The temples at Khajuraho, including the Lakshmana temple, have become famous for these amorous images—variations of which graphically depict figures engaged in sexual intercourse. These erotic images were not intended to be titillating or provocative, but instead served ritual and symbolic function significant to the builders, patrons, and devotees of these captivating structures.[2]



Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India, dedicated 954 C.E. (Chandella period), sandstone (photo: Christopher Voitus, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y3kxmzf7>

Chandella rule at Khajuraho



Location of Khajuraho, India (source: Uwe Dedering, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y3mzq4cw>

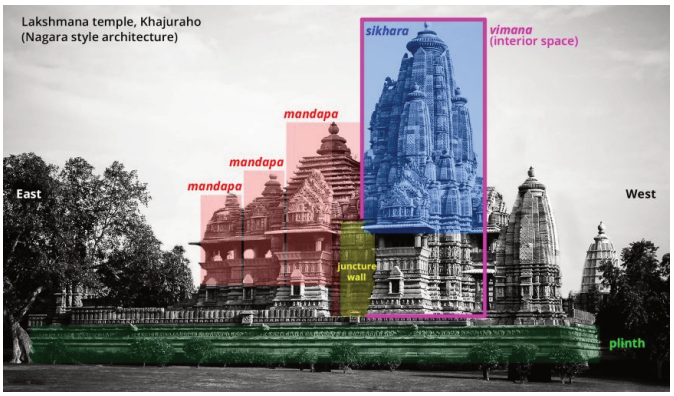
The Lakshmana temple was the first of several temples built by the Chandella kings in their newly-created capital of Khajuraho. Between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, the Chandellas patronized artists, poets, and performers, and built irrigation systems, palaces, and numerous temples out of sandstone. At one time over 80 temples existed at this site, including several Hindu temples dedicated to the gods Shiva, Vishnu, and Surya.[3] There were also temples built to honor the divine teachers of Jainism (an ancient Indian religion). Approximately 30 temples remain at Khajuraho today.

The original patron of the Lakshmana temple was a leader of the Chandella clan, Yashovarman, who gained control over territories in the Bundelkhand region of central India that was once part of the larger Pratihara Dynasty. Yashovarman sought to build a temple to legitimize his rule over these territories, though he died before it was finished. His son Dhanga completed the work and dedicated the temple in 954 C.E.

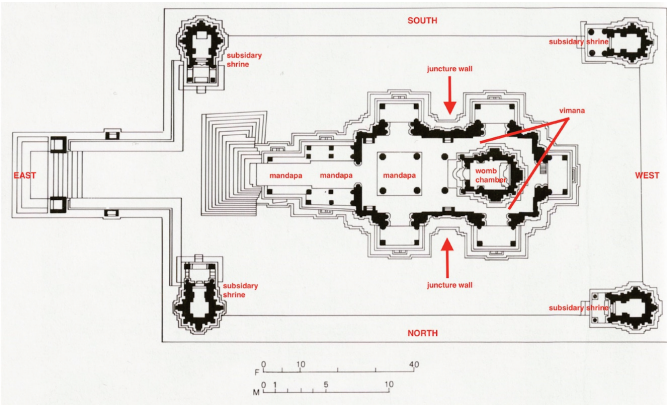
Nagara style architecture



The central deity at the Lakshmana temple is an image of Vishnu in his three-headed form known as Vaikuntha[4] who sits inside the temple's inner womb chamber also known as *garba griha* (above)—an architectural feature at the heart of all Hindu temples regardless of size or location. The womb chamber is the symbolic and physical core of the temple's shrine. It is dark, windowless, and designed for intimate, individualized worship of the divine—quite different from large congregational worshipping spaces that characterize many Christian churches and Muslim mosques.



The Lakshmana Temple is an excellent example of Nagara style Hindu temple architecture.[5] In its most basic form, a Nagara temple consists of a shrine known as *vimana* (essentially the shell of the womb chamber) and a flat-roofed entry porch known as *mandapa*. The shrine of Nagara temples include a base platform and a large superstructure known as *sikhara* (meaning mountain peak), which viewers can see from a distance.[6] The Lakshmana temple's superstructure appear like the many rising peaks of a mountain range.



Plan of Lakshmana temple

Approaching the divine

Devotees approach the Lakshamana temple from the east and walk around its entirety—an activity known as circumambulation. They begin walking along the large plinth <https://c1.staticflickr.com/9/8100/8586762306_b490b599cf_b.jpg> of the temple's base, moving in a clockwise direction starting from the left of the stairs. Sculpted friezes along the plinth depict images of daily life, love, and war and many recall historical events of the Chandella period.



Section of a narrative frieze encircling the temple at the level of the plinth, Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India, dedicated 954 (photo: Sheep"R"Us, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6Q897u>

Devotees then climb the stairs of the plinth, and encounter another set of images, including deities sculpted within niches <https://c1.staticflickr.com/3/2260/2053736282_b16d22118b_o.jpg> on the exterior wall of the temple (view in Google Street View <https://goo.gl/maps/r1ru6pJE6zD2>).

In one niche the elephant-headed Ganesha appears. His presence suggests that devotees are moving in the correct direction for circumambulation, as Ganesha is a god typically worshipped at the start of things.



Ganesha in niche, exterior mandapa wall, south side, Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India, dedicated 954 (photo: Manuel Menal, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/aDLi5G>

Other sculpted forms appear nearby in lively, active postures: swaying hips, bent arms, and tilted heads which create a dramatic "triple-bend" contrapposto pose, all carved in deep relief emphasizing their three-dimensionality. It is here —specifically on the exterior juncture wall between the *vimana* and the *mandapa* (see diagram above)—where devotees encounter erotic images of couples embraced in sexual union <https://tinyurl.com/yxmow8cj> (see image below and here on Google Street View <https://goo.gl/maps/vhh3a5UAiuQ2>). This place of architectural juncture serves a symbolic function as the joining of the *vimana* and *mandapa*, accentuated by the depiction of "joined" couples.

Four smaller, subsidiary shrines <https://tinyurl.com/yycok45j> sit at each corner of the plinth. These shrines appear like miniature temples with their own *vimanas*, *sikharas*, *mandapas*, and womb chambers with images of deities, originally other forms or avatars of Vishnu.

Following circumambulation of the exterior of the temple, devotees encounter three *mandapas*, which prepare them for entering the *vimana*. Each *mandapa* has a pyramidal-shaped roof that increases in size as devotees move from east to west.



Figural groupings on the temple exterior including Shiva, Mithuna, and erotic couples, Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India, dedicated 954 (photo: Antoine Taveneaux, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lakshmana_Temple_24.jpg> View this on Google Street View <https://tinyurl.com/yxg8h7qb>.

Once devotees pass through the third and final *mandapa* they find an enclosed passage along the wall of the shrine, allowing them to circumambulate this sacred structure in a clockwise direction. The act of circumambulation, of moving around the various components of the temple, allow devotees to physically experience this sacred space and with it the body of the divine.



Entrance to the Mandapa, Lakshmana Temple, Khajuraho, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India, dedicated 954 (photo: Antoine Taveneaux, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y3u7cw2v>

Notes:

[1] *Mithuna* figures appear on numerous Hindu temples and Buddhist monastic sites throughout South Asia from as early as the first century C.E. *Maithuna* is a related term that references figures depicted in the act of sexual intercourse.

[2] Some scholars suggest that these erotic images may be connected to Kapalika tantric practices prevalent at Khajuraho during Chandella rule. These practices included drinking wine, eating flesh, human sacrifice, using human skulls as drinking vessels, and sexual union, particularly with females who were given central importance (as the seat of the divine). The idea was that by indulging in the bodily and material world, a practitioner was able to overcome the temptations of the senses. However, these esoteric practices were generally looked down upon by others in South Asian society and accordingly very often were done in secrecy, which raises questions about the logic of including Kapalika-related images on the exterior of a temple for all to see. For a compelling discussion on the history of popular and scholarly perception of the nude figures at Khajuraho, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta's essay referenced below.

[3] There is also at least one temple at Khajuraho, the Chausath Yogini Temple, dedicated to the Hindu Goddess Durga and 64 ("chausath") of her female attendants known as yoginis. It was built by a previous dynasty who ruled in the area before the Chandella kings rose to power.

[4] The original Vaikuntha at Lakshmana temple was itself politically significant: Yashovarman took it from the Pratihara overlord of the region. Susan Huntington indicates that the stone image currently on view at Lakshmana temple, while indeed a form of Vaikuntha, is not in fact the original (metal) image which Yashovarman appropriated from the Pratihara ruler. Appropriating another ruler's family deity as a political maneuver was a widespread practice throughout South Asia. For more on this practice, see the work of Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), particularly Chapter 4. A similar Vaikuntha image now appears in the central shrine of the Lakshmana temple and is notable for its depiction of the deity's three heads with a human face at the front (east), a lion's face on the left (south), and a boar's face on the right (north)—the latter two of which are now badly damaged. An implied, though not visible fourth face is that of a demon's head at the rear of the image (west-facing) which has led some scholars to identify this form as Chaturmurti or four-faced.

[5] In general, there are two main styles of Hindu temple architecture: the Nagara style, which dominates temples from the northern regions of India, and the Dravida style, which appears more often in the South.

[6] The base platform is sometimes known as *pitha*, meaning "seat." A flattened bulb-shaped topper known as *amalaka* appears at the top of the superstructure or *sikhara*. The *amalaka* is named after the local amla fruit and is symbolic of abundance and growth.

201. Fan Kuan, Travelers among Mountains and Streams

Dr. Jennifer McIntire

Daoist mountain man, hermit, rustic, wine-lover—Fan Kuan has the reputation of having been truly unconventional. We know very little about this great artist, yet he painted the most majestic landscape painting of the early Song period. Everything about *Travelers by Streams and Mountains*, which is possibly the only surviving work by Fan Kuan, is an orderly statement reflecting the artist's worldview.

Landscape as a subject

Fan Kuan's masterpiece is an outstanding example of Chinese landscape painting. Long before Western artists considered landscape anything more than a setting for figures, Chinese painters had elevated landscape as a subject in its own right. Bounded by mountain ranges and bisected by two great rivers—the Yellow and the Yangzi—China's natural landscape has played an important role in the shaping of the Chinese mind and character. From very early times, the Chinese viewed mountains as sacred and imagined them as the abode of immortals. The term for landscape painting (*shanshui hua*) in Chinese is translated as "mountain water painting."

After a period of upheaval

During the tumultuous Five Dynasties period in the early tenth century (an era of political upheaval from 907–960 C.E., between the fall of the Tang Dynasty and the founding of the Song Dynasty, when five dynasties quickly succeeded one another in the north, and more than twelve independent states were established, mainly in the south), recluse scholars who fled to the mountains saw the tall pine tree as representative of the virtuous man. In the early Northern Song dynasty that followed, from the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh century, gnarled pine trees and other symbolic elements were transformed into a grand and imposing landscape style.



Fan Kuan, Travelers by Streams and Mountains, ink on silk hanging scroll, c. 1000, 206.3 x 103.3 cm. (National Palace Museum, Taipei)



Gnarled pine trees (detail), Fan Kuan, Travelers by Streams and Mountains, c. 1000, ink on silk hanging scroll, 206.3 x 103.3 cm (National Palace Museum, Taipei)



Temple in the forest (detail), Fan Kuan, Travelers by Streams and Mountains, c. 1000, ink on silk hanging scroll, 206.3 x 103.3 cm. (National Palace Museum, Taipei)

Fan Kuan painted a bold and straightforward example of Chinese landscape painting. After the long period of political disunity (the Five Dynasties period), Fan Kuan lived as a recluse and was one of many poets and artists of the time who were disenchanted with human affairs. He turned away from the world to seek spiritual enlightenment. Through his painting *Travelers by Streams and Mountains*, Fan Kuan expressed a cosmic vision of man's harmonious existence in a vast but orderly universe. The Neo-Confucian search for absolute truth in nature as well as self-cultivation reached its climax in the eleventh century and is demonstrated in this work. Fan Kuan's landscape epitomizes the early Northern Song monumental style of landscape painting. Nearly seven feet in height, the hanging scroll composition presents universal creation in its totality and does so with the most economic of means.

Immense boulders occupy the foreground and are presented to the viewer at eye level. Just beyond them, one sees crisp, detailed brushwork describing rocky outcroppings, covered with trees. Looking closely, one sees two men driving a group of donkeys loaded with firewood and a temple partially hidden in the forest. In the background, a central peak rises from a mist-filled chasm and is flanked by two smaller peaks. This solid screen of gritty rock takes up nearly two-thirds of the picture. The sheer height of the central peak is accentuated by a waterfall plummeting from a crevice near the summit and disappearing into the narrow valley.



Central peak (detail), Fan Kuan, Travelers by Streams and Mountains, c. 1000, ink on silk hanging scroll, 206.3 x 103.3 cm. (National Palace Museum, Taipei)

The mountain form accurately captures the geological traits of southern Shaanxi and northwestern Henan provinces–thick vegetation grows only at the top of the bare steep-sided cliffs in thick layers of fine-grained soil known as loess. The mountains are triangular with deep crevices. In the painting, they are conceived frontally and additively. To model the mountains, Fan Kuan used incisive thickening-and-thinning contour strokes, texture dots, and ink wash. Strong, sharp brushstrokes depict the knotted trunks of the large trees. Notice the detailed brushwork that delineates the foliage and the fir trees silhouetted along the upper edge of the ledge in the middle distance.

To convey the sheer size of the landscape depicted in *Travelers by Streams and Mountains*, Fan Kuan relied on suggestion rather than description. The gaps between the three distances act as breaks between changing views. Note the boulders in the foreground, the tree-covered rock outcropping in the middle, and the soaring peaks in the background. The additive images do not physically connect; they are comprehended separately. The viewer is invited to imagine himself roaming freely, yet one must mentally jump from one distance to the next.

The unsurpassed grandeur and monumentality of Fan Kuan's composition is expressed through the skillful use of scale. Fan Kuan's landscape shows how the use of scale can dramatically heighten the sense of vastness and space. Diminutive figures are made visually even smaller in comparison to the enormous trees and soaring peaks. They are overwhelmed by their surroundings. Fan Kuan's signature is hidden among the leaves of one of the trees in the lower right corner.



Monumental landscape (detail), Fan Kuan, Travelers by Streams and Mountains, c. 1000, ink on silk hanging scroll, 206.3 x 103.3 cm. (National Palace Museum, Taipei)

Neo-Confucianism

The development of Monumental landscape painting coincided with that of Neo-Confucianism—a reinterpretation of Chinese moral philosophy. It was Buddhism that first introduced, from India, a system of metaphysics and a coherent worldview more advanced than anything known in China. With Buddhist thought, scholars in the 5th and 6th centuries engaged in philosophical discussions of truth and reality, being and non-being, substantiality, and nonsubstantiality. Beginning in the late Tang and early Northern Song (960-1127), Neo-Confucian thinkers rebuilt Confucian ethics using Buddhist and Daoist metaphysics. Chinese philosophers found it useful to think in terms of complementary opposites, interacting polarities— inner and outer, substance and function, knowledge and action. In their metaphysics, they naturally employed the ancient yin and yang (Yin: feminine, dark, receptive, yielding, negative, and weak. Yang: masculine, bright, assertive, creative, positive, and strong.) The interaction of these complementary poles was viewed as integral to the processes that generate natural order.

Central to understanding Neo-Confucian thought is the conceptual pair of *li* and *qi*. *Li* is usually translated as principles. It can be understood as principles that underlie all phenomena. *Li* constitutes the underlying pattern of reality. Nothing can exist if there is no *li* for it. This applies to human conduct and to the physical world. *Qi* can be characterized as the vital force and substance of which man and the universe are made. *Qi*can also be conceived of as energy, but energy

which occupies space. In its most refined form it occurs as mysterious ether but condensed it becomes solid metal or rock.

Not as the human eye sees

The Neo-Confucian theory of observing things in the light of their own principles (*li*) clearly resonates in the immense splendor of Fan Kuan's masterpiece. Northern Song landscape painters did not paint as the human eye sees. By seeing things not through the human eye, but in the light of their own principles (*li*), Fan Kuan was able to organize and present different aspects of a landscape within a single composition—he does this with a constantly shifting viewpoint. In his masterful balance of *li* and *qi*, Fan Kuan created a microcosmic image of a moral and orderly universe.

Fan Kuan looked to nature and carefully studied the world around him. He expressed his own response to nature. As Fan Kuan sought to describe the external truth of the universe visually, he discovered at the same time an internal psychological truth. The bold directness of Fan's painting style was thought to be a reflection of his open character and generous disposition. His grand image of the beauty and majesty of nature reflects Fan Kuan's humble awe and pride.

Note from author: With tremendous debt to my teacher Wen Fong.

202. Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja)

Farisa Khalid



Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), c. 11th century, Copper alloy, Chola period, 68.3 x 56.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

A sacred object out of context

The art of medieval India, like the art of medieval Europe, was primarily in the service of religion. The devotee's spiritual experience was enhanced by meditation inspired by works of art and architecture. Just as the luminous upper chapel of the Sainte Chapelle dazzled and overwhelmed worshipers in France, the looming bronze statues of Shiva and Parvati in, for example, the inner halls of the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, in south India would have awed a Hindu devotee.

Its important to keep in mind that the bronze *Shiva as Lord of the Dance* ("*Nataraja*"—nata meaning dance or performance, and raja meaning king or lord), is a sacred object that has been taken out of its original context—in fact, we don't even know where this particular sculpture was originally venerated. In the intimate spaces of the Florence and Herbert Irving South Asian Galleries in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the *Shiva Nataraja* is surrounded by other metal statues of Hindu gods including the Lords Vishnu, Parvati, and Hanuman. It is easy to become absorbed in the dark quiet of these galleries with its remarkable collection of divine figures, but it is important to remember that this particular statue was intended to be movable, which explains its moderate size and sizeable circular base, ideal for lifting and hoisting onto a shoulder.



Shiva Nataraja in procession. (photo: Neil Greentree, Smithsonian Institution)

Made for mobility

From the eleventh century and onwards, Hindu devotees carried these statues in processional parades as priests followed chanting prayers and bestowing blessings on people gathered for this purpose. Sometimes the statues would be adorned in resplendent red and green clothes and gold jewelry to denote the glorious human form of the gods. In these processions The *Shiva Nataraja* may have had its legs wrapped with a white and red cloth, adorned with flowers, and surrounded by candles. In a religious Hindu context, the statue is the literal embodiment of the divine. When the worshiper comes before the statue and begins to pray, faith activates the divine energy inherent in the statue, and at that moment, Shiva is present.

A bronze Shiva

Shiva constitutes a part of a powerful triad of divine energy within the cosmos of the Hindu religion. There is Brahma, the benevolent creator of the universe; there is Vishnu, the sagacious preserver; then there is Shiva, the destroyer. "Destroyer" in this sense is not an entirely negative force, but one that is expansive in its impact. In Hindu religious philosophy all things must come to a natural end so they can begin anew, and Shiva is the agent that brings about this end so that a new cycle can begin.

The Metropolitan Museum's *Shiva Nataraja* was made some time in the eleventh century during the Chola Dynasty (ninth-thirteenth centuries C.E.) in south India, in what is now the state of Tamil Nadu. One of the longest lasting empires of south India, the Chola Dynasty heralded a golden age of exploration, trade, and artistic development. A great area innovation within the arts of the Chola period was in the field of metalwork, particularly in bronze sculpture. The expanse of the Chola empire stretched south-east towards Sri Lanka and gave the kingdom access to vast copper reserves that enabled the proliferation of bronze work by skilled artisans.



Round face, almond eyes and long arms of Shiva surrounded by circle of fire (detail), Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), c. 11th century, Copper alloy, Chola period, 68.3 x 56.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

During this period a new kind of sculpture is made, one that combines the expressive qualities of stone temple carvings with the rich iconography possible in bronze casting. This image of Shiva is taken from the ancient Indian manual of visual depiction, the *Shilpa Shastras* (The Science or Rules of Sculpture), which contained a precise set of measurements and shapes for the limbs and proportions of the divine figure. Arms were to be long like stalks of bamboo, faces round like the moon, and eyes shaped like almonds or the leaves of a lotus. The *Shastras* were a primer on the ideals of beauty and physical perfection within ancient Hindu ideology.

A dance within the cosmic circle of fire

Here, Shiva embodies those perfect physical qualities as he is frozen in the moment of his dance within the cosmic circle of fire that is the simultaneous and continuous creation and destruction of the universe. The ring of fire that surrounds the figure is the encapsulated cosmos of mass, time, and space, whose endless cycle of annihilation and regeneration moves in tune to the beat of Shiva's drum and the rhythm of his steps.

In his upper right hand he holds the *damaru*, the drum whose beats syncopate the act of creation and the passage of time.



Shiva's upper left hand holding the agni, the flame of destruction (detail), Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), c. 11th century, Copper alloy, Chola period, 68.3 x 56.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

His lower right hand with his palm raised and facing the viewer is lifted in the gesture of the *abhaya mudra*, which says to the supplicant, "Be not afraid, for those who follow the path of righteousness will have my blessing."
Shiva's lower left hand stretches diagonally across his chest with his palm facing down towards his raised left foot, which signifies spiritual grace and fulfillment through meditation and mastery over one's baser appetites.

In his upper left hand he holds the *agni* (image left), the flame of destruction that annihilates all that the sound of the *damaru* has drummed into existence.



Shiva's foot on Apasmara (detail), Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), c. 11th century, Copper alloy, Chola period, 68.3 x 56.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Shiva's right foot stands upon the huddled dwarf, the demon Apasmara, the embodiment of ignorance.

Shiva's hair, the long hair of the yogi, streams out across the space within the halo of fire that constitutes the universe. Throughout this entire process of chaos and renewal, the face of the god remains tranquil, transfixed in what the historian of South Asian art Heinrich Zimmer calls, "the mask of god's eternal essence."

Beyond grace there is perfection

The supple and expressive quality of the dancing Shiva is one of the touchstones of South Asian, and indeed, world sculpture. When the French sculptor Auguste Rodin saw some photographs of the eleventh century bronze *Shiva Nataraja* in the Madras Museum around 1915, he wrote that it seemed to him the "perfect expression of rhythmic movement in the world." In an essay he wrote that was published in 1921 he wrote that the *Shiva Nataraja* has "what many people cannot see—the unknown depths, the core of life. There is grace in elegance, but beyond grace there is perfection." The English philosopher Aldous Huxley said in an interview in 1961 that the Hindu image of god as a dancer is unlike anything he had seen in Western art. "We don't have anything that approaches the symbolism of this work of art, which is both cosmic and psychological."

The eloquent bronze statue of the *Shiva Nataraja*, despite the impact of its formal beauty on Rodin who knew little of its background, is incomplete without an understanding of its symbolism and religious significance. Bronzes of the Chola period such as *Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja)* arose out of a need to transmute the divine into a physical embodiment of beauty.



Shiva's tranquil expression with long hair streaming (detail), Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), c. 11th century, Copper alloy, Chola period, 68.3 x 56.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

203. Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace

Dr. Hannah Sigur



Burning Palace (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

It is hard to imagine an image of war that matches the visceral and psychological power of the *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*. This thirteenth-century portrayal of a notorious incident from a century earlier appears on a hand scroll (a hand scroll is meant to be held and unrolled section by section horizontally in contrast to a scroll that is intended to be hung and is vertically oriented), a common East Asian painting format in Japan called an *emaki*. It also is a prime example of the action-packed *otoko-e*, "men's paintings," created in the Kamakura period (1185-1333, initiated by the Shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo and marked the beginning of feudal Japan and the samurai caste).



Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace fully unrolled (right side above, left side below), Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Designed to be unrolled in sections for close-up viewing, it shows the basic features of this pictorial form: a bird's eye view of action moves right-to-left (between a written introduction and conclusion). In vibrant outline and washes of color, the story (one event in an insurrection—more on this below) unfolds sequentially, so the main characters appear multiple times. The attention to detail is so exact that historians consider it a uniquely valuable reference for this period: from the royal mansion's walled gateways, unpainted wooden buildings linked by corridors, bark roofs, large shutters and bamboo blinds that open to verandas, to the scores of foot soldiers, cavalry, courtiers, priests, imperial police, and even the occasional lady—each individualized by gesture and facial expression from horror to morbid humor, robes, armor, and weaponry easily identifiable according to rank, design, and type.



Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace without framing text, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Unfurled this work stands apart. Its now-forgotten artist used the expressive potential of the long, narrow *emaki* format with such interpretive brilliance that he perhaps considered that on occasion it might be fully open. He organized a jumble of minutiae into a cohesive narrative arc.



Opening text and ox cart (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Beginning from a point of ominous calm, a single ox carriage transports the eye to a tangle of shoving and colliding carts and warriors. With escalating violence, the energy pulses, swells, and then rushes to a crescendo of graphic hand-to-hand mayhem—decapitations, stabbings and hacking, the battle's apex marked at the center by the palace rooflines slashing through the havoc like a bolt of lightening followed by an explosion of billowing flame and women fleeing for their lives amid the din.



Palace (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The chaos ebbs as victors and dazed survivors stream through the rear gate, and ends in grisly, surreal calm with the dressed and tagged heads of vanquished nobles on pikes, a disorderly cluster of foot soldiers and cavalry surrounding the ox carriage, their general trotting before them in victorious satisfaction over the smoking wreckage and bloody atrocity left behind.



Warriors enter palace below a zig-zag roofline (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The *Night Attack at Sanjô Palace*arrests even the casual viewer with its sheer comprehensibility. Although the artist would likely not have imagined an audience beyond the world he knew, his vision has enthralled viewers across centuries and cultures, making this painting not only among the very finest picture scrolls ever conceived but also among the most gripping depictions of warfare—creating an irresistible urge to examine the work closely. But in depicting an event that really happened, it comes fully to life only when we know something of what it so vividly portrays.



One of numerous violent confrontations within the palace (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

This begins in a brief introduction to a complicated yet fascinating chapter in Japanese history. Incredibly, the appalling incident at Sanjô Palace depicted on the scroll was but one chapter in the vicious Heiji Insurrection of 1159-60. This short war, with two other famous conflicts before and after, punctuated a brutal epoch that came to a close in 1192 with the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate (refers to the rule of a military leader; shōgun warlords ruled Japan from 1192 until 1867 though they were, in theory, appointed by the emperor. Their rule is known as the shogunate). The stories of these flashpoints of blood thirst, collectively called *gunki monogatari*, or "war tales," have inspired a huge body of art over the centuries. *The Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace,* once part of a larger set that pictorialized the entire Heiji incident, survives with two other scrolls, one of them only in remnants.

Stories of romanticized martial derring-do, *gunki monogatari* are history recounted by the victors. They celebrate Japan's change from a realm controlled by a royal court to one ruled by samurai. But the events originated in the unusual, even unique, nature of Japan's

imperial world. Centered in the city of Kyôto, in some ways it resembled many ancient kingdoms. It was prey to shifting loyalties, betrayals, and factional divisions among ambitious families who would stop at nothing in the quest for power. As elsewhere, emperors had several consorts, and noble daughters served as tools in political marriages to elevate the power of their families, and above all their clan head.



First half (above) and second half (below) of the handscroll, Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace (detail, left half), Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Unusually, a few patriarchs managed over time to displace imperial authority, relegating emperors to stultifying ceremonial functions. And possibly uniquely, Japanese emperors found a way to reclaim some of that lost power: by abdicating in favor of a successor. Freed from onerous rituals, a "retired" emperor could assert himself. Which prince from which wife of which current or previous emperor would succeed to the throne stood highest among the disputes. By the twelfth century, nobles, as well as current and retired emperors, had all turned to samurai clans to resolve their bitter rivalries.



Fire (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The cast of characters in the *Night Attack at the Sanjô Palace* came from this treacherous world. Sanjô Palace was the home of former Emperor Go-Shirakawa, known for a career as the wiliest and longest-lived of retired royals. He had recently abdicated in favor of his son Emperor Nijô. The two emperors backed vying sides of the Fujiwara clan, a conspiratorial family unsurpassed in subjugating and sometimes choosing a succession of emperors. One member of this clan, Fujiwara no Nobuyori,[1] plotted against everyone. The Taira and the Minamoto clans served powerful interests in all of these disputes, while also pursuing their own ambitions as bitter rivals of the other.



Dead archer (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Simply put the Night Attack was part of Fujiwara no Nobuyori's bid to seize power by abducting both the emperor and the retired emperor. Backed by Minamoto no Yoshitomo, head of that clan, Nobuyori saw an opportunity when the head of the Taira clan, who supported Emperor Nijō, left Kyōto on a pilgrimage. The *emaki* depicts the seizing of the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa. Three key elements appear multiple times, orienting the eye and organizing the sweep of events: guided by a groom inside, the elegant ox carriage that will carry off Go-Shirakawa opens the action.



Tumult at the palace gate, note the two women (top left) distinguished by flowing hair and aided by an attendent, fleeing the battle as fast as their voluminous robes will allow (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

We see it knocked about with others in the crush of fighting at the palace wall, on the veranda where Nobuyori in colorful armor orders Go-Shirakawa into it, and finally in the surge of departing victors where two soldiers lolling on top lending an air of indignity and insult to the monarch. Nobuyori, now in court robes and on horseback, appears in front, glancing back at the carriage. A mounted Minamoto Yoshitomo, distinguished by red armor and a distinctive horned helmet, appears twice—behind the carriage as it crashes onto the veranda, and brandishing a bow and arrow, cantering behind it in the departing crowd.



Palace gate (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace (detail, left center), Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The remainder of the Heiji Rebellion story appeared on other *emaki* in the set, now mostly lost: the kidnapping of Emperor Nijô, the slaughter of another noble household, Nobuyori forcing Nijô to appoint him chancellor, Taira Kiyomori's return to decimate the schemers, and finally Kiyomori's mistake—banishing rather than executing several of Minamoto sons. Minamoto no Yoritomo and his brother Yoshitsune would return years later to destroy the Taira clan in the Gempei War and found the first of four military governments of the Shōgunate that ruled Japan from 1192 until 1867. Emperors and nobles remained in Kyoto, but were politically powerless. Feudal culture came to a violent end in 1868 at the hands of other samurai clans. They brought the young emperor Meiji into a new role as the monarch (really a figurehead) of a modern nation. Over the Meiji era's early tumultuous decades many spectacular works of art left Japan to join important collections in the West. The *Night Attack at Sanjô Palace*, once owned by a powerful samurai family, came into the possession of an influential American who brought it home to Boston. It has been a highlight of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston since 1889.

[1] Japanese surnames come first and given names come second. Fujiwara and Taira are surnames. The Chinese characters used have different pronunciations that can appear at different times. "Minamoto" can be "Genji;" "Taira" can be "Heike."



Closing sequence (detail), Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

204. The David Vases (Yuan dynasty)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the galleries of the British Museum in London.



The David Vases, 1351 (Yuan dynasty), porcelain, cobalt and clear glaze, 63.6 x 20.7 cm each, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, China (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/fNLPwf>

Steven: On May 13, 1351, two vases and an incense burner were dedicated to a Daoist temple in China…

Beth: …by a man who had these made specifically for this purpose and had his name, date, and the purpose of this dedication inscribed right on the vases themselves. These were an offering to this temple in honor of a general who had recently been made a god.

Steven: I love that we have all of this specific information. In art history, we so often have to guess the year, and here, we have the exact *day*.

Beth: This is something rather familiar to us: we still make dedications, we still make offerings.

Steven: We've lost the incense burner, but we do have the two vases, and now we're looking at them in the British Museum in London.

Beth: Right, they're known as the David Vases, after Sir Percival David, the collector who purchased them and amassed this amazing collection of about 1500 Chinese ceramics and brought these two vases, which belong together, back together again.

Steven: They're fairly tall and they are an archetype of what we think of Chinese ceramics in the west. This is blue and white porcelain.

Beth: Porcelain is a very specific kind of ceramic that's very lustrous.

Steven: It's made from a very pure kind of clay. We get the word "porcelain" from the Venetian explorer, Marco Polo, who went to China during this very period. Apparently, when he saw porcelain and its hard white surface, he thought it looked like the inside of a seashell. The word porcelain is very close to the Italian word for a cowry shell (*porcellana*).

Beth: The deed is 1351; China was part of the vast Mongol Empire that stretched from China in the east to what we think of today as eastern Europe.

Steven: So often we use the word China to refer, not to the country, but to porcelain material. That's because China produced an enormous amount of porcelain for export. What's interesting is that the Chinese produced products for export with the local markets that they were selling to in mind.



The David Vases, 1351 (Yuan dynasty), porcelain, cobalt and clear glaze, 63.6 x 20.7 cm each, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, China (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/fNucBP>

Beth: In fact, we think about this kind of blue and white China as quintessentially Chinese, but as it turns out history is always a lot more complicated because at this point, China was actually part of the Mongol Empire, also known as the Yuan Dynasty. Porcelain is white, but the blue is from a mineral called cobalt, from what is present-day Iran.

Steven: The cobalt is painted on the white porcelain, which is this very pure clay, and then the entire thing is covered with a clear glaze which helps to give it this great sense of luminosity.

Beth: Then it's fired at a very high temperature so it becomes like glass, unlike typical ceramics or earthenware.

Steven: The Chinese had kilns that were technologically far advanced of anything in the west or even in the near east.

Beth: While we might think about this as very Chinese, this is actually the result of a global Mongol Empire and the interaction of China and Iran.

Steven: In fact, some scholars think that the blue and white motif itself was not only based on the material from Iran, but was based on the taste of the local markets in Iran, and that these pots were made for export.

Beth: Although in this case, it was made for a temple in China.

Steven: Near the principal production center for porcelain.

Beth: So while we might think about blue and white China as from the period of the Ming dynasty, later than this, these vases help us to date blue and white porcelain to the period before the Ming dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty.

Steven: Let's take a look at the vases themselves. They're about two-and-a-half feet tall, and they're covered with motifs that we think of as typical for Chinese ceramics. Most prominently on both vases, right at the shoulder is a great dragon, the serpentine form.



The David Vases, 1351 (Yuan dynasty), porcelain, cobalt and clear glaze, 63.6 x 20.7 cm each, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, China (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/fNLQ5L>

Beth: Then around the base, we see a vine and floral motif. We see that again just above the dragon motif and again at the very top.

Steven: The neck of the vase is divided into two parts. The bottom part includes a phoenix and then the top part leaves, but interspersed between the leaves is the inscription that helps us date this to the Yuan Dynasty and specifically to May 13. The handles are elephants, and although this is ceramic, the design seems to come from bronze ware. In a bronze vessel, you'd normally have a ring that hangs down from the handle. You can see that there was probably a ring here originally—it was attached to the elephant's trunk, you can see the break marks. So, these are not in perfect condition, although they are in awfully good condition.

Beth: Considering that they date from 1351…

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/lfIHzumEghQ>.

205. Portrait of Sin Sukju

Dr. Kristen Chiem

Portrait paintings commemorated the sitter in both life and death in Joseon dynasty, Korea (the Joseon, or Yi dynasty, was founded in 1392 by the military leader Yi Song-gye and lasted until 1910; it was the last imperial dynasty and the longest in the history of Korea). This painting depicts Sin Sukju (1417-75) as a "meritorious subject," or an official honored for his distinguished service at court and loyalty to the king during a tumultuous time. Skilled in capturing the likeness of the sitter while still adhering to pictorial conventions, artists in the Royal Bureau of Painting (a government agency staffed with artists) created portraits of officials awarded this honorary title. These paintings would be cherished by their families and worshiped for generations to follow.

A meritorious portrait

This painting shows Sin Sukju dressed in his official robes with a black silk hat on his head. In accordance with Korean portraiture conventions, court artists pictured subjects like Sin Sukju seated in a full-length view, often with their heads turned slightly and only one ear showing. Crisp, angular lines and subtle gradations of color characterize the folds of his gown. Here, the subject is seated in a folding chair with cabriole-style arms, where the upper part is convex and the bottom part is concave. Leather shoes adorn his feet, which rest on an intricately carved wooden footstool. In proper decorum, his hands are folded neatly and concealed within his sleeves. He wears a rank badge on his chest.

Rank badges are insignia typically made of embroidered silk. They indicate the status of the official, which could be anyone from the emperor down to a local official. As in Ming-dynasty China (1368–1644), images of birds on rank badges precisely identified the rank of the wearer. Here, Sin Sukju's rank badge shows a pair of peacocks amongst flowering plants and clouds. It is an auspicious scene suiting a civic official, and especially luminous with the use of gold embroidery. Crafted in sets, rank badges were worn on both the front and back of the official overcoat.

Physical likeness

Although portraiture conventions, such as the attire and posture of the sitter, were quite formulaic, the facial features were painted with the goal of transmitting a sense of unique, physical likeness. This careful attention to the sitter's face, such as wrinkles and bone structure, served the Korean belief that the face could reveal important clues about the subject.



Portrait of Sin Sukju, second half of the 15th century, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 167 x 109.5 cm, Goryeong Sin Family Collection, Cheongwon, Treasure no. 613.



Portrait of Sin Sukju (detail), second half of the 15th century, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 167 x 109.5 cm, Goryeong Sin Family Collection, Cheongwon, Treasure no. 613.

Look carefully and you might notice the wrinkles around the edges of Sin Sukju's eyes ("crow's feet"). His thin, almond-shaped eyes are bright and clear, and his mouth is surrounded by deep grooves where his mustache meets his chin. His solemn visage exudes wisdom and dignity.



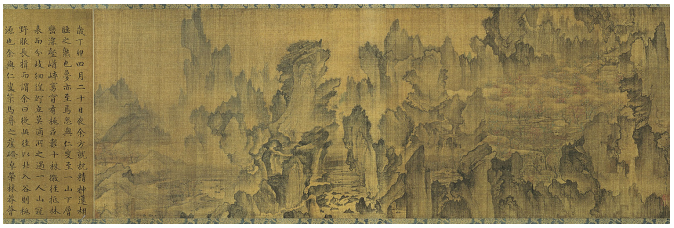
Portrait of Sin Sukju (detail), second half of the 15th century, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 167 x 109.5 cm, Goryeong Sin Family Collection, Cheongwon, Treasure no. 613.

The meticulous brushwork on Sin Sukju's face is even more striking in comparison with the solid, undulating lines and bold blocks of color that define his attire. Highly skilled artists at the court may have collaborated on portraits, such that one artist may have painted the robes according to the prescribed rank or title, while another may have painted the face in great detail. Later portraits developed this interest in the face even further with the use of Western painting techniques introduced to Korea by Jesuit missionaries in China in the eighteenth century.

Sin Sukju and Hwagi

Sin Sukju was an eminent scholar and a powerful politician who rose to the rank of Prime Minister. Named a meritorious subject four times in his life, he served both King Sejong and King Sejo. Remarkably, he managed to maintain court favor through the tumult of King Sejo's coup in 1453. In the course of capturing the throne, King Sejo arrested and killed his own brother, Prince Anpyeong, who Sin Sukju had also served until the prince's untimely death.

It was his service to Prince Anpyeong that earned Sin Sukju a significant place in the history of art. In 1445, Sin Sukju compiled *Hwagi (Commentaries on Painting)*, which contains a catalogue of Prince Anpyeong's collection of paintings. Sin Sukju's detailed records revealed the prince's interest in Chinese paintings and his patronage of the Joseon court painter, An Gyeon, who was professionally active as an artist for 30 years beginning in approximately 1440. Sin Sukju's commentaries have helped scholars to identify specific works and prompted speculation on the cultural exchange between China and Korea.



An Gyeon, Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land, 1447, handscroll with ink and light color on silk, 38.6 x 106.2 cm, Tenri Central Library, Tenri University, Nara, Japan

Ancestral worship

In addition to the virtue of loyalty (such as the devotion of a subject to his ruler), Confucianism (Confucianism is named after Kong Qiu—later given the Latinized name Confucius—who lived from approximately 551 until 479 B.C.E. Confucianism is a philosophical system that stresses a moral and ethical order. the teachings of Kong Qiu have had an immense impact on Chinese culture for more than two millennium) emphasized filial piety, or honor and respect for one's elders and ancestors. Even more important than recording the sitter's appearance and preserving his rank during life, portrait painting served as a focus for ancestral rituals after his death. It was thought that when a person died, the soul of the deceased remained among the world of the living until it gradually dissipated. Rendered in the format of a hanging scroll, this painting likely hung within the family shrine to guide the soul in the practice of ancestral worship. In this way, *Portrait of Sin Sukju* reflected both the honor that Sin Sukju brought to his lineage as a meritorious official as well as Confucian beliefs about the afterlife.

206. Forbidden City (China)

Dr. Ying-chen Peng



View of the Tongzi moat surrounding the Forbidden City, Beijing

The Forbidden City is a large precinct of red walls and yellow glazed roof tiles located in the heart of China's capital, Beijing. As its name suggests, the precinct is a micro-city in its own right. Measuring 961 meters in length and 753 meters in width, the Forbidden City is composed of more than 90 palace compounds including 98 buildings and surrounded by a moat as wide as 52 meters.



Aerial view of the Forbidden City (Imperial Palace Museum), Beijing, 15th century and later, Google Earth ©2015 Google



One of two enormous bronze Ming Dynasty lions guarding the Gate of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City (Imperial Palace Museum)

The Forbidden City was the political and ritual center of China for over 500 years. After its completion in 1420, the Forbidden City was home to 24 emperors, their families and servants during the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. The last occupant (who was also the last emperor of imperial China), Puyi (1906–67), was expelled in 1925 when the precinct was transformed into the Palace Museum. Although it is no longer an imperial precinct, it remains one of the most important cultural heritage sites and the most visited museum in the People's Republic of China, with an average of eighty thousand visitors every day.

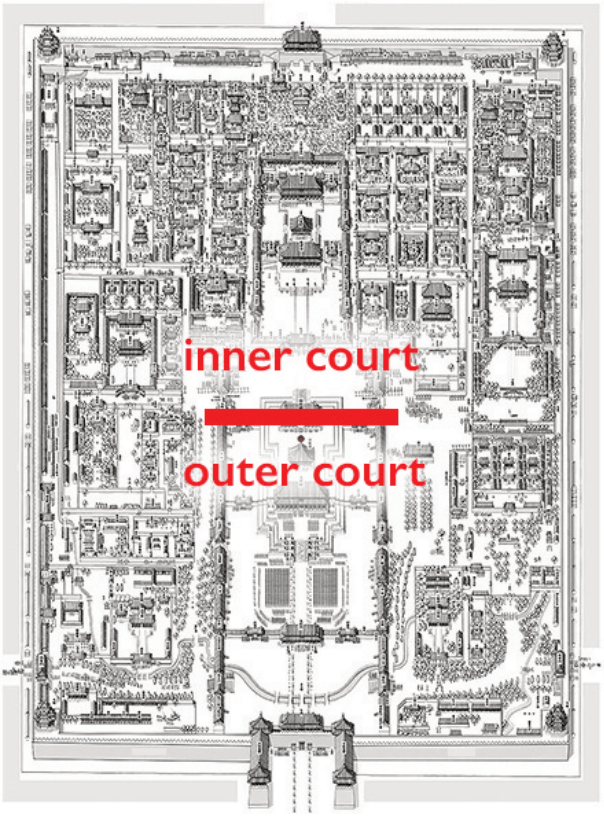
Construction and layout

The construction of the Forbidden City was the result of a scandalous coup d'état plotted by Zhu Di, the fourth son of the Ming dynasty's founder Zhu Yuanzhang, that made him the Chengzu emperor (his official title) in 1402. In order to solidify his power, the Chengzu emperor moved the capital, as well as his own army, from Nanjing in southeastern China to Beijing and began building a new heart of the empire, the Forbidden City.



Carved, painted dragons, lintel, Forbidden City (Imperial Palace Museum)

The establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1644 did not lessen the Forbidden City's pivotal status, as the Manchu imperial family continued to live and rule there. While no major change has been made since its completion, the precinct has undergone various renovations and minor constructions well into the twenty-first century. Since the Forbidden City is a ceremonial, ritual and living space, the architects who designed its layout followed the ideal cosmic order in Confucian ideology that had held Chinese social structure together for centuries. This layout ensured that all activities within this micro-city were conducted in the manner appropriate to the participants' social and familial roles. All activities, such as imperial court ceremonies or life-cycle rituals, would take place in sophisticated palaces depending on the events' characteristics. Similarly, the court determined the occupants of the Forbidden City strictly according to their positions in the imperial family.



The architectural style also reflects a sense of hierarchy. Each structure was designed in accordance with the *Treatise on Architectural Methods or State Building Standards* (*Yingzao fashi*), an eleventh-century manual that specified particular designs for buildings of different ranks in Chinese social structure.



View of the Meridian Gate from outside the Forbidden City (Imperial Palace Museum)

Public and private life

Public and domestic spheres are clearly divided in the Forbidden City. The southern half, or the outer court, contains spectacular palace compounds of supra-human scale. This outer court belonged to the realm of state affairs, and only men had access to its spaces. It included the emperor's formal reception halls, places for religious rituals and state ceremonies, and also the Meridian Gate (Wumen) located at the south end of the central axis that served as the main entrance.

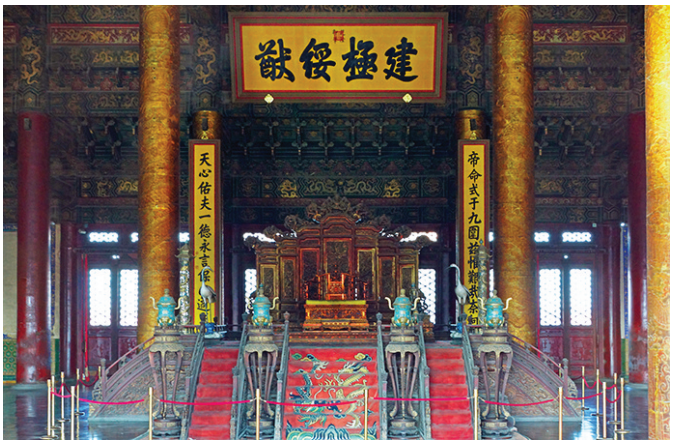


Looking to the Meridian Gate from the north (Imperial Palace Museum) (photo: inkelv112, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8paUt7>

Upon passing the Meridian Gate, one immediately enters an immense courtyard paved with white marble stones in front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian). Since the Ming dynasty, officials gathered in front of the Meridian Gate before 3 a.m., waiting for the emperor's reception to start at 5 a.m.



View of the Hall of Supreme Harmony from the south (Imperial Palace Museum)



Throne, Hall of Supreme Harmony

While the outer court is reserved for men, the inner court is the domestic space, dedicated to the imperial family. The inner court includes the palaces in the northern part of the Forbidden City. Here, three of the most important palaces align with the city's central axis: the emperor's residence known as the Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong) is located to the south while the empress's residence, the Palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunninggong), is to the north. The Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union (Jiaotaidian), a smaller square building for imperial weddings and familial ceremonies, is sandwiched in between.



Left: Palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunninggong) Center: Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union (Jiaotaidian) Right: Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong)

Although the Palace of Heavenly Purity was a grand palace building symbolizing the emperor's supreme status, it was too large for conducting private activities comfortably. Therefore, after the early eighteenth-century Qing emperor, Yongzheng, moved his residence to the smaller Hall of Mental Cultivation (Yangxindian) to the west of the main axis, the Palace of Heavenly Purity became a space for ceremonial use and all subsequent emperors resided in the Hall of Mental Cultivation.



Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union (Jiaotaidian)

The residences of the emperor's consorts flank the three major palaces in the inner court. Each side contains six identical, walled palace compounds, forming the shape of K'un "☷," one of the eight trigrams of ancient Chinese philosophy. It is the symbol of mother and earth, and thus is a metaphor for the proper feminine roles the occupants of these palaces should play. Such architectural and philosophical symmetry, however, fundamentally changed when the empress dowager Cixi (1835-1908) renovated the Palace of Eternal Spring (Changchungong) and the Palace of Gathered Elegance (Chuxiugong) in the west part of the inner court for her fortieth and fiftieth birthday in 1874 and 1884, respectively. The renovation transformed the original layout of six palace compounds into four, thereby breaking the shape of the symbolic trigram and implying the loosened control of Chinese patriarchal authority at the time.



Aerial view of the north end of the Forbidden City (Imperial Palace Museum) looking south, Google Earth ©2015 Google

The eastern and western sides of the inner court were reserved for the retired emperor and empress dowager. The emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–96) built his post-retirement palace, the Hall of Pleasant Longevity (Leshoutang), in the northeast corner of the Forbidden City. It was the last major construction in the imperial precinct. In addition to these palace compounds for the older generation, there are also structures for the imperial family's religious activities in the east and west sides of the inner court, such as Buddhist and Daoist temples built during the Ming dynasty. The Manchus preserved most of these structures but also added spaces for their own shamanic beliefs.



Scholar's Rock, Imperial garden

The Forbidden City now

Today, the Forbidden City is still changing. As a modern museum and a historical site, the museum strikes a balance by maintaining the structures and restoring the interiors of the palace compounds, and in certain instances transforming minor palace buildings and hallways into exhibition galleries for the exquisite artwork of the imperial collections. For many, the Forbidden City is a time capsule for China's past and an educational institute for the public to learn and appreciate the history and beauty of this ancient culture.

207. Ryoan-ji (Japan)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in Kyoto, Japan at the temple complex of Ryoanji.



Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple), dry rock garden, study and grounds, Kyoto, Japan. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/K829He>

Steven: We've made our way up a steep hillside on the north end of Kyoto, and we've entered into the temple complex of Ryoanji.

Beth: When we entered the temple, we were asked to take off our shoes. We're in a spiritual space, but also one that tourists are making their way through. The complex consists of many temples and shrines and places of meditation for the monks who lived here, but this is specifically a place related to Zen Buddhism. The most famous place within is the rock garden, and that's where we're standing now.

Steven: You can see the garden as a distillation of the ideas of Zen Buddhism and of the highly refined sense of Japanese aesthetics. This is such a refined space. We see an enclosed courtyard filled with light-gray stones with a series of moss islands from which rocks protrude.

Beth: When we think of a garden, we think of flowers. We might think of a water-feature, the informality of an English garden, the rigid geometry of a French garden, but a zen garden is to encourage meditation. In fact the word zen means meditation.

Steven: The central idea of Buddhism is cultivating oneself for reaching enlightenment. A garden is an attempt to cultivate nature, to bring out its essential qualities.

Beth: For Buddha, the world was a place of suffering and desire was the cause of suffering. The goal is to transcend that suffering to transcend the cycle of rebirth—of samsara—and in Zen Buddhism, the path is sudden enlightenment that comes through meditation.

Steven: Nature is looked at carefully—its innate qualities, its imperfection, its inherent forms—and that becomes the starting point. The idea is not to erase nature and make something that's perfect; the idea is rather to examine something, to understand its qualities, and then to enhance them.

Beth: Finding beauty in what is worn, what is aged. When we look around the edges of the rock garden, of this enclosure, we see a wall that hasn't been recently painted—it's worn.



Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple), dry rock garden, Kyoto, Japan. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/K829He>

Steven: That creates this atmospheric quality that makes the entire garden reminiscent of a Japanese painting where the rocks function as mountains and the two-dimensional wall functions as an atmospheric space. In the study area for the abbot that is just adjacent to the garden, there are paintings that show rocky crags emerging out of a sea of mist. It's a perfect reflection of the garden itself.



Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple), study area, Kyoto, Japan (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/JiuVHG>

Beth: Well, it's more beautiful in a Japanese aesthetic to not see a perfect view of the mountain on a perfectly, clear day, but rather for the mountain to be obscured by the mist. There's an opening for interpretation for the suggestive for—

Steven: Surprise.

Beth: For things that are half there, half hidden, and as we move through the garden, our view shifts. The numbers of rocks that we see shift. That idea of never seeing the whole, but instead, of the appreciation for the incomplete, is here.



Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple), rock garden, Kyoto, Japan (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/KeYxqX>

Steven: The pebbles have been raked into a very deliberate pattern, one that emphasizes the horizontal. It slows our eyes down. Ovoid shapes frame each of the individual islands, the waves of the sea.

Beth: The analogy of water—and it also suggests to me, in its sparseness, when the stuff of the world came to being out of nothingness.

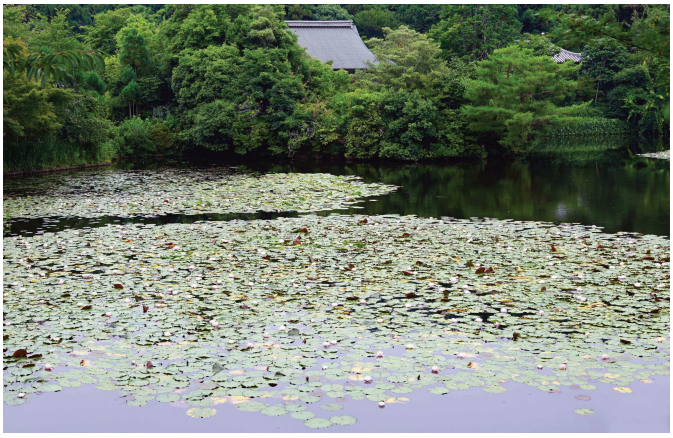
Steven: This is a garden that's meant to insight enlightenment that could come to you at any moment. Even on this cloudy, slightly rainy day, the garden is bright and feels dry. Just immediately to its right is a densely forested rectangle, slightly smaller than the rock garden. It is completely carpeted with green moss, and it's such a relief for the eye.



Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple), grounds, Kyoto, Japan (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/KeYtpR>

Beth: This is all about our eye, awakening our eyes, asking us to look, asking us to pay attention, and the very act of paying attention takes us out of our everyday lives, and takes us to a place of heightened awareness of standing apart from things, and in that way, helping to prepare the path for enlightenment.

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/WfZe2NLKEns>.



Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple), grounds, Kyoto, Japan. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/JiuMg1>

208. Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings

Roshna Kapadia



Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Seizer of the world

When Akbar, the third Emperor of the Mughal dynasty, had no living heir at age 28, he consulted with a Sufi (an Islamic mystic), Shaikh Salim, who assured him a son would come. Soon after, when a male child was born, he was named Salim. Upon his ascent to the throne in 1605, Prince Salim decided to give himself the honorific title of Nur ud-Din ("Light of Faith") and the name Jahangir ("Seizer of the World").

In this miniature painting, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, flames of gold radiate from the Emperor's head against a background of a larger, darker gold disc. A slim crescent moon hugs most of the disc's border, creating a harmonious fusion between the sun and the moon (thus, day and night), and symbolizing the ruler's emperorship and divine truth.



Emperor with halo (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Jahangir is shown seated on an elevated, stone-studded platform whose circular form mimics the disc above. The Emperor is the biggest of the five human figures painted, and the disc with his halo—a visual manifestation of his title of honor—is the largest object in this painting.



Emperor on a pedestal (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Jahangir favors a holy man over kings

Jahangir faces four bearded men of varying ethnicity, who stand in a receiving-line format on a blue carpet embellished with arabesque flower designs and fanciful beast motifs. Almost on par with the Emperor's level stands the Sufi Shaikh, who accepts the gifted book, a hint of a smile brightening his face. By engaging directly only with the Shaikh, Jahangir is making a statement about his spiritual leanings. Inscriptions in the cartouches on the top and bottom margins of the folio reiterate the fact that the Emperor favors visitation with a holy man over an audience with kings.



From top to bottom, in order of importance, Ottoman Sultan, King James I of England, and the artist Bichitr (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Below the Shaikh, and thus, second in the hierarchical order of importance stands an Ottoman Sultan. The unidentified leader, dressed in gold-embroidered green clothing and a turban tied in a style that distinguishes him as a foreigner, looks in the direction of the throne, his hands joined in respectful supplication.

The third standing figure awaiting a reception with the Emperor has been identified as King James I of England. By his European attire—plumed hat worn at a tilt; pink cloak; a fitted shirt with lace ruff; and elaborate jewelry—he appears distinctive. His uniquely frontal posture and direct gaze also make him appear indecorous and perhaps even uneasy.

Last in line is Bichitr, the artist responsible for this miniature, shown wearing an understated yellow jama (robe) tied on his left, which indicates that he is a Hindu in service at the Mughal court—a reminder that artists who created Islamic art were not always Muslim.

This miniature folio was once a part of a muraqqa', or album, which would typically have had alternating folios containing calligraphic text and painting. In all, six such albums are attributed to the rule of Jahangir and his heir, Shah Jahan. But the folios, which vary greatly in subject matter, have now been widely dispersed over collections across three continents.

During Mughal rule artists were singled out for their special talents—some for their detailed work in botanical paintings; others for naturalistic treatment of fauna; while some artists were lauded for their calligraphic skills. In recent scholarship, Bichitr's reputation is strong in formal portraiture, and within this category, his superior rendering of hands.



Shaikh's bare hands and the bejeweled hands of Jahangir (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Jahangir and the Shaikh

Clear to the observer is the stark contrast between Jahangir's gem-studded wrist bracelets and finger rings and the Shaikh's bare hands, the distinction between rich and poor, and the pursuit of material and spiritual endeavors. Less clear is the implied deference to the Emperor by the elderly Shaikh's decision to accept the imperial gift not directly in his hands, but in his shawl (thereby avoiding physical contact with a royal personage, a cultural taboo). A similar principle is at work in the action of the Sultan who presses his palms together in a respectful gesture. By agreeing to adopt the manner of greeting of the foreign country in which he is a guest, the Ottoman leader exhibits both respect and humility.

King James

King James' depiction is slightly more complex: Bichitr based his image of the English monarch on a portrait by John de Crtiz, which is believed to have been given to Jahangir by Sir Thomas Roe, the first English Ambassador to the Mughal court (this was a way to cement diplomatic relations and gifted items went both ways, east, and west). In Bichitr's miniature, only one of King James's hands can be seen, and it is worth noting that it has been positioned close to—but not touching—the hilt of his weapon. Typically, at this time, portraits of European Kings depicted one hand of the monarch resting on his hip, and the other on his sword. Thus, we can speculate that Bichitr deliberately altered the positioning of the king's hand to avoid an interpretation of a threat to his Emperor.



King James I of England (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

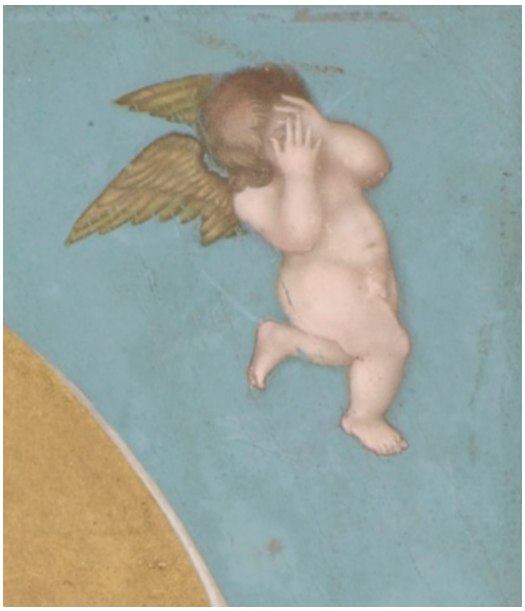
A self-portrait

Finally, the artist paints himself holding a red-bordered miniature painting as though it were a prized treasure. In this tiny painting-within-a-painting, Bichitr replicates his yellow jama (a man's robe)—perhaps to clarify his identity—and places himself alongside two horses and an elephant, which may have been imperial gifts. He shows himself bowing in the direction of his Emperor in humble gratitude. To underscore his humility, Bichitr puts his signature on the stool over which the Emperor's feet would have to step in order to take his seat.



Angels at Jahangir's pedestal (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Putti and other (more mysterious) figures



Crying putto (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Beneath Jahangir's seat, crouching angels write (in Persian), "O Shah, May the Span of Your Life be a Thousand Years," at the base of a mighty hourglass that makes up the pedestal of Jahangir's throne. This reading is a clear allusion to the passage of time, but the putti figures (borrowed from European iconography) suspended in mid-air toward the top of the painting provide few clues as to their purpose or meaning.

Facing away from the Emperor, the putto on the left holds a bow with a broken string and a bent arrow, while the one on the right covers his face with his hands. Does he shield his eyes from the Emperor's radiance, as some scholars believe? Or as others suggest, is he crying because time is running out for the Emperor (as represented in the slipping sand in the hourglass)?



Kneeling figure at base of footstool (detail), Bichitr, Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 18 x 25.3 cm (Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Also cryptic is the many-headed kneeling figure that forms the base of Jahangir's footstool. Questions remain as to who these auxiliary figures are and what they or their actions represent.

Allegorical portraits were a popular painting genre among Jahangir's court painters from 1615. To flatter their Emperor, Jahangir's artists portrayed him in imagined victories over rivals and enemies or painted events reflecting imperial desire. Regardless of whether Jahangir actually met the Shaikh or was visited by a real Ottoman Sultan (King James I certainly did not visit the Mughal court), Bichitr has dutifully indulged his patron's desire to be seen as powerful ruler (in a position of superiority to other kings), but with a spiritual bent. While doing so, the artist has also cleverly taken the opportunity to immortalize himself.

209. Taj Mahal (India)

Roshna Kapadia



Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-53 (photo: Amit Rawit , CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/LWebVU>

Shah Jahan was the fifth ruler of the Mughal dynasty. During his third regnal year, his favorite wife, known as Mumtaz Mahal, died due to complications arising from the birth of their fourteenth child. Deeply saddened, the emperor started planning the construction of a suitable, permanent resting place for his beloved wife almost immediately. The result of his efforts and resources was the creation of what was called the Luminous Tomb in contemporary Mughal texts and is what the world knows today as the Taj Mahal.

In general terms, Sunni Muslims favor a simple burial, under an open sky. But notable domed mausolea for Mughals (as well as for other Central Asian rulers) were built prior to Shah Jahan's rule, so in this regard, the Taj is not unique. The Taj is, however, exceptional for its monumental scale, stunning gardens, lavish ornamentation, and its overt use of white marble.

The location

Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal in Agra, where he took the throne in 1628. First conquered by Muslim invaders in the eleventh century, the city had been transformed into a flourishing area of trade during Shah Jahan's rule. Situated on the banks of the Yamuna River allowed for easy access to water, and Agra soon earned the reputation as a "riverfront garden city," on account of its meticulously planned gardens, lush with flowering bushes and fruit-bearing trees in the sixteenth century.



Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India (map: Uwe Dedering, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_location_map.svg>



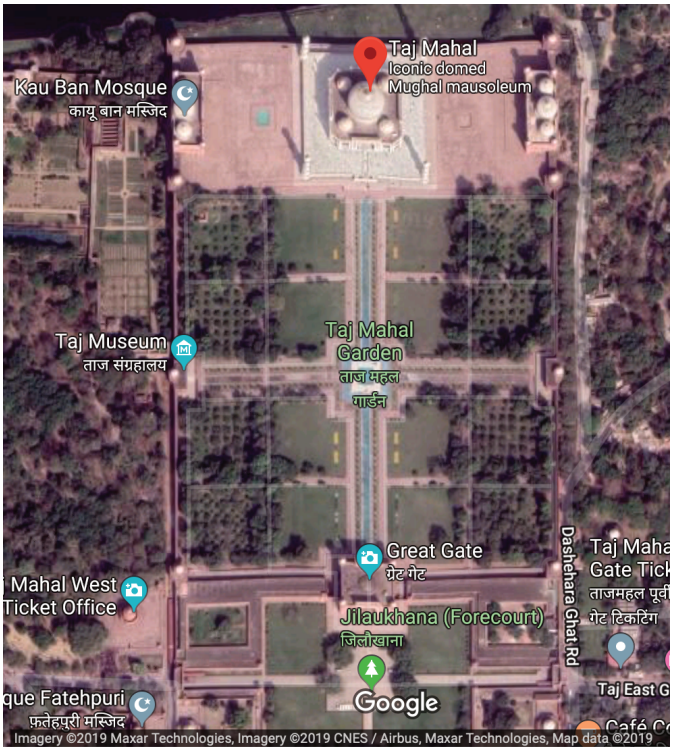
Taj Mahal and Yamuna River (photo: Louis Vest, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/68khvG>

Paradise on Earth

Entry to the Taj Mahal complex via the forecourt, which in the sixteenth century housed shops, and through a monumental gate of inlaid and highly decorated red sandstone made for a first impression of grand splendor and symmetry: aligned along a long water channel through this gate is the Taj—set majestically on a raised platform on the north end. The rectangular complex runs roughly 1860 feet on the north-south axis, and 1000 feet on the east-west axis.



Entrance, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-53



Aerial view, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-53 (© Google Earth)

The white-marble mausoleum is flanked on either side by identical buildings in red sandstone. One of these serves as a mosque, and the other, whose exact function is unknown, provides architectural balance.

The marble structure is topped by a bulbous dome and surrounded by four minarets of equal height. While minarets in Islamic architecture are usually associated with mosques—for use by the muezzin who leads the call to prayer—here, they are not functional, but ornamental, once again underscoring the Mughal focus on structural balance and harmony.

The interior floor plan of the Taj exhibits the *hasht bishisht* (eight levels) principle, alluding to the eight levels of paradise. Consisting of eight halls and side rooms connected to the main space in a cross-axial plan—the favored design for Islamic architecture from the mid-fifteenth century—the center of the main chamber holds Mumtaz Mahal's intricately decorated marble cenotaph on a raised platform. The emperor's cenotaph was laid down beside hers after he died three decades later—both are encased in an octagon of exquisitely carved white-marble screens. The coffins bearing their remains lie in the spaces directly beneath the cenotaphs.



Cenotaphs, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-53 (photo: Derek A Young, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/aTFZwa>

Qur'anic verses inscribed into the walls of the building and designs inlaid with semi-precious stones—coral, onyx, carnelian, amethyst, and lapis lazuli—add to the splendor of the Taj's white exterior. The dominant theme of the carved imagery is floral, showing some recognizable, and other fanciful species of flowers—another link to the theme of paradise

Some of the Taj Mahal's architecture fuses aspects from other Islamic traditions, but other aspects reflect with indigenous style elements. In particular, this is evident in the umbrella-shaped ornamental chhatris (dome shaped pavillions) atop the pavilions and minarets.

And whereas most Mughal-era buildings tended to use red stone for exteriors and functional architecture (such as military buildings and forts)—reserving white marble for special inner spaces or for the tombs of holy men, the Taj's entire main structure is constructed of white marble and the auxiliary buildings are composed of red sandstone. This white-and-red color scheme of the built complex may correspond with principles laid down in ancient Hindu texts—in which white stood for purity and the priestly class, and red represented the color of the warrior class.



Carving and inlaid stone, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-53 (photo: Martin Lambie, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8bKHAL>

The gardens

Stretching in front of the Taj Mahal is a monumental char bagh garden. Typically, a char bagh was divided into four main quadrants, with a building (such as a pavilion or tomb) along its central axis. When viewed from the main gateway today, the Taj Mahal appears to deviate from this norm, as it is not centrally placed within the garden, but rather located at the end of a complex that is backed by the river, such as was found in other Mughal-era pleasure gardens.

When viewed from the Mahtab Bagh, moonlight gardens, across the river, however, the monument appears to be centrally located in a grander complex than originally thought. This view, only possible when one incorporates the Yamuna River into the complex, speaks to the brilliance of the architect. Moreover, by raising the Taj onto an elevated foundation, the builders ensured that Shah Jahan's funerary complex, as well as the tombs of other Mughal nobles along with their attached gardens, could be viewed from many angles along the river.



View from the Mahtab Bagh, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-53 (photo: Steve Evans, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/71XkLR>

The garden incorporated waterways and fountains. This was a new type of gardening that was introduced to India by Babur, Shah Jahan's great-great grandfather in the sixteenth century. Given the passage of time and the intervention of many individuals in the garden since its construction, it is hard to determine the original planting and layout scheme of the garden beds at the Taj.

From the outset, the Taj was conceived of as a building that would be remembered for its magnificence for ages to come, and to that end, the best material and skills were employed. The finest marble came from quarries 250 miles away in Makrarna, Rajasthan. Mir Abd Al-Karim was designated as the lead architect. Abdul Haqq was chosen as the calligrapher, and Ustad Ahmad Lahauri was made the supervisor. Shah Jahan made sure that the principles of Mughal architecture were incorporated into the design throughout the building process.

What the Taj Mahal represents

When Mumtaz Mahal died at age 38 in 1631, the emperor is reported to have refused to engage in court festivities, postponed two of his sons' weddings, and allegedly made frequent visits to his wife's temporary resting place (in Burhanpur) during the time it took for the building of the Taj to be completed. Stories like these have led to the Taj Mahal being referred to as an architectural "symbol of love" in popular literature. But there are other theories: one suggests that the Taj is not a funeral monument, and that Shah Jahan might have built a similar structure even if his wife had not died. Based on the metaphoric specificity of Qur'anic and other inscriptions and the emperor's love of thrones, another theory maintains that the Taj Mahal is a symbolic representation of a Divine Throne—the seat of God—on the Day of Judgment. A third view holds that the monument was built to represent a replica of a house of paradise. In the "paradisiacal mansion" theory, the Taj was something of a vanity project, built to glorify Mughal rule and the emperor himself.

If his accession to the throne was smooth, Shah Jahan's departure from it was not. The emperor died not as a ruler, but as a prisoner. Relegated to Agra Fort under house arrest for eight years prior to his death in 1666, Shah Jahan could enjoy only a distant view of the Taj Mahal. But the resplendent marble mausoleum he built "with posterity in mind" endures, more than 350 years after it was constructed, and is believed to be the most recognizable sight in the world today. Laid to rest beside his beloved wife in the Taj Mahal, the man once called Padshah—King of the World—enjoys enduring fame, too, for having commissioned the world's most extravagant and memorable mausoleum.



Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-53 (photo: LASZLO ILYES, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/4Y6SQf>

Backstory

The Taj Mahal is one of the world's great tourist attractions, hosting millions of visitors per year. Though it was designated as UNESCO World Heritage Site <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/252> in 1983 and is currently overseen by the Archaeological Survey of India, its heavy visitor traffic is just one of the many factors that threaten the integrity of the site.

One of the biggest risk factors for the Taj Mahal is air pollution, which discolors the exterior and, some experts think, causes acid rain that deteriorates the marble. Air pollution is caused by a multitude of factors including industry, vehicle emissions, and the burning of household waste. The government of India designated an area called the Taj Trapezium Zone (named for its trapezoidal shape), a 10,400 square kilometer swath (about 4,000 square miles) of Agra encompassing the Taj Mahal as well as the Agra Fort and the historic Mughal settlement of Fatehpur Sikri. Oil refineries and coal-burning industries have been ordered to regulate their emissions or switch to natural gas within this zone, and most have complied.

There has also been a ban on auto traffic near the Taj Mahal, air quality monitors have been installed, and the Archaeological Survey of India has proposed a tourist cap <https://tinyurl.com/y4svts8l> and increased fees to limit visitor impact.

Another potential risk for the Taj Mahal is the drying up of the Yamuna River, which flows along the rear of the complex. The river has been partially dammed upstream from the Taj Mahal in order to augment municipal water supplies, and some argue that the changes in the soil due to the lower water table may be threatening the structural integrity of the monument. Various

activists and scholars <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-to-save-the-taj-mahal-49355859/> have claimed to have found cracks in the marble platform, sinking of the structure, and tipping of the minarets, though UNESCO <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/252> asserts that

> The physical fabric is in good condition and structural stability, nature of foundation, verticality of the minarets and other constructional aspects of Taj Mahal have been studied and continue to be monitored.

The Taj Mahal is rightly a top destination for millions of travelers. As global tourism grows and the economic pressures of industry continue to increase, the authorities who oversee the site must strive to implement legal and structural measures to ensure that this irreplaceable monument survives.

Backstory by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee

210. Ogata Korin, White and Red Plum Blossoms

Dr. Hannah Sigur



Ogata Kōrin, Red and White Plum Blossoms, Edo period, 18th century, pair of two-fold screens, color and gold leaf on paper, 156 ×172.2 cm each, National Treasure (MOA Museum in Atami, Japan)

A landscape transformed

In *Red and White Plum Blossoms*, Ogata Kôrin transforms a very simple landscape theme—two flowering trees on either side of a brook—into a dream vision. Executed in black ink and blotchy washes of gem-like mineral color on a pair of folding screens, the image seems both abstract and realistic at the same time. Its background, a subtle grid of gold leaf, denies any sense of place or time and imbues everything with an ethereal glow. The stream's swelling metallic curls and spirals are a make-believe of flowing water, and its sharply tapered serpentine contour lines angle the picture plane in an unnatural upward tilt. The trunks of the trees are nothing more than pools of mottled color without so much as an outline. These forms and spaces appear flat to the eye. Yet the artist's intimate knowledge of how a plum tree grows can be seen in their writhing forms and tangle of shoots and branches.

Enveloping us in spring

In planning its imagery Kôrin closely considered the function of the folding screen within the traditional Japanese interior. The two sections would have been positioned separately yet near enough to each other to define an enclosed space. At 156 cm (or 67 in) in height, they towered over the average Japanese person of the day. Kôrin depicted only the lower parts of the trees, as if viewed from very near: the tree with red blossoms thrusts upward from the ground and out of sight; the white pushes leftward out of view and then, two slender branches appear to spring back diagonally downward from the top corner and jab upward. With each screen standing hinged at its central fold, a viewer experiences these exaggerated two-dimensional images in three dimensions. Stopping us in our tracks by confounding logic with this combination of pure design and intimate naturalism, Kôrin envelops us in the pulsing vitality of early spring.



Right side, red blossoms (detail), Ogata Kōrin, Red and White Plum Blossoms, Edo period, 18th century, pair of two-fold screens, color and gold leaf on paper, 156 ×172.2 cm each, National Treasure (MOA Museum in Atami, Japan)

Rinpa, or "School of Kôrin"

An acknowledged masterpiece painted toward the end of his life, *Red and White Plum Blossoms*exemplifies a style that for many epitomizes Japanese art. It has profoundly impacted modernism in the West, most famously in the work of Gustav Klimt. Since the nineteenth century, this combination of abstraction and naturalism, monumental presence, dynamism, and gorgeous sensuality has commonly been referred to as *Rinpa*, or "School of Kôrin." But Kôrin neither originated this aesthetic nor presided over a formal school; more accurately he stood at the forefront of a loose movement of like-minded artists and designers in various media. Rinpa first appeared a century earlier, in the brilliant relationship of a gifted calligrapher, connoisseur, and intellectual named Hon'ami Kôetsu, and an equally gifted painter of fans and screens, Tarawaya Sôtatsu, who created works that aimed to satisfy the luxurious tastes of seventeenth-century Kyoto's aristocrats and wealthy merchants (below).



Tawaraya Sōtatsu, Waves at Matsushima, c. 1600–40, right side of a pair of six-panel folding screens, ink, color, gold, and silver on paper (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.)

Entranced by a few of Sôtatsu's paintings that he saw in the collection of a patron, Kôrin taught himself the techniques: images pared to bare essentials and then dramatically magnified, emphasis on the interplay of forms, colors, and textures, and unconventional adaptations of ink painting methods. These methods included *tarashikomi*, or dilute washes of color blended while very wet, and *mokkotsu*, or "bonelessness," which creates forms without exterior outlines. Some scholars now use terms such as Sôtatsu-Kôrinha, Kôetsuha, and Kôetsu-Kôrinha rather than Rinpa, in recognition of its actual origins. Yet Kôrin is owed a great debt as the one who revived a dazzling creative approach from obscurity and whose vibrant works firmly established his own reputation.



Left side, white plum blossoms (detail), Ogata Kōrin, Red and White Plum Blossoms,Edo period, 18th century, pair of two-fold screens, color and gold leaf on paper, 156 ×172.2 cm each, National Treasure (MOA Museum in Atami, Japan)

A profligate who squandered his family's enormous wealth, Kôrin benefitted from the wide design experience afforded by its position as one of Kyoto's most distinguished producers and purveyors of fine textiles. This he combined with painting studies in one of Japan's preeminent studios. His numerous works in this sophisticated style thus encompass many media, formats and subjects—paintings in color and ink on large screens, small albums, fans, hanging and hand scrolls, printed books, lacquers, ceramics and even textiles.

Initially inspired by Japanese classical literature, the Rinpa movement's attention soon extended to themes from nature, including Chinese motifs that may have influenced Kôrin's choice of plum trees for this painting. Looking now at the impact of his work from over three centuries ago, it seems incredible that a vision so dramatic, luxurious and radical could ever have fallen into obscurity.

211. Hokusai, The Great Wave, from Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji

Leila Anne Harris



Katsushika Hokusai, Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki nami ura), also known as The Great Wave, from the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei), c. 1830-32, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 1/8 x 14 15 /16″ / 25.7 x 37.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Katsushika Hokusai's *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, also called *The Great Wave* has became one of the most famous works of art in the world—and debatably the most iconic work of Japanese art. Initially, thousands of copies of this print were quickly produced and sold cheaply. Despite the fact that it was created at a time when Japanese trade was heavily restricted, Hokusai's print displays the influence of Dutch art, and proved to be inspirational for many artists working in Europe later in the nineteenth century.

Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji



Fishing boats (detail), Under the Wave off Kanagawa, from the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, c. 1830-32, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 1/8 x 14 15 /16″ / 25.7 x 37.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Under the Wave off Kanagawa is part of a series of prints titled *Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, which Hokusai made between 1830 and 1833. It is a polychrome (multi-colored) woodblock print, made of ink and color on paper that is approximately 10 x 14 inches. All of the images in the series feature a glimpse of the mountain, but as you can see from this example, Mount Fuji does not always dominate the frame. Instead, here, the foreground is filled with a massive cresting wave. The threatening wave is pictured just moments before crashing down on to three fishing boats below. Under the Wave off Kanagawa is full of visual play. The mountain, made tiny by the use of perspective, appears as if it too will be swallowed up by the wave. Hokusai's optical play can also be lighthearted, and the spray from top of the crashing wave looks like snow falling on the mountain.

Hokusai has arranged the composition to frame Mount Fuji. The curves of the wave and hull of one boat dip down just low enough to allow the base of Mount Fuji to be visible, and the white top of the great wave creates a diagonal line that leads the viewers eye directly to the peak of the mountain top. Across the thirty-six prints that constitute this series, Hokusai varies his representation of the mountain. In other prints the mountain fills the composition, or is reduced to a small detail in the background of bustling city life.



Katsushika Hokusai, South Wind, Clear Sky (also known as Red Fuju), from the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, c. 1830-31, woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9 5/8 x 15″ / 24.4 x 38.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Who was Katsushika Hokusai?

Hokusai was born in 1760 in Edo (now Tokyo), Japan. During the artist's lifetime he went by many different names; he began calling himself Hokusai in 1797. Hokusai discovered Western prints that came to Japan by way of Dutch trade. From the Dutch artwork Hokusai became interested in linear perspective. Subsequently, Hokusai created a Japanese variant of linear perspective. The influence of Dutch art can also be seen in the use of a low horizon line and the distinctive European color, Prussian blue.

Hokusai was interested in oblique angles, contrasts of near and far, and contrasts of manmade and the natural. These can be seen in *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* through the juxtaposition of the large wave in the foreground which dwarfs the small mountain in the distance, as well as the inclusion of the men and boats amidst the powerful waves.



Mount Fuji, Japan (photo: j_arlecchino, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/qasYBF>

Why Mount Fuji?

Mount Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan and has long been considered sacred. Hokusai is often described as having a personal fascination with the mountain, which sparked his interest in making this series. However, he was also responding to a boom in domestic travel and the corresponding market for images of Mount Fuji. Japanese woodblock prints were often purchased as souvenirs. The original audience for Hokusai's prints was ordinary townspeople who were followers of the "Fuji cult" and made pilgrimages to climb the mountain, or tourists visiting the new capital city. Although the skyscrapers in Tokyo obscure the view of Mount Fuji today, for Hokusai's audience the peak of the mountain would have been visible across the city.

The making of Ukiyo-e Prints

Ukiyo-e is the name for Japanese woodblock prints made during the Edo Period. Ukiyo-e, which originated as a Buddhist term, means "floating world" and refers to the impermanence of the world. The earliest prints were made in only black and white, but later, as is evident from Hokusai's work, additional colors were added. A separate block of wood was used for each color. Each print is made with a final overlay of black line, which helps to break up the flat colors. Ukiyo-e prints are recognizable for their emphasis on line and pure, bright color, as well as their ability to distill form down to the minimum.

Hokusai moved away from the tradition of making images of courtesans and actors, which was the customary subject of ukiyo-e prints. Instead, his work focused on the daily life of Japanese people from a variety of social levels. Such as the quotidian scene of fishermen battling the sea off the coast of Mount Fuji that we see in The Great Wave. This change of subject matter was a breakthrough in both ukiyo-e prints and in Hokusai's career.

Popularity of Ukiyo-e prints in Europe

Beginning in 1640, Japan was largely closed off to the world and only limited interaction with China and Holland was allowed. This changed in the 1850s, when trade was forced open by American naval commodore, Matthew C. Perry. After this, there was a flood of Japanese visual culture into the West. At the 1867 International Exposition in Paris, Hokusai's work was on view at the Japanese pavilion. This was the first introduction of Japanese culture to mass audiences in the West, and a craze for collecting art called Japonisme ensued. Additionally, Impressionist artists in Paris, such as Claude Monet, were great fans of Japanese prints. The flattening of space, an interest in atmospheric conditions, and the impermanence of modern city life—all visible in Hokusai's prints—both reaffirmed their own artistic interests and inspired many future works of art.

212. Liu Chunhua, Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan

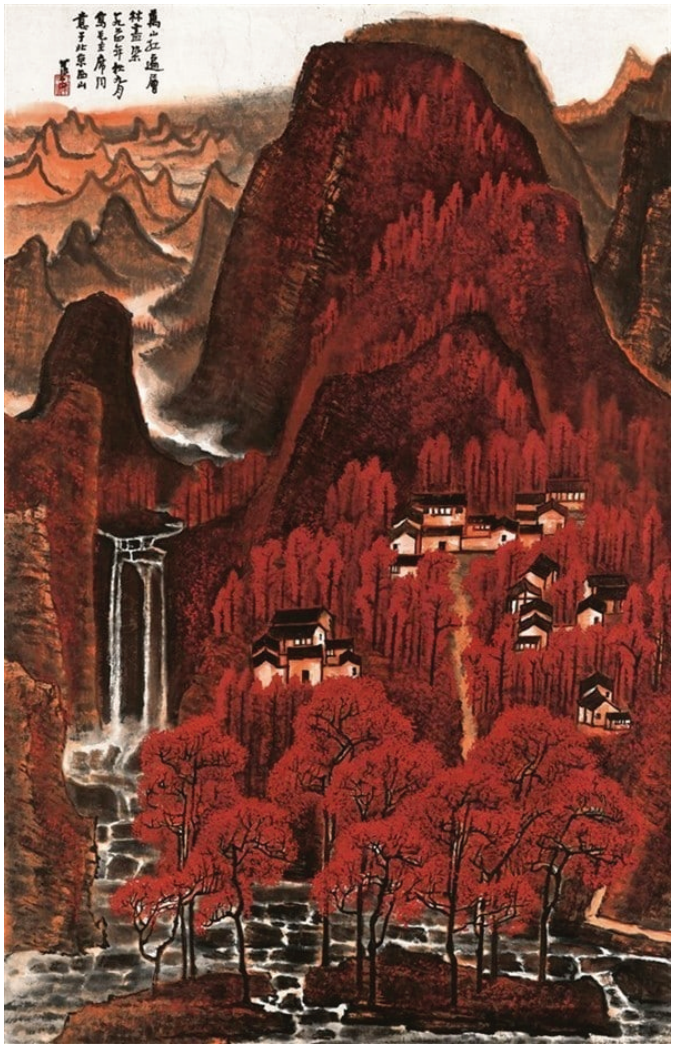
Dr. Kristen Chiem



Liu Chunhua, Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan, 1967, oil on canvas

Striding atop a mountain peak wearing a look of determination on his face, *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan* shows a young Mao Zedong (Chinese Communist revolutionary, founding father of the People's Republic of China, and leader of China from 1949-76) ready to weather any storm. In picturing a moment in Chinese Communist Party history, Liu Chunhua celebrated Chairman Mao (then in his seventies) and his longstanding commitment to Communist Party ideals. Painted in 1967 at the dawn of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, this work uses socialist realism to portray Chairman Mao as a revolutionary leader committed to championing the common people.

Socialist realism and Mao paintings



Li Keran, Ten Thousand Crimson Hills, 1964, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper (collection of the artist's family, Beijing)

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), artists focused on creating portraits of Mao, or "Mao paintings," which represented Mao's effort to regain his hold after bitter political struggles within the party. With the leadership of Mao's last wife, Jiang Qing, the movement aimed to quell criticisms of Mao in drama, literature, and the visual arts. More broadly, it aimed to correct political fallout from the disasters of the 1950s, especially the widespread famine and deaths that resulted from the Great Leap Forward (an attempt from 1958–61 to rapidly modernize China, transforming it from an agrarian economy into an industrialized, socialist society), and reinvigorate Communist ideology in general. In the years that followed, Mao would lead the country through a decade of violent class struggles aimed at purging traditional customs and capitalism from Chinese society.

In the early years of the Cultural Revolution, artists such as Liu Chunhua turned to a style known as socialist realism for creating portraits of Mao Zedong. Socialist realism was introduced to China in the 1950s in order to address the lives of the working class. Suitable for propaganda, socialist realism aimed for clear, intelligible subjects and emotionally moving themes. Subjects often included peasants, soldiers, and workers—all of whom represented the central concern of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party. Modeled after works in the Soviet Union, paintings in this style were rendered in oil on canvas. They notably departed from Chinese hanging scrolls in ink and paper, such as Li Keran's *Ten Thousand Crimson Hills*, painted in 1964 (left).

Standardized by the Central Propaganda Department, Mao paintings typically pictured the Chinese leader in an idealized fashion, as a luminous presence at the center of the composition. Unlike *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan*, portraits usually depicted Mao among the people, such as strolling through lush fields alongside smiling peasants.



Map showing Anyuan within Jiangxi province in China (Source: TUBS, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/yyv6tden>

The Anyuan Miners' Strike of 1922

Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan presents a critical moment in Chinese Communist Party history: Mao marching toward the coal mines of Anyuan, Jiangxi province in south-central China, where he was instrumental in organizing a nonviolent strike of thirteen thousand miners and railway workers. Occurring only a year after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, the Anyuan Miners' Strike of 1922 was a defining moment for the Chinese Communist Party because the miners represented the suffering of the masses at the heart of the revolutionary cause. Many of the miners enlisted as soldiers in the Red Army (the army of the Chinese Communist Party), intent on following the young Mao toward revolution.

Painting nearly half a century after the Anyuan Miners' Strike, Liu Chunhua created *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan* for a national exhibition. Liu Chunhua was a member of the Red Guard, or the group of radical youth whose mission was to attack the "four olds" (customs, habits, culture, and thinking). To create this painting, he studied old photographs of Mao and visited Anyuan to interview workers for visual veracity. Based on his findings, he rendered Mao wearing a traditional Chinese gown rather than Western attire, which is more commonly seen in portraits of Mao created during the Cultural Revolution. The cool color tonalities of *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan* also differ from other Mao paintings, which tended toward warm tones with clear, blue skies, such as Chen Yanning's *Chairman Mao Inspects the Guangdong Countryside* (below). Others often featured vibrant red accents—red being the color of revolution. Instead, Liu Chunhua opted for deep blue and purple hues to capture Mao's determination as he marched to address the plight of those suffering.



From the painting by Chen Yanning, Chairman Mao Inspects the Guangdong Countryside, 1972, oil on canvas, 67 15/16 x 116″ (Sigg Collection)

In *Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan*, Liu Chunhua adapted Chinese landscape conventions to a new style and purpose—an evocative portrayal that suggested that Mao was capable of leading the country toward revolution. He pictured his subject emerging atop a mountain with clouds of mist below. In China, landscapes such as this often evoked immortal realms or extraordinary sites invested with the misty vapors of the mountain. However, a telephone pole is discernable in the lower left corner of the composition, and water cascades from a dam in the right—hints of modernity within the ethereal landscape. With an umbrella tucked beneath one arm and the other hand clenched into a fist and wearing windswept robes, Mao appears superhuman, yet also practical and charismatic.

As a prominent icon in the Cultural Revolution, *Chairman Mao en*

Route to Anyuan celebrated the grassroots nature of revolutionary history and cultivated devotion to Mao during a tumultuous time. As a brilliant example of Chinese Communist Party propaganda, it was reportedly reproduced over nine hundred million times, and distributed widely in print, sculpture, and other media.

The Pacific 700-1980 C.E.

213. Nan Madol (The Federated States of Micronesia)

Dr. Billie Lytheberg



Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: smwd0030, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/fKf6q8>

How did they do it?

Sometimes art and architecture calls on us to reimagine what we think was possible in the past, and what ancestors were able to achieve. The abandoned megalithic (forms made of large stones) capital of Nan Madol, located in a lagoon adjacent to the eastern shoreline of the island of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia in the Pacific Ocean, is a terrific example. [1] Once the political and ceremonial center for the ruling chiefs of the Sau Deleur dynasty (c. 1100–1628), Nan Madol is a complex of close to 100 artificial rectilinear islets spread over 200 acres that are thought to have housed up to 1000 people. Its basalt (volcanic rock) and coral rock structures were built from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century by a population of fewer than 30,000 people and their total weight is estimated at 750,000 metric tons. Archaeologist Rufino Mauricio pulls these vast quantities into focus for us by explaining that the people of Pohnpei moved an average of 1,850 tons of basalt per year over four centuries—and no one knows quite how they did it. [2]

Immense human power

Nan Madol specialist Mark McCoy has used the chemistry of the stones to link some to their source on the opposite side of the island. [3] The creators of Nan Madol managed to quarry columns of basalt from a site in Sokehs, on the other side of Pohnpei, and transport them more than 25 miles to the submerged coral reefs that are the foundations of Nan Madol. There, they used ropes and levers to stack them in an intersecting formation, making raised platforms, ceremonial sites, dwellings, tombs, and crypts. They used no mortar or concrete, relying solely on the positioning and weight of each basalt column, with a little coral fill, to hold each structure in place.

The human power required to move these materials over such an extended period of time and space is evidence of an impressive display of power by the rulers of Pohnpei as well as ecological and economic systems capable of supporting a busy labor force.



Basalt structure in Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: ajdemma, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8qnkh>



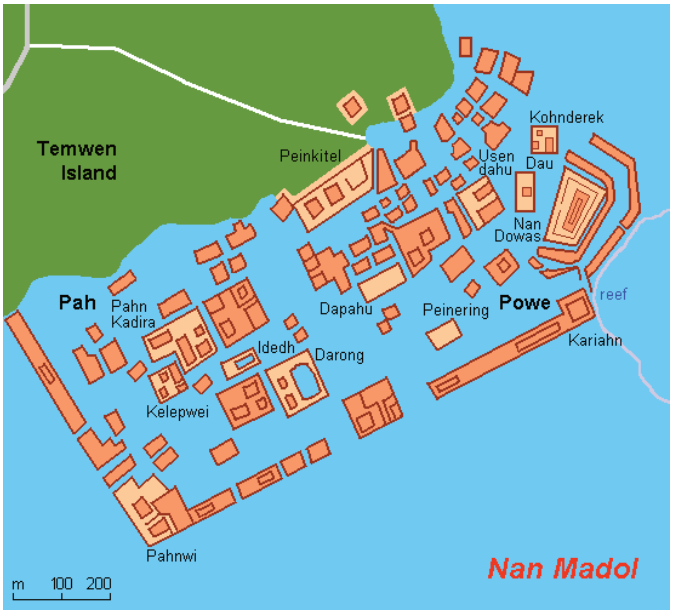
Detail of a wall in Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: Joyce McClure, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/Mm24Hj>

Sacred histories

Sometimes oral histories are able to explain the extraordinary feats of men in ways that present-day science cannot replicate. Oral histories of Nan Madol describe great birds or giants moving the basalt rocks into place, others recall the magic used by the twin sorcerers Olosohpa and Olosihpa to create a place to worship their gods. Beyond these creation narratives, aspects of the oral history of Nan Madol passed down through many generations correlate with archaeological evidence. For example, oral histories describe a series of canals cut to allow eels to enter the city from the sea. A well on the island of Idehd is said to have housed a sacred eel who embodied a sea deity, and to whom the innards of specially raised and cooked turtles were fed by priests. Traces of the canal system, as well as a large midden (mound) of turtle, remains on Idehd are among the archaeological evidence that supports these histories.

While the exact engineering of Nan Madol eludes us, we know that the construction of elevated, artificial islets had commenced by 900 to 1200 C.E. and that around 1200 C.E. the first monumental burial took place when a chief was interred in a stone and coral tomb. This significant ceremonial event was followed by a period of truly megalithic building from 1200 to 1600 C.E.

Madol Pah in the southwest was the administrative center of the complex and Madol Powe in the northeast was its religious and mortuary sector. This area comprises 58 islets, most of which were inhabited by priests. The most elaborate building is Nandauwas, the royal mortuary, which covers an area greater than a football field. Its walls are 25 feet high and just one of its cornerstones is estimated to weigh 50 tons. Elsewhere, log-cabin style walls of stone reached 50 feet in height and are 16 feet thick, and were topped with thatched roofs. All were protected from surging tides by large breakwaters and seawalls.



Map of Nan Madol (source: Hobe / Holger Behr, CC0) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_FM-Nan_Madol.PNG>



Basalt structure in Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: ajdemma, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8Mfao>

What's in a name?

Archaeological and linguistic evidence suggest that certain islets were dedicated to specific activities—Dapahu to food preparation and canoe building, and Peinering ("place of coconut oil preparation"), Sapenlan ("place of the sky") and Kohnderek ("place for dancing and anointing the dead") to the activities their names describe. Tombs surrounded by high walls can be found on Peinkitel, Karian and Lemonkou.



Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: CT Snow, CC BY 2.0) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nan_Madol_5.jpg>

Powerful rulers

Nan Madol is simultaneously an engineering marvel, a logistical puzzle, and the product of a sophisticated economy and highly stratified society—all presided over by a dynasty known as the Sau Deleurs. Who were these leaders who inspired (or perhaps coerced) the people of Pohnpei into such a long-term and physically challenging undertaking? Many oral histories describe them, and there are many possible interpretations of these, but most agree that for many centuries Pohnpei was under the rule of a series of chiefs (Sau) descended from Olosohpa, who began as gentle leaders but came to exert extraordinary power over their people before deteriorating into tyrants. Under their rule, the people of Pohnpei not only built the Nan Madol structures but also made tributes and food offerings to the Sau Deleur, including turtles and dogs, which were reserved for their consumption. This period of history is remembered as the "Mwehin Sau Deleur"—the "Time of the Lord of Deleur."

The dynasty was overthrown by the culture hero Isokelekel, who destroyed the last of the Sau Deleurs in a great battle. Following his victory, Isokelekel divided power into three chieftainships and established a decentralized ruling system called Nahnmwarki which remains in existence today. He took up residence at Nan Madol on the islet of Peikapw. A century later, his successor abandoned the site and established a residence away from Nan Madol. The site gradually lost its association with prestige and its population dwindled, though religious ceremonies continued to be held here from time to time into the late 1800s.



Leaves of the Kava plant (photo: Forest & Kim Starr, CC BY 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/yxewjmdh>

Artifacts found at Nan Madol include stone and shell tools, necklaces, arm rings, "trolling lure" ornaments, drilled porpoise and fruit bat teeth, quartz crystals, lancet and disc-shaped bead necklaces, pottery, remnants of turtle and dog status foods, and large pounders used to process the root of the kava plant (*Piper methysticum*) into a ceremonial drink. Kava has mild sedative, anesthetic and euphoriant qualities, and its botanical name literally means "intoxicating pepper." Extensive personal adornments, food, and kava are evidence of Nan Madol's significance as the ceremonial center of Eastern Micronesia.

The garden of Micronesia

Pohnpei is rich in natural resources and has been called "the garden of Micronesia." It has fertile soil and heavy rainfall, that promotes the growth of lush vegetation from its coastal mangrove swamps to the rainforests at the apex of its central hills, as well as lagoons. These natural resources would have provided the necessary food for the workers who built the extraordinary complex that is Nan Madol, as well as timber that may have been used to help shift the basalt rocks. It seems unlikely that any foods were cultivated within Nan Madol, and likely no source of freshwater existed within the complex—food and water were brought from the island's interior.



Detail of a wall in Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: Wayne Batzer, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/49F7a3>



Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: ajdemma, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8Mfai>

The basalt columns used to build Nan Madol are almost as extraordinary as the megalithic structures they comprise. Columnar grey basalt is a volcanic rock that breaks naturally into flat-sided rods when it cools. Though it appears quite marvelously to have been shaped by chisels, its predominantly hexagonal or pentagonal columns are due to natural fractures that form while a thick lava flow cools. Rapid cooling results in slender columns (<1 cm in diameter) while slow cooling results in longer and thicker columns. Some of the columns used to build Nan Madol are up to 20 feet long and weigh 80–90 tons. [4]

A space between things

In July 2016, Nan Madol was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The dedicated UNESCO webpage explains that "The huge scale of the edifices, their technical sophistication and the concentration of megalithic structures bear testimony to complex social and religious practices of the island societies of the period." [5] It also describes how siltation (the buildup of silt, or minerals, in water, which can create sediment) of the waterways that are an integral part of this site is allowing an overgrowth by mangroves (a type of tropical shrub or tree found in coastal swamps, especially recognizable by their thick, tangled roots). Both the mangroves and the siltation are threatening the structures themselves.

Since Nan Madol was built on a coral foundation, it is sometimes called "the Venice of the Pacific." Like Venice (which is made up of 117 islands), the islands of Nan Madol are connected by a network of tidal channels and waterways. These are referred to in the name Nan Madol, which means 'in the space between things'—here, as elsewhere in the Pacific, waterways are described as connectors of people and places rather than barriers. The waterways might be local, like the canals of Nan Madol, or expansive, like the great Pacific Ocean, the largest body of water on Earth.

To get a sense of the extent of this space between things, it is instructive to zoom in on Nan Madol using an online mapping system. Pinpoint Sokehs Pah while you are at it, so you can also see the distance between this quarry and the ancient capital built from its rock supply. Then, frame by frame, zoom out. Marvel at the space that unfolds as you ponder what motivated the Sau Deleur dynasty to build such an expansive, impressive and intimidating structure, and just how they might have achieved this.

Notes:

1. On the island of Kosrae is another smaller capital at Leluh with megalithic architecture made from columnar basalt around 1300–1400 C.E.
2. Christopher Pala, "Nan Madol: The City Built on Coral Reefs," Smithsonian.com, November 3, 2009. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/nan-madol-the-city-built-on-coral-reefs-147288758/> Nan Madol has inspired many speculative "lost continent" theories as well as songs and popular fiction. More recently it featured as a cultural city-state in the 2016 video game *Civilization VI.*
3. "New Research Sheds More Light on Ancient Pacific Site," RNZ, October 25, 2016.<https://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/316492/new-research-sheds-more-light-on-ancient-pacific-site> See also Mark McCoy, "Earliest direct evidence of monument building at the archaeological site of Nan Madol (Pohnpei, Micronesia) identified using 230 Th/U coral dating and geochemical sourcing of megalithic architectural stone" <https://tinyurl.com/yy54w6u7> in *Quaternary Research,* vol. 86, issue 3 (November 2016), pp. 295-303.
4. Columnar basalt deposits can be found throughout the world but the best known is probably the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland.
5. UNESCO: "Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia"<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1503>

214. Moai on platform (ahu)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Wayne Ngata

This is a transcript of a conversation about the moai on the island of Rapa Nui.



Moai of Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Waka Tapu (photo: Jorge Manriquez P, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y6tfs2fm>

Steven: On the island of Rapa Nui, perhaps better known as Easter Island, are these extraordinary stone monuments—these moai. There are nearly 900 on Rapa Nui; most were made from 1250 to 1500, and they can function as a way of understanding the fragility of culture in the twenty-first century.

Wayne: My experience of the moai was first seeing them from a waka (a double hulled traditional Maori sailing vessel) lined up on the shore, facing inland, some facing out to sea. And when we did eventually arrive on shore, and were introduced through ceremony and ritual to the moai, it was an amazing experience.

Steven: So you journeyed on a traditional boat to Rapa Nui, and had that opportunity to see the island as it would have been seen for hundreds of years.

Wayne: We voyaged across the sea, as part of revisiting our own relationship with traditional voyaging, that our ancestors were engaged in, and as part of revisiting places that we knew had genealogical links with us—Rapa Nui being one—completing one league of the Polynesian triangle.

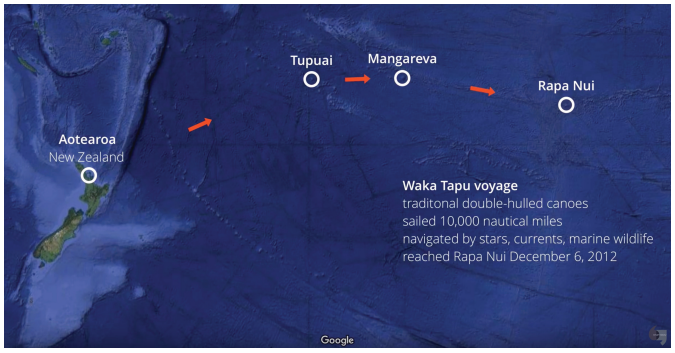
Steven: When I think about the ocean, when I think about the open sea, I see it as a barrier, but what you're saying is that the ocean is a place of connection.

Wayne: For us, the Pacific Ocean—we probably see as a continent, with a whole lot of settlements and people.

Steven: And the moai also function as important elements in this reclaiming of culture, of this reclaiming of heritage.

Wayne: There are standing moai, there are moai still lying down, there are moai partly still submerged and part of the rock structure of the earth, and in various stages of construction. When they are standing, they provide the opportunity for ancestors to talk, and to engage with those ancestors through ritual, through ceremony.

Steven: That ancestral connection must seem especially precious because of all that the peoples of Rapa Nui have suffered over the years, not only the deforestation but colonialization, enslavement.



Map of Waka Tapu voyage, 2012, when traditional double-hulled canoes sailed 10,000 nautical miles and navigated by stars, currents, and marine wildlife (map underlay © Google)



Moai head and bust, Rano Raraku, Rapa Nui (photo: Arian Zwegers, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/bcgcpF>

Wayne: So, while we were there, as part of the ceremony, the men created a human ladder to reach the eyes of the moai, so they could place the coral eyes back in to the moai, and by doing that, bring them back to life—for a period of time. Our understanding was that they were not allowed to do that for a number of decades; it was against the colonial rule. That particular site that we went on to had been a restricted area for some centuries. So, we witnessed something which was quite poignant, quite emotional, for them as well as us. They had brought them back to life for a short period of time, and then took the eyes out and put them back to sleep—if I can put it that way.

Steven: The moai had lost their eyes, and some of them had been toppled. And in so much of the Pacific, traditional systems were toppled. And the idea of removing the eyes, seemed such a potent symbol for that disempowering.



View of fallen moai and Ahu Tongariki, Rapa Nui (photo: David Berkowitz, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/e6JEvx>

Wayne: What we found out, from the Rapa Nui people, was that some years ago, decades ago, they sought help to support restoring the moai: restoring those moai that were still standing and ensuring that those that were not standing were preserved as well.

Steven: Rapa Nui seems to be one of the most remote places I can imagine, and yet because of the moai, it is an extremely famous place and one that has been designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. And so, people do come from all over the world. And I know that that tourism functions both to support the economy and to help preserve these objects and this culture, but it also comes at a cost.

Wayne: It's a fine line. The Rapa Nui people are balancing their obligations to their own culture and obligations to the pragmatism of the time—to feed themselves.

Steven: The moai are embodiments of ancestors: the ancestors that would have come to that island initially that were, to my eyes, incredibly brave, reaching out to islands that, perhaps, they weren't even sure existed. Taking this extraordinary journey, but also, a kind of extraordinary risk.

Wayne: That's exactly what the people of Rapa Nui told us. We were trying to align and see where the connections were with us. Rapa Nui, the colonizer's language—Spanish. Mangareva—French. Ours—English. We don't know French, we don't know Spanish. So we all spoke Maori. We can understand each other quite clearly. If we go further east toward the Cook Islands, Tahiti, we can still understand, but the language is faster.

Steven: And that suggests to me that there was travel, that these were not isolated cultures.

Wayne: Yeah, we've always maintained that there was exchanges. We certainly know that when Maori came to Aotearoa, Maori also went back to where they came from to tell others, so they were two way voyages, certainly in our ancestors' time.



View with cruise ships at Rapa Nui (photo: Tristan Smith, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/mnvcGD>

Steven: The efforts by the people of Rapa Nui to reassert their culture, to reengage with their culture, are a microcosm of efforts that are taking place across Polynesia. But I'm also thinking about the responsibility of the larger world, and I'm thinking about the complicated role that universal museums around the world play, in preserving cultures. I'm thinking about museums in France, in the United States, in the United Kingdom, that hold large collections of Pacific Island objects. They preserve them, they make them available for study, but these objects are very far from home.



Moai, called Hoa Hakananai'a ('lost or stolen friend'), ca. 1000-1200, on display at the British Museum, London (photo: Lin Yu Chen, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/uh68G5>

Wayne: Endangered cultures are, in the main, minority cultures. And minority cultures require friends in dominant cultures, or majority cultures. So, learning institutions—museums included—universities, schools, public institutions, have a major role in promoting that agenda, of finding equitable ways to support the revitalization of those minority indigenous cultures. In terms of objects and artifacts and taonga (the Maori word for an object of value, a treasure), that are spread throughout the world—plundered, purchased, given in the spirit of goodwill—whatever way they were exchanged, many are disconnected from their source communities. Maori taonga and artifacts that are spread throughout the world, particularly through Europe, UK, US, then there's probably a rising demand from Maori to reconnect with those particular taonga. Reconnect, how? Repatriation, maybe. Digital can only go to some extent to satisfy that source community. Would physical repatriation help support cultural revitalization?

Steven: The British Museum has two moai, one large moai, that is much beloved in London, but it is very far away from its home. (The British Museum's two moai were taken aboard the British ship HMS Topaze in 1868.) It is a really complicated issue, because the museum does have a universal agenda to show works of art from cultures across the world, and there is some real benefit to having a spectrum of cultures available, that can be compared and studied. But it also isolates that object from its culture, and when we think about the sculpture not as an inanimate, but as an animate figure that has a spiritual life, that becomes even more important, perhaps. And of course there is a price to the island itself, in the loss of that object.

Wayne: If I take the view that, I think that taonga or artifacts or objects that are in museums, need to speak of their own culture, of their own history through their own language, then, I think that's a challenge for an institution to enable that, because it needs to speak, first and foremost, of and to its own people.

Steven: There are Maori curators, there are people that hold their cultural tradition and also are interested in museology.

Wayne: The interesting thing about Maori curators or indigenous curators, for that matter, is that they are loaded with expectations of indigenous people and institutional expectations. It's an unfair burden.

Steven: And it sounds like, the museums' responsibility is broadening, and museums have significant work to be responsible partners in not only being places that care for, and display, but are much more directly responsive to the cultures that produce the objects that they hold.

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/b06FwTP9TOU>.



Anakena Bay Ahu (photo: Lieutenant Elizabeth Crapo, NOAA Corps, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/fNRkxW>

215. Ahu ʻula (feather cape)

British Museum



Feather cape, probably before 1850 C.E., olona fibre, feather, 68.5 x 45 cm, Hawaii
© Trustees of the British Museum

For ceremonies and battle

The Hawaiian male nobility wore feather cloaks and capes for ceremonies and battle. Such cloaks and capes were called ʻahu'ula, or "red garments." Across Polynesia the color red was associated with both gods and chiefs. In the Hawaiian Islands, however, yellow feathers became equally valuable, due to their scarcity. They consisted of olona (Touchardia latifolia) fibre netting made in straight rows, with pieces joined and cut to form the desired shape. Tiny bundles of feathers were attached to the netting in overlapping rows starting at the lower edge. The exterior of this example is covered with red feathers from the ʻi'iwi bird (Vestiaria cocchinea), yellow feathers from the ʻo'o (Moho nobilis), and black feathers also from the ʻo'o.

This small cape has a shaped neckline which would closely fit the wearer. This style of semi-circular cape is considered a later development from the trapezoidal shape. Large numbers of feathered cloaks and capes were given as gifts to the sea captains and their crews who were the earliest European visitors to Hawaii. Some of these attractive items would then have passed into the hands of the wealthy patrons who financed their voyages. It is not known who brought this particular cape to England.

Suggested readings:

P.H. Buck, *Arts and crafts of Hawaii* (Honolulu, Bishop Museum Press, 1957).

S. Phelps, *Art and artifacts of the Pacific* (London, Hutchinson, 1976).

© Trustees of the British Museum

216. Staff god (Rarotonga, Cook Islands)

British Museum

The Cook Islands are situated in the middle of the South Pacific. The wood carvers of the island of Rarotonga, one of the Cook Islands, have a distinctive style.The Cook Islands were settled around the period 800-1000 C.E.. Captain Cook made the first official European sighting of the islands in 1773, but spent little time in the area during his voyages. In 1821 the London Missionary Society set up a mission station on the island of Aitutaki, followed by one on Rarotonga in 1827. The Cook Islands became a British Protectorate in 1888, and were annexed in 1901. Since then they have been administered by New Zealand.



Staff-god, late 18th-early 19th century, wood, paper mulberry bark, feather, 396 cm, Rarotonga, Cook Islands © Trustees of the British Museum

The most sacred

Representations of the deities worshipped by Cook Islanders before their conversion to Christianity included wooden images in human form, slab carvings and staffs such as this, known as "god sticks." They varied in size from about 73 cm to nearly four metres, like this rare example. It is made of ironwood wrapped with lengths of barkcloth. The upper part of the staff consists of a carved head above smaller carved figures. The lower end is a carved phallus. Some missionaries removed and destroyed phalluses from carvings, considering them obscene. Reverend John Williams observed of this image that the barkcloth contained red feathers and pieces of pearl shell, known as the manava or spirit of the god. He also recorded seeing the islanders carrying the image upright on a litter. This image was among fourteen presented to Reverend John Williams at Rarotonga in May 1827.

The only surviving wrapped example of a large staff god, this impressive image is composed of a central wood shaft wrapped in an enormous roll of decorated barkcloth. There are no other surviving large staff-gods from the Cook Islands that retain their barkcloth wrapping as this one does. This was probably one of the most sacred of Rarotonga's objects. This impressive image is composed of a central wood shaft wrapped in an enormous roll of decorated barkcloth. The shaft is in the form of an elongated body, with a head and small figures at one end. The other end, composed of small figures and a naturalistic penis, is missing. A feathered pendant is bound in one ear.



Staff-god, late 18th-early 19th century, wood, paper mulberry bark, feather, 396 cm, Rarotonga, Cook Islands © Trustees of the British Museum



Staff-god (detail), late 18th-early 19th century, wood, paper mulberry bark, feather, 396 cm, Rarotonga, Cook Islands © Trustees of the British Museum

Little is known of the function or identity of these images. The ethnologist Roger Duff speculated that they represent Tangaroa the creator god, but without evidence. What is clear is that in their materials they combine the results of the skilled labor of men and women. They also have an explicit sexual aspect, thus embodying male and female productive and reproductive qualities.*



Staff-god (detail), late 18th-early 19th century, wood, paper mulberry bark, feather, 396 cm, Rarotonga, Cook Islands © Trustees of the British MuseumMale and female elements

This staff god is a potent combination of male and female elements. The wooden core, made by male carvers, has a large head at one end and originally terminated in a phallus. Smaller figures in profile appear to be prominently male. Jean Tekura Mason, curator of the Cook Islands Library and Museum Society suggests that the other figures facing outwards could depict women in childbirth. The barkcloth, made by women, not only protects the ancestral power (*'mana*) of the deity, but contains it within the different layers.



Staff-god (detail), late 18th-early 19th century, wood, paper mulberry bark, feather, 396 cm, Rarotonga, Cook Islands © Trustees of the British Museum

Additional resources:

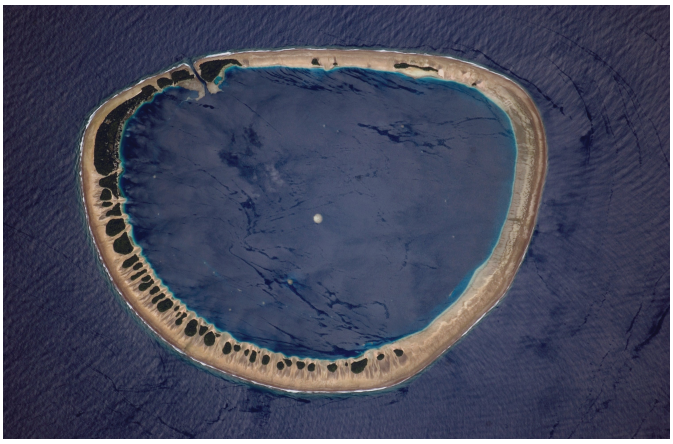
* Hooper, S.J.P., 1997, "Robert and Lisa Sainsbury collection," 3 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press and University of East Anglia, Norwich, II: 17).

Williams, J., 1837, "A narrative of missionary enterprises in the South Sea Islands," London, J Snow: 115-16).

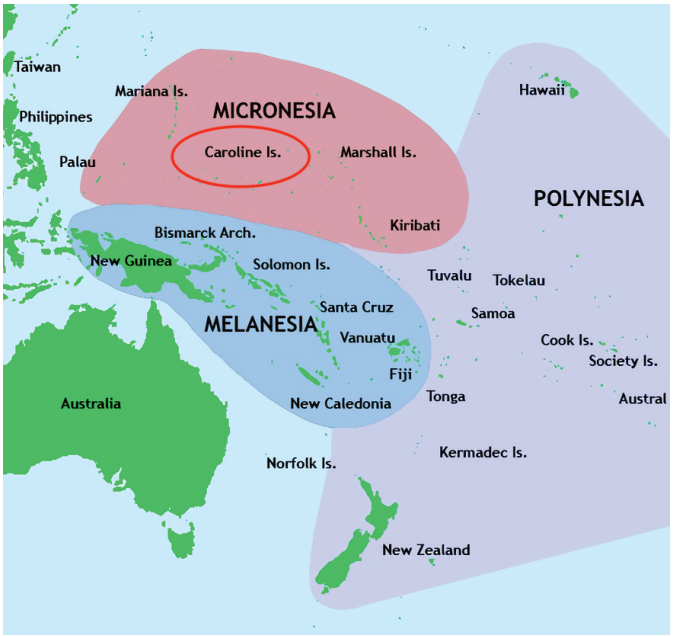
© Trustees of the British Museum

217. Female deity from Nukuoro

Dr. Fanny Wonu Veys



Nukuoro Atoll, Micronesia (Archive: NASA, International Space Station, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/oeQdPu>



Location of Nukuoro in the Caroline Islands

At the crossroads of cultures

Nukuoro is a small isolated atoll (a ring-shaped coral reef including a coral rim that encircles a lagoon partially or completely) in the archipelago of the Caroline Islands. It is located in Micronesia, a region in the Western Pacific.

Archaeological excavations demonstrate that Nukuoro has been inhabited since at least the eighth century. Oral tradition corroborates these dates relating that people left the Samoan archipelago in two canoes led by their chief Wawe. The canoes first stopped at Nukufetau in Tuvalu and later arrived on the then uninhabited island of Nukuoro. These new Polynesian settlers brought with them ideas of hierarchy and rank, and aesthetic principles such as the carving of stylized human figures. However, the new inhabitants also incorporated Micronesian aspects such as the art of navigation, canoe-building and loom-weaving with banana fiber. Because Nukuoro is geographically situated in Micronesia, but is culturally and linguistically essentially Polynesian, it is called a Polynesian Outlier.

Encounters with Westerners

The Spanish navigator Juan Bautista Monteverde was the first European to sight the atoll on 18 February 1806 when he was on his way from Manila (in the Philippines) to Lima (in South America). The estimated 400 inhabitants of Nukuoro engaged in barter and exchange with Europeans as early as 1830, as can be attested from the presence of Western metal tools. A trading post was only established in 1870. From the 1850s onwards, American protestant mission teachers who had been posted in the area, visited Nukuoro regularly from the Marshall Islands and from the islands Lukunor, Pohnpei, and Kosrae. However, when the American missionary Thomas Gray arrived in Nukuoro in 1902, to baptize a female chief, he found that a large part of the population was already acquainted with Christianity through a Nukuoran woman who had lived on Pohnpei. When Gray returned three years later, he found that the local sacred ground (*marae*) and the large temple had been replaced by a church. By 1913, many of the pre-Christian traditions including dances, songs, and stories were lost. Most of the wooden images had been taken off the island before 1885 and subsequently lost their function.



Figure, Nukuoro, Caroline Islands, Micronesia, wood, 54.5 cm high (The British Museum, acquired in 1944)

Earliest sources

In 1874, the missionary Edward T. Doane made the first mention of carved wooden figures. It is unclear, however, where this experienced missionary got his information from as he never left his ship, the Morning Star, to go ashore. Two German men, Johann Stanislaus Kubary, who visited the island in 1873 and in 1877 while working for the Godeffroy trading company and its museum, and Carl Jeschke, a ship's captain who first visited the atoll in 1904 and then regularly between 1910 and 1913, give the most detailed information on the Nukuoron figures.



Female Figure, Nukuoro, Caroline Islands, Micronesia, 18th-19th century, wood, 40.2 cm high (Barbier-Mueller Museum)

Wooden sculptures

The first Europeans to collect the Nukuoro sculptures found them coarse and clumsy. It is not known whether the breadfruit tree (*Artocarpus altilis*) images were carved with local adzes equipped with Tridacna shell blades or with Western metal blade tools (Tridacna is a genus of large saltwater clams). The surfaces were smoothed with pumice which was abundantly available on the beach. All the sculptures, ranging in size from 30 cm to 217 cm, have similar proportions: an ovoid head tapering slightly at the chin and a columnar neck. The eyes and nose are either discretely shown as slits or not at all. The shoulders slope downwards and the chest is indicated by a simple line. Some female figures have rudimentary breasts. Some of the sculptures, be they male, female or of indeterminate sex, have a sketchy indication of hands and feet. The buttocks are always flattened and set on a flexed pair of legs.

Deities

Local deities in Nukuoro resided in animals or were represented in stones, pieces of wood or wooden figurines (*tino aitu*). Each of the figurines bore the name of a specific male or female deity which was associated with a particular extended family group, a priest and a specific temple. They were placed in temples and decorated with loom-woven bands, fine mats, feathers, paint or headdresses. The *tino aitu* occupied a central place in an important religious ceremony that took place towards the month of *Mataariki*, when the Pleiades are visible in the west at dusk. The rituals marked the beginning of the harvesting of two kinds of taro, breadfruit, arrowroot, banana, sugar cane, pandanus and coconuts. During the festivities—which could last

several weeks—the harvested fruits and food offerings were brought to the wooden sculptures, male and female dances were performed and women were tattooed. Any weathered and rotten statues were also replaced during the ceremony. For the period of these rituals, the sculptures were considered the resting place of a god or a deified ancestor's spirit.

Early twentieth-century artists

When the Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti made his famous sculpture *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)* (left) he was inspired by a wooden Nukuoro figure he had seen at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (now in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly <https://tinyurl.com/y35sttcb>). A fellow artist, Henry Moore, considered the Nukuoro image at the British Museum (image above) to be one of the highlights in the history of sculpture. Both carvings are part of a small group of thirty-seven sculptures from Nukuoro that arrived in Western Museum collections from the 1870s onwards. European artists believed that the highly stylized representation of the human in the Nukuoro figures represented the purest form of art—an art that lay at the origins of mankind.

Nukuoro figures today

Today the sight of even a small Nukuoro figure still makes a big impact on visitors. Scattered across museums and private collections in Europe, North America and New Zealand, ten figures were brought together for the first time at the Fondation Beyeler in Riehen, near the Swiss city of Basel. This prompted research in these exquisite sculptures, which has been bundled in a book *Nukuoro. Sculptures from Micronesia* (2013). Nukuoro figures continue to inspire Nukuorons and Westerners alike as they are copied, and displayed in places ranging from people's houses to Pacific themed hotel lobbies.



Alberto Giacometti, Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object), 1934 (cast c. 1954-55), bronze, 152.1 cm high (The Museum of Modern Art)

218. Buk mask (Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Peri Klemm

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Mask (Buk, Krar, or Kara), mid to late 19th century, Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait, turtle shell, wood, cassowary feathers, fiber, resin, shell, paint, 54.6 x 63.5 x 57.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/vRv3iQ>

Beth: We're in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, looking at a fabulous mask that was made by people who lived on an island in the Torres Strait. This is a body of water between New Guinea and Australia that has hundreds of islands, most of which are uninhabited. This is from a particular island called the Mabuiag Island.

Peri: What we have here is a turtle shell mask divided into three registers. In the bottom, we have a human face. Above it, the face and body of a bird. And above that, feathers.

Beth: Now, it is only in the Torres Strait that we find masks made out of this very precious material of turtle shell.

Peri: In this particular case, we have a frigatebird depicted. And we have a face that has raffia attached to it as though it were hair. In fact, in other examples, it really is human hair.

Beth: What I notice is that we have a lot of pieces that have been stitched together. The piece that forms the face. Three decorative pieces that surround that. We have a piece underneath, another piece in the back. And then the bird itself is made up of many pieces of turtle shell.

Peri: And in addition to turtle shell, we also have feathers and shell and raffia that add to the texture and the materiality of this piece.

Beth: Of course, this would only have been one part of an elaborate costume used in a masquerade.

Peri: It would have been seen in motion in front of an audience when it was actually used.

Beth: Right—music, those feathers on the top moving in the wind, and the raffia that we see for the hair also moving. So we're seeing it in a very static way which is very unnatural.

Peri: And it's likely the dancer was making the gestures of a bird.



Mask (Buk, Krar, or Kara), mid to late 19th century, Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait, turtle shell, wood, cassowary feathers, fiber, resin, shell, paint, 54.6 x 63.5 x 57.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/vBcrQ1>

Beth: So who's represented here? Art historians conjecture that perhaps this is the face of a hero. Someone who lived in the past, but who did supernatural deeds he's being remembered here.

Peri: It could also be an ancestor. It could be an older person because we have this lovely lattice-work around the sides of the face and the bottom which suggest a beard. Somebody important in your lineage who you would want to honor through this mask.

Beth: Perhaps that person was associated with the frigatebird on the top of the mask. Or perhaps the frigatebird was associated, in some way, with the wearer of the mask.

Peri: In that sense, the bird could be seen as a totem—that is, a mythological creature connected to a particular lineage or a family. Maybe it was an animal that they didn't hunt; maybe it was an animal that they regarded as unique and special.

Beth: So this mask likely connected the wearer—connected the culture—to the supernatural, to something beyond the physical world.



Mask (Buk, Krar, or Kara), mid to late 19th century, Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait, turtle shell, wood, cassowary feathers, fiber, resin, shell, paint, 54.6 x 63.5 x 57.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/vTcdgW>

Peri: Because we have to ask ourselves *why* the artist created it. Why did they spend so much time carving this, putting it together? We know turtle shell was actively traded and that European sailors in particular were interested in collecting turtle shell in the early 1800s. We know that, by the late 1800s, the presence of missionaries had made this practice almost obsolete. In fact, they asked the Torres Strait islanders to burn their masks, to destroy them. So, the only examples that we have today are in collections that anthropologists, ethnographers, sailors, missionaries—folks that were outsiders in the Torres Straits—might have collected.

Beth: In the end, we're not sure whether this dates to the late nineteenth century, after this area had been Christianized. So we're not sure if this is an object that was made for the people themselves or to be exported for tourists and collectors.

Peri: Because there are accounts of turtle shell masks in the Torres Straits, we assume that these were fairly important. They have a long history, a long tradition. And we know from another account in the 1930s that they were kept in special houses of stone—so it suggests that they were items that had prestige. And I would love to know more about those circular pieces on the wings.



Mask (Buk, Krar, or Kara), mid to late 19th century, Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait, turtle shell, wood, cassowary feathers, fiber, resin, shell, paint, 54.6 x 63.5 x 57.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/vBcWuh>

Beth: They almost look like propellers. The whole sculpture, this whole mask gives me a feeling of flight and of upward movement.

Peri: And while we may not be completely satisfied with understanding the cultural context of this piece, we can actually really appreciate it formally in this space.

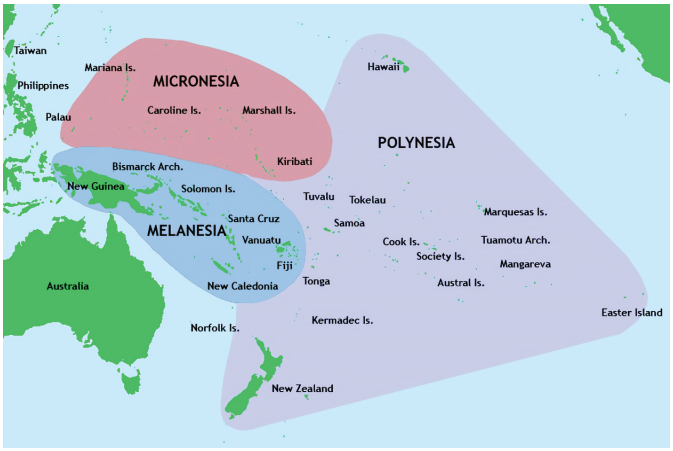
Watch the video. <https://youtu.be/3ntQz5vxFec>



Mask (Buk, Krar, or Kara), mid to late 19th century, Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait, turtle shell, wood, cassowary feathers, fiber, resin, shell, paint, 54.6 x 63.5 x 57.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/uWWUKg>

219. Hiapo (tapa) (Polynesia)

Dr. Caroline Klarr



Pacific culture areas <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pacific_Culture_Areas.png>

Polynesian history and culture

Polynesia is one of the three major categories created by Westerners to refer to the islands of the South Pacific. Polynesia means literally "many islands." Our knowledge of ancient Polynesian culture derives from ethnographic journals, missionary records, archaeology, linguistics, and oral traditions. Polynesians represent vital art producing cultures in the present day.

Each Polynesian culture is unique, yet the peoples share some common traits. Polynesians share common origins as Austronesian speakers (Austronesian is a family of languages). The first known inhabitants of this region are called the Lapita peoples. Polynesians were distinguished by long-distance navigation skills and two-way voyages on outrigger canoes. Native social structures were typically organized around highly developed aristocracies, and beliefs in primo-geniture (priority of the first-born). At the top of the social structure were divinely sanctioned chiefs, nobility, and priests. Artists were part of a priestly class, followed in rank by warriors and commoners.

Polynesian cultures value genealogical depth, tracing one's lineage back to the gods. Oral traditions recorded the importance of genealogical distinction or recollections of the accomplishments of the ancestors. Cultures held firm to the belief in *mana*, a supernatural power associated with high rank, divinity, maintenance of social order and social reproduction, as well as an abundance of water and fertility of the land. *Mana* was held to be so powerful that rules or taboos were necessary to regulate it in ritual and society. For example, an uninitiated person of low rank would never enter in a sacred enclosure without risking death. *Mana* was believed to be concentrated in certain parts of the body and could accumulate in objects, such as hair, bones, rocks, whale's teeth, and textiles.

Gender roles in the arts

Gender roles were clearly defined in traditional Polynesian societies. Gender played a major role, dictating women's access to training, tools, and materials in the arts. For example, men's arts were often made of hard materials, such as wood, stone, or bone and men's arts were traditionally associated with the sacred realm of rites and ritual.



Hawaiian kapa (barkcloth), 1770s, 64.5 x 129 cm (Te Papa, New Zealand)

Women's arts historically utilized soft materials, particularly fibers used to make mats and bark cloth. Women's arts included ephemeral materials such as flowers and leaves. Cloth made of bark is generically known as *tapa* across Polynesia, although terminology, decorations, dyes, and designs vary throughout the islands.

Bark cloth as women's art

Generally, to make bark cloth, a woman would harvest the inner bark of the paper mulberry (a flowering tree). The inner bark is then pounded flat, with a wooden beater or *ike*, on an anvil, usually made of wood. In Eastern Polynesia (Hawai'i), bark cloth was created with

a felting technique and designs were pounded into the cloth with a carved beater. In Samoa, designs were sometimes stained or rubbed on with wooden or fiber design tablets. In Hawai'i patterns could be applied with stamps made out of bamboo, whereas stencils of banana leaves or other suitable materials were used in Fiji. Bark cloth can also be undecorated, hand decorated, or smoked as is seen in Fiji. Design illustrations involved geometric motifs in an overall ordered and abstract patterns.



Barkcloth Panel (Siapo), Samoa, early 20th century, 139.7 x 114.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The most important traditional uses for *tapa* were for clothing, bedding and wall hangings. Textiles were often specially prepared and decorated for people of rank. *Tapa* was ceremonially displayed on special occasions, such as birthdays and weddings. In sacred contexts, *tapa* was used to wrap images of deities. Even today, at times of death, bark cloth may be integral part of funeral and burial rites.



Masi (tapa cloth), likely used as a room divider, Fiji, date unknown, 300 x 428 cm (Te Papa, New Zealand)



Barkcloth strip, Fiji, c. 1800-50, worn as a loin cloth, decorated with a combination of free-hand painting, cut out stencils and by being laid over a patterned block and rubbed with pigment (The British Museum)

In Polynesia, textiles are considered women's wealth. In social settings, bark cloth and mats participate in reciprocity patterns of cultural exchange. Women may present textiles as offerings in exchange for work, food, or to mark special occasions. For example, in contemporary contexts in Tonga, huge lengths of bark cloth are publically displayed and ceremoniously exchanged to mark special occasions. Today, western fabric has also been assimilated into exchange practices. In rare instances, textiles may even accumulate their own histories of ownership and exchange.

Hiapo: Niuean bark cloth

Niue is an island country south of Samoa. Little is known about early Niuean bark cloth or *hiapo*, as represented by the illustration depicted below. Niueans' first contact with the west was the arrival of Captain Cook, who reached the island in 1774. No visitors followed for decades, not until 1830, with the arrival of the London Missionary Society. The missionaries brought with them Samoan missionaries, who are believed to have introduced bark cloth to Niue from Samoa. The earliest examples of *hiapo* were collected by missionaries and date to the second half of the nineteenth century. Niuean *ponchos* (*tiputa*) collected during this era, are based on a style that had previously been introduced to Samoa and Tahiti (see example at left). It is probable, however, that Niueans had a native tradition of bark cloth prior to contact with the West.

In the 1880s, a distinctive style of hiapo decorations emerged that incorporated fine lines and new motifs. Hiapo from this period are illustrated with complicated and detailed geometric designs. The patterns were composed of spirals, concentric circles, squares, triangles, and diminishing motifs (the design motifs decrease in size from the border to the center of the textile). Niueans created naturalistic motifs and were the first Polynesians to introduce depictions of human figures into their bark cloth. Some hiapo examples include writing, usually names, along the edges of the overall design.



Tiputa (Poncho), 19th century, Niue (Te Papa, New Zealand) (photo: CC BY-NC-ND)



Hiapo (tapa), Niue, c. 1850–1900, Tapa or bark cloth, freehand painting (Aukland War Memorial Museum)

Niuan *hiapo* stopped being produced in the late nineteenth century. Today, the art form has a unique place in history and serves to inspire contemporary Polynesian artists. A well-known example is Niuean artist John Pule, who creates art of mixed media inspired by traditional *hiapo* design.

Tapa today

Tapa traditions were regionally unique and historically widespread throughout the Polynesian Islands. Eastern Polynesia did not experience a continuous tradition of tapa production, however, the art form is still produced today, particularly in the Hawaiian and the Marquesas Islands. In contrast, Western Polynesia has experienced a continuous tradition of tapa production. Today, bark cloth participates in native patterns of celebration, reciprocity and exchange, as well as in new cultural contexts where it inspires new audiences, artists, and art forms.

220. Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati waka Nene

Dr. Billie Lytheberg

Ancestor portraits

We all know portraits can be made of ancestors, but can a portrait be an ancestor?



Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene, 1890, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 84.2 cm (Auckland Art Gallery) *Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene, 1890, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 84.2 cm (Auckland Art Gallery)*

In *Te Ao Māori*, the Māori world, they can. Paintings like this one—and even photographs—do two important things. They record likenesses and bring ancestral presence into the world of the living. In other words, this portrait is not merely a representation of Tamati Waka Nene, it can be an embodiment of him. Portraits and other *taonga tuku iho* (treasures passed down from the ancestors) are treated with great care and reverence. After a person has died their portrait may be hung on the walls of family homes and in the *wharenui* (the central building of a community center), to be spoken to, wept over, and cherished by people with genealogical connections to them. Even when portraits like this one, kept in the collection of the Auckland Art Gallery, are absent from their families, the stories woven around them keep them alive and present. Auckland Art Gallery acknowledges these living links through its relationships with descendants of those whose portraits it cares for. The Gallery seeks their advice when asked for permission to reproduce such portraits. This portrait has been published in the Google Art Project <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/tamati-waka-nene/5QG8fzo0FBl_hQ> which is why we can look at it here.

Tamati Waka Nene

Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. The subject of this portrait, Tamati Waka Nene, was a *Rangatira* or chief of the Ngāti Hao people in Hokianga, of the Ngāpuhi iwi or tribe, and an important war leader. He was probably born in the 1780s, and died in 1871. He lived through a time of rapid change in New Zealand, when the first British missionaries and settlers were arriving and changing the Māori world forever. An astute leader and businessman, Nene exemplified the types of changes that were occurring when he converted to the Wesleyan faith and was baptised in 1839, choosing to be named Tamati Waka after Thomas Walker, who was an English merchant patron of the Church Missionary Society. He was revered throughout his life as a man with great mana or personal efficacy. (Wesleyanism is a Protestant denomination following the theology of John Wesley and associated with the Methodist Church.)

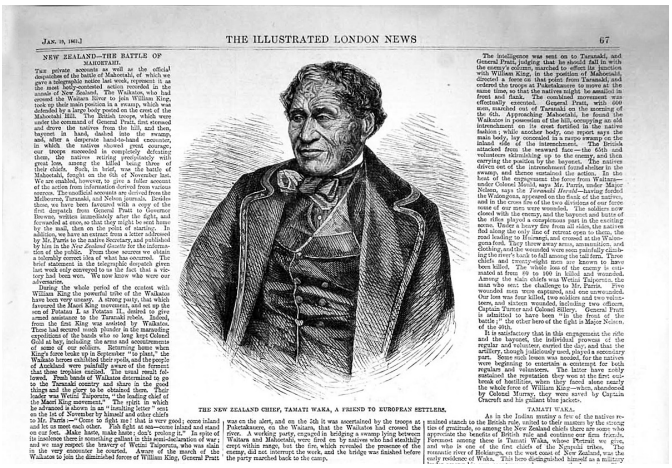
In his portrait, Nene wears a *kahu kiwi*, a fine cloak covered in kiwi feathers, and an earring of greenstone or pounamu. Both of these are prestigious *taonga* or treasures. He is holding a hand weapon known as a *tewhatewha*, which has feathers adorning its blade and a finely carved hand grip with an abalone or paua eye. All of these mark him as man of *mana* or personal efficacy and status. But perhaps the most striking feature for an international audience is his intricate facial tattoo, called *moko*.



Detail, Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene, 1890, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 84.2 cm (Auckland Art Gallery)

Gottfried Lindauer and his patron

Lindauer was a Czech artist who arrived in New Zealand in 1873 after a decade of painting professionally in Europe. He had studied at the Academy of Fine Art in Vienna from 1855 to 1861 and learned painting techniques rooted in Renaissance naturalism. When he left the Academy he began working as a portrait painter, and established his own portrait studio in 1864. Just ten years later he arrived in New Zealand and quickly became acquainted with a man called Henry Partridge who became his patron. Partridge commissioned Lindauer to paint portraits of well-known Māori, and three years later, in 1877, Lindauer held an exhibition in Wellington. The exhibition was important because it demonstrated Lindauer's abilities and he was soon being commissioned by Māori chiefs to paint their portraits. Lindauer took different approaches to his commissions depending on who was paying. He tended to paint well-known Māori in Māori clothing for European purchasers but painted unknown Māori in everyday European clothing when commissioned by their families to do so. His paintings are realistic, convincingly three-dimensional, and play beautifully with the contrast between light and shadow, causing his subjects to glow against their dark backgrounds. As his patron, Partridge amassed a large collection of portraits as well as large scale depictions that re-enacted Māori ways of life that were thought to be disappearing. In 1915, Partridge gave his collection of 62 portraits to the Auckland Art Gallery—the largest collection of Lindauer paintings in the world.



JAN. 19, 1861.] THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS 67

NEW ZEALAND—THE BATTLE OF MAHOETAHI.

Two private accounts as well as the official despatches of the battle of Mahoetahi, of which we gave a brief notice last week, have reached us of the second hard-contested action recorded in the war of New Zealand. The Waikatos, who had crossed the Waitara River to join William King, took up their main position in a swamp, which was defended by a large body posted on the crest of the Mahoetahi hill. General Pratt's troops, which were under the command of Colonel Leslie, attacked and drove the natives from the hill, and then, bayonet in hand, dashed into the swamp, and, after a desperate hand-to-hand encounter, in which the natives showed great courage, drove them out of it, and pursued them, until the latter—being completely cut off from their great line, among the killed being three of their chiefs. Such, in brief, was the battle of Mahoetahi, fought on the 6th of November last. We are enabled, however, to give a fuller account of the action from information derived from various sources, including letters published in the Melbourne, Taranaki, and Nelson journals. Besides those, we have been favoured with a copy of the first despatch from General Pratt to Governor Browne, written immediately after the fight, and forwarded at once, so that they might be sent home by the mail, then on the point of starting. This despatch, which was received on the 10th inst. by Mr. Parris to the native Secretary, and published by him in the *New Zealand Gazette* for the information of the public. From these sources we obtain a tolerably correct idea of what has occurred. The brief sentences in the telegraphic despatch given last week only conveyed to us the fact that a victory had been won. We now know who were our adversaries.

During the whole period of the contest with William King the powerful tribe of the Waikatos have been very uneasy. A strong party, that which has been fighting with the rebels, headed by Rewi, the son of Rotatau I. or Potatau II., decided to give material assistance to the Taranaki rebels. In order, from the first King was assisted by Waikatos. These had secured much plunder in the marauding expeditions of the bands who so long kept Colonel Gold at bay, including the arms and accoutrements of the 65th, which, as we have stated, fell into the hands of the Taranaki rebels on September 11 last. The Waikato braves exhibited their spoils, and the people of Auckland were painfully aware of the interest that those trophies excited. The usual result followed. Fresh bands of Waikatos determined to go to the Taranaki country and share in the good things said to be going to be obtained there. Among these was Te Paparaka, the principal chief of the Maori King movement. The spirit in which he advanced is shown in an "insulting letter" sent on the 1st of November by himself and other chiefs to Mr. Parris:—"Come to fight me! that is very good; come inland and let us meet each other. Fish fight at sea—come inland and stand on our feet. Make haste, make haste; don't prolong it." In spite of its insolence there is something gallant in this semi-declaration of war; and the reception accorded to Te Paparaka, who was slain in the very earliest fighting, by the troops of the Waikatos to join the diminished forces of William King, General Pratt was on the alert, and on the 5th it was ascertained by the troops at Puketakauere, on the Waitara, that the Waikatos had crossed the river. A working party, engaged in bridging a swamp lying between Waitara and Mahoetahi, were fired on by natives who had stealthily crept within range, but the fire, which revealed the presence of the enemy, did not interrupt the work, and the bridge was finished before the party marched back to the camp.

THE NEW ZEALAND CHIEF, TAMATI WAKA, A FRIEND TO EUROPEAN SETTLERS.

The intelligence was sent on to Taranaki, and General Pratt, judging that he should fall in with the enemy, marched his troops, consisting of detachments of the 57th, 65th, and 70th regiments of Militia, and directed a force on that point from Taranaki, and ordered the troops at Puketakauere to move at the same time, so that the natives might be assailed in front and flank. The combined movement was effectually executed. General Pratt, with 600 men, reached Te Arei on the morning of the 6th. Approaching Mahoetahi, he found the Waikatos in possession of the hill, occupying an old intrenchment on its crest fortified in the native fashion; while another body, one report says the whole force, was concealed in a rear swamp on the inland side of the position, from which they attacked from the seaward face—the 65th and volunteers shrinking up to the enemy, and thus carrying the position by the bayonet. The natives driven out of the intrenchment found shelter in the swamp, and thence sustained the action. In the fight, the 65th, which was under Major Nelson, and under Colonel Mould, says Mr. Parris, under Major Nelson, says the *Taranaki Herald*—having forded the Waingongoro, appeared on the flank of the natives, and in the cross fire of the two divisions of our force the natives were wounded. The soldiers now closed with the enemy, and the bayonet and butts of the rifles did fearful execution among the Waikatos, making the river's bank reddened among the bad swimmers. Seven chiefs, and twenty-eight natives, are said to have been killed. The whole loss of the enemy is estimated at from 60 to 100 in killed and wounded. Among the slain chiefs was Wetini Taiporutu, the man who sent the challenge to Mr. Parris. Five Europeans fell in the action, and one native woman. Our loss was four killed, two soldiers and one volunteer, and sixteen wounded, including two officers, Captain Turner and Colonel Gillery. General Pratt is admitted to have been "in the front of the battle;" the other hero of the fight is Major Nelson, of the 65th.

The testimony that in this engagement the rifle and the bayonet, the individual prowess of the regular and volunteer, carried the day, and that the artillery, though judiciously used, played a secondary part. Some such lesson was needed, for the natives were beginning to entertain a contempt for both regulars and volunteers. The latter have only themselves to thank for the reputation they won the first week of last September. They could skate round the whole force of William King—who, according to Colonel Murray, they were saved by Captain Cracroft and his gallant blue jackets.

TAMATI WAKA.

As in the Indian mutiny a few of the native regulars remained staunch to the British rule, united to their masters by the strong ties of gratitude, so among the New Zealand chiefs there are some who appreciate the benefits of British rule and continue our firm friends. Foremost among these is Tamati Waka, whose Portrait we give, and who is one of the first chiefs of the Ngapuhi tribes. The romantic river of Hokianga, on the west coast of New Zealand, was the early residence of Waka. This here distinguished himself as a military

"New Zealand—The Battle of Mahoetahi," The Illustrated London News, January 19, 1861, page 67 with engraving from John Crombie photograph of Tamati Waka Nene

Painting Tamati Waka Nene

If you've been paying attention to dates you will have noticed that Nene died in 1871 but Lindauer didn't arrive in New Zealand until 1873, and didn't paint his portrait until 1890. It is likely that Lindauer based this portrait on a photograph taken by John Crombie, who had

been commissioned to produce 12 photographic portraits of Māori chiefs for *The London Illustrated News*. There are several other photographs <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/tamati-waka-nene> of Nene, and in 1934 Charles F Goldie—another famous portrayer of Māori—painted yet another portrait of him from a photograph. So Nene didn't sit for either of his famous painted portraits but clearly sat for photographic portraits in the later years of his life. These were becoming more common by 1870, due to developments in photographic methods that made the whole process easier and cheaper. Many Māori had their portraits taken photographically and produced as a *carte de visite*, roughly the size of a playing card, and some had larger, postcard-sized images made, called cabinet portraits. Lindauer is thought to have used a device called an epidiascope to enlarge and project small photographs such as these so he could paint them.

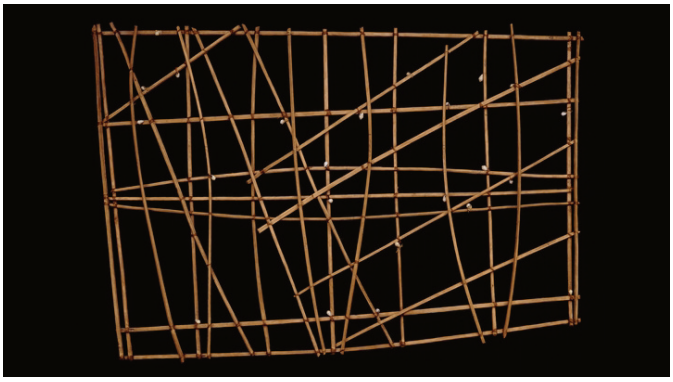
Lindauer didn't make many sketches. He worked straight onto stretched canvas, outlining his subjects in pencil over a white background before applying translucent paints and glazes. Through the thinly painted surface of some of his works, you can still see traces of pencil lines that may be evidence of his practice of outlining projected images. But Lindauer wasn't simply copying photographs. In the 1870s, color photography had yet to be invented—Lindauer was working from black and white images and reimagining them in color. Moreover, sometimes he dressed his sitters—and those he painted from photos—in borrowed garments and adorned them with *taonga* that were not necessarily theirs. Thus some of his works contain artistic interventions rather than being entirely documentary.

221. Navigation chart (Marshall Islands, Micronesia)

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Jenny Newell

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the galleries of the American Museum of Natural History in New York.



Navigation chart (rebbelib), probably 19th century C.E., wood, shell, 67.5 x 99 x 3 cm, Marshall Islands, Micronesia © Trustees of the British Museum

Steven: One of the practices from the Pacific Islands that I find most intriguing is map-making from the Marshall Islands.

Jenny: The Marshall Islands see themselves as being the greatest navigators in the world, and one of the things that you can see is a material representation of this is the wonderful maps. They're called *meddo* or *rebbelib,* and they're made of sticks and shells and put together as mental maps of the Marshall Islands and the currents and the swells that link those islands.

Steven: The maps aren't used in the way that we use GPS in the car currently, or the way that we used to use a paper map. These aren't things that the navigators would have taken with them in boats. This is a memory aid.

Jenny: So it's a thing that will help you to create a mental map, a really good, solid map, so it was only ever used onshore.

Steven: The Marshall Islands represents an enormous number of islands and atolls in the Pacific and it's the first major island group that you reach if you're traveling south-west from Hawaii.

Jenny: The Marshall Islands are a set of 29 atolls, made up of 1,200, roughly, islands and it takes up a space of about two million square kilometers.

Steven: And this is almost all water. It's so interesting that this is a map not of land, but it's a map of the relationship between land and sea.

Jenny: The sea is very much the element that Marshall Islanders live with all the time. It's a very intimate part of who they are and their daily lives and their cosmologies and this ocean links them. It's the unifying element.

Steven: I think of the ocean as a barrier, but this is the reverse. The ocean is the thing that creates the relationship between the atolls and the islands.

Jenny: The great Tongan scholar, Apeli Haloffa has written very eloquently and powerfully about this, that our sea of islands, the way they're all connected by the ocean, they're not separated by it.

Steven: I love that the cowry shells represent the islands and they're really small. Most of the chart is wood, it's sticks. It beautifully expresses how isolated those islands are, but brought together within this greater matrix of the wood, of the ocean.



Map of Oceania (source: Tintazul, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oceania_UN_Geoscheme_-_Map_of_Micronesia.svg>

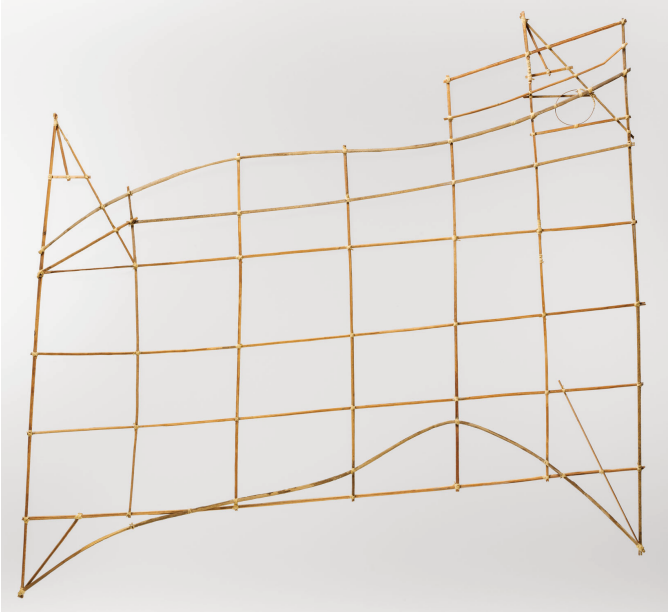
Jenny: Each one of these charts is different, because it's made by a navigator to represent the way he sees this ocean with its islands and how to get between them, and this one here is one that was collected by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Steven: The author?

Jenny: That's right. He and his family traveled to the Marshalls. He bought this here, or was given it, and then, later on, it was sold in his estate.

Steven: It seems impossible that you could create a map of the open ocean, but the way that these function, in a general sense, is that they're registering the swells, the currents, the landmarks of the open sea.

Jenny: In most of the charts, you'll see that there are these curving sticks. Those ones are like the echoes of the swells and the waves out from an island, so when they hit an island, they then echo back out and then you can see the longer sticks, are the ones which are currents and there's also sticks, which are like the pathways from one place to another, that the navigators wanted to emphasize.



Navigational Chart (Rebbilib), 19th-early 20th century, Marshall Islands, coconut midrib, fiber, 89.5 x 109.9 x 2.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of New York)

Steven: It makes sense that the chart is recording the way in which the water is responsive to the islands. Since these islands are low and probably can't be seen until you're right up against them.

Jenny: That's one of the great skills of Marshallese and other Micronesian navigators, is that as soon as you're just a little way beyond your atoll, your island, you can't see landforms anymore. You really have to just be able to read the sea.

Steven: It's a reminder of how treacherous the ocean could be for somebody who was not a skilled navigator and how important passing knowledge from a senior navigator to somebody who's just learning that craft really is.

Jenny: The master navigators would take the younger men out on the canoes and they would have them lie down in the canoe and feel the waves, and you can feel when there's one current intersecting another and you can feel the way the boat rocks differently and these are very beautifully designed outrigger canoes and they're very highly attuned to their specific lagoon and sea environment and work in all sorts of difficult sailing conditions.

Steven: That relationship with the sea is changing rapidly now.



Ocean surface (photo: gpparker, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/qNAKNA>

Jenny: The big issue for the Marshall Islanders now is climate change. During the past, it's been nuclear testing.

Steven: So in the 1940s and the 1950s, this was a place where the United States tested its hydrogen bombs, most famously at the Bikini Atoll.

Jenny: Marshall Islanders are still living with that legacy and there's still testing going on, but not nuclear weapons, it's more ballistic missiles now. But part of what has come out of that is that there's this compact of free association between the Marshall Islanders and the United States, which means that the people from the Republic of Marshall Islands can actually live and work in the States.

Steven: One can only imagine what a contemporary map would look like now, one that spans not only islands but actually nations.



Jaluit Atoll Lagoon, Marshall Islands (photo: Keith Polya, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/fWZm6e>

Steven: Certainly these maps are now fulfilling a very different role. They're much more about navigating identities and connections to place. They are put on people's walls, so if someone from Majuro, you know, the capital of the Marshalls, moves out to New York, they might take one of these. I've been working with Tina Stege from the Marshall Islands for a number of years and she wrote a beautiful piece to talk about climate change and I just wanted her to read it out for us.

Tina: I call this "We Are Navigating Threatening Seas." Our ancestors sailed to the Marshall Islands over 1000 years ago in canoes. It was a feat of wayfinding that sustains and inspires those of us now looking for a way forward in threatening seas. This is also a story of our children, and the generations to come. What will it mean to them to be Marshallese? Will they know the names of their home islands, and the wato, the land parcels that bind us to the earth and to each other? Will they think of the ocean as a part of themselves? Will it be a source of sustenance in a vast network of waves, each with names, leading like roads to other islands? Will they know the smell of Māan, the pandanus fiber we use to weave everything—clothing mats, baskets, the small flowers we wear in our hair? What will the world be like for them?

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/rrJkjEYJLWs>.

222. Malangan display and mask

Patrick Nason



Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, 280.7 x 87.6 x 26.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

Let us assume this: that there is life in everything, and that living continues long after death. Certainly, we humans are alive; as are dogs, cats, lizards, fish, trees, and birds. But so too are rivers, forests, stones, boats, buildings, and even computers. All these lives and many more have one quality in common: they are relational beings. By that I mean they have the ability to interact with other living things and affect other lives in some way. Beyond anything else, it is through this ability to build relationships that we all remain alive in one form or another. From this basic premise, we can begin to understand the lives of *malagan.*

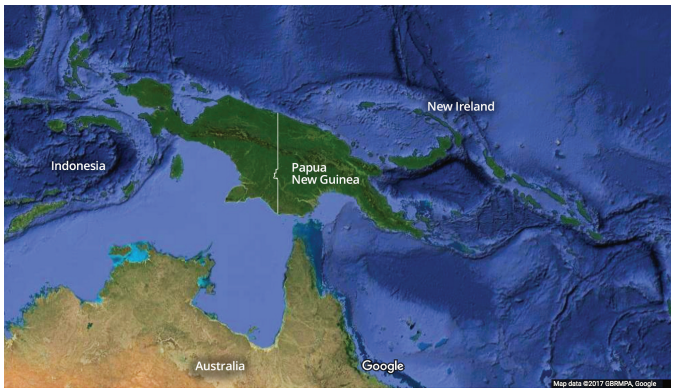


Tatanua, c. late 19th century, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, pith, and shell, 49.5 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

What are *malagan?*

The term *malagan* (also spelled *malangan* or *malanggan*) usually refers to one or more intricate carvings from the island of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea. These carvings may take the form of a mask, a wooden board or "frieze," a sturdy housepole, a circular, woven mat, or a scaled model of a dugout canoe with or without human figures inside. In many such forms, *malagan* can be found in museums

throughout the world. All of these well-traveled carvings were born in New Ireland, a place of extraordinary diversity. There alone, over thirty distinct languages are spoken. In most of these languages, the word *malagan* means "likeness," or otherwise "to carve, or inscribe."



Map of Papua New Guinea (©Google)

To see a *malagan* in person or in a photograph is to meet many inscribed likenesses or motifs, each entwined to form a single, visible organism. Of these, there are several species: on mask-like *malagan* (referred to as *Lentanon* or *Tantanua*), we normally see a contrast in color and texture in hemispheric shapes above the face. Another, the *Walik malagan*, typically features two birds or two fish poised on opposite sides of the same hole, or "eye." The *Wowara malagan* are characterized by a circular "sun" motif, and are typically woven from smooth, flat palm fronds. Upon seeing a *malagan*with its various motifs (examples in the images below), we might ask, what does it mean? Or otherwise, considering the careful detail that goes into them, we might question the tools and techniques utilized by master carvers in their production.



Seven tantanua displayed at the annual "New Ireland Day" festival, 2016 (photo: Elisha Omar)



Wowara (the radial shapes) and a Walik in between (the two lobsters) displayed at the annual "New Ireland Day" festival, 2016 (photo: Elisha Omar)

What do *malagan* do?

With such variation emerging from so many common motifs, *malagan*have confused and confounded anthropologists and art historians for over a century. Only recently have scholars begun to think differently about them. Rather than asking what each motif means, we are now listening more closely to the people of New Ireland and asking what each assemblage of motifs does in the world. By understanding these composite forms as agents, we can begin to see how *malagan*inspire, nurture, and participate in social life. To see this agency in action requires we look closely at the socioecological context out of which *malagan* come to life.

New Ireland

New Ireland is a narrow, tropical island only a few degrees south of the Equator. There are two primary seasons: a hot and dry period lasting from March to around November, and a rainy monsoon in December, January, and February. There are two modest towns on the island, but the majority of people live in rural villages. These indigenous residents spend the majority of their time in their beautiful gardens, where they grow sweet potatoes, cassava, bananas, various greens, and taro. In the village, they raise pigs, feeding them the white meat of dried coconuts. A significant part of their diet

comes from the sea. They catch smaller fish on the coral reefs and larger fish like tuna and snapper in the deep ocean. While the fish can be caught year-round, the majority of garden food is harvested after the monsoon. Assuming the gardens are maintained properly (with labor as well as a kind of fertility magic), this seasonal variability yields a surplus of crops—far more than required for basic sustenance. This is fortunate, for the arrival of the dry season marks the time when large, elaborate feasts are held throughout the island to foster the passage of recently departed relatives into the afterlife.



Pig (detail), Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, Papua New Guinea, New Ireland, New Ireland, wood, 280.7 x 87.6 x 26.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

Mortuary feasts

The people of New Ireland take these mortuary rituals very seriously. Throughout the year, as the crops grow larger and pigs grow fatter, the feasts are planned by the families of the deceased. Only when all the materials are ready—when enough pigs have been marked for sacrifice, enough taro has been dug out of the garden, and enough traditional shell-money (or mis) has been amassed—will the host family announce the impending event to the entire island. *Malagan* is the name given to these large mortuary feasts, but it more accurately refers to the carvings that are revealed with great flourish and excitement in the final moments of the event. At that time, hundreds or even thousands of people have gathered to witness a process of customary work led by an appointed cultural leader, or *maimai*. Dressed conspicuously in red, the *maimai* coordinates the entire event. He says when the pigs should be killed, when the taro should be peeled and roasted, and when various *singsing* groups should perform their unique song and dance. He supervises and coordinates obligatory exchange of *mis* (a traditional form of currency) and paper money between the family of the deceased and others who have supported them in their grief.



Group of malagan carvings displayed during a mortuary ceremony, Medina, Northern New Ireland, 1930 (photo: Felix Speiser)

With bold chants and avian gestures, the *maimai* gathers everyone together for the grand revelation of one or more *malagan* carvings. It is his responsibility to ensure everyone witnesses the powerful *malagan*, pays for the experience of seeing it, and then consumes all of the prepared food before returning to their homes at sundown. This dramatic revelation brings the living *malagan* into the social world, but only for a brief moment. For many months prior to the final event, a skilled carver secludes himself in a special enclosure, well out of sight from those in the village. With seashells, stones, knives, sharks teeth, fire, and natural pigments, he inscribes into a piece of monsoon-borne driftwood a set of images that have come to him in a dream. Snakes, crocodiles, birds, fish, and other motifs are brought into relief, many of which hold a special association with a particular matriline.* Through the sweat and fire of his efforts, a powerful assemblage comes to life.



Fish (detail), Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, Papua New Guinea, New Ireland, New Ireland, wood, 280.7 x 87.6 x 26.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

When it is finally revealed to the public, the *malagan* is considered "hot" and dangerous. Only when its witnesses "buy" it with *mis*, and when the feasting is complete, does its power diminish. The once-powerful *malagan* is cast aside to decay in the tropical forest, or is otherwise sold off to foreign tourists or museums. This final dismissal marks the "finishing" of the dead, when all the work of mourning and customary obligations has been settled. The dead are "sent away to *biksolwara*"—to the deep sea where everything has come from and to where everything eventually returns.



Profile (detail), Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, Northern New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, paint, shell, resin, 132.7 x 34.9 x 33.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

The power of the *malagan*

Like the *maimai*, the power or vitality of the *malagan* lies in its capacity to bring multiple clans together so that they may see each other, see themselves, and witness what the master carver has brought to life. Long after a dead receive their final *malagan* feast, part of that person remains active in the social world in the form of memory. Suppose, for example, a woman is working in the garden and sees a *londoli* (frigatebird) soaring overhead. There, for a brief moment, the graceful form of the bird prompts her to recall the intricate detail of *malagan*carved for her old uncle who died when she was only a child. That uncle, who long ago was sent away over the sea, enters back into her world through the power of that one, particularly memorable motif. In this capacity, *malagan* and their associated mortuary rites ensure a vibrant social life for the people of New Ireland, and an eternal afterlife for their ancestors.

*Common throughout the Papua New Guinea islands, *matriline* refers to a descent group in which membership is inherited from one's mother.

223. Presentation of Fijian mats and tapas cloths to Queen Elizabeth II

Dr. Jennifer Wagelie



Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II during the 1953-54 royal tour, silver gelatin print, 16.5 x 22 cm (Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand) <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23214937>

A procession for a royal visit

On December 17, 1953, a newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, arrived on the island of Fiji, then an English colony, and stayed for three days before continuing on their first tour of the commonwealth nations of England in the Pacific Islands. The Commonwealth of Nations, today is commonly known as the Commonwealth, but formerly the British Commonwealth is an intergovernmental organization of 53 member states that were mostly territories of the former British Empire.

While the precise date of the photograph depicted above is unknown, there is still much that can be learned both about Fijian art and culture and the Queen's historic visit. The first thing you might notice in the photograph is the procession of Fijian women making their way through a group of seated Fijian men and women.

Barkcloth

Several of the processing women are wearing skirts made of barkcloth painted with geometric patterns. Barkcloth, or *masi*, as it is referred to in Fiji, is made by stripping the inner bark of mulberry trees, soaking the bark, then beating it into strips of cloth that are glued together, often by a paste made of arrowroot. Bold and intricate geometric patterns in red, white, and black are often painted onto the *masi*. The practice of making *masi* continues in Fiji, where the cloth is often presented as gifts in important ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, or to commemorate significant events, such as a visit by the Queen of England. While in this photograph, the *masi* is only worn by the women and not carried, as far as can be ascertained in this picture; it is very likely that the women also presented the cloth to the Queen to celebrate the occasion of her visit.



Masi (bark cloth), Fiji (Auckland War Memorial Museum, accession no. 1990.54)

Mats

What is definitely evident from the photograph are the rolls of woven mats that each woman in the procession carries. Like masi, Fijian mats served and continue to serve an important purpose in Fijian society as a type of ritual exchange and tribute. Made by women, Fijian mats are begun by stripping, boiling, drying, blackening, and then softening leaves from the Pandanus plant. The dried leaves are then woven into tight, often diagonal patterns that culminate in frayed or fringed edges.



Mat, Fiji (Auckland War Memorial Museum, accession no. 1993.29)

While the mats that the women in this photograph are carrying may seem too plain to present to the Queen of England, their simplicity is an indication of their importance. In Fiji, the more simple the design, the more meaningful its function. Fijian artists continue to create mats and it is a practice that is growing, with many mats beings sold at market, often to tourists. With the advent of processed pandanus, they are more widely available than *masi*, and used heavily in wedding and funeral rituals.

In addition to *masi* and mats, Fijian art also includes elaborately carvings made of wood or ivory, as well as small woven god houses called *bure kalou*, which provided a pathway for the god to descend to the priest.

The Queen's itinerary

Returning to the Queen's visit in 1953, while in Fiji she visited hospitals and schools and held meetings with various Fijian politicians. She witnessed elaborate performances of traditional Fijian dances and songs and even participated in a *kava* ceremony, which was (and continues to be) an important aspect of Fijian culture. The *kava* drink is a kind of tea made from the *kava* root and is sipped by members of the community, in order of importance. On the occasion of the Queen's visit, she was, as you might imagine, given the first sip of *kava*. In thinking about the importance of the *kava* ceremony, consider what might happen if everyone from a large group takes a sip from the same cup and of the same liquid. Although sipped in order of hierarchical importance, it would, in the end, put everyone in the group on the same level before beginning the event, meeting, or ceremony.

After three days on the island of Fiji, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip departed for the Kingdom of Tonga where they stayed for two days before leaving for extended stays in New Zealand and Australia. On Tonga, they were greeted warmly by Queen Sälote and other members of the royal Tongan family. On the occasion of her visit to Tonga, an enormous barkcloth was commissioned in Queen Elizabeth's honor and had her initials, "ERIII," painted onto the rare piece of *ngatu*. Referred to as *ngatu launima* in Tongan, it is just shy of 75 feet in length and is significant not only because it commemorated Queen Elizabeth's visit, but also because it was placed under the coffin of Queen Sälote when her body was flown back to Tonga in 1960 after an extended stay in a New Zealand hospital. The barkcloth is now in the collection of Te Papa Tongarewa/Museum of New Zealand <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/95519>, after being donated by the pilot who had flown Queen Sälote's body back to Tonga, to whom the barkcloth had been given by the Tongan Royal Family.



Bure kalou, Fiji, 81 x 38 cm (Australian Museum) <http://australianmuseum.net.au/image/house-model-fiji-pun1142>

Global Contemporary 1980 C.E. to present

224. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates

Dr. Doris Maria-Reina Bravo



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates, 1979-2005 (view across the pond looking southeast) © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates, 1979-2005 (aerial photo: Roy Smith) © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Nearly thirty years after the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude first conceived of *The Gates*, this logistically complex project was finally realized over a period of two weeks in New York's Central Park. Each gate, a rectilinear three-sided rigid vinyl frame resting on two steel footings, supported saffron-colored fabric panels that hung loosely from the top. The gates themselves matched the brilliant color of the fabric. The statistics are impressive: 7,503 gates ran over 23 miles of walkways; each gate was 16 feet high, with widths varying according to the paths' width. Despite a brief exhibition period—February 12th through 27th 2005—*The Gates* remains a complex testament to two controversial topics in contemporary art: how to create meaningful public art and how art responds to and impacts our relationship with the built environment.

Wrapped, surrounded, suspended

Since the 1960s, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have introduced eye-catching color into the landscape, for example, pink in *Surrounded Islands,* 1980-83 in Biscayne Bay, Florida.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83 Photo: Wolfgang Volz © 1983 Christo

The saffron color in *The Gates* was used to create "a golden ceiling creating warm shadows"[1] for the visitor walking along the Central Park path. The same color also appeared in an earlier work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Valley Curtain* (1970-72), in Rifle, Colorado.



Christo, Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado 1970-72, © 1972 Christo

In contrast to many of their works that directly intervene in urban structures like the Pont Neuf in Paris or the German Parliament building in Berlin, where architectural masses are literally wrapped, *Surrounded Islands* and *Valley Curtain* engage, rather than seek to contain nature: a pink border of fabric floating around islands or a curtain suspended across a remote valley.

A public art

The Gates respond to spaces designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux within the dense urban grid of Manhattan. The artists complicate an environment that was, in fact, entirely invented in the mid-nineteenth century to express the Victorian ideal of the pastoral and picturesque landscape.

This intrusion into Manhattan's "natural environment" left many visitors uneasy, as in the case of Joanne Landy:

> Whoever…wrote about the way the exhibit draws aesthetic attention to the park itself is off the mark, in my experience anyway. The flags just draw attention to themselves, period, and there appears to be no particular relationship to the shapes and colors of the park. That's part of the problem. [2]

A point of contrast can be seen at the Storm King Art Center, a renowned sculpture park 52 miles north of New York City that has successfully cultivated a dialogue between sculptures and their landscape for over fifty years. Whereas sculptures are installed within the meadows and rolling hills of Storm King's grounds, *The Gates* were tied to the paths that meander through the park. This was done for two reasons: to avoid drilling thousands of holes into the soil and potentially harming the root systems of adjacent trees, and because Christo and Jeanne-Claude were inspired by the way the city's pedestrians navigate its paths. Thus, in contrast to the works in Biscayne Bay and Rifle that divide and isolate forms in the landscape, *The Gates* aligned itself along pre-existing pathways of movement.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates, 1979-2005, © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Pathways

A path cut into a pristine natural environment is very much an intervention, as evidenced in Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967 and Walter De Maria's *One Mile Long Drawing*, 1969.

However, Central Park, a much-loved urban oasis, is one of the most famous examples of urban planning. The Gates reinforce and highlight pre-existing routes within this manmade environment. Critiques of *The Gates* that are rooted in the issue of the artwork's relationship with nature are therefore curious since the Park itself is not an untouched natural space.



Richard Long, A Line Made by Walking England, 1967 © Richard Long

This installation alters the experience of seeing and walking along the paths that run throughout the park. The title alludes to a threshold, a point of exit and entrance. In fact, in some places, the structures form an oval. There is no starting point and no endpoint and moreover, no favored point from which to view the work. It is an installation made for the pedestrian in motion and not a static object that asks us to stand still before it.

Bureaucratic collaborators

The Gates cost 21 million dollars and both the artists and the supporting institutions (the City of New York and the Central Park Conservancy) were quick to emphasize that Christo and Jeanne-Claude financed the project themselves and that the installation was free to the public. The artists sold preparatory drawings related to *The Gates* and other works before the exhibition opened; they rely on this method to independently fund their projects since they do not accept sponsors. Though the City and the Central Park Conservancy did not use public money to support this project, their approval and support were seen as an invaluable currency by many critics. Months before *The Gates* debuted, both institutions had worked in concert to prevent United for Peace from holding an antiwar demonstration in Central Park to coincide with the Republican National Convention which was held in New York that year.



Christo, The Gates (Project for Central Park, New York City), 2003, 38 x 244 cm and 106.6 x 244 cm, pencil, charcoal, pastel, crayon, fabric sample, aerial photograph (Whitney Museum of American Art) © 2003 Christo

It is important to remember that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's favorable turn with the powers that be was 26 years in the making. The artists submitted proposals, attended meetings, and made presentations throughout this period, persisting even after they received a 251-page official rejection only three years into their campaign. Many consider the 2001 mayoral election of Michael Bloomberg—a Christo and Jeanne-Claude collector—as the turning point in this saga. The artists are accustomed to bureaucratic battles, an inevitability given subjects that reshape iconic structures such as their *The Pont Neuf, Wrapped*, 1975-1985, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1971-1995, and *The Gates*.

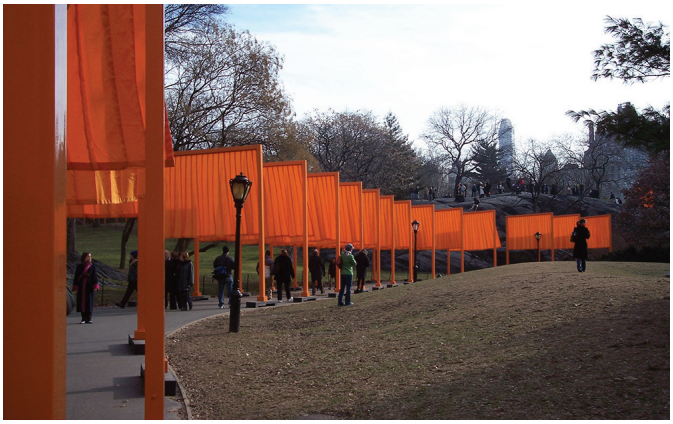


Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Wrapped Reichstag,1971-95, © Christo (photo: Jotefa, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/avxgH>

Art designed to end

It might seem odd that Christo and Jeanne-Claude invest so much time, effort, reputation, and money in creating ephemeral non-collectible artwork. Yet they are completely devoted to this kind of artistic practice: "The temporary quality of the projects is an aesthetic decision. Our works are temporary in order to endow the works of art with a feeling of urgency to be seen, and the love and tenderness brought by the fact that they will not last. Those feelings are usually reserved for other temporary things such as childhood and our own life. These are valued because we know that they will not last. We want to offer this feeling of love and tenderness to our works, as an added value (dimension) and as an additional aesthetic quality." [3]

In the end the show took about six weeks to install and *The Gates* came down the day after the exhibition ended, with most of the materials headed for recycling. The artists maintain a thorough archive of their work on their website; along with projects that never materialized (including several for New York City) and current projects (not surprisingly these are decades in the making). With Jeanne-Claude's passing in 2009, this archive <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/projects/the-gates#.U1P2neZdXbE> of the past, present, and future is poignant in its meticulous documentation and optimism—evidence of the duo's perseverance and monumental dreams.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates, 1979-05, © Christo, Jeanne-Claude

225. Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.



Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial (entrance), 1982, granite, National Mall, Washington, D.C. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: We're in Washington, D.C. on the mall at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.

Beth: Which is situated right between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. Maya Lin, the architect of the memorial, set about uniting the memorial to the nation's past, bringing together the past and the present.

Steven: It's this very long series of slabs of stone—this highly reflective black granite—that actually points to both of those monuments.

Beth: Although the architect didn't like to refer to these as walls, in a way they are walls, but they're very thin, sunk into the ground and inscribed with the names of the servicemen who died in the Vietnam War.

Steven: Now there are more than 58,000 names and in fact, more names are being added. It is overwhelming in its density of names. What happens as you walk down this path is you sink into the earth. The earth opens up and reveals these names. Because the surface of the stone is so reflective, it becomes a mirror and really all that seems to have substance is the rougher surface of the names themselves.

Beth: Maya Lin's idea was that it was the names that were the reality—the substance of the monument—and that the reflectivity of the granite opened up into another world that we could not enter, but which was there for us to see.

Steven: She describes when she first visited the site that she wanted to reveal that edge.

Beth: In fact, she said, "I had a simple impulse to cut into the earth. I imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth, opening it up, and initial violence and pain that in time would heal." She writes that "the experience of the monument would help people to come to terms with the death of their loved ones."

Steven: There is a real journey involved here. You walk down in, you find the name of your loved one embedded within the chronological sequence of the death of all of these soldiers, and then you walk back out.

Beth: That's right. In the center, the chronology begins and goes down toward the right as we're facing the wall and then picks up again on the low edge of the left side and then towards the center again. As we move down the center, the path widens and the granite rises more than 10 feet above us.

Steven: The names become a symbol of this person multiplied more than 58,000 times, but even though you've got that abstraction, you also have this very concrete reality. You have this place for family to come, to gather, to reflect on that name.

Beth: Maya Lin talks about the name as an abstraction that in fact, means more to family and loved ones than a picture. The picture represents someone at a particular time and a particular place as one moment in their lives whereas a name might recall everything about that person.

Steven: There is this powerful accumulation of all of the names. As you descend, as you walk into the densest middle of the monument, it becomes absolutely overwhelming.



Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982, granite, National Mall, Washington, D.C. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/gb7xsJ>

Beth: It's a very different experience than most previous war memorials. When we think about the history of war memorials, we often think about memorials to military heroes like the monument to Lord Nelson in Trafalgar Square or we might think about the Shaw memorial by Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the National Gallery where you have a hero leading an anonymous army with an allegorical figure representing peace and death, this combination of allegory and heroism that's usually in memorials, it's completely absent here.

Steven: How can one create a meaningful monument in the late twentieth century? What does it mean to strip away all of the representational form? What does it mean to create something so subconsciously abstract and yet also so powerful and so meaningful?

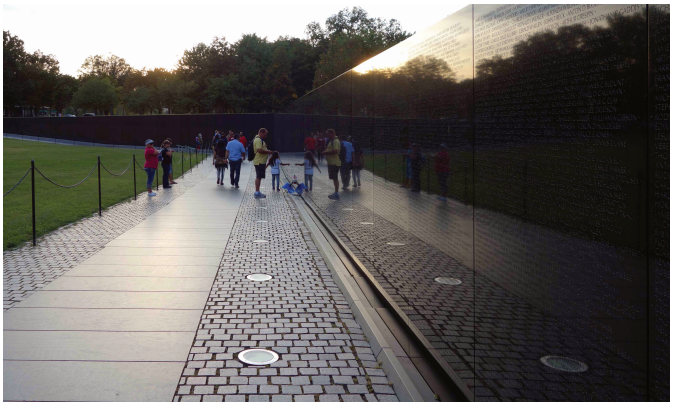
Beth: Evidently the committee that judged this decided that this abstraction would be best. It's interesting to think about how the committee didn't know who Maya Lin was. There were 1,400 entries, completely anonymous. Maya Lin at that point was an undergraduate at Yale, she was an architecture student, she's an Asian American. It's interesting to think about what might have happened had they known who this application was from.

Steven: Once her identity had been revealed, there was real backlash and racism. There was backlash also about the abstraction. Ultimately that was resolved by a much more naturalistic sculpture adjacent to the main memorial.

Beth: One that shows soldiers in a very naturalistic way, three-dimensionally, which is also powerful, but in a way that feels much more public and far less intimate.

Steven: Maya Lin was brilliant in creating a space that is public and yet has tremendous intimacy. We can feel those names inscribed. The active reading is to come close, to internalize those names. Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial is one of the most successful memorials in the nation.

Beth: And apparently one of the most visited monuments in Washington, D.C. In an article that was published much later, writing about her ideas for the monument, Maya Lin said, "It would be an interface between our world and the quieter, darker, more peaceful world beyond. I chose black granite in order to make the surface reflective and peaceful. I never looked at the memorial as a wall, an object, but as an edge to the earth, an opened side. The mirrored sect would double the size of the park creating two worlds; one we are part of and one we cannot enter."



Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982, granite, National Mall, Washington, D.C. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/gb7bbe>

Steven: Even that black granite created controversy. She also talked about how she couldn't accept granite that came from Canada or from Sweden, two countries that had really good quality black granite because there was too much political baggage because draft dodgers had gone to both of those countries.

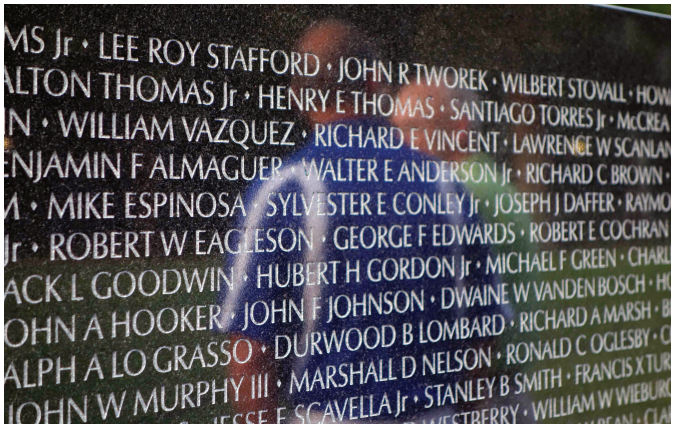
Beth: One opponent of her design said, "One needs no artistic education to see this memorial designed for what it is, a black scar and a hole hidden, as if out of shame." No, I think this is very different than what Maya Lin intended for the wall. She specifically took an

apolitical approach and wanted the design to be about those veterans who had sacrificed their lives and not about the political controversy at all; not about whether it was something shameful or something honorable.

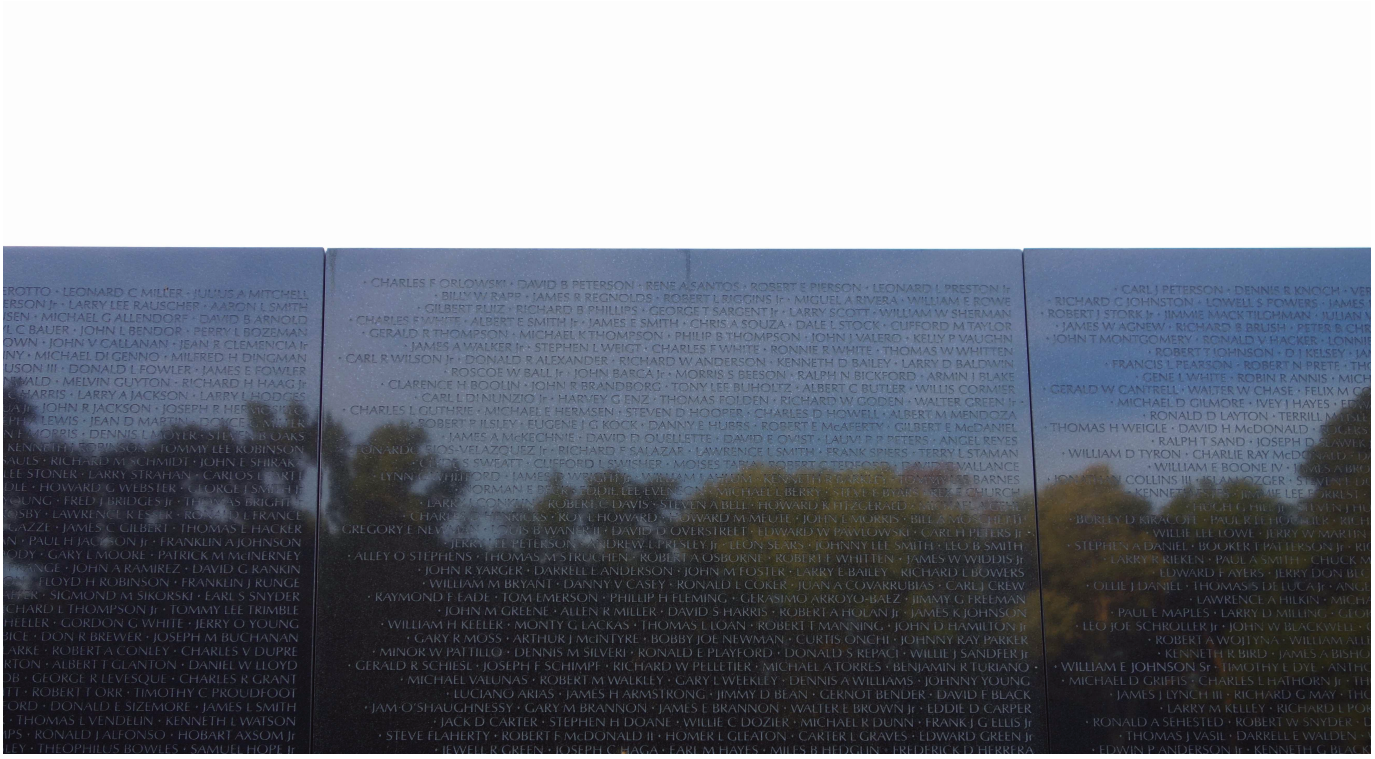
Steven: The country had not only fought the war but then fought itself over the meaning of the war. Maya Lin was very wise in sidestepping that and putting to the fore simply the names, the numerical power of all those fallen.

Beth: And she wrote, "The wall dematerializes of the form and allows the names to become the object. Pure and reflective surfaces that would allow visitors the chance to see themselves with the names."

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/wuxjTxxQUTs>.



Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982, granite, National Mall, Washington, D.C. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/gb7D5W>



Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial (detail), 1982, granite, National Mall, Washington, D.C. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/gb7Bad>

226. Basquiat, Horn Players

Dr. Jordana Moore Saggese



Jean-Michel Basquiat, Horn Players, 1983, acrylic and oil stick on three canvas panels mounted on wood supports, 243.8 x 190.5 cm (The Broad Art Foundation) © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat

Jean-Michel Basquiat's 1983 painting *Horn Players* shows us all the main stylistic features we have come to expect from this renowned American artist. In addition to half-length portraits on the left and right panels of this triptych (a painting consisting of three joined panels), the artist has included several drawings and words—many of which Basquiat drew and then crossed out. On each panel, we also notice large swaths of white paint, which seem to simultaneously highlight the black background and obscure the drawings and/or words beneath. Most notable perhaps is the preponderance of repeated words like "DIZZY," "ORNITHOLOGY," "PREE" and "TEETH" that the artist has scattered across all three panels of this work.

Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie

Despite the seeming disorder of the composition, however, it is clear that the main subjects of *Horn Players* are two famous jazz musicians—the saxophonist Charlie Parker and the trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, who Basquiat has depicted in both linguistic and visual portraits. On the left of the canvas, the artist has drawn the figure of Parker, holding his saxophone which emits several hot pink musical notes and distorted waves of sound. We see Dizzy Gillespie in the right panel, who holds a silent instrument alongside his torso. The words "DOH SHOO DE OBEE" that float to the left of the figure's head call to mind the scat (wordless improvisational) singing Gillespie often performed onstage.

Many of the words Basquiat has written on the canvas relate specifically to Charlie Parker, but they make sense only for those viewers with some knowledge of the musician's life. For example, the literal meaning of "ORNITHOLOGY" is "the study of birds," but this is also the title of a famous composition by Parker, who named the tune (first recorded in 1946) in reference to his own nickname "Bird." The words "PREE" and "CHAN" that we see written above and below the saxophonist's portrait refer to Parker's infant daughter and common-law wife, respectively.

Basquiat and wordplay



Jean-Michel Basquiat posing next to SAMO graffiti

This kind of wordplay is a characteristic that extends across most of Jean-Michel Basquiat's work. One of the most recognizable features of the artist's more than 2000 paintings and drawings is the overwhelming abundance of written words on the canvas. The art historian Robert Farris Thompson once declared: "It's as if he were dripping letters." Before his success as a painter, Basquiat was famous for writing on the walls of lower Manhattan as a teenager when he and a high school friend, Al Diaz, left cryptic messages in spray paint under the name "SAMO" (an acronym for "Same Old Shit") from 1977 until 1979.

As SAMO, Basquiat and Diaz wrote maxims, jokes, and prophecies in marker and spray paint on subway trains throughout New York City (particularly the "D" train, which ran between downtown Manhattan and Basquiat's home in Brooklyn), as well as on the walls and sidewalks in the SoHo and Tribeca neighborhoods. Many of the locations where SAMO writings were to be found were in close proximity to prominent art galleries. Combined with these strategic positions, phrases like "SAMO AS AN END TO PLAYING ART" or "SAMO FOR THE SO-CALLED AVANT-GARDE" presented the "SAMO" persona as outside the commercial art world and critical of it. In fact, even after relinquishing the SAMO persona and emerging to the art world as Jean-Michel Basquiat, the artist remained an outsider to the mainstream art world, despite his meteoric rise on the art auction block.

"The Black Picasso"

Basquiat went from SAMO" to commercial success at warp speed in the early 1980s. He first exhibited (still under the name SAMO) at the Times Square Show—an exhibition in June 1980 that marked the genesis of the eighties art movement. He was later invited to exhibit in New York/New Wave <http://momaps1.tumblr.com/post/43657654469/new-yorknew-wave-which-opened-32-years-ago>, a group show of sixteen hundred works by 119 artists that opened at P.S. 1 on Valentine's Day. The show was affectionately called "The Armory Show" of the 1980s (the original Armory Show in 1913 was the first large exhibition of international modern art in America).

Almost immediately afterward, the young Basquiat (at this point just 20 years old) was invited to exhibit in his first solo show in Modena, Italy. The gallerist Annina Nosei, who showed more established artists like David Salle and Richard Prince, agreed to represent Basquiat, who had a one-man show at her gallery the next year. That same year, Basquiat had exhibitions in Los Angeles, Zurich, Rome, and Rotterdam and became the youngest artist invited to participate in Documenta 7 (an international contemporary art exhibition that takes place every five years). By 1983 the average sale price of Basquiat's work had increased by 600 percent, and his popularity (both in the auction house and in popular culture) persists even today. You can buy his images on shirts and hats from popular retail outlets and his large paintings sell at auction for more than $20 million.

Based on his meteoric success, critics referred to Jean-Michel Basquiat as "the black Picasso." The nickname was complicated for Basquiat, who never embraced it, but was nevertheless concerned with his own place within art history. He often relied on textbooks and other sources for his visual material; most biographies of the artist note his reliance on the medical textbook *Gray's Anatomy* (a gift from the artist's mother when Basquiat was hospitalized as a child) for the anatomical drawings and references we see on many of his surfaces. Basquiat also appropriated the work of Leonardo, Edouard Manet, and Pablo Picasso into his own compositions. These appropriations were in part an homage to the great painters Basquiat admired, but they also were a way for Basquiat to rewrite art history and insert himself into the canon.



Pablo Picasso, Three Musicians, 1921, oil on canvas, 200.7 x 222.9 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Looking again at *Horn Players*, for example, reveals several connections to Picasso's *Three Musicians*. Basquiat's use of the triptych format—a popular device for the artist in this period—echoes the triple subjects of the Picasso image. The figure of Parker in Basquiat's composition is also reproduced in the same position as the standing figure (playing the clarinet) in Picasso's work.



Right: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Horn Players (detail), 1983, acrylic and oilstick on three canvas panels mounted on wood supports, 243.8 x 190.5 cm (The Broad Art Foundation) © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat; left: Pablo Picasso, Three Musicians (detail), 1921, oil on canvas, 200.7 x 222.9 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

The central panel of Basquiat's canvas, which does not show a portrait of an identifiable musician like the other two panels, but instead a distorted head with roughly outlined features, suddenly comes into focus via its comparison with *Three Musicians*. Here Picasso references in paint, his earlier experiments with paper collage especially in rendering the face and head of his central figure, whose jawline dramatically extends beyond what is anatomically possible to create an abstract, bulbous shape. Basquiat's central figure bears a

similar protrusion—this time from the top of the head—which he fills in with hatch marks that are suggestive of the patterning of Picasso's "collaged" paper. Once again, Basquiat seems to be speaking in code. This time, we are being asked not only to draw upon our knowledge of music history but of modern painting to fully understand his work.

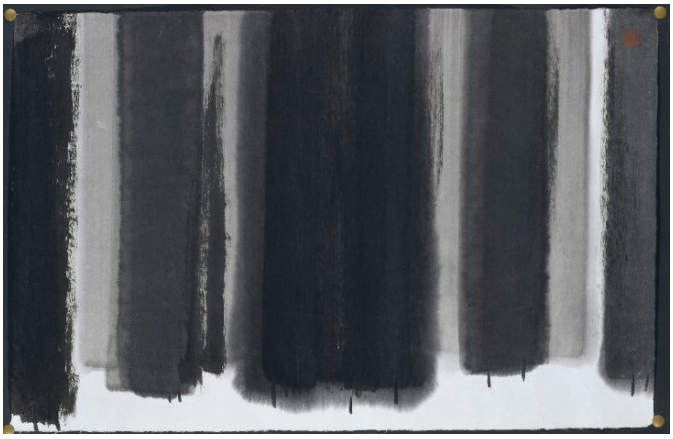
Basquiat's musicians

Musicians were a popular subject for Basquiat, who himself played briefly in a noise band called Gray––likely a reference to the *Gray's Anatomy* textbook. Jazz musicians began to appear in the artist's paintings around 1982; references to jazz musicians or recordings appear in more than thirty large-format paintings and twenty works on paper. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie are the two musicians who appear most frequently, both as figures in the paintings and through linguistic references to their work. The artist painted canvases with figures playing the trumpet, the saxophone, and the drums. He also devoted several canvases to replicating the labels of jazz records or the discographies of musicians.

Many scholars have connected Basquiat's interest in jazz to a larger investment in African American popular culture (for example, he also painted famous African American athletes) but an alternative explanation is that the young Basquiat looked to jazz music for inspiration and for instruction, much in the same way that he looked to the modern masters of painting. Parker, Gillespie, and the other musicians of the bebop era infamously appropriated both the harmonic structures of jazz standards, using them as a structure for their own songs, and repeated similar note patterns across several improvisations. Basquiat used similar techniques of appropriation throughout his career as a painter.

227. Song Su-nam, Summer Trees

Dr. Hannah Sigur



Song Su-Nam, Summer Trees, 1979, ink on paper, 2 feet 1-5/8 inches high (British Museum) © Song Su-Nam

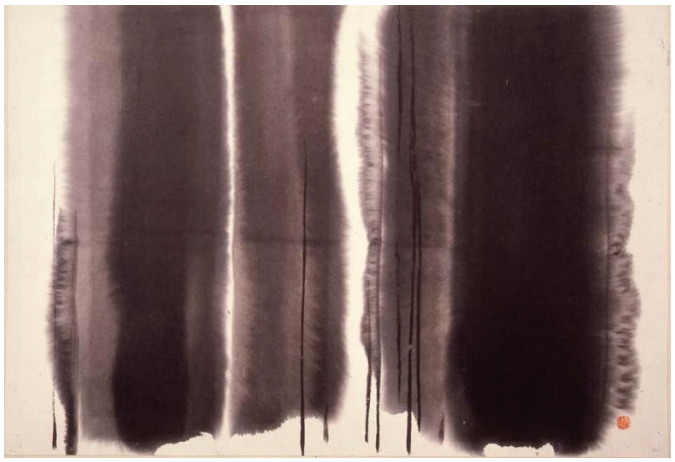
Modern, but deeply rooted in tradition

In Song Su-nam's *Summer Trees,* broad, vertical parallel brush strokes of ink blend and bleed from one to the other in a stark palette of velvety blacks and diluted grays. The feathery edges of some reveal them to be pale washes applied to very wet paper, while the darkest appear as streaks that show both ink and paper were nearly dry. The forms overlap and stop just short of the bottom edge of the paper, suggesting a sense of shallow space—though one that would be difficult to enter. Only a practiced hand could control ink with such simplicity and impact. The painting exudes psychological power, despite its relatively modest proportions (it is only a little more than 2 feet high).

Song's exploration of tone (the shades of black and gray) and the effects produced by the marks of the brush, the wet paper, and dripping ink, has led some to think that these abstract, formal qualities are the real subject of this very modern-looking work. But it is important that the title refers to the natural world. Song created *Summer Trees* in 1979, but he made at least two similar paintings. One, in 1986, he called *Tree* (below). Not until the second <https://tinyurl.com/y2dn6s67>, painted in 2000, did he fully embrace abstraction by leaving the work untitled. His title—and even his decision to create a work in ink—shows us that though clearly addressing issues of contemporary art—Song's work is deeply rooted in tradition.

Ink

To choose the medium of ink on paper was important for the artist, a leader of Korea's "Sumukhwa" or Oriental Ink Movement of the 1980s. Sumukwha is the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese word for "ink wash painting," also called "literati painting." The "literatus" can be defined as a "scholar-poet" or "scholar-artist," a type of ideal man that emerged in China in the eleventh century or before. Chinese poetry was considered the noblest art and "ink wash painting" was its twin, because writing a poem and making a painting used the same tools and techniques—one resulting in words, the other a picture. In their simplicity and reductiveness, the style of ink wash paintings created centuries ago often seem to match Western notions of abstraction.



Song Su-Nam, Tree, 1985, india ink on Korean paper, 94 x 138 cm (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea) © Song Su-Nam

In Chinese poetry, mountainous landscapes and the plants that grow in them serve as metaphors for the ideal qualities of the literatus himself—qualities such as loyalty, intelligence, spirituality, and strength in adversity. The world the literatus wants to live in is one of beauty, deep in nature, away from the centers of power and money. These themes provided painters with a library of motifs. From the 1970s–90s, Song created many such landscapes, executed unconventionally, with and without titles. *Summer Trees* may also reference a traditional theme: a group of pine trees can symbolize a gathering of friends of upright character. Whatever his intention

with this title, Song was clearly alluding to the special world of the literati. Highly educated and a respected professor, he stood among the modern literati of Korea.

A Korean identity

Song's interest in abstraction and the formal properties of ink has led some art historians to attribute the inspiration for his work to that of American artists like Morris Louis who used the medium of acrylic resin on canvas in his "Stripe" paintings of the 1960s, which resemble Song's works of later decades such as Summer Trees. But in Korea during the 1980s there was a tension between the influence of Western art that used oil paint (whether traditional or contemporary in style), and traditional Korean art that used an East Asian style, the vocabulary of traditional motifs, and the medium of ink for calligraphy and painting. Song felt very strongly that the materials and styles of Western art did not express his identity as a Korean.



Ni Zan, Six Gentleman, 1345, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 61.9 x 33.3 cm (Shanghai Museum)



Morris Louis, Pungent Distances, 1961, magna on canvas, 231.8 x 150.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) © 1961 Morris Louis

Sumukwha provided Song and his circle with a way to express Korean identity. Since antiquity, the country had taken great pride in a political and cultural distinctiveness that was recognized throughout Asia. Yet the twentieth century had brought humiliating trauma: the end of Korea's ancient monarchy, colonization by the Japanese who had attempted to obliterate the Korean language, mass destruction during the Korean War (1950-53), and the partitioning of the nation. In South Korea, where Song lived, the country was healing but endured authoritarian government and student unrest. People lived in constant fear of hostility from North Korea. For protection, they accepted a conspicuous American military presence, but this cast modernization in a decidedly Westernized light.

Sumukwha's ideal—the literatus—presented a compelling antidote to the psychological displacement felt by Song's circle of artists and intellectuals: a model individual of character and moral compass no matter what challenges life presents; and a way of expressing those ideals through his iconic tools of ink and brush. *Summer Trees*, with its allusions to friendship and a balmy season, could be Song's statement of optimism in the rediscovery of traditional values recast for modern times.

228. Abakanowicz, Androgyne III

Dr. Mary Kinnecome



Magdalena Abakanowicz, Androgyne III, 1985, burlap, resin, wood, nails, and string, 121.9 x 161.3 x 55.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

> Becoming: Between myself and the material with which I create, no tool intervenes. I select it with my hands. I shape it with my hands. My hands transmit energy to it. In translating idea into form, they always pass on to it something that eludes conceptualization. They reveal the unconscious. –Magdalena Abakanowicz

War and childhood

At the beginning of World War II, Abakanowicz, then a young girl, witnessed German tanks enter her family's estate. At one point, a drunken soldier burst into her house and, in Abakanowicz's presence, shot off her mother's arm. In 1944, the family was forced to flee the advance of the Soviet army and ended up in Warsaw, where the artist still lives and works. As a teenager, Abakanowicz worked as a nursing assistant in a makeshift hospital caring for the wounded while also finishing her high school education. Her family lost everything during the war and had to hide their aristocratic roots when the nobility became the enemy in postwar Communist Poland. Abakanowicz remembered, "…we, as family, lost our identity. We were deprived of our social position and…thrown out of society. We were punished for being rich. So I had to hide my background. I had to lie. I had to invent." [1]

Magdalena Abakanowicz was born in 1930 and spent her early years on the family's estate about 200 miles east of Warsaw. There, she often played in the nearby forest, an experience that later influenced the materials she uses in her work. Her family had both Tartar and aristocratic roots (the term Tartar has a complex history but in this case, the artist's father was a descendant of Abaqa Khan, a thirteenth-century Il-khan of Persia). (Abaqa Khan was a Mongol ruler or "Il-khan" who controlled Persian Ilkhanate or kingdom, present-day Iran, from 1265 until 1282. Abaqa Khan was the great-grandson of Ghengis Khan, founder of the Mongol Empire.)

After the war

Abakanowicz graduated the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1955. Post-war Poland was part of the Soviet bloc and had a Communist government. Social Realism was the style taught in art schools during this era and initially, Abakanowicz experimented with textiles and weaving in order to avoid it. Social Realism demanded images of smiling workers and a perfected society and although Abakanowicz disliked the style, she was ultimately required to adopt it in order to obtain a degree and enter the Polish Artists Union—a step required of all professional sculptors. Socialist Realism was a style of art found especially in the Soviet Union, China, other communist nations from the 1930s until the 1980s. Its images of happy, healthy, and productive workers celebrated the role of labor in making the state strong. It used bright colors and bold, easily understood graphics and was often used as propaganda.

Throughout her life, Abakanowicz has continued to live in Poland despite the communist government that held power there until 1989 and the hardships that she and her fellow Poles endured. After Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, there was considerable hardship in Warsaw but also a flourishing of the arts. Abakanowicz attended gatherings of artists, intellectuals, scientists, and politicians in the one-room apartment of the Polish Constructivist painter Henryk Stażewski. Joseph Stalin led the Soviet Union from the 1920s until his death in 1953. He was largely responsible for the push for rapid industrialization and the forced collectivization of farms in the USSR, initiatives that caused wide-spread hardship and famines resulting in the deaths of millions. Stalin entered into a pact with Hitler that allowed Germany to invade Poland though he would later repulse Nazi aggression. Stalin became infamous for condemning the educated elite as enemies of the working class and for political show trials.



Magdalena Abakanowicz, Abakan Red, 1969, sisal and metal, 405 x 382 x 400 cm, Tate (photo: Rachel, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Unconventional materials

In 1967 Abakanowicz began creating forms made with fabric and tapestry. She became well known for work she called *Abakans*, a series of monumental fiber sculptures that created the framework for her later work. The *Abakan* sculptures refer to clothing but are not functional. They hang from the ceiling and although they allude to human figures, they also reference the natural world. Some gently swing, suggesting the rocking of underwater vegetation, or the flight of birds.

In the 1970s, Abakanowicz began to experiment with other materials including burlap, string, and cotton gauze. In 1974, she began to form figures by dipping burlap and string into resin, which she then pressed into a plaster mold. Sometimes she took a cast from the body of a friend for these forms. The figures are hollow and repetitious as can be seen in *Seated Figures* (1974-79) <http://www.abakanowicz.art.pl/seated/seated10.php.html> and *Backs* (1976-80) <http://www.abakanowicz.art.pl/backs/BacksinCanada.php.html>.

Androgyne III

The body as a structure became increasingly important to Abakanowicz and she visited laboratories to learn more about dissection and the construction of the human body. The effect of *Seated Figures* and *Backs* can be chilling and is often understood as expressing dehumanization in the twentieth-century. In these works, the same shape is repeated but the surface of each figure has an individual texture, the result of Abakanowicz's unique handling of the materials.[2]



Magdalena Abakanowicz, Androgyne III, 1985, burlap, resin, wood, nails, and string, 121.9 x 161.3 x 55.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Androgyne III uses the same molded-torso shell that Abakanowicz employed in her sculpture series *Backs* (1976-1980). The piece is made of burlap, resin, wood, nails, and string. Unlike the *Back* series, however, in which the figures sat directly on the floor, the *Androgyne* torsos are seated on low stretchers of wooden logs, perhaps filling in for lost legs.

Abakanowicz's figures are mostly androgynous, with their sexual characteristics de-emphasized. The artist wants the viewer to focus on the humanity of the figures rather than their gender. At the same time, the fragmentary nature of the figures is important, perhaps a reflection of the time she spent helping in the hospital during World War II and her memories of the attack on her mother. A distinguishing feature of all of the burlap casts is the wrinkled skin and the implication of backbones, musculature, and veins. The bodies, or body parts, more accurately, are intended to be seen in the round as the hollow interior is as much a part of the piece as the molded exterior. Space is as significant as mass in these works.

Abakanowicz draws on her personal history, but her sculptures possess an ambiguity that encourages multiple interpretations that speak broadly to human experience. *Androgyne III* alludes to the brutality of war and the totalitarian state. The body is a husk without arms, legs or a head. It is an expression of suffering, both mournful and disturbing.

[1] Michael Brenson, "Abakans," *Art Journal* (spring 1995) 54/1, p. 59. [2] Mara Witzling, ed., *Voicing Today's Visions: Writings by Contemporary Women Artists*, New York, NY: Universe Publishing, 1994, p. 92.

229. Xu Bing, A Book from the Sky

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Allison Young and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



Xu Bing, Book from the Sky, c. 1987-91, hand-printed books and ceiling and wall scrolls printed from wood letterpress type; ink on paper, each book, open: 18 1/8 × 20 inches / 46 × 51 cm; each of three ceiling scrolls 38 inches × c. 114 feet 9-7/8 inches / 96.5 × 3500 cm; each wall scroll 9 feet 2-1/4 inches × 39-3/8 inches / 280 × 100 cm (installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), collection of the artist, © Xu Bing (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/rknXgA>

Steven: I'm in the Metropolitan Museum of Art with Allison Young. We're in an installation by the Chinese artist, Xu Bing, called *Book from the Sky*. Chinese characters are above us, they're below us, and they're on either side of us.

Allison: Pages containing columns and columns of Chinese text are surrounding us on the walls, hanging from the ceiling, and also on the floor in the open book pages from volumes that he has hand-bound in the form of traditional Chinese book art.

Steven: On either side of this gallery are thousands of Chinese characters printed on this beautiful paper. Below us, a sea of waves made up of open books, and above us, a beautiful billowing sky, three long pieces of paper scroll-like stretched across the ceiling filled with Chinese characters.

Allison: To Western viewers, it's not immediately clear what the text says, what this piece might be about, and it reminds me of other works around the Chinese art galleries in the Metropolitan Museum of more historical, calligraphic arts.

Steven: But to a Chinese viewer, the meaning is also elusive.

Allison: This is because Xu Bing has actually invented over 1,000 new characters.

Steven: So these are not real characters.

Allison: Because traditional Chinese characters are composed in a modular way meaning that different components are brought together to form a character in a block form. Xu Bing actually uses some real components and some that are invented in combinations that are entirely new to create a character that looks extremely familiar to somebody who can read Chinese.

Steven: We're surrounded by literally tens of thousands of Chinese characters that don't actually mean anything.



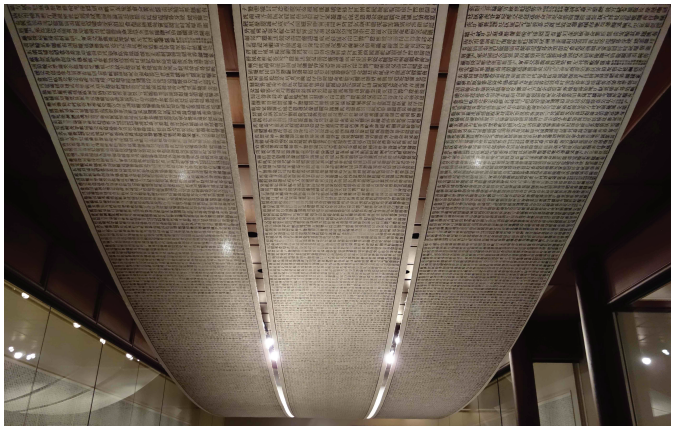
Xu Bing, Book from the Sky, c. 1987-91 (installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), collection of the artist, © Xu Bing (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/riBT1c>

Allison: Xu actually discarded any characters that he came up with that looked too inauthentic.

Steven: Xu Bing didn't render all of these characters with a brush by hand, rather he carved wooden blocks harking back to the ancient Chinese system of movable type, which is far older than Gutenberg's system in the West.

Allison: We're looking at a very early form of mass production that relates to the contemporary moment in which print media have played a large role in Xu Bin's upbringing.

Steven: He was a young man during the cultural revolution, a period when intellectuals were vilified when the very notion of the individual was distrusted, when everything was about the group, everything was about the State.



Xu Bing, Book from the Sky, c. 1987-91 (installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), collection of the artist, © Xu Bing (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/rknWAs>

Allison: Xu Bing was actually very talented as a child in writing and in calligraphy. This skill was identified by teachers and harnessed in service of the State. So like many other young intellectuals, he was sent to the countryside where he was put to work creating banners by hand for things like holidays, weddings, and funerals where he would be asked to combine modern and traditional forms of calligraphy.

Steven: When Xu Bing was in art school, he was trained in the art of propaganda as was expected of anybody involved in the arts at this time in China. So it's fascinating with that in mind to look at this overwhelming display of block printing. It admits no actual word.

Allison: The piece also makes me think of a lot of other works of contemporary Chinese art, which used the act of destruction in order to create new meaning—Ai Weiwei dropping a Han Dynasty urn. Other artists repeating a text in layers that eventually obliterate its meaning.

Steven: We can't locate meaning in what we read, so where do we look for meaning? We're asked to move from the symbolic representation of the words to the characters themselves and the accumulation of those characters.

Allison: As well as the vehicle through which they're delivered. We're reminded of the way that text is used for propaganda purposes during Mao's regime, and the inundation of posters and banners that would have surrounded him just like these texts surround us here.

Steven: But the irony is that this was produced not during Mao's lifetime, but in the period after when China was flooded with Western literature. And yet the artist has, nevertheless, created characters that are empty of meaning.

Allison: He has observed two phases of the consumption of texts in his lifetime. The first being from the regime through the use of propaganda, and the second when China opened up to receiving and translating Western philosophy, theory, literature, and art history. This was consumed by youths who were hungry for information.

Steven: I'm struck by the way the books on the floor create a series of waves that almost seem like the sea and the banners that hang from the ceiling function very much as the sky. The title of this is *Book from the Sky*, and the panels on the walls seem like landscapes.

Allison: This is an interesting observation in light of the medium that we're looking at. Mao considered woodblock printed text to be one of the most non-elitist forms of art and communication because it was direct and because it could be mass produced and widely disseminated. Whereas, scholar painting earlier in Chinese history, often depicted the landscape and the natural environment, but very subtle political messages were sometimes conveyed in these compositions. These were a more elitist form of art.

Steven: Here we have subtle references to landscape, but represented through text emptied of meaning.

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/DseIYQdjzgE>.



Xu Bing, Book from the Sky, c. 1987-91 (installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), collection of the artist, © Xu Bing (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/rBQFVN>

230.Koons, Pink Panther

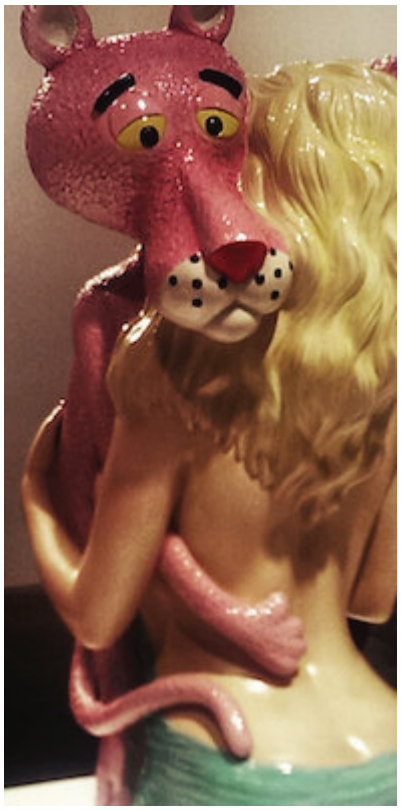
Dr. Tom Folland



Jeff Koons, Pink Panther, 1988, glazed porcelain, 104.1 x 52 x 48.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (photo: LP, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/4xH6sM>

Banality

Imagine walking into an art gallery and seeing overgrown toys, or cartoon characters presented as sculpture. If in 1988, you had wandered into the Sonnabend Gallery on West Broadway in New York City, this is indeed what you would have witnessed: it was an exhibition entitled "Banality" by New York artist Jeff Koons presenting some twenty sculptures in porcelain and polychromed wood. The work certainly strikes as an affront to taste: the sculptures are highly polished and gleaming. The colors—muted pale blue, pink, lavender, green and yellowish gold—seem to belong to the 1950s and 60s. The glossy textures look garish and factory-made, surfaces one associates with inexpensive commercial art. One would almost want to call these sculptures "figurines" were it not for their size. To add to this catalogue of horrors, the artist had farmed out the actual production to German and Italian artisans who made each work in triplicate! "Banality" thus debuted simultaneously in New York, Chicago, and Cologne.



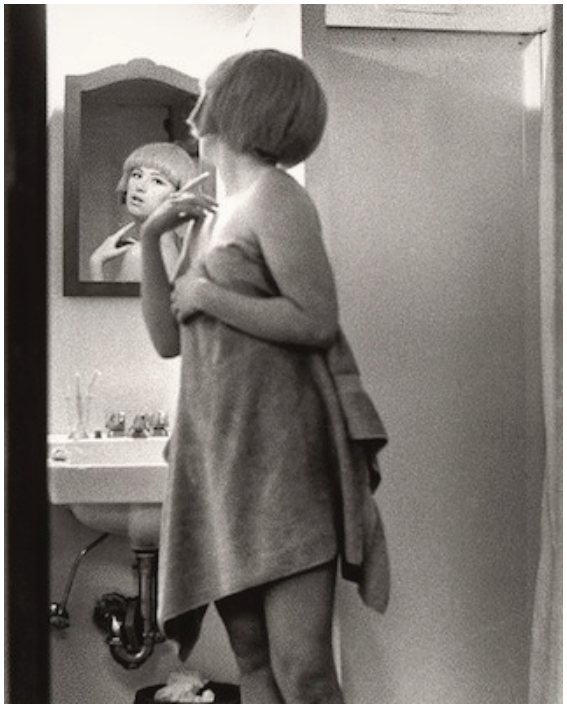
Jeff Koons, Pink Panther, 1988, glazed porcelain, 104.1 x 52 x 48.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (photo: Jack Zalium, CC BY-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/pd9Dwn>

A glazed porcelain statue entitled *Pink Panther* belongs to that body of work. It depicts a smiling, bare-breasted, blond woman scantily clad in a mint-green dress, head tilted back and to the left as if addressing a crowd of onlookers. The figure is based on the 1960s B-list Hollywood star Jayne Mansfield—here she clutches a limp pink panther in her left hand, while her right hand covers an exposed breast. From behind one sees that the pink panther has its head thrown over her shoulder and wears an expression of hapless weariness. It too is a product of Hollywood fantasy—the movie of the same name debuted the cartoon character in 1963. The colors are almost antiquated; do they harken back to the popular culture of a pre-civil rights era as a politically regressive statement of nostalgia? And what about the female figure—posed in a state of deshabille (carelessly and partially

undressed)? At a time of increased feminist presence in the still male-dominated art world this could only be perceived as a rearguard move. Or was Koons—a postmodern provocateur like no other—simply parodying male authority as he had done in some of his other work?

Postmodernism: the artist as critic of mass culture

Provocation is a mainstay of the modernist avant-gardes reaching at least as back as far as when Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* of 1917, an ordinary urinal, was proposed as an artwork ("avant-garde" refers to artists whose work challenges established ideas). But whereas Duchamp eventually accrued near-mythical status, that same critical reception for Koons was not forthcoming—in fact, he would become one of the first artists of this period to achieve a level of success that depended more on the art market than on art criticism. He is still reviled. Only recently a review described Koons as "Duchamp with lots of ostentatious trimmings."[1] It's easy to see why he has continued to provoke: the postmodern 1980s inaugurated the contemporary sense of the artist as a critical and serious interrogator of mass culture and mass media. Cindy Sherman, one of the most prominent artists of that period, made photographs of herself that paraded the clichés of femininity before an audience that consumed critical theory about the constructed nature of reality and the oppressive manipulations of mass media.



Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #2, 1977, gelatin silver print, 24.1 x 19.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Her work was understood as a deconstruction (shorthand for the examination and analysis of the elements) of gender stereotypes. Another prominent postmodern artist of the period, Krzysztof Wodcizko, used high-powered projectors to cast politically charged imagery onto corporate façades after dark—imagery that often pointed to economic and social contradictions and prompted public discourse within an ephemeral and often provocative, public space.

Artists—postmodern artists—were supposed to counter the banality of evil that lurked behind public and popular culture, not giddily revel in it as Koons seemed to do. There appeared to be nothing serious about any of the works in the "Banality" exhibition: a life-sized bust of pop icon Michael Jackson and his pet monkey Bubbles; a ribbon-necked pig—especially egregious—in polychromed wood escorted by cherubic youths, two of which are winged. And of course *Pink Panther*, a work that seemed destined to insult rather than inform. It all seemed like kitsch posing as high art.



Jeff Koons, Michael Jackson and Bubbles, 1988, ceramic, glaze and paint, on view at Versailles, 2014 (photo: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra , CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/5wNuTU>

Kitsch

What is kitsch? The American art critic Clement Greenberg once defined it as the opposite of what a truly progressive, avant-garde modernism embodied. Greenberg advocated for a modern art that was true to its materials, such as the gestural abstractions of New York School artists like Jackson Pollock, who splattered and spilled paint in abstract fashion on unprimed canvas—declaring a direct creative confrontation that was raw and honest. Kitsch, a word of German origin, refers to mass-produced imagery designed to please the broadest possible audience with objects of questionable taste (think of objects and images with popular, sentimental subject matter and style). Postmodern art attacked Greenberg's influential theory of modern art, creating images in direct opposition to modernism. While modernism championed painting, form and originality, postmodernism foregrounded photography, subject matter, and the reproduction, and responded to modernism's search for the profound by presenting the quotidian and banal aspects of experience. Postmodernism grounded the rarified atmosphere of genius that was prevalent in modernism in the politics of everyday life.

But postmodernism stopped short of fully embracing kitsch by insisting on a degree of self-aware critical distance. This is where Koons found a fault line that he fully exploited with works like *Pink Panther*. Hummel figurines and other popular collector's items are the basis for the art in "Banality." Koons rendered these saccharine and sentimental little figural groupings—cartoonish emblems of childhood innocence—at a life-size scale as an assault upon sincerity but also as an assault upon taste, and it is here that even the most daring of postmodern advocates drew a line in the sand. Like the modernist distinction between art and an everyday object drawn by Greenberg, *Pink Panther* challenged the distinction between an ironic appropriation of a mass-culture object and the object itself (seemingly without critical distance) thereby challenging the whole critical enterprise of postmodernism itself.

1. Jed Perl, "The Cult of Jeff Koons," <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/sep/25/cult-jeff-koons/> *The New York Review of Books*, September 25, 2014



"A Little Boo Boo," Hummel figurine, porcelain

231. Sherman, Untitled (#228), from the History Portraits series

Mary Beth Looney



Cindy Sherman, Untitled #228, from the History portraits series, 1990, chromogenic color print, 6′ 10 1/16″ x 48″ (208.4 x 122 cm) (The Museum of Modern Art)

This photograph is from Sherman's History Portraits series—where she draws inspiration from the history of art.

Description

The artist depicts herself in costume, standing in front of printed textiles parted slightly to reveal darkness beyond. She wears a red satin, full-length dress, which is cinched by a dark blue sash across the shoulders, just under the bust line, and also well below a seemingly swollen abdomen. A gold sash wraps around her head and neck and drapes over each shoulder. In one hand she holds the head or mask of an old person, with a wrinkled, receding hairline, a large nose, and bloodshot eyes. In the other hand, which is bloody, she holds a knife.

The figure tilts her head slightly to one side as she gazes at the viewer with a blank expression. The face is artificially made up with thin, arching brows and lips stained red in the center to suggest that they are puckered, as if about to kiss. Bare feet point outward and appear enlarged in proportion to the rest of the figure.

Judith

In *Untitled #228,* Sherman cites the story of Judith and Holofernes—a popular subject during the Renaissance and Baroque periods (especially the sixteenth-seventeenth century).

The Book of Judith (included in some versions of the Bible), recounts the story of Judith, who, to save her people (the Israelites in the town of Bethulia) from the Assyrian King Nebuchadnezzar, entered the tent of the invading general (named Holofernes), who found her attractive. She seduced him into drinking too much and then beheaded him. In triumph, she brought the severed head back to the Jewish people.



Elisabetta Sirani, Judith with the Head of Holofernes, 1638-55, oil on canvas, 129.5 x 91.7 cm (The Walters Art Museum)

For Renaissance and Baroque audiences, the story of Judith and Holofernes symbolized triumph over tyranny (much like the story of David and Goliath). Painters such as Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi and Elisabetta Sirani provided patrons with select stages in the story—at times depicting Judith in the act of severing Holofernes' head, sneaking away from the darkened enemy encampment while carrying the severed head, or marching forward in triumph, holding aloft the head by the hair, as the citizens of Bethulia look on.



Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith and Holofernes, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

Sherman's photographic interpretation of this subject conflates two of those picture types. While Judith (enacted by Sherman herself) stands, holding the general's head in a fully lit space, the array of printed textiles draped behind her evokes a middle Eastern motif—referencing Holofernes' tent. The darkened parting between two cloths implies that Judith has just left.

The subject is pushed forward in the picture plane, backgrounded by the row of hanging textiles (this treatment of space is typical of Baroque art of the seventeenth century). She occupies a shallow stage. Her feet splay outwards, perhaps as a reminder of proto-Renaissance artists' struggles with foreshortening of forms intended to project towards the viewer (see frescos by Giotto, for example).

In a nod to Raphael's many High Renaissance Madonna images (below), the rich primary colors of red, blue and yellow figure prominently, and the two heads, arms, and hand form a small, triangular composition within an otherwise vertically oriented format. The suggestion of a swollen abdomen may refer to Renaissance-era fashion, in which women's empire-waisted garments deemphasized natural waists and hips. It may also be a way of conflating the figure of the Virgin Mary of the New Testament—typically portrayed in reds and blues in the Renaissance period—with the Old Testament heroine Judith.



Raphael, The Small Cowper Madonna, c. 1505, oil on panel, 59.5 x 44 cm (National Gallery of Art)

Props

Sherman's work in this series is characterized by the blatant use of props and prosthetic devices. The full mask or head appears to be a store-bought "fright mask" typically used for Halloween. It is a jarringly out-of-place element in an image that historically featured a somewhat younger adult man. Both the rounded belly and the overly large feet are also obvious prosthetic enhancements. Sherman's facial makeup exaggerates the overall effect of artificiality.

Sherman asks the viewer to consider layers of un-realities, beginning with the props and prosthetics she has employed in the image. Sherman herself is a prop: a real stand-in for the idealized Judiths of art history. As the props undermine the seriousness with which we might consider the scene, the image also questions the complex implications of a violent murder. As in many of the historical paintings, Judith's hands are bloody, but her garments and face remain clean. Her face—like the bland faces of so many other images of Judith is matter-of-fact, revealing no trace of the grim act that was purportedly committed (the exception to this is Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith*). The direct studio lighting of Sherman's image dampens the drama and further heightens the artificiality of the scene.

The artist invites the viewer to consider how all of these matters converge in a photograph. In the early nineteenth century, painters struggled to supplant or utilize the technical advantages of photography. Both painting and photography can and do afford the opportunity for invention. By adopting contrivances from prior centuries and adding multiple contemporary contrivances to her interpretation, Sherman's *Untitled #228* both blatantly exposes and provides an art historical context for her contemplations on the nature of narrative and pictorial invention.

232. Ringgold, Dancing at the Louvre

Dr. Virginia Spivey

> Marcia and her three little girls took me dancing at the Louvre. I thought I was taking them to see the Mona Lisa. You've never seen anything like this. Well, the French hadn't either. Never mind Leonardo da Vinci and Mona Lisa, Marcia and her three girls were the show.
>
> — Willa Marie Simone, *Dancing at the Louvre*

Breaking rules

Faith Ringgold's *Dancing at the Louvre* is all about breaking the rules, and having lots of fun while doing it. Combining representational painting and African-American quilting techniques with the written word, *Dancing at the Louvre* is the first in Ringgold's series of twelve "story quilts" called *The French Collection.*



Faith Ringgold, Dancing at the Louvre, 1991, acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border, 73.5 x 80″, from the series, The French Collection, part 1; #1 (private collection)

The series tells the fictional story of Willa Marie Simone, a young black woman who moves to Paris in the early twentieth century. Told through text written around the margin of each quilt, Willa Marie's adventures lead her to meet celebrities such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks on the road to becoming an artist and businesswoman.

Drawing on her own struggle for recognition in an art world dominated by European traditions and male artists, Ringgold uses this narrative format to literally rewrite the past by weaving together histories of modern art, African-American culture, and personal biography. This practice reflects the shift toward postmodernism in art of the 1980s and 1990s. In deliberate contrast to Modernism's emphasis on autonomy and universal meaning, artists like Ringgold highlighted the implicit biases in accepted forms of art, especially in their treatment of race and gender. Characteristic is her use of appropriation, narrative, biographical references, and non-Western traditions. Through these devices, Ringgold offers an alternative to the European and masculine perspectives that are prevalent in art history.

Story-quilts

Ringgold's story-quilting technique is important to meaning in her work. She creates the central image using acrylic paint on canvas, reflecting her knowledge of western art history in both style and subject matter, and surrounds it with a patchwork cloth border that includes her hand-written text. She then uses traditional quilting methods to sandwich a layer of batting by stitching the decorative front to the plain cotton backing.

She first developed this format in *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima* (1983), a large quilt that transformed the marketing stereotype into Jemima Blakey, a successful black businesswoman. Comprised of squares of fabric, painted portraits, and text, Ringgold's quilt draws on Afro-Caribbean storytelling practices to create the Blakey's family folklore. Made soon after the death of Ringgold's mother Willi Posey (a seamstress and fashion designer in Harlem), the quilt also serves as personal tribute to the inspiration and creative skills she passed on to her artist-daughter.

Ringgold's technique positions her work more in the world of folk art and craft than European traditions of fine art. Associated with women's domestic work, quilt making has historically been important to maintaining female relationships. Quilting is often done collectively, allowing women time to gather and have conversations away from men or others outside their community. Young girls watch and participate in the activity in order to learn family stories, cultural

background, shared knowledge, and technical skills associated with their maternal and domestic roles. Although quilts are common in a number of cultures, Ringgold's African-American heritage recalls their historical role, especially within the Underground Railroad, to communicate codes and hidden messages that remain unrecognized by outsiders to the community. (The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses in the nineteenth century that allowed slaves of African descent to move northward to freedom.)

Rewriting the past

Typical of much postmodern art, Ringgold's work appropriates recognizable imagery and alternative artistic practices to offer critical cultural commentary. She challenges us to consider expectations of gender and race, as well as traditional expectations and values of what art might be. Through image and text, Ringgold rewrites history to make a place for women like herself in its historical development.

The transformative power of Ringgold's message led her to translate her work into picture books for children. Her first *Tar Beach* (1991), based on a 1988 story quilt in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, received the 1992 Caldecott Honor Award. She has since published several others including *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* (1992) and *If A Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (1999) inspired by African-American history and her own life story.



Faith Ringgold, Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima? (1983), acrylic on canvas, dyed, painted and pieced fabric, 90 x 80″ (private collection)

233. Quick-to-See Smith, Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)

Dr. Suzanne Newman Fricke



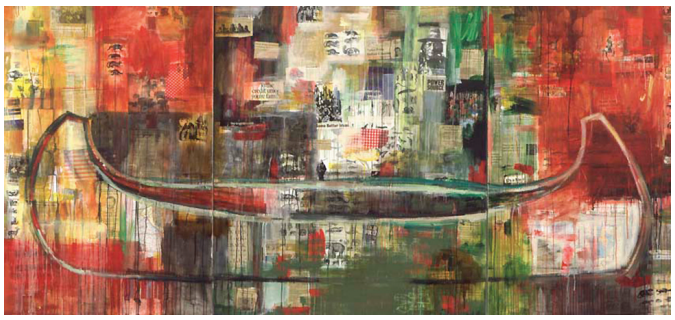
Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People),1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

A Non-Celebration

As a response to the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in North America in 1992, the artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Nation, created a large mixed-media canvas called *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People). Trade*, part of the series "The Quincentenary Non-Celebration," illustrates historical and contemporary inequities between Native Americans and the United States government.

Trade references the role of trade goods in allegorical stories like the acquisition of the island of Manhattan by Dutch colonists in 1626 from unnamed Native Americans in exchange for goods worth 60 guilders or $24.00. Though more apocryphal than true, this story has become part of American lore, suggesting that Native Americans had been lured off their lands by inexpensive trade goods. The fundamental misunderstanding between the Native and non-Native worlds—especially the notion of private ownership of land—underlies *Trade*. Smith stated that if *Trade* could speak, it might say: "Why won't you consider trading the land we handed over to you for these silly trinkets that so honor us? Sound like a bad deal? Well, that's the deal you gave us."[1]

For *Trade*, Smith layered images, paint, and objects on the surface of the canvas, suggesting layers of history and complexity. Divided into three large panels, the triptych (three part) arrangement is reminiscent of a medieval altarpiece. Smith covered the canvas in collage, with newspaper articles about Native life cut out from her tribal paper *Char-Koosta,* photos, comics, tobacco and gum wrappers, fruit carton labels, ads, and pages from comic books, all of which feature stereotypical images of Native Americans. She mixed the collaged text with photos of deer, buffalo, and Native men in historic dress holding pipes with feathers in their hair, and an image of Ken Plenty Horses—a character from one of Smith's earlier pieces, the *Paper Dolls for a Post Columbian World with Ensembles Contributed by US Government* from 1991-92.



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, canoe (detail), Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People), 1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

She applied blocks of white, yellow, green, and especially red paint over the layer of collaged materials. The color red had multiple meanings for Smith, referring to her Native heritage as well as to blood, warfare, anger, and sacrifice. With the emphasis on prominent brushstrokes and the dripping blocks of paint, Smith cited the Abstract Expressionist movement from the 1940s and 50s with raw brushstrokes describing deep emotions and social chaos. For a final layer, she painted the outline of an almost life-sized canoe. Canoes were used by Native Americans as well as non-Native explorers and traders in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century to travel along the waterways of North America. The canoe suggests the possibility of trade and cultural connections—though this empty canoe is stuck, unable to move.



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, toys and souvenirs (detail), Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People), 1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

Above the canvas, Smith strung a clothesline from which she dangled a variety of Native-themed toys and souvenirs, especially from sports teams with Native American mascots. The items include toy tomahawks, a child's headdress with brightly dyed feathers, Red Man chewing tobacco, a Washington Redskins cap and license plate, a Florida State Seminoles bumper sticker, a Cleveland Indian pennant and cap, an Atlanta Braves license plate, a beaded belt, a toy quiver with an arrow, and a plastic Indian doll. Smith offers these cheap goods in exchange for the lands that were lost, reversing the historic sale of land for trinkets. These items also serve as reminders of how Native life has been commodified, turning Native cultural objects into cheap items sold without a true understanding of what the original meanings were.



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, toys and souvenirs (detail), Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People), 1992, oil paint and mixed media, collage, objects, canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm (Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia) © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

The Artist

The artist was born on January 15, 1940, at the St. Ignatius Jesuit Missionary on the Reservation of the Flathead Nation. Raised by her father, a rodeo rider and horse trader, Smith was one of eleven children. Her first name comes from the French word for "yellow" (jaune), a reminder of her French-Cree ancestors. Her middle name "Quick-to-See" was not a reference to her eyesight but was given by her Shoshone grandmother as a sign of her ability to grasp things readily. From an early age Smith wanted to be an artist; as a child, she had herself photographed while dressed as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Though her father was not literate, education was important to Smith.



National Bison Range (near St. Ignatius, Flathead Reservation) (photo: Jaix Chaix, Check All Home Inspection Corp., CC BY-SA 2.0)

She received a bachelor of arts from Framingham State College in Massachusetts in 1976 in art education rather than in studio art because her instructors told her that no woman could have a career as an artist, though they acknowledged that she was more skilled than the men in her class. In 1980 she received a master of fine arts from the University of New Mexico. She was inspired by both Native and non-Native sources, including petroglyphs, Plains leger art, Diné saddle blankets, early Charles Russell prints of western landscapes, and paintings by twentieth-century artists such as Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Willem DeKooning, Jasper Johns, and especially Kurt Schwitters and Robert Rauschenberg (see image below). Both Schwitters and Rauschenberg brought objects from the quotidian world into their work, such as tickets, cigarette wrappers, and string.



Robert Rauschenberg, Canyon, 1959, oil, pencil, paper, metal, photograph, fabric, wood, canvas, buttons, mirror, taxidermied eagle, cardboard, pillow, paint tube and other materials, 207.6 x 177.8 x 61 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) © 2014 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/ARCjSV>

In addition to her work as an artist, Smith has curated over thirty exhibitions to promote and highlight the art of other Native artists. She has also lectured extensively, been an artist-in-residence at numerous universities, and has taught art at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico the only four-year university dedicated to teaching Native youth across North America. In her years

as an artist, Smith has received many honors, including an Eitelijorg Fellowship in 2007, a grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation to create a comprehensive archive of her work, a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for the Arts, the College Art Association's Committee on Women in the Arts award, the 2005 New Mexico Governor's award for excellence in the arts, as well as four honorary doctorate degrees.

Smith's art shares her view of the world, offering her personal perspective as an artist, a Native American, and a woman. Her work creates a dialogue between the art and its viewers and explores issues of Native identity as it is seen by both Native Americans and non-Natives. *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)* restates the standard narratives of the history of the United States, specifically the desire to expand beyond "sea to shining sea," as encompassed in the ideology of Manifest Destiny (the belief in the destiny of Western expansion), and raises the issue of contemporary inequities that are rooted in colonial experience.

1. Arlene Hirschfelder, *Artists and Craftspeople, American Indian Lives* <https://tinyurl.com/y3ky94sk>, New York: Facts On File, 1994, page 115.

234. Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Earth's Creation

Dr. Allison Young



Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Earth's Creation, 1994, synthetic polymer paint on linen mounted on canvas, four panels (private collection)

At nearly twenty feet wide and nine feet high, Emily Kwame Kngwarreye's painting *Earth's Creation* is monumental in its scale and impact, rivaling Abstract Expressionist masterpieces by Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock not only in size but also in its painterly virtuosity (see a photo of it in a gallery here <https://flic.kr/p/sgPuRV>, to get a sense of its scale). Patches of bold yellows, greens, reds and blues seem to bloom like lush vegetation over the large canvas. Comprised of gestural, viscous marks, each swath of color traces the movement of the artist's hands and body over the canvas, which would have been laid horizontally as she painted, seated on (or beside) and intimately connected to her art.



Still from a short video produced by The National Museum of Australia (source:<http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/utopia_the_genius_of_emily_kame_kngwarreye/emily_kame_kngwarreye>)

The work made records at auction when it was sold in 2007 for over $1,000,000—the highest price ever fetched for a work by a female artist in Australia. Yet, just decades earlier, Kngwarreye was virtually unknown to the world outside her small desert community in the Australian country of Alhakere. A self-taught artist who was trained in ceremonial painting, she rose to international prominence only in her eighties, and enjoyed a flourishing career at the end of her life.

Rooted in tradition

Kngwarreye was born around 1910, and spent most of her life in an isolated Anmatyerr community in Central Australia. The area, however, was forcibly occupied by European pastoralist settlers in the 1920s, and the artist, alongside other members of her community, worked on the pastoral property (pastoral refers to the tending of cattle and sheep). In 1976, Aboriginal land rights were legally granted, and she was able, finally, to live independently.

Aboriginal culture has long been intimately connected to the landscape of Australia; inhabited by humans for over 40,000 years, the region is characterized by deserts, grasslands and dramatic arched rock formations. Kngwarreye was an established elder of her community and was trained to create ceremonial sand paintings inspired by her ritual "dreamings,'" as well as to paint decorative motifs on women's bodies as part of a ceremony called *Awelye.* These visual forms were connected to cultural expressions in song, storytelling and dance. While her paintings have never been figural, they remain influenced by the culture in which she grew up as well as the natural environment.

Artistic intervention

In the late 1970s, Kngwayere began to work in the medium of batiks, making works that were purely artistic endeavors for the first time. In 1977, she was a founding participant of the Utopia Women's Batik Group. Her compositions were abstract and featured the motif of repeated dots, acting sometimes as a linear stroke, or elsewhere used to fill large patches of space. A decade later, in 1988, the S.H. Ervin Gallery in Sydney initiated a "Summer Project" that sought to facilitate the creation of Aboriginal art, as well as to establish a market for the genre. Sponsored by the collector Robert Holmes à Court, curators traveled to the Aboriginal homeland of Utopia and delivered acrylic paints and materials. After two weeks they returned to find "abstract and richly expressive" compositions created by many of the artists and held a group exhibition in Sydney.



Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Emu Woman, 1988–89, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 92.0 x 61.0 cm (The Holmes à Court Collection, Heytesbury)

Kngwarreye's painting *Emu Woman* (above) was selected for the cover of the exhibition catalogue as a gesture of respect for her seniority, as she was the oldest artist from the community. Dominated by rich, earthy tones, the painting—her first ever on canvas–contained references to plants and seeds that featured in her "dreaming" ritual. Against a dark field of charcoal, violet and black, the piece is punctuated with bright marks in tangerine and white hues, which lend the work an electric sense of energy and rhythm. Her decades-long experience in painting directly on the human body informs the curving swells of dotted marks that comprise the composition.

Critics lauded the piece, and virtually overnight, the artist received international exposure and unprecedented acclaim. The following year, Kngwarreye held her first solo exhibition at Utopia Art Sydney, after which she would be invited to participate in several renowned international exhibitions and biennales.

The "global" turn

The arc of Kngwarreye's career runs alongside a period of tremendous change in Australia, moving from the end of a phase of colonial settlement through to a more ethical embrace of Aboriginal culture by the nation's Western population. Yet the period in which she came to prominence also reflects changes taking place in the contemporary art world internationally, as the 1980s and 1990s saw a notable expansion within the mainstream to include non-Western or minority artists.

"Green time"

Earth's Creation belongs to the "high colorist" phase in Kngwarreye's work, which is characterized by a loosening of her compositions—which were no longer reliant on pseudo-geometric patterns—and the expansion of her color palette to include a range of tones beyond the familiar clay and ochre hues that dominated her prior works. Still connected to the natural environment, however, these works reference the changing atmospheric character of seasonal cycles. *Earth's Creation* documents the lushness of the "green time" that follows periods of heavy rain, and makes use of tropical blues, yellows and greens. The piece has often been likened to Claude Monet's studies of seasonal and temporal change, and given its formidable, room-filling scale, a comparison to the artist's *Water Lilies* of 1914-26 (MoMA) might be remarkably apt.

Earth's Creation was created as part of the larger Alhalkere Suite which contains twenty-two panels, and is still considered one of the most virtuosic of Kngwarreye's immense and prolific artistic output. In the last two weeks of her life, Kngwarreye completed a suite of twenty-four small paintings. These were characterized by extremely broad, milky strokes of jewel-toned hues of blue and rose, and communicate the artist's long-standing fascination with color and her sophisticated grasp of abstract composition.

235. Neshat, Rebellious Silence, from the Women of Allah series

Dr. Allison Young

In *Rebellious Silence*, the central figure's portrait is bisected along a vertical seam created by the long barrel of a rifle. Presumably, the rifle is clasped in her hands near her lap, but the image is cropped so that the gun rises perpendicular to the lower edge of the photo and grazes her face at the lips, nose, and forehead. The woman's eyes stare intensely towards the viewer from both sides of this divide.

Shirin Neshat's photographic series *Women of Allah* examines the complexities of women's identities in the midst of a changing cultural landscape in the Middle East—both through the lens of Western representations of Muslim women, and through the more intimate subject of personal and religious conviction.

While the composition—defined by the hard edge of her black chador against the bright white background—appears sparse, measured and symmetrical, the split created by the weapon implies a more violent rupture or psychic fragmentation. A single subject, it suggests, might be host to internal contradictions alongside binaries such as tradition and modernity, East and West, beauty and violence. In the artist's own words, "every image, every woman's submissive gaze, suggests a far more complex and paradoxical reality behind the surface." [1]



Shirin Neshat, Rebellious Silence, Women of Allah series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat (courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels)

The *Women of Allah* series confronts this "paradoxical reality" through a haunting suite of black-and-white images. Each contains a set of four symbols that are associated with Western representations of the Muslim world: the veil, the gun, the text and the gaze. While these symbols have taken on a particular charge since 9/11, the series was created earlier and reflects changes that have taken place in the region since 1979, the year of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Islamic Revolution

Iran had been ruled by the Shah (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi), who took power in 1941 during the Second World War and reigned as King until 1979 when the Persian monarchy was overthrown by revolutionaries. His dictatorship was known for the violent repression of political and religious freedom, but also for its modernization of the country along Western cultural models. Post-war Iran was an ally of Britain and the United States and was markedly progressive with regards to women's rights. The Shah's regime, however, steadily grew more restrictive, and revolutionaries eventually rose to abolish the monarchy in favor of a conservative religious government headed by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Shirin Neshat was born in 1957 in the town of Qazvin. In line with the Shah's expansion of women's rights, her father prioritized his daughters' access to education, and the young artist attended a Catholic school where she learned about both Western and Iranian intellectual and cultural history. She left, however, in the mid-1970s, pursuing her studies in California as the environment in Iran grew increasingly hostile. It would be seventeen years before she returned to her homeland. When she did, she confronted a society that was completely opposed to the one that she had grown up in.

Looking back

One of the most visible signs of cultural change in Iran has been the requirement for all women to wear the veil in public. While many Muslim women find this practice empowering and affirmative of their religious identities, the veil has been coded in Western eyes as a sign of Islam's oppression of women. This opposition is made more clear, perhaps, when one considers the simultaneity of the Islamic Revolution with women's liberation movements in the U.S. and

Europe, both developing throughout the 1970s. Neshat decided to explore this fraught symbol in her art as a way to reconcile her own conflicting feelings. In *Women of Allah*, initiated shortly after her return to Iran in 1991, the veil functions as both a symbol of freedom and of repression.

The veil and the gaze

The veil is intended to protect women's bodies from becoming the sexualized object of the male gaze, but it also protects women from being seen at all. The "gaze" in this context becomes a charged signifier of sexuality, sin, shame, and power. Neshat is cognizant of feminist theories that explain how the "male gaze" is normalized in visual and popular culture: Women's bodies are commonly paraded as objects of desire in advertising and film, available to be looked at without consequence. Many feminist artists have used the action of "gazing back" as a means to free the female body from this objectification. The gaze, here, might also reflect exotic fantasies of the East. In Orientalist painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, Eastern women are often depicted nude, surrounded by richly colored and patterned textiles and decorations; women are envisaged amongst other beautiful objects that can be possessed. In Neshat's images, women return the gaze, breaking free from centuries of subservience to male or European desire.

Most of the subjects in the series are photographed holding a gun, sometimes passively, as in *Rebellious Silence*, and sometimes threateningly, with the muzzle pointed directly towards the camera lens. With the complex ideas of the "gaze" in mind, we might reflect on the double meaning of the word "shoot," and consider that the camera—especially during the colonial era—was used to violate women's bodies. The gun, aside from its obvious references to control, also represents religious martyrdom, a subject about which the artist feels ambivalently, as an outsider to Iranian revolutionary culture.

Poetry

The contradictions between piety and violence, empowerment and suppression, are most prevalent in the use of calligraphic text that is applied to each photograph. Western viewers who do not read Farsi may understand the calligraphy as an aesthetic signifier, a reference to the importance of text in the long history of Islamic art. Yet, most of the texts are transcriptions of poetry and other writings by women, which express multiple viewpoints and date both before and after the Revolution. Some of the texts that Neshat has chosen are feminist in nature. However, in *Rebellious Silence*, the script that runs across the artist's face is from Tahereh Saffarzadeh's poem "Allegiance with Wakefulness" which honors the conviction and bravery of martyrdom. Reflecting the paradoxical nature of each of these themes, histories and discourses, the photograph is both melancholic and powerful—invoking the quiet and intense beauty for which Neshat's work has become known.

As an outspoken, feminist and progressive artist, Neshat is aware that it would be dangerous to show her work in conservative modern-day Iran, and she has been living in exile in the United States since the 1990s. For audiences in the West, the "Women of Allah" series has allowed a more nuanced contemplation of common stereotypes and assumptions about Muslim women, and serves to challenge the suppression of female voices in any community.

[1] Shirin Neshat, "Artist Statement," *Signs Journal* <http://signsjournal.org/shirin-neshat/> (accessed July 2015)



Shirin Neshat, Faceless, Women of Allah series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat (courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels)

236. Osorio, En la Barberia no se Llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop)

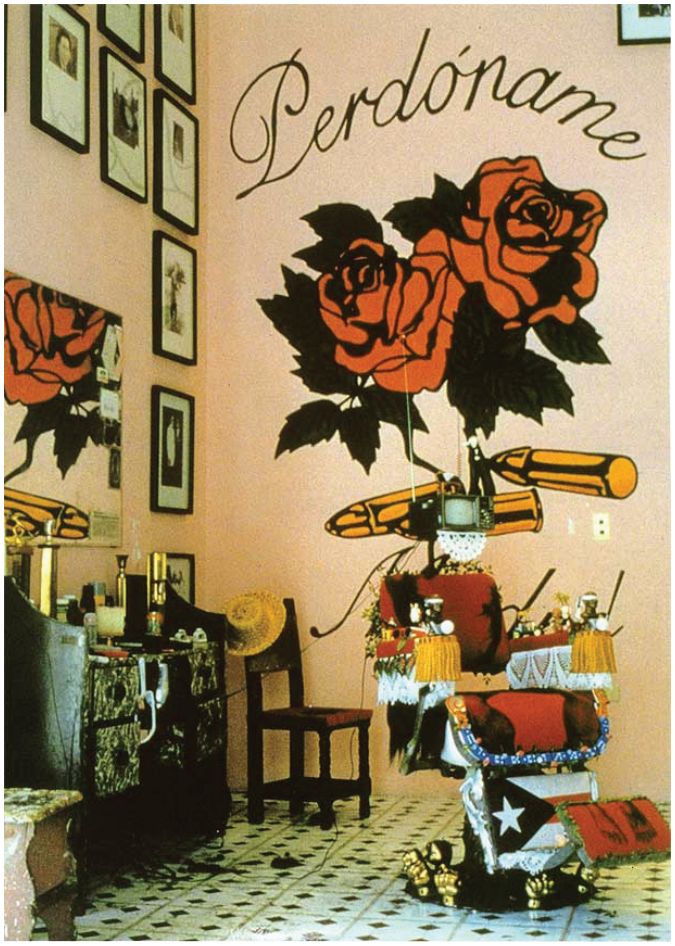
Dr. Maya Jiménez

The Puerto Rico born artist Pepón Osorio trained as a sociologist and became a social worker in the South Bronx. His work is inspired by each of these experiences and is rooted in the spaces, experiences, and people of American Latino culture, particularly Nuyorican communities (Nuyorican refers to the Puerto Rican diaspora living in New York, especially New York City). Osorio's large-scale installations are meant for a local audience, yet they have also been exhibited in mainstream cultural institutions (though after the 1993 Whitney Biennial, Osorio vowed to show his work first within the community, and then elsewhere).

Nuyorican

Puerto Rico is a United States territory. Its residents are United States citizens and carry an American passport, yet they cannot vote in presidential elections or have representatives voting for their interests in Washington. This sense of marginality is further complicated when one considers that Nuyoricans often retain a distinct sense of cultural pride that is informed by their dual American and Puerto Rican identities.

Having lived both experiences—that of a Puerto Rican and Nuyorican—Osorio is best known for large-scale installations that address street life, cultural clashes, and the rites of passage experienced by Puerto Ricans in the United States. Outside the traditional museum setting, and commissioned by Real Art Ways (RAW) from Hartford, Connecticut, *En la barberia no se llora* (*No Crying Allowed in the Babershop*) is a mixed-media installation located in the Puerto Rican community of Park Street in Hartford. Created in collaboration with local residents, Osorio engaged the public through conversation, workshops, and artistic collaborations. The art itself is visually lavish—his installations have often been dubbed "Nuyorican Baroque" (a reference to the seventeenth-century style characterized by theatricality and opulence and found in both Europe and Latin America).



Pepón Osorio, En la barbaria no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop), 1994 Installation at Real Art Ways, Hartford, Connecticut, mixed media installation with barbers' chairs, photographs, objects and videos (Collection of the Museum de Arte de Puerto Rico) (photo by Pepón Osorio)

Masculinity

Inspired from his first haircut in Santurce, Puerto Rico, Osorio recreates the space of the barbershop as one that is intensely packed with "masculine" symbols like barber chairs, car seats, sports paraphernalia, depictions of sperm and a boy's circumcision, phallic symbols, and male action figurines. Osorio boldly challenges the idea of masculinity, and particularly of machismo (a strong sense of masculine pride), in Latino communities.

Chucherías

Spanish for trinkets or knick-knacks, and known to art historians as kitsch (mass produced objects characterized by—or ironically admired for—their bad taste), *chucherías* overpopulate Osorio's work. These include Puerto Rican flags, religious ornaments, plastic toys, dolls, ribbons, beads, etc., all of which function—to quote art historian Anna Indych-Lopez—as a "gesture of cultural resistance," presented as something universal yet personal.[1] The *chucherías* included in the installation *En la barberia no se llora*, (a flag, fake foliage, baseballs, framed portraits of famous Latin American and Latino men), serve to localize the work, yet these objects also raise issues of social class expressed here through taste, and the distinction between high and low art—effectively straddling a fine line between cultural celebration and social critique.

Video

One prominent aspect of *En la barberia no se llora* are the video installations featuring Latino men from Park Street in stereotypically "masculine" poses. The men vary in age. Osorio included older men from the retirement home, Casa del Elderly, presenting the issue of machismo as multi-generational and deeply ingrained in Nuyorican culture. As a foil to this construction, the artist also included videos of men crying, with the public reacting both in sympathy and disgust.



Detail of Pepón Osorio, The Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?), installation at The New Museum, 1993 (photo: Hrag Vartanian, CC BY-ND 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/dUBwjs>

These same men then participated in workshops, in which they discussed how notions of masculinity had shaped their personal relationships as brothers, husbands, and fathers. Despite this participation of men, most of the visitors to the barbershop installation were, in fact, women.[2]

While *En la barberia no se llora (No Crying Allowed in the Babershop)* challenges definitions of masculinity, it also brings up—in a more subtle way—the relationship between machismo and homophobia, violence, and infidelity, and the ways in which popular culture, religion, and politics help craft these identities and issues.

1. "Nuyorican Baroque: Pepón Osorio's Chucherías," *Art Journal*, vol.60, issue 1, 2001, p. 75.
2. Erika Suderburg, Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 323.

237. Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)

Dr. Billie Lytheberg



Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000), 1994, flattened cans of corned beef (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

What can a tin can bull teach us about ecological and population health issues in the Pacific? Michel Tuffery is one of New Zealand's best-known artists of Pacific descent, with links to Samoa, Rarotonga and Tahiti. He majored in printmaking at Dunedin's School of Fine Arts and describes art quite literally as his first language because he didn't read, write or speak until he was 6 years old. Encouraged instead to express himself through drawing, he now aims artworks like *Pisupo Lua Afe* primarily at children, hoping to engage their curiosity and inspire them to care for both their own health and that of the environment.

Pisupo Lua Afe is one of Tuffery's most iconic works, made from hundreds of flattened corned beef tins, riveted together to form a series of life-sized bulls. Despite evident connections to Pop Art, especially Andy Warhol's celebrations of the humble *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), it's impossible to read this work solely in the terms of Western art history. So what is Tuffery trying to tell us?

Pisupo—canned food in the Pacific

Pisupo is the Samoan language version of "pea soup," which was the first canned food introduced into the Pacific Islands. *Pisupo* is now a generic term used to describe the many types of canned food that are eaten in the Islands—including corned beef. Not only is corned beef a favorite food source in the Islands, it has also become a ubiquitous part of the ceremonial gift economy. At weddings and birthdays, and other important life events both in the Islands and in Islander communities in New Zealand, gifts of treasured textiles like fine mats and decorated barkcloths are made alongside food items and cash money. But unlike the Island feast foods gifted at these events—such as pigs and large quantities of root vegetables—canned corned beef is a processed food high in saturated fat, salt, and cholesterol (a type of fat that clogs arteries). These are all things that contribute to disproportionately high incidences of diabetes and heart disease in Pacific Island populations as diets formerly high in locally grown fruits and vegetables, seafood, coconut milk and flesh, give way to cheap, imported foodstuffs.

So Tuffery's sculpture is impossible to separate from the ceremonies at which brightly colored tins of corned beef now figure in large quantities. But these links to traditional economic exchanges and population health only tell part of the story. *Pisupo Lua Afe* also critiques serious issues of ecological health and food sovereignty. Tuffery is interested in the introduction of cattle to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands and how they impact negatively on the plants, landscapes and waterways of these countries, as well as how industrialized approaches to farming disrupt traditional food production.

Look at *Pisupo Lua Afe*. It's literally a "tinned bull"—solid, hard-edged and weighty. Whereas a real cow has a visual softness suggested by its movements, eyes and coat, Tuffery's tin cans and rivets—overlapping like large metal scales— better convey the capacity of beef and dairy cattle to destroy fragile island eco-systems. Look closer—single out just one flattened can. Think about all the cans that were emptied to make *Pisupo Lua Afe*. Then think about all the cans that are emptied and discarded in the Pacific Islands each year. Tuffery is gesturing rather obviously towards the challenge of rubbish disposal in Island economies where creative "upcycling" of materials into new objects is often more common than the civic recycling regimes of larger cities and countries (upcycling refers to reusing discarded objects to create a product of a higher value). What use is there for thousands of empty tin cans? And what use are foods that cause ill health, damage the environment, and take up large swathes of land formerly used to grow healthier indigenous foods? Especially when the Pacific Island nations under Tuffery's scrutiny are recipients of some of the worst products of such agricultural farming: fatty lamb flaps and turkey tails, and tinned corned beef.



Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000), detail, 1994, flattened cans of corned beef (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty (sometimes called food security) is a great lens through which to view the various threads of traditional economic exchanges, population health, environmental degradation and industrialized food production introduced so far. Food sovereignty is the right of a nation and its peoples to decide who controls how, where and by whom their food is to be produced, and what that food will be. For Indigenous peoples in the Pacific, food and the environment are sacred gifts. There cannot be food sovereignty without control over food production and ownership, and without appropriate care of the environment.

Alongside *Pisupo Lua Afe* and his other tin can bulls, Tuffery has produced many artworks that address challenges to food sovereignty and the continued exploitation of Pacific Island resources, including the taro leaf blight epidemic <https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Taro_leaf_blight> in Samoa in 1993, and drift net fishing <http://articles.latimes.com/1989-06-21/news/mn-2392_1_drift-net-fishing-drift-nets-gill-nets> that is depleting fish stocks. For example, he's made fish tin sculptures, like his "tinned bull," which upcycle cans that hold another "staple" food in the Pacific: tinned mackerel. Tuffery made two of these for an exhibition called Le Folauga <http://www.lefolauga.co.nz/Auckland/index.html>, shown in Auckland, New Zealand in 2007, which are now in the collection of the Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Michael Tuffery, Asiasi [Yellowfin] II (2000), fish cans, copper, aluminium and polyurethane, 60 x 250 x 100 cm (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

In the exhibition's catalogue he explained:

> *O le Saosao Lapo'a* and *Asiasi I* reflect on the ironic and irreversible impact that over-fishing and exploitation of the Pacific's natural resources has wrought on the traditional Pacific lifestyle. This includes changing virtually overnight the dietary habits of generations.
>
> Is it co-incidental that significantly increasing health and dietary problems amongst Pacific Islanders has occurred during the same period that their premium fisheries catches are exported? And at the same time locals have experienced explosive growth of canned & other imported products flooding into the Pacific?

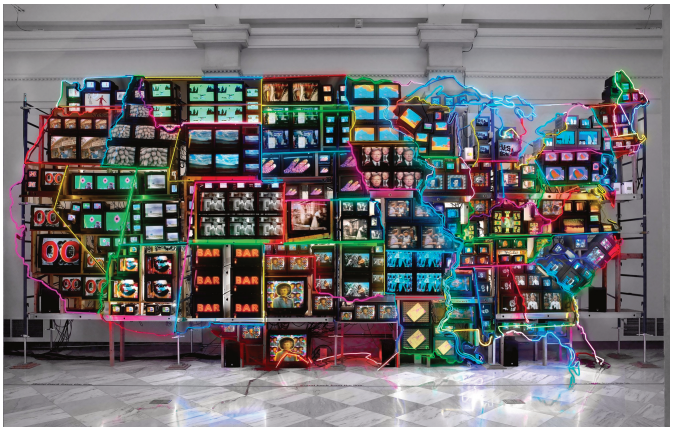
Tuffery states the aims of his works very clearly. His fish tin sculptures are perhaps even more interesting and evocative because they are also functional fish-smokers used to cure and preserve fish. They have been used in this way at his exhibition openings, bringing a smoky, wood- and fish-scented haze to the gallery experience.

Firebreathing bulls?

Tuffery has also brought his "tinned beef" bulls to smoky life in various performative installations throughout the world, by installing fireworks inside their heads to give them the appearance of breathing fire. Mounted on castors with their necks articulated so their heads can be turned, he has staged bullfights with his fire breathing monsters, accompanied by drummers and groups of human performers issuing fierce challenges. But these performances have not been restricted to the sanctuary of the white-walled gallery—these were performed outdoors, on city streets, to reach a community that might not otherwise come into the gallery to encounter his work.

238. Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway

Tina Rivers Ryan



Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995, fifty-one channel video installation (including one closed-circuit television feed), custom electronics, neon lighting, steel and wood; color, sound, approx. 15 x 40 x 4′ (Smithsonian American Art Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

Getting on the "Electronic Super Highway"

In 1974, artist Nam June Paik submitted a report to the Art Program of the Rockefeller Foundation, one of the first organizations to support artists working with new media, including television and video. Entitled "Media Planning for the Post Industrial Society—The 21st Century is now only 26 years away," the report argued that media technologies would become increasingly prevalent in American society, and should be used to address pressing social problems, such as racial segregation, the modernization of the economy, and environmental pollution. Presciently, Paik's report forecasted the emergence of what he called a "broadband communication network"—or "electronic super highway"—comprising not only television and video, but also "audio cassettes, telex, data pooling, continental satellites, micro-fiches, private microwaves and eventually, fiber optics on laser frequencies." By the 1990s, Paik's concept of an information "superhighway" had become associated with a new "world wide web" of electronic communication then emerging—just as he had predicted.

From Music to Fluxus

Paik was well-positioned to understand how media technologies were evolving: in the 1960s he was one of the very first people to use televisual technologies as an artistic medium, earning him the title of "father" of video art. Born in Seoul in 1932, Paik studied composition while attending college in Tokyo; he eventually traveled to Germany, where he hoped to encounter the leading composers of the day. He met John Cage in 1958 and soon became involved with the avant-garde Fluxus group, led by Cage's student George Maciunas.

Following the example of Cage's oeuvre, many of Paik's Fluxus works undermined accepted notions of musical composition or performance. This same irreverent spirit informed his use of television, to which he turned his attention in 1963 in his first one-man gallery show, "Exposition of Music—Electronic Television," at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany. Here, Paik became the first artist to exhibit what would later become known as "video art" by scattering television sets across the floor of a room, thereby shifting our attention from the content on the screens to the sculptural forms of the sets.



Detail, Nam June Paik, Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, 1995 (Smithsonian American Art Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

The father of video art

Paik moved to New York in 1964, where he came into contact with the downtown art scene. In 1965, he began collaborating with cellist Charlotte Moorman, who would wear and perform Paik's TV sculptures for many years; he also had a one-man show at the 57th Street Galeria Bonino, in which he exhibited modified or "prepared"

television sets that upset the traditional TV-watching experience. One example is *Magnet TV*, in which an industrial magnet is placed on top of the TV set, distorting the broadcast image into abstract patterns of light.



Nam June Paik, Magnet TV, 1965, modified black-and-white television set and magnet (Smithsonian American Art Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

According to an oft-cited story, on October 4th of that same year, Paik purchased the first commercially-available portable video system in America, the Sony Portapak, and immediately used it to record the arrival of Pope Paul VI at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Later that night, Paik showed the tape at the Café au Go Go in Greenwich Village, ushering in a new mode of video art based not on the subversion or distortion of television broadcasts, but on the possibilities of videotape. The evolution of these tendencies into a new movement was announced by a 1969 group show, "TV as a Creative Medium." Held at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York, the show included one of Paik's interactive TVs, and also premiered another one of his collaborations with Moorman.

TV as a Creative Medium

For Paik and other early adopters of video, this new artistic medium was well-suited to the speed of our increasingly electronic modern lives. It allowed artists to create moving images more quickly than recording on film (which required time for negatives to be developed), and unlike film, video could be edited in "real-time," using devices that altered the video's electronic signals. (Ever the pioneer, Paik created his own video synthesizer with engineer Shuya Abe in 1969.) Furthermore, because the image recorded by the video camera could be transmitted to and viewed almost instantaneously on a monitor, people could see themselves "live" on a TV screen, and even interact with their own TV image, in a process known as "feedback." In the years to come, the participatory nature of TV would be redefined by two-way cable networks, while the advent of global satellite broadcasts made TV a medium of instant global communication.



Nam June Paik, TV Garden, 1974 (image shows 2000 version), video installation with color television sets and live plants (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) (© Nam June Paik Estate)

As television continued to evolve from the late 1960s onward, Paik explored ways to disrupt it from both inside and outside of the institutional frameworks of galleries, museums, and emerging experimental TV labs. His major works from this period include *TV Garden* (1974), a sculptural installation of TV sets scattered among live plants in a museum (image above), and *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), a broadcast program that coordinated live feeds from around the world via satellite. In these and other projects, Paik's goal was to reflect upon how we interact with technology, and to imagine new ways of doing so. The many retrospectives of his work in recent decades, including one organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2012, speak to the increasing relevance of his ideas for contemporary art.

The nation electric

By the 1980s, Paik was building enormous, free-standing structures comprising dozens or even hundreds of TV screens, often organized into iconic shapes, as in the giant pyramid of *V-yramid* (1982). For the German Pavilion at the 1993 Venice Biennale, Paik produced a series of works about the relationship between Eastern and Western cultures, framed through the lens of Marco Polo; along with Hans Haacke, another artist representing Germany, Paik was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion. One of the works, *Electronic Superhighway*, was a towering bank of TVs that simultaneously screened multiple video clips (including one of John Cage) from a wide variety of sources. Two years later, Paik revisited this work in *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, placing over 300 TV screens into the overall formation of a map of the United States outlined in colored neon lights (see image at the top of the page and the detail below). Roughly forty feet long and fifteen feet high, the work is a monumental record of the physical and also cultural contours of America: within each state, the screens display video

clips that resonate with that state's unique popular mythology. For example, Iowa (where each presidential election cycle begins) plays old news footage of various candidates, while Kansas presents the *Wizard of Oz*.

The states are firmly defined, but also linked, by the network of neon lights, which echoes the network of interstate "superhighways" that economically and culturally unified the continental U.S. in the 1950s. However, whereas the highways facilitated the transportation of people and goods from coast to coast, the neon lights suggest that what unifies us now is not so much transportation, but electronic communication. Thanks to the screens of televisions and of the home computers that became popular in the 1990s, as well as the cables of the internet (which transmit information as light), most of us can access the same information at any time and from any place. *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, which has been housed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum since 2002, has, therefore, become an icon of America in the information age.

While Paik's work is generally described as celebrating the fact that the "electronic superhighway" allows us to communicate with and understand each other across traditional boundaries, this particular work also can be read as posing some difficult questions about how that technology is impacting culture. For example, the physical scale of the work and number of simultaneous clips makes it difficult to absorb any details, resulting in what we now call "information overload," and the visual tension between the static brightness of the neons and the dynamic brightness of the screens points to a similar tension between national and local frames of reference.



Nam June Paik, V-yramid (detail), 1982, video installation, color, sound, with forty television sets (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) (© Nam June Paik Estate) (photo: Mark B. Schlemmer, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/yNndQo>

239. Viola, The Crossing

Dr. Allison Young

> We have to reclaim time itself, wrenching it from the "time is money" maximum efficiency, and make room for it to flow the other way – towards us. We must take time back into ourselves to let our consciousness breathe and our cluttered minds be still and silent. This is what art can do and what museums can be in today's world.
> —Bill Viola [1]



Bill Viola, The Crossing, 1996, video/sound © Bill Viola (photo: stunned, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Taking time back

Bill Viola's *The Crossing* is a room-sized video installation that comprises a large two-sided screen onto which a pair of video sequences is simultaneously projected. They each open in the same fashion: a male figure walks slowly towards the camera, his body dramatically lit from above so that it appears to glow against the video's stark-black background. After several minutes he pauses near the foreground and stands still. He faces forward, staring directly into the lens, motionless.

At this point the two scenes diverge; in one, a small fire alights below the figure's feet. It spreads over his legs and torso and eventually engulfs his whole body in flames; yet, he stands calm and completely still as his body is immolated, only moving to raise his arms slightly before his body disappears in an inferno of roaring flames. On the opposite screen, the event transpires not with fire but with water. Beginning as a light rainfall, the sporadic drops that shower the figure build up to a surging cascade of water until it subsumes him entirely. After the flames and the torrent of water eventually retreat, the figure has vanished entirely from each scene, and the camera witnesses a silent and empty denouement.

Expanded temporal experience



Bill Viola, The Crossing, 1996, video/sound © Bill Viola (image: SFMOMA) <http://www.sfmoma.org/media/features/viola/BV01.html>

The Crossing makes use of Viola's signature manipulation of filmic time. Like many of the artist's recent works, it was shot using high-speed film capable of registering 300 frames per second, thus attaining a much greater level of detail than would be discerned by the naked eye. In postproduction, Viola reduces the speed of playback to an

extreme slow motion—further enhancing the level of definition to a dramatic and scrutinizing effect.

However, it is not only an interest in technological experimentation that drives the artist's technical and aesthetic decisions. Viola's use of slow-motion is meant to invite a meditative and contemplative response, one that requires the viewer to concentrate for a longer duration of time and simultaneously to increase his or her own awareness of detail, movement and change. This is consistent with the artist's intent to reignite the longstanding relationship between artistic and spiritual experience. A devoted practitioner of Zen Buddhist meditation, Viola has explained that after "fifty minutes of quiet stillness in a room of solitary individuals"—a description that could, just as easily, reflect a museum-goer's experience of his installations—"time opens up in an unbelievable way." [2]

Religious symbolism



Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja), Chola period, Indian (Tamil Nadu), c. 11th century, copper alloy, 68.3 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The Crossing might be interpreted through the lens of mythology or religious thought, even though the work does not make iconographic or stylistic reference to a particular narrative. Viola has been inspired by a rich variety of spiritual traditions, including Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sufism. Viewers may recall, for instance, the ring of flames that surrounds images of Shiva Nataraja (left) in which he sets in motion the continuous cycles of creation and destruction through his cosmic dance, or the biblical tales of fire and brimstone, rapture and the Great Floods. Throughout such narratives, the elemental forces of fire and water often symbolize change, redemption, transformation and renewal—common themes in Viola's oeuvre. The artist has similarly made reference to transitions and passages in works such as *The Passing*, a 1991 video made shortly after his mother's death, or *Two Women*, a 2008 piece in which figures slowly move through a translucent and symbolic barrier of water.

Viola's education and artistic practice have long been guided by questions of "how we see, how we hear, and how we come to know the world." [3] The artist grew up in Queens, New York and attended Syracuse University in the late 1960s where he enrolled not only in fine arts classes, but also in a variety of academic subjects ranging from the humanities to the hard sciences. In particular, he was captivated by religious studies, psychology and electrical engineering, interests that are clearly assimilated throughout his oeuvre.

Technological experimentation

As early as the 1970s, Viola was one of the first visual artists to make use of new video technologies. As a student he experimented enthusiastically with new portable recording devices, with which he created short video performances that explored a variety of gestures, sounds and expressions. During the 1970s and 1980s, he was artist-in-residence at a number of media laboratories and television stations, while also serving as an assistant curator at Everson Museum of Art where he was exposed to the work of Nam June Paik and Peter Campus, artists who were early innovators in the emerging field of video art. Eventually, Viola conceived of multi-channel and immersive installations where viewers are surrounded by carefully arranged screens and projections, sometimes displayed within an otherwise pitch-black room.

Sacred space

Between 1974 and 1976, Viola lived in Italy, where religious paintings and sculptures are often displayed in-situ, in the cathedrals for which they were commissioned. The continuing integration of historical art into contemporary public and religious life inspired Viola to design installations that mimicked the forms of devotional paintings, diptychs, predellas and altarpieces—formats that encourage intimate contemplation of religious icons. Later traveling throughout Japan and other parts of East Asia, Viola observed the same active level of engagement with art. In Tokyo, for instance, he witnessed museum visitors placing offerings at the feet of sculptural bodhisattvas or other religious statuary.

For viewers, the experience of viewing Viola's works need not be spiritually inscribed. In many cases, his works appeal to or reflect raw human emotions (the theme of his acclaimed exhibition *The Passions*) or universal life experiences. While *The Crossing* can be interpreted in light of a host of religious associations, the act of "self-annihilation" represented in the figure's disappearance at each conclusion also serves as a metaphor for the destruction of the ego. In the artist's words, this action "becomes a necessary means to transcendence and liberation," [4] especially in the face of life's inevitable unpredictability.

[1] Bill Viola, as quoted in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art,* Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 254
[2] Bill Viola, *Buddha Mind*, p. 254.
[3] "Bill Viola Interviewed by John Hanhardt, *Going Forth By Day* (Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim and New York: Harry N Abrams, Inc, 2005), p. 87.
[4] Bill Viola, as quoted in "Emotions in Extreme Time: Bill Viola's Passions Project," in *The Passions*, John Walsh, ed. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), p. 53.

240. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Dr. Matthew Postal

Gehry's Guggenheim

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, art museums in Europe and the United States were mostly designed in variants of the Neoclassical style. From the Louvre in Paris to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (below), large and small cultural institutions commissioned stately stone structures, distinguished by pedimented fronts, long colonnades, and lofty rotundas. Axial and processional, exhibition galleries were traditionally arranged in rows, with understated decorative treatments that complement the artworks.



John Russell Pope, National Gallery of Art, 1941, Washington (photo: AgnosticPreachersKid, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y5xlpznp>

The 1959 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (originally the Museum of Non-Objective Art), with its spiraling concrete ramps, was one of the first museums to challenge this tradition. By the 1980s it had outgrown its Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Fifth Avenue home in New York and Thomas Krens, the museum's director, began developing plans to expand the museum's reach though the establishment of satellite branches funded by foreign governments.



Frank Lloyd Wright, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City, 1942-59 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6VAweZ>

Among these projects, the 1997 branch in Bilbao, Spain, has been the most highly regarded. Not only did it provide the Guggenheim with a large exhibition venue for twentieth-century and contemporary art but it shifted the direction of museum design.



Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (exterior detail), 1993-97, titanium, limestone, glass, steel (photo: josu.orbe, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/3Q737L>



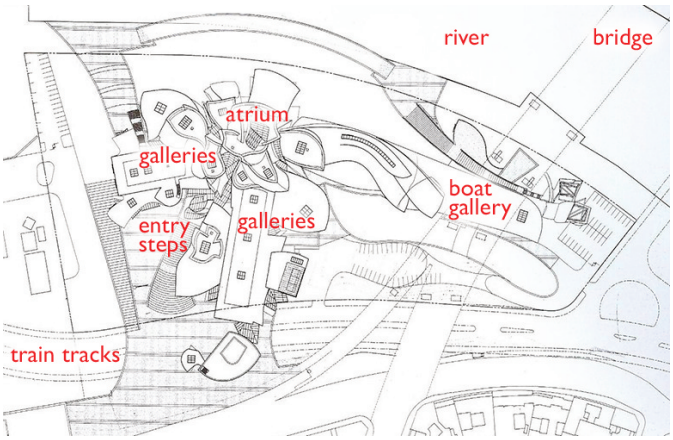
Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1993-97 (photo: Emilio I. Panizo, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6S7VxF>

At this point in his prolific career, Frank Gehry had a number of cultural institutions to his credit and was developing an international reputation for producing consistently innovative work. Born in Toronto, Canada, in 1929, this Los Angeles-based architect received the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1989. Important early projects by Gehry include his remodeled bungalow (begun 1977) in Santa Monica, California, the Vitra Design Museum (1989) in Germany (below) and the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum (1990-93) at the University of Minnesota, which was under construction when he received the Guggenheim commission.



East façade, Frank Gehry, Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein von Osten, 1989 (photo: Wladyslaw, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y3tuz9l7>

The Guggenheim Bilbao was also part of an ambitious urban renewal program conceived by the Basque regional government. An aging port and industrial center, the city had entered a period of significant economic decline during the 1980s. Various well-known architects were invited to design new structures, including Santiago Calatrava from Spain and Norman Foster from England. Though initial discussions focused on converting an existing industrial structure into an art museum, Krens convinced local officials to provide a more central and flexible location, a site on the banks of the Nerviron River.



Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao plan

Comparisons to the Guggenheim Museum in New York would be inevitable. Krens urged Gehry to "make it better than Wright" and the Bilbao museum recalls the earlier building in various subtle ways. From the absence of historical references to the focus on a central rotunda or atrium—albeit in Bilbao on a much larger scale—both architects produced unrestrained modern spaces of great architectural force and energy.



View from Iparraguirre Kalea toward the main entrance, (photo: Mariordo Emilio I. Panizo, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/6QJjkg>

A personal aesthetic

Gehry, who started his career in the 1960s, developed a personal aesthetic gradually, discovering exhilarating ways to shatter and re-assemble architectural forms. As most architects do, he began with the structure's most basic program. After determining the size and shape of the interiors, he melded the forms together, arranging them into a lively sculptural whole.

Though his earlier work, sometimes categorized as Deconstructivism, featured everyday building materials like chain link, corrugated metal, and plywood, by the late 1980s Gehry had refined his vision, using more costly surfaces to produce unexpectedly sensuous designs. Aided by sophisticated computer software, his most daring projects evoke aspects of the Italian Baroque style. Like the drapery folds that animate some pieces of seventeenth-century figurative sculpture, Gehry's more striking works juxtapose elements that bend, ripple and unfurl.

Most photographs depict the Guggenheim Bilbao from across the river. Although this view is arguably the most dramatic and satisfying, the main entrance is on the opposite side of the building, at the foot of a narrow residential street, the Iparraguirre Kalea (above left). Arriving visitors cross over concealed railroad tracks and descend through a broad stepped limestone plaza passing from a slender notch into a soaring 165-foot atrium. A complex and somewhat chaotic interior, this twisting glass-and-steel volume combines irregularly-shaped limestone and plaster walls, glazed elevator shafts, and vertigo-inducing catwalks.



Richard Serra, Snake, 2005, "The Matter of Time" sculptures in the "boat gallery," Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (photo: Ardfern, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y26sy3mn>



Atrium, Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1993-97 (photo: Ardfern, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/y3mraqq3>

The central atrium (above) serves as a circulation hub and orientation gallery, providing access to approximately 20 galleries on three levels. While the sequence of "classic" galleries are predictably rectangular, other exhibition spaces have surprising shapes, with angled or curving walls and occasional balconies. Particularly memorable is the so-called "boat gallery." Though Gehry compares the shape to a fish (a reoccurring motif in his work), this enormous column-free space (above) extends more than 400 feet along the river-front promenade and beneath the adjoining bridge. Ideal for large works of sculpture, this vast space contains an installation by Richard Serra.

A “miracle” in Bilbao

The Guggenheim Bilbao opened to the public in 1997. The reception to Gehry’s unorthodox design was nothing less than ecstatic, drawing international acclaim from fellow architects and critics, as well as from tourists who throng here from throughout the world. Herbert Muschamp, *The New York Times* architecture critic called the undulating structure a “miracle.”[1] The benefit to the city’s local economy was immediate and substantial and numerous cities have tried (but not always succeeded) to match its success, commissioning similarly dynamic structures from high-profile “starchitects.”

[1] Herbert Muschamp, “The Miracle in Bilbao,” *The New York Times*, September 7, 1997.



Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1993-97, (photo: Ardfern, CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://tinyurl.com/yykjojke>

241. Mariko Mori, Pure Land

Katrina Klaasmeyer

Floating on a lotus blossom

Set within a golden landscape, a female figure serenely floats above a lotus blossom while six alien musicians whirl by on bubbly clouds. Her pink robes mirror the predominantly pale orange, yellow and pink of the water, land and sky—firmly embedding her within the tranquil scene. *Pure Land,* a photograph set within glass, is the counterpart of Mori's three-dimensional video installation, *Nirvana*, 1997.*Nirvana* animates the imagery we see in *Pure Land*. Viewed within a darkened room with the aid of three-dimensional glasses, *Nirvana's* audience was limited to a group of 20 people at a time. During the seven-minute video, the central female figure would hum and whisper echoed rhythms as if meditating, while the little musicians floated around her. At the conclusion, a fan came on and blew cool, scented air into the audience's faces. Through the integration of sensory elements such as three-dimensional imagery, sound, scent, and the gentle touch of a breeze, combined with the limited viewing audience, *Nirvana* created an immersive, intimate experience. As its photographic counterpart, *Pure Land* captures a moment of this experience, enabling the viewer a longer, perhaps more meditative, relationship with the work.



Mariko Mori, Pure Land, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer, 305 x 610 x 2.2 cm



Mariko Mori, Enlightenment Capsule, 1996-1998, plastic, solar transmitting device, fiber optic cables, 108 x 83 x 83 inches

Symbolism and spiritual allusions

Every element we see here has significance that may not be apparent at first glance—the serene landscape, with its golden sky, smooth pink land masses, and perfectly still water, is rich with symbolism. *Pure Land* is set during sunrise in the landscape of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, called "dead" because the high salinity of its water does not support fish or plant life. In Shinto tradition, salt is used as an agent of purification. Floating in the water is a lotus blossom—symbol of purity and rebirth into paradise. This blossom resembles one in Mori's 1998 sculptural installation, *Enlightenment Capsule*, which featured a rainbow-colored acrylic lotus blossom set within a space-age capsule illuminated by sunlight. In both *Enlightenment Capsule* and *Pure Land* Mori blends traditional symbolism with futuristic elements. On the right hand side of the background of *Pure Land* is a fantastical object which resembles a playful futuristic spacecraft with arms. This may be a variation of a Tibetan stupa—a sacred Buddhist monument originally used as a

burial mound. Through her imaginative reinterpretation of symbols steeped in tradition, the artist creates a timeless setting appropriate for meditation on death, purification, and rebirth.



Stupa, 13th century, Western Tibet, brass, 21.1 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Immersion

The distant horizon line, combined with the larger island in the foreground that seems to continue into the viewer's space, create a sense of immersion, as if one were present with these fantastical figures. Perhaps this feeling of personal involvement ties in with the title itself, *Pure Land,* which is the paradise of Amida (or Amitabha) Buddha who descends to greet devotees at the moment of their death and takes them back to his "Pure Land of Perfect Bliss."



Descent of Amitabha and the Heavenly Multitude, Heian period, 12th century, National Treasure (Yushi Hachiman Ko)

Beginning with the eleventh century in Japan, several paintings and sculptures were made on this theme, such as the *Descent of Amida and the Heavenly Multitude.* In this type of imagery, Amida Buddha, resting on a lotus blossom and holding his hands in a symbolic gesture known as a mudra, is typically surrounded by celestial attendants in a sea of swirling clouds. These attendants are boddhisattvas, enlightened beings who act out of great compassion to help others achieve enlightenment. In a sculptural example from Byodo-in Temple, 52 boddhisattvas fly on clouds on either side of Amida Buddha; some are seated quietly with their hands joined in prayer, some hold a lotus blossom to receive the soul of the deceased, while others are playing musical instruments.



Jōchō, Amida Buddha, Heian Period, c. 1053, wood covered with wood leaf, 295 cm (Phoenix Hall, Byodo-in, Kyoto)

Oneness and universality



Mark Mori, Oneness, on exhibit in 2007 at the Grand Duke Jean Museum of Modern Art, Luxembourg (MUDAM) (photo: Mark Weston, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

In Mori's version, these celestial attendants are pastel-colored alien figures with large pointy heads and delicate bodies. Each figure plays a different instrument as they float on their light blue bubbly clouds. The two musicians in the foreground are blurred, as if they are flying quickly toward the viewer. These muscians appear again in a later sculptural installation by Mori, *Oneness*, 2003 (left). In this work, the six aliens are given three-dimensional form, complete with soft, flesh-like material. They stand in a circle facing outward as they hold each other's hands. The viewer becomes an active participant in the work—when a person hugs one of the figures, its eyes light up and you feel its heartbeat. As in the Nirvana video installation upon which *Pure Land* is based, Mori seems to want to engage more than just the viewer's sense of sight and for each participant to have a direct experience with the artwork. Perhaps more significantly, *Oneness* is a metaphor for bringing in the outsider, achieved through revealing commonalities of experience. The binding together of seemingly disparate realities is a central theme throughout Mori's work.

Artist as object

Another element typical in Mori's work is for the artist to cast herself in the principle role, and *Pure Land* is no exception. The central female figure is the artist herself, wearing an elaborate costume and headdress, both of her own design. Born in Tokyo in 1967, Mori studied design at Tokyo's Bunka Fashion College and worked part-time as a fashion model, which she originally considered a form of personal creativity. However, she found modeling an inadequate medium in which to express herself fully, so she began to stage elaborate tableaux, taking full creative control of the process, acting as director, producer, set and costume designer, and model. This recalls the practices of other photographers, most notably Cindy Sherman, as well as Yasumasa Morimura, the Japanese photographer notorious for substituting himself for figures in famous paintings throughout art history.

In the *Pure Land* photograph, Mori's light blue, pupil-less eyes, gaze serenely somewhere beyond our vision. Like the Amida Buddha, she rests above a lotus blossom and holds her right hand in a mudra of blessing and teaching; the circle formed by the index finger and thumb is the sign of the Wheel of Law. In her left hand she holds a *hojyu*, or magical wishing jewel, in the shape of a lotus bud. This figure is inspired by Kichijoten, originally the Indian goddess, Shri Lakshmi, who was eventually incorporated into Buddhism, and typically represents fertility, fortune, and beauty. Here Mori bares comparison with a well-known eighth-century painting of Kichijoten from Yukushi-ji Temple in Nara. Similarities include the serene elegance, softly fluttering gown, and wish-granting jewel. The eighth-century painting depicts the clothing and appearance of an elegant lady of the Chinese Tang Dynasty, and it may have been an object of veneration during the annual New Year event when devotees prayed for happiness and fertility. In this manner, a beautiful, elegant woman was seen to embody the ideas of good fortune and prosperity and became an object of worship.



Left: Kichijoten from Yukushi-ji Temple in Nara, 8th century, color on hemp, 53 x 31.7 cm; right: Mariko Mori, Pure Land, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer, 305 x 610 x 2.2 cm

By taking on this ancient persona, Mori dissolves her own identity and is transformed into the elegant Tang lady and goddess of fortune, while simultaneously performing the welcoming role of Amida Buddha. Mori's enlightened self-representation descends to guide the viewer into a "Pure Land of Perfect Bliss" of her own creation. Perhaps more significantly, the artist seeks to lead the viewer into her immersive paradise. In both formats, the multi-sensory video *Nirvana* and purely visual *Pure Land* photograph, the message is clear: enlightenment is for all.

242. Kiki Smith, Lying with the Wolf

Dr. Allison Young



Kiki Smith, Lying with the Wolf, 2001, ink and pencil on paper 88 x 73″ (Centre Pompidou, Paris) © Kiki Smith

This delicate but large-scale work on paper, which depicts a female nude reclining intimately alongside a wolf, represents the assimilation of several themes that Kiki Smith has explored throughout her decades-long career. Featuring an act of bonding between human and animal, the piece speaks not only to Smith's fascination with and reverence for the natural world, but also her noted interests in religious narratives and mythology, the history of figuration in western art, and contemporary notions of feminine domesticity, spiritual yearning, and sexual identity.

Lying with the Wolf is one in a short series of works executed between 2000 and 2002 that illustrates women's relationships with animals, drawing from representations found in visual, literary, and oral histories. Smith is most interested in narratives that speak to collectively shared mythologies; these include folk tales, biblical stories and Victorian literature, yet the once-familiar stories are then fragmented and conflated with one another to form new clusters of meaning and association.

Intimate Relationships with Nature



Kiki Smith, Rapture, 2001, bronze, 67-1/4 x 62 x 26-1/2″, edition of 3, © Kiki Smith

Many of Smith's works from this period feature a female protagonist who is based on Little Red Riding Hood as well Sainte Geneviève, the Patron Saint of Paris. Geneviève is herself often associated with Saint Francis of Assisi because of her close relationships with animals and her ability, in particular, to domesticate wolves.

Other works in the series include *Geneviève and the May Wolf*—a bronze sculpture in which a standing female figure calmly embraces the wolf—and *Rapture*, which is perhaps more closely aligned to Red Riding Hood, as it depicts a woman stepping out from the stomach of the recumbent creature.

The pair as depicted in *Lying with the Wolf*, however, seems locked in a more intimate embrace, as the wolf nuzzles affectionately into the nude woman's arms. She wraps herself around the animal's body in a gesture of comforting, her fingers stroking the soft fur beneath its ears and along the side of its stomach. The wolf's wildness is tamed, and both figures seem to nurture one another, floating within the abstract space of the textured paper surface upon which they are delicately drawn. Smith imbues a story that is normally quite violent with a kind of tenderness that is characteristic of her overall aesthetic.

Feminist Approaches to Narrative

It has been suggested by some critics that Smith's reinterpretations of Red Riding Hood and Sainte Geneviève represent a feminist approach to popular folktales. This is supported by her placement of "woman" amidst the natural world, but also, importantly, at a structural level: in the way in which the two narratives are fragmented and combined. Borrowing from divergent sources in order to forge a new storyline, Smith demonstrates the slippery relationship between a visual image and its multiple references, adopting a narrative style indebted to feminist re-writings of history.

As the curator Helaine Posner has explained: "Instead of presenting them in their traditional roles as predator and prey, Smith re-imagined these characters as companions, equals in purpose and scale." The distinction between "predator" and "prey" might be thought of as a metaphor for hierarchies of power in human relationships, which have traditionally been drawn along the lines of gender, race, and class. Because patriarchal societies typically grant more power to men, while requiring women to be submissive or dependent, we can think of this "overturning" in Smith's art as a political statement against such inequalities. The artistic narratives portrayed in her work are ones in which binaries are flipped and opposing qualities are merged; in so doing, Smith asserts a critical feminist position that favors the articulation of multiple meanings.

"Walking Around in a Garden"

"My career has stopped being linear. A couple of years ago, the storyline or narrative fell apart…"[1]

As is the case with *Lying with the Wolf*, several of Smith's works integrate a diverse list of themes and motifs that she has accumulated over the course of her career. The artist continuously re-imagines tropes she has used in past works, with the result that her practice does not seem to progress through discrete artistic stages. Rather, she works in cycles and layers; she has described her career as an act of meandering, or "walking around in a garden."

Kiki Smith grew up in a vibrant artistic family; she is the daughter of the sculptor Tony Smith and the opera singer Jane Lawrence Smith. She has spoken fondly of the Victorian house in which she was raised in South Orange, New Jersey, and how it captured her young imagination, as a historical artifact with its own memories and indices to the past. The notion of "home" has been central to her practice, and she likens it to the human body, a theme that is pervasive across her oeuvre. Domesticity, fragility, and the humble materials of craft and folk arts feature strongly in her work.

Abjection and The Body

While Kiki Smith's early work is aligned with the collaborative and activist art scene of the 1980s, she became known for intimate explorations of the human body in the following decade, often through life-sized sculpture that honored the figural tradition in Western art.



Kiki Smith, Blood Pool, 1992, wax, gauze, and pigment, 42 x 24 x 16″, © Kiki Smith

These works emphasized the body's vulnerability and made reference to feminist theories of the "abject," which conceived of the body as a messy, porous, and boundary-less system. *Blood Pool*, for instance, features a small, apparently violated figure, huddled into a fetal position on the floor. Many other works of this period feature bodily fluids or marks of injury.

Mysticism and Mythologies

Throughout the 1990s, Smith would come to embrace her religious upbringing, creating works that are spiritual, ethereal, and markedly more decorative. Celestial motifs and references to the natural world became ubiquitous, although these themes are still deeply connected to the body. As an investigation of the body in its capacity for fertility, reproduction, and nurturing, this turn towards the natural environment would eventually lead Smith to her interest in animals and our connections to them.

Lying with the Wolf is an extension of this yearning to connect the earthly with the spiritual and the personal with the collective.

1. As quoted in Christopher Lyon, "Free Fall: Kiki Smith on Her Art" in *Kiki Smith*, ed. Helaine Posner and Christopher Lyon, New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, Inc: page 37.

243. Kara Walker, Darkytown Rebellion

Dr. Doris Maria-Reina Bravo

Brilliant patterns

The Art of Kara Walker, a "PBS Culture Shock" web activity, tests the participant's tolerance for imagery that occupies the nebulous space between racism and race affirmation. Though the activity gives the participant only two options at the end (whether or not to feature one of Walker's silhouettes on the "Culture Shock" homepage), the activity explores the multiple and complex reactions Walker's work elicits. Yet to focus solely on the controversy Walker's art generates is a disservice to her artistic training and the strength of her art, especially in a stunning and absorbing installation like *Darkytown Rebellion*. Here, a brilliant pattern of colors washes over a wall full of silhouettes enacting a dramatic rebellion, giving the viewer the unforgettable experience of stepping into a work of art. Walker's talent is not about creating controversy for its own sake, but building a world that unleashes horrors even as it seduces viewers.



Kara Walker, Darkytown Rebellion, 2001, cut paper and projection on wall, 4.3 x 11.3m, (Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg) © Kara Walker

In contrast to larger-scale works like the 85 foot, *Slavery! Slavery!* (1997), *Darkytown Rebellion* occupies a 37 foot wide corner of a gallery. This ensemble, made up of over a dozen characters, plays out a nightmarish scene on a single plane: one figure stands upright over his severed limb, despite his bleeding leg stump, with bones protruding from his hips; another figure, also exhibiting a severed limb, rolls on his back; a woman with a bonnet and voluminous hoop skirt may be attacking a smaller figure on its back, perhaps a crying baby, with a long, plunger-like instrument.

Silhouettes and concealment

What is most remarkable about these scenes is how much each silhouette conceals. Without interior detail, the viewer can lose the information needed to determine gender, gauge whether a left or right leg was severed, or discern what exactly is in the black puddle beneath the woman's murderous tool. The color projections, whose abstract shapes recall the 1960s liquid light shows projected with psychedelic music, heighten the surreality of the scene.

Walker is a well-rounded multimedia artist, having begun her career in painting and expanded into film as well as works on paper. The layering she achieves with the color projections and silhouettes in Darkytown Rebellion anticipates her later work with shadow puppet films.

In addition to creating a striking viewer experience, *Darkytown Rebellion* reflects on the historical representation of African Americans in American visual culture. From the infamous Brookes slave ship print (1789), to *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to the Aunt Jemima logo (c.1890-today), powerful visuals shape African-American stereotypes and inform how popular culture perceives this community. Walker is one of several African-American women who use art to engage with and challenge visualizations of race within popular culture; others include Renee Cox, Adrian Piper, and Faith Ringgold.

Perverse ingenuity

Walker anchors much of her work in documents reflecting life before and after the Civil War. *The Daily Constitution 1878* (2011) emerged after Walker read an 1878 article from the eponymous Atlanta newspaper about a mob lynching a black woman and the brutal way the tree flung the woman's body into the air. Walker converted the article into a drawing because, as she stated, "it's this completely absurd, extreme, violent situation that required so much perverse ingenuity."[1]

Darkytown Rebellion is also born from a desire to translate the past into visual form. Walker discovered a landscape painting in *American*

Primitive Painting, a book featuring artwork by unschooled artists. One anonymous landscape, mysteriously titled *Darkytown*, intrigued Walker and inspired her to remove the over-sized African-American caricatures. She placed them, along with more figures (a jockey, a rebel, and others), within a scene of rebellion, hence the re-worked title of her 2001 installation. Through *Darkytown Rebellion*, Walker is not attempting to correct a late-nineteenth century depiction of African-Americans but rather to broach a discussion: are these merely images from the past or do these caricatures still resonate in the twenty-first century?

Incomplete histories

Walker's dedication to recovering lost histories through art is a way of battling the historical erasure that plagues African Americans, like the woman lynched by the mob in Atlanta. Though this lynching was published, how many more have been forgotten? Who was this woman, what did she look like, why was she murdered? The impossibility of answering these questions finds a visual equivalent in the silhouetted voids in Walker's artistic practice.

Silhouettes began as a courtly art form in sixteenth-century Europe and became a suitable hobby for ladies and an economical alternative to painted miniatures, before devolving into a craft in the twentieth century. Traditionally silhouettes were made of the sitter's bust profile, cut into paper, affixed to a non-black background, and framed. Except for the outline of a forehead, nose, lips, and chin all the subject's facial details are lost in a silhouette, thus reducing the sitter to a few personal characteristics. In Walker's hands the minimalist silhouette becomes a tool for exploring racial identification. All things being equal, what distinguishes the white master from his slave in *Darkytown Rebellion*? Walker forces the viewer to confront the visual cues that make up stereotypes: these cues distill human forms into basic and arbitrary shapes that compose the basis of racial discrimination.

Though *Darkytown Rebellion* is full of shapes lacking detail, Walker reserves sharp outlines for faces and limbs. Walker's silhouettes are (mostly) full-bodied figures, captured in various poses from the traditional profile, to a three-quarter turn, to full frontal. This plurality of poses, often in a single body, is another example of obscured detail within the silhouette tradition: here not only is the face absent, but the body's action is also ambiguous. As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to make out which leg is severed on the standing figure near the corner, yet Walker manages to give the gory details of that man's tragedy. If traditional silhouettes illustrated a contained shape, Walker's figures overflow these boundaries, whether through graphic violence or metaphorically, in terms of subject matter.

Getting at the truth

In contrast to *The Daily Constitution 1878*, which was born from a news article, Walker herself developed the narrative for the orphaned figures that compose *Darkytown Rebellion*. Though the title suggests a historical event, both the original nineteenth-century painting and Walker's response are visual inventions rather than documents in a traditional sense. Walker enjoys this ambiguity between history and fiction: "I'm not making work about reality; I'm making work about images. I'm making work about fictions that have been handed down to me, and I'm interested in those fictions because I'm an artist, and any sort of attempt at getting at the truth of a thing, you kind of have to wade through these levels of fictions, and that's where the work is coming from."[2]

Darkytown Rebellion does not attempt to stitch together facts, but rather to create something more potent, to imagine the unimaginable brutalities of an era in a single glance.

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1. Laura Barnett, "Kara Walker's Art: Shadows of Slavery," <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/oct/10/kara-walker-art-shadows-of-slavery> *The Guardian* (October 10, 2013)

2. "Kara Walker Rattles Art World Again," <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=87985217> NPR (March 07, 2008)

244. Shonibare, The Swing (After Fragonard)

Dr. Allison Young



Yinka Shonibare MBE, The Swing (After Fragonard), 2001 (Tate, London) © Yinka Shonibare MBE

With her fingers delicately grasping the thickly coiled rope of a swing suspended mid-flight, a life-sized female mannequin flirtatiously kicks up her left foot, projecting her slipper into the air where it hovers above a tangle of branches. Our gaze is directed from the arch of her foot towards the vibrant trim of her petticoat, gown and coat.

A recreation of a Rococo painting

The Swing (After Fragonard) is a three-dimensional recreation of the Rococo painting after which it was titled, which itself offers testimony to the opulence and frivolity of pre-Revolutionary France. Painted in 1767, Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Swing* depicts a coquettish young girl swinging in a lush and fertile forest and, of course, playfully kicking up her shoe. A sculpture of a bashful cherub looks on, but he is not alone; the female figure is flanked by two male figures lurking in the shadows, one seems to push her swing from behind, as the other mischievously glances up the layers of her dress to catch a glimpse of what is beneath.



Jean-Honoré Fragonard, The Swing, oil on canvas, 1767 (Wallace Collection, London)

Living with History

> Living in England, with my colonial relationship to this country, one cannot escape all these Victorian things,

> because they are everywhere: in architecture, culture, attitude…

Shonibare's quotations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century style and sensibility are visually captivating; at the same time, tableaux such as *The Swing* contain some dark undertones. To begin with, the beautiful young protagonist of Fragonard's painting has somehow become headless. This is likely a reference to the use of the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in the 1790s, when members of the French aristocracy were publicly beheaded. Drawing our attention to questions of excess, class and morality that were raised by revolutionaries two centuries ago, Shonibare invites us to also consider the increasing disparity between economic classes today, especially alongside the growing culture of paranoia, terror and xenophobia in global politics since 9/11.

As a British-born Nigerian, raised between Lagos and London, Shonibare is especially perceptive to the ways in which issues of access, nationalism and belonging have their roots in modern European history, particularly with regards to the United Kingdom and its relationship to its former colonies. Here is where the specific fabrics that Shonibare utilizes become more relevant, as their symbolism is steeped in histories of cultural appropriation, imperialism and power.

Indonesian motifs, made by Europeans, sold in West Africa

Though tailored in the fashion of eighteenth-century French aristocratic style, the costume that is modeled by Shonibare's protagonist has been sewn from colorful and abstractly patterned fabrics with quite different origins: the bright golds, reds and blues arranged in geometric motifs across her ruffled skirt are typical of the "African" Dutch wax fabrics that Shonibare has famously used to adorn his figural tableaux throughout his career.

While these fabrics have come to signify African identity today, the patterns on Dutch wax fabrics were originally based on motifs found in Indonesian batiks, and were manufactured in England and Holland in the nineteenth-century. Predictably, the European imitations did not prove lucrative when sold in South Asian markets, so Dutch manufacturers then marketed the textiles to their West African colonies, where they have since been appropriated and integrated into local visual culture.

As such, Dutch wax fabrics as we know them today are the product of the complex economic and cultural entanglements that resulted from European imperialism. As curator Okwui Enwezor has explained, Shonibare uses the fabrics "as a tool to investigate the place of ethnicity and the stereotype in modernist representation. (…) The textile is neither Dutch nor African, therefore, the itinerary of ideas it circulates are never quite stable in their authority or meaning."

Aesthetics and Authenticity

As fictional as their "African-ness" may appear to be, however, the fabrics have now been completely assimilated in places like Nigeria, where Shonibare grew up. As Enwezor points out, the material is "both fake and authentic, both readymade and original," not to mention indisputably cosmopolitan.

The question of what is "authentically" African has personal resonance for Shonibare, who, as an art student in London, was shocked when one of his instructors suggested that he make work that expressed his African identity. This conversation prompted him to think about stereotypes and the areas that exist between categories of identity and culture. The artist began using the material in 1992.



Dutch wax print fabrics (photo: ipercher, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/gGEwaY>

In Pursuit of Leisure

What might Shonibare wish to communicate by bringing together these "African" textiles with Fragonard's Rococo images, or any of the other European masterpieces that the artist has appropriated in his sculptural installations?

In imaging this particular moment in European history, Shonibare wishes to forge connections between imperialism, the aristocracy, and the "colonized wealthy class." In *The Swing (After Fragonard)*, which is loaded with references to the French Revolution, the Age of Enlightenment and colonial expansion into Africa, Shonibare asks us to consider how a simple act of leisure can be so controversial.

> While the leisure pursuit might look frivolous (…) my depiction of it is a way of engaging in that power. It is actually an expression of something much more profoundly serious insofar as the accumulation of wealth and power that is personified in leisure was no doubt a product of exploiting people.

In this and other works, Shonibare chooses stories—including biographies, world events, and works of art—which are already effective allegories concerning race, class, corruption and greed, calling our attention to some of the darker moments in Western history. However, his use of the Dutch Wax fabric, with its spurious origins and its misleading aesthetic identity, serve as a reminder that history and truth are also themselves constructions.

245. El Anatsui, Old Man's Cloth

A CONVERSATION

Dr. Peri Klemm and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the galleries of the Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C.



El Anatsui, Untitled, repurposed printed aluminum, copper, 256.5 x 284.5 x 27.9 cm as installed (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art) © Smithsonian

Steven: We are in the Museum of African Art, part of the Smithsonian on the Mall in Washington, D.C., and we're looking at a spectacular wall hanging by a very well-known contemporary African artist from Ghana.

Peri: This work is by El Anatsui who, while born in Ghana and raised there, spent most of his time as an artist in Nsukka, Nigeria. We're looking at a recent work which is, at first glance, a textile.

Steven: And textile is important in Ghana and has a long history. We're probably most familiar with Kente cloth.

Peri: The predominant color in Kente is gold, which was associated with royalty, and the Ashanti control of the gold trade. And so El Anatsui is using gold in this work to give it that sense of royal reverence and authority.

Steven: What we're looking at are small pieces of metal that are reclaimed most often from liquor bottles that have been pounded and then wired together, which returns us to traditional West African culture—the importance of alcohol and of the libation.

Peri: In many traditional societies in West Africa, there is a strong belief in the importance of venerating and honoring ancestors, especially when one eats. And so before taking that first bite or that first drink, you pour libations—you pour a bit of palm wine, or some other kind of alcohol, to the ancestors just by dribbling a bit onto the ground. And so we have a reference here to that tradition.



Libation, 2005 (photo: Chris Lewis, CC BY NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/49WAi>

Steven: This was refuse and what the artist has done is to collect these items and transform them now into something that has powerful meaning and is stunningly beautiful.

Peri: This sculpture, this textile was made up of pieces that are smaller square sheets of this material that would have been created by El

Anatsui, and today more so by men he employs in his workshop who create these squares and then lay them out. El Anatsui will often climb up on a ladder or look from above to figure out how to arrange them and put them together. He may travel with this piece and put it up or it might just be shipped and it's really up to the curator how it's going to be hung. So in each new location, it takes on a different form. Notice it's not flat. It really is intended to be sculptural and come out into our space.

Steven: I'm really interested in the idea that this was something that was done not only by the artist but also by his workshop. In the West, we often think of that as detracting from the value of the object because the artist is not solely responsible for the work. But in African culture, traditional cloth was often a more communal activity.



Kente, Woman's Wrapper (Asante people), c.1925-50, silk, 82-84 inches (Indianapolis Museum of Art)

Peri: Absolutely, and so El Anatsui, while we want that name to be recognized with this piece of modern art, really acknowledges that there are other people that come together to make this possible. One thing that he also mentioned is that these objects have had a life before, and in fact they've been touched and handled and manipulated by someone, and that harkens back to the belief system, you can find this among the Ashanti for example, this idea of sunsum, or an aura or an energy that gets transferred into objects that people handle most often. So it has an energy, an electricity, a sort of vitality of this history.

Steven: Those words—energy, vitality—are so appropriate just visually to the surface. Look at the way the light plays over—you called it sculptural, it is not a flat surface. It intentionally bulges. There are valleys and hills, and our eye rides over this really sensuous surface.



El Anatsui, Untitled (detail), repurposed printed aluminum, copper, 256.5 x 284.5 x 27.9 cm as installed (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art) © Smithsonian

Peri: We have to remember that this is recycled, this is a piece that is completely recycled from materials that would have otherwise ended up in large trash heaps just outside of almost any major city in Africa. El Anatsui is using his traditional visual vocabulary, his heritage, to make sense of this very complicated idea of consumerism and capitalism, that is such a part of people's lives in Africa today.

Watch the video. <https://youtu.be/4zatyfXy_D0>



El Anatsui, Many Come Back, 2005, aluminum (liquor bottle tops) and copper wire, 84 x 115 in (Newark Museum) ©El Anatsui (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/CVz83f>

246. Julie Mehretu, Stadia II

Dr. Allison Young



Julie Mehretu, Stadia II, 2004, ink and acrylic on canvas, 108 x 144″ (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh) (© Julie Mehretu)

Opening / Ceremonies

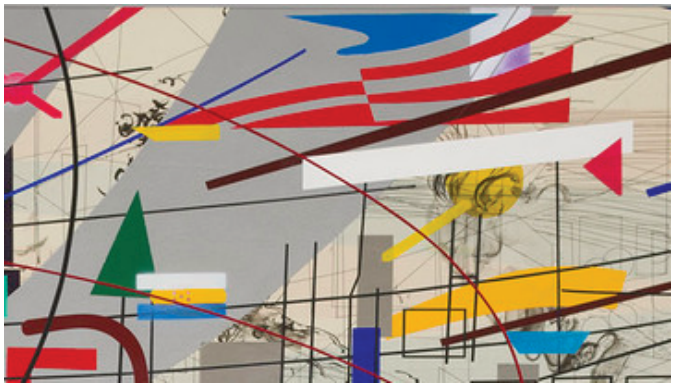
When looking at *Stadia II*, first try to isolate the black lines from the rest of the composition. Does this centrifugal structure remind you of a sports arena, an amphitheater or opera house? Perhaps a political chamber? It could denote all of these, broadly invoking our experiences as individuals and collective bodies in such spaces. The built environment, for Mehretu, provides a setting in which people can gather, protest, pray, and riot in mass numbers.

Now, try to imagine yourself in a large stadium, at an important

athletic championship such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics. How do the crowds behave? What types of phrases or slogans are they shouting, and at what volume? Think about the matching clothing and the painted faces of spectators wearing team colors, or the flags and banners that they wave over their heads.

In her monumental paintings, murals, and works on paper, Julie Mehretu overlays architectural plans, diagrams, and maps of the urban environment with abstract forms and personal notations. The resulting compositions convey the energy and chaos of today's globalized world. *Stadia II* is part of a triptych of works created in 2004, and explores themes such as nationalism and revolution as they occur in the worlds of art, sports, and contemporary politics.

Gaze back into the painting and observe the various shards of color floating over the work's architectural skeleton. The scene, however abstract, could easily represent our visualization of the sports arena. Small circles, dots, and hash marks float through the open space at the center of the composition, resembling the eruption of confetti that announces a winning team's victory (or, alternately, that of a lucky political candidate on Election Day).



Julie Mehretu, detail, Stadia II, 2004, ink and acrylic on canvas, 108 x 144″ (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh) (© Julie Mehretu)

Notice the larger circles, triangles, blocks and parallelograms that float across the upper register. Far from arbitrary, these basic pictorial elements could comprise the designs of nearly any country's national flag. The cluster of red and blue stripes, for instance, located along the top-right edge of the canvas, resemble the American flag, without necessarily resolving into a perfect match. We may also find corporate logos and religious symbols interspersed throughout; Mehretu is intentional in drawing analogies between these forms and the propagandistic ways in which they are often used.

Lastly, observe the painterly grey marks that seem to rise from the lower and central registers like plumes of smoke. Stadiums and capital buildings can represent triumph, pride and celebration, but they are also common targets for bombings and acts of terror, which are often motivated by a comparable degree of zealousness and ideological fervor.

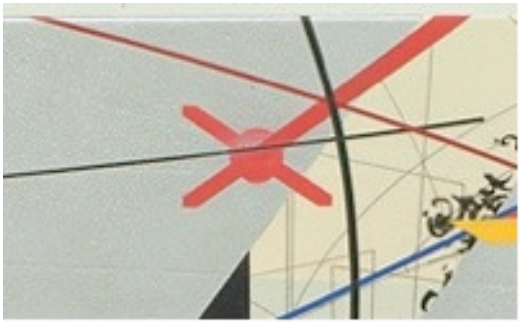
Process

Mehretu's working process begins with the projection of maps and diagrams onto the work's blank surface. From these, the artist makes traces and hash marks that eventually grow into characters and communities. The first layer is coated with an acrylic-and-silica mixture that seals the drawing under a transparent ground. After drying, this ground is itself overlaid with more figures and photographs that are again assimilated into the composition.

The artist describes her final product as containing a "stratified, tectonic geology (…) with the characters themselves buried—as if they were fossils."[1] This distinct sense of temporality serves as a metaphor for history, memory, and the legacies of past cultural epochs that still influence contemporary life.

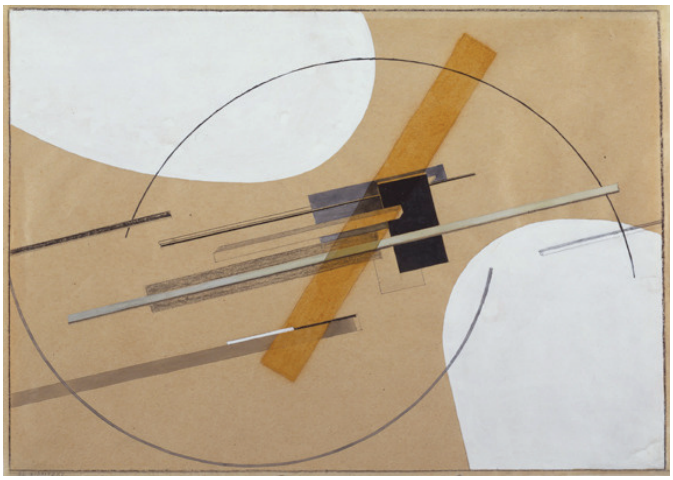
Utopian Abstraction

While nationalism, sports and global politics are key points of entry into the work, Mehretu also considers art historical precedents for these themes.



Julie Mehretu, detail, Stadia II, 2004, ink and acrylic on canvas, 108 x 144″ (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh) (© Julie Mehretu)

Take a look at the orange diamonds at the side edges, the black quadrilaterals interspersed above, or the dynamic red "X" found at the top edge. These lines and shapes are unmistakable references to the Russian constructivist and Bauhaus movements of the early twentieth century and to artists such as Alexandr Rodchenko, Kasmir Malevich, El Lissitzky, and Wassily Kandinsky. These artists conceived of pure abstraction as a way to wipe clean the slate of history and to promote universalism and collectivity in art, politics and culture.



El Lissitzky, Proun (Entwurf zu Proun, S.K.), 1922-23, watercolor, gouache, india ink,graphite, conté crayon, and varnish on buff paper, 8 7/16 × 11 3/4″ / 21.4 × 29.7 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Mehretu has long explored the use of abstraction in service of revolution and utopian politics throughout the history of Modernist art, "I am (…) interested in what Kandinsky referred to in 'The Great Utopia' when he talked about the inevitable implosion and/or explosion of our constructed spaces out of the sheer necessity of agency. So, for me, the coliseum, the amphitheater, and the stadium are perfect metaphoric constructed spaces."[2] These can represent both the organized sterility of institutions and the "chaos, violence, and disorder" of revolution and mass gathering.

Global Networks

Because Mehretu builds her piece from multiple layers of figure and ground alike, the colors, shapes, and planar forms in *Stadia II* seem to be suspended between surfaces, and are often caught in a swirling motion around the axis of her compositions. The dynamism of the work makes reference to traffic patterns, wind and water currents, migrations, border crossings and travel.

Depicting patterns of movement, Mehretu emphasizes, on one hand, the militarization of bodies moving within and between national (or digital) spaces, and acknowledges the increasing speeds at which the world seems to be moving. Yet, while her compositions might be vertiginous and disorienting at times, we are given a chance to reflect on the potential and importance of such interconnectedness.

Born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Mehretu has lived in Michigan, Rhode Island, and Dakar Senegal, and now resides in New York City.

1. Julie Mehretu, quoted in Thelma Golden, "Julie Mehretu's Eruptive Lines of Flight as Ethos of Revolution," in *Julie Mehretu: The Drawings*, ed. Catherine de Zegher and Thelma Golden, New York, NY: Rizzoli, 2007.

2. Julie Mehretu, "Looking Back: Email Interview between Julie Mehretu and Olukemi Ilesanmi, April 2003" in *Drawing into Painting*, Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2003: 13-14.

247. Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra

Dr. Shawnya Harris



Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra, 2006, mixed media on mylar (Brooklyn Museum)
© Wangechi Mutu, all rights reserved

Using the medium of collage, the artist Wangechi Mutu creates new worlds that re-imagine culture through the realm of fantasy. Mutu was born in Nairobi, Kenya and educated in Europe and the United States. Her art is global in nature and she clearly relishes complicating both Western and non-Western cultural norms; questioning how we see gender, sexuality, and even cultural identity.

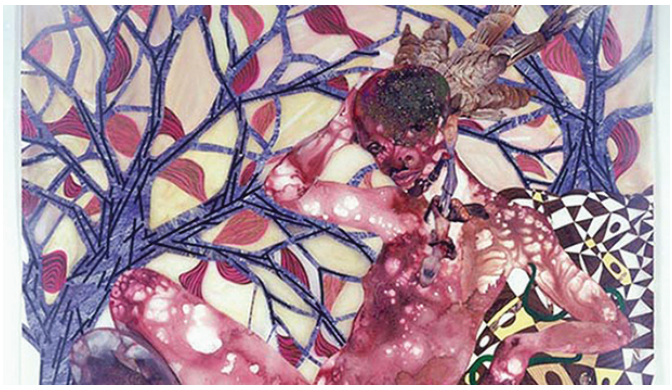
Wangechi Mutu's artistic practice includes video, installation, sculpture, and mixed-media collage. One of her recurrent themes concerns the violence of colonial domination in Africa (particularly in her native Kenya). Her images incorporate the female body, specifically an imagined "African" body, subjected to sexism and racism on a global scale.

Sources for Mutu's collages include fragments from fashion magazines, pornography, medical literature or even popular magazines such as National Geographic. Inspiration for her collages can be traced to the early photomontages of the German Dada artist Hannah Hoch (below left) and the American artist Romare Bearden (below right). Mutu appreciates Bearden's use of collage—how it emphasizes community and the African American traditions found in jazz, while the spliced images in Hoch's photomontages reflect Mutu's interest in disrupting societal convention in art. Mutu creates a space for exploring an informed consciousness about being "African" and female that incorporate these artists' techniques yet develops a new visual vocabulary.



Left: Hannah Höch, Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany, collage, mixed media, 1919-1920 (Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin); right: Romare Bearden, The Calabash, 1970, collage (Library of Congress)

Preying Mantra centers on female subjectivity, exoticism and the notion of hybridity—both in concept and imagery. Hybridity is a concept often used in postcolonial studies. It describes how the mixing the cultures of colonized and the colonizer—can produce a third space for newer and often disruptive understanding of cultural identity. Colonialism in Africa, which began in earnest in the nineteenth century, violently wrested power from Africans for the benefit of European nations through the enforcement of strict military and administrative controls. As colonialism waned during the mid-twentieth century, other social and political issues emerged. Mutu's work was shaped by this complex history and by issues such as the rights of women that came to the fore at the end of the century.



Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra (detail), 2006, mixed media on mylar (Brooklyn Museum) © Wangechi Mutu, all rights reserved

In Mutu's *Preying Mantra*, a female creature appears to recline on a geometrically patterned blanket that is sprawled between trees or perhaps on a tree branch. The blanket resembles a Kuba cloth (traditional fabric created by the Kuba people). Legs tightly crossed in front of her, the figure stares suggestively at the viewer with her right hand positioned behind her head, which is surmounted by a cone-like crown. Her relaxed posture is camouflaged by her skin, which appears dappled by sunlight and which mirrors the colors of the tree's leaves. Like the female body, the tree is emblematic of the creation myths found in many cultures, including Mutu's Kikuyu ancestors in Kenya. In her left hand, the figure holds a green serpent that rests on the blanket which fills much of the scene. The serpent, linked with the role of Eve in the biblical creation narrative, provides yet another cultural source for Mutu's protagonist. The tree envelopes the female figure, reinforcing links between history and fiction, African and Non-African cultural myths as well as natural versus unnatural phenomena.

The title *Preying Mantra*, recalls the praying mantis—an insect that resembles the protagonist in Mutu's collage, with her prominently bent legs. As a carnivorous insect, praying mantises camouflage themselves to match their environment, snaring their prey with their enormous legs. During mating, the female can become a sexual cannibal—eating her submissive mate. Such imagery and its association with natural phenomena creates a primal sensibility. Despite this reference to a real praying mantis, Mutu's "preying mantra" is also vulnerable to our gaze, suggesting that the figure may be a victim that is "preyed" upon by "mantras." Mutu creates a natural, even primitive, fictional environment that entices and disturbs us even as she invites us to explore stereotypes about the African female body as explicitly sexual, dangerous, and aesthetically deformed in relation to Western standards. Given that elements of the collage are assembled from sociocultural documents found in popular literature from the West, the figure may be preying on the viewer's own fears and desires.



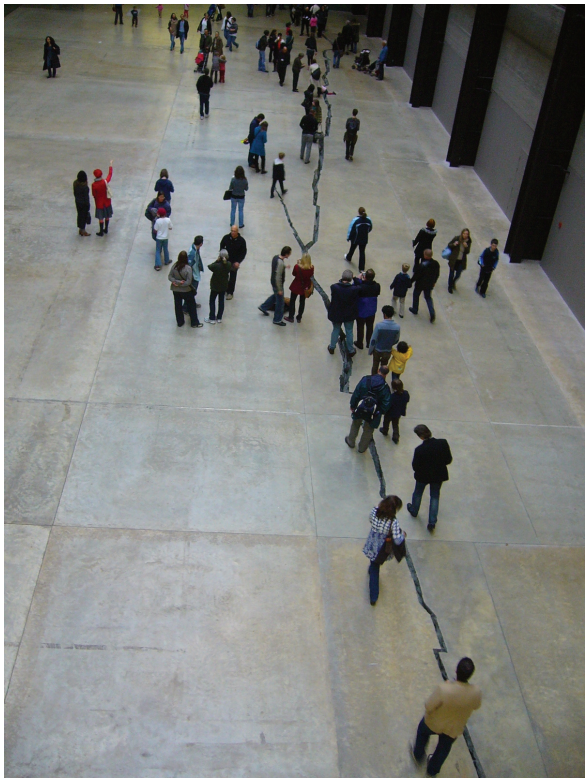
Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra (detail), 2006, mixed media on mylar (Brooklyn Museum) © Wangechi Mutu, all rights reserved

248. Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth

Dr. Doris Maria-Reina Bravo

The Turbine Hall

Since 2000, the Tate Modern has commissioned installations (the Unilever series) for the museum's enormous Turbine Hall, including Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (2003) and Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* (2010). In the eighth iteration, the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo produced *Shibboleth*, a deep meandering crack in the floor. Despite the unassuming nature of this work, it defies neat description and exists in a limbo between sculpture and installation; and the provocative title complicates the work instead of decoding it.



Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth, 2007-08, installation, Tate Modern © Doris Salcedo (photo: Dan Powell, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/41dqDC>

Salcedo has offered few explanations beyond stating how the fissure represents the immigrant experience in Europe. Though this theme is apparent in the work, it is by no means the only issue raised. As photographs of the installation demonstrate, visitors contorted their bodies in infinite ways as they tried to see below the crack. In *Shibboleth*, Salcedo elaborates a complex socio-political topic in a work with a tremendous formal presence.

Coded identification

Salcedo's installation requires attentive viewing. The rupture measures 548 feet in length but its width and depth vary (changing from a slight opening to one several inches wide and up to two feet in depth). The viewer's perception into the crevice alters, as he or she walks and shifts to better glimpse inside the cracks and appreciate the interior space, notably the wire mesh embedded along the sides.



Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth, 2007-08, installation, Tate Modern (photo: Chris Geatch, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/4C5Fq6>

Change in perspective is one of Salcedo's goals. She quotes the Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno: "We should all see the world from the perspective of the victim, like Jewish people that were killed with their head down in the Middle Ages. So he wonders, what is the perspective of a person that is agonizing in this position?"

To go from viewing this installation as a fissure in concrete to an artwork about the disenfranchised may seem like a big step. It is helpful to think of *Shibboleth* as a work of conceptual art since the ideas that frame the physical crack in the floor are of equal, if not greater importance than the material work itself. Salcedo's installation at the Tate Modern would be completely different if it were simply untitled; indeed, the analysis of the work would then settle exclusively on its formal qualities. But Salcedo has bestowed a curious and specific name: "Shibboleth," a codeword that distinguishes people who belong from those who do not.

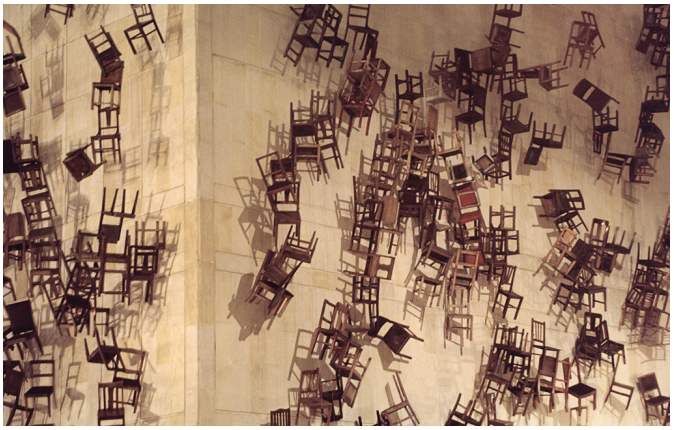


Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth (detail), 2007-08, Tate Modern (photo: Nic McPhee, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/4zD9Yy>

Every community, culture, and nation has its shibboleth. Among the U.S. military, "lollapalooza" was used during World War II since its tricky pronunciation could identify native, English-speaking Americans. But the sinister history of the word "shibboleth" illustrates how friends and enemies are separated by fine, linguistic lines. Any stranger in a foreign land appreciates the vulnerability this entails, especially the fear of being outed as a foreigner and exposed in a hostile environment.

Irrevocably "other"

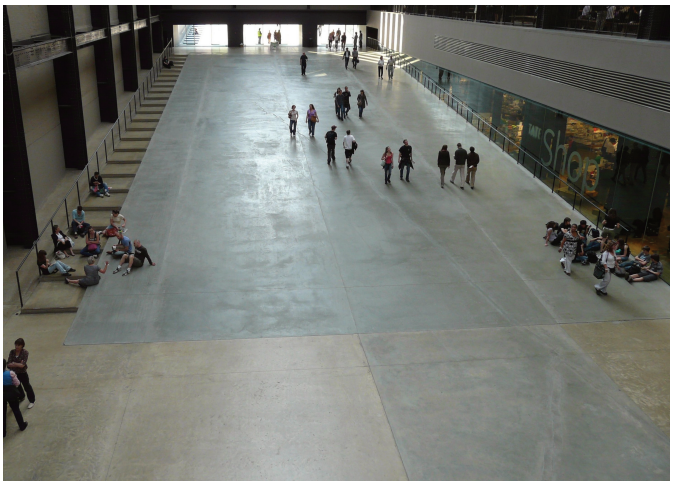
Salcedo's experience as a Colombian artist working abroad has made her especially sympathetic to the plight of marginalized people. Between 2002 and 2003, Salcedo completed two installations that make this clear. In the first work, the artist staged a performance where she lowered empty wooden chairs over the side of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. The performance lasted 53 hours and commemorated the 1985 siege in that building where three hundred people were held hostage; the siege ended in a bloody confrontation between rebels and the military.



Doris Salcedo, Noviembre 6 y 7, 2002, Supreme Court, Bogotá © Doris Salcedo

The second installation also honored the victims of senseless violence. Salcedo piled more than 1,500 chairs into a space between two buildings in Istanbul. The breathtaking sight of this nearly three-story sculpture highlighted how warfare disrupts everyday life and creates refugees out of ordinary citizens as it recalls the countless shoes discovered at concentration camps at the end of World War II.

For Salcedo, the ravine in the Tate Modern's floor represents the immigrant experience in Europe, notably the racial segregation that marks people from the third-world as irrevocably "other," a permanent state apart. Yet, the artist offers some hope. After seven months, the show ended and the Tate Modern filled the crack, leaving a scarred floor. This is a remarkable symbol of the possibility of healing through figurative and literal closure; however, the mark is also an obstacle to any attempts to erase the past.



Shibboleth filled, Tate Modern (photo: Loz Pycock, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/4M1fVa>

Sources

From an institutional perspective, this scar is remarkable for other reasons: it is usually unimaginable for museum officials to permit an artist to permanently alter the exhibition space.



Lucio Fontana, Spatial Concept: Expectations, 1960, slashed canvas and gauze, 100.3 x 80.3 cm (MoMA) © 2013 Fondation Lucio Fontana

Salcedo's act remains transgressive: the act of deliberately breaking one's media (in this case a concrete floor) is an act of rebellion. In this way, *Shibboleth* joins a tradition of artists experimenting with the surface. In the late 1940s, Lucio Fontana developed "Spazialismo," an approach to art-making that converted the two-dimensional canvas into a three-dimensional space. Fontana slashed his monochrome canvases and revealed a new space underneath the gashes. The artist's bold move to disrupt the canvas's nearly sacred surface was revolutionary and influenced later artists.

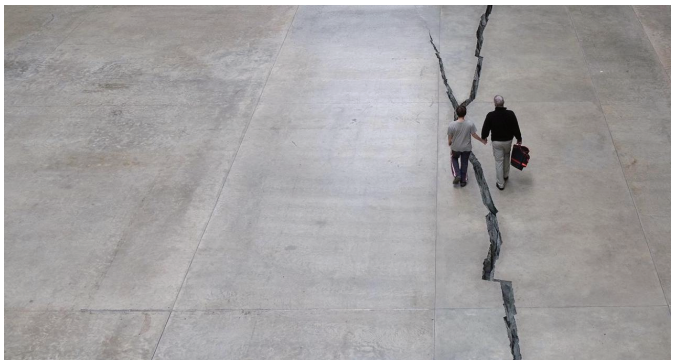
Throughout the 1970s Gordon Matta-Clark sawed into the walls, floors, and ceilings of buildings, often leaving cracks like the line of light in *Splitting* (1974). For centuries, a canvas was a flat plane, the support for an image rather than an object in its own right. A building by definition sought to be structurally sound; any structural damage makes it unstable and dangerous. To highlight their subversion, these artists flaunt the negative space made by their incisions: Matta-Clark's cuts in *Splitting* are illuminated by blinding light, while Fontana's slashes and Shibboleth each reveal a startlingly dark void previously unseen.



Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting, 1974

Meanings

Matta-Clark, Fontana, and Salcedo create art that is difficult to classify. Is this painting? Sculpture? Architecture? Installation? Intervention? Salcedo's strength as an artist is her ability to balance the formal impact of *Shibboleth* with its message while preventing one from overshadowing the other. Salcedo's reticence to discuss her process and meaning at length is our opportunity to develop infinite interpretations.



Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth, 2007-08, Tate Modern (photo: Wonderferret, CC BY 2.0-altered) <https://flic.kr/p/4z1rij>

249. Hadid, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome, Italy.



Zaha Hadid, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, 1998 – 2009 (opened 2010), Via Guido Reni, Rome. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/nmse69>

Steven: We're just north of the center of Rome looking at Zaha Hadid's relatively new building, the Maxxi Museum, devoted to twenty-first century art. As we approached the museum we walked by military barracks and we just begin to spot the concrete facade of the museum resting gently on the older buildings, poking its nose around the older buildings. Until we walked into a large piazza where the full whiff of the building is apparent.

Beth: In some ways, it seems to have almost landed on that older structure.

Steven: The fact that it feels like it's landed suggest weightlessness despite the fact that it is an almost unbroken slab of concrete and that's in part because of the shadow created by the overhang of that concrete reminiscent of the international style and the work of people like Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe.

Beth: In the facade of the building, rows of metallic columns that might remind us of Bernini's piazza at St. Peter's.

Steven: There's also the historical precedent of this concrete material that the ancient Romans perfected and used to shape space and she is very much the inheritor of that tradition.

Beth: Although we don't see those round arches like a Roman aqueduct or the Pantheon, it's almost like those round arches have tilted and become horizontal and moved the visitor to the museum through ribbons of space.

Steven: Zaha Hadid has won virtually every major international architectural prize.

Beth: She was born in Iraq but is a British architect. She holds faculty positions at numerous universities all over the world.

Steven: Right after school she had worked for Rem Koolhaas at his Office for Metropolitan Architecture. This was one of the most inventive and theoretically important architectural firms in the 1970s and 1980s.

Beth: Hadid is clearly drawing inspiration from modernism, from constructivism, from the work of the great Russian painters of the early-twentieth century like Malevich, embodying early twentieth-century Utopianism about the modern city.



Zaha Hadid, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, 1998 – 2009 (opened 2010), Via Guido Reni, Rome. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/nCHQYN>

Steven: In the warm grace of the concrete, in the silvery grace of the metal flooring and in the blacks and whites. It reminds me of the interest in translucency, transparency and opaqueness that you see especially in the work of artists like Moholy-Nagy in the early part of the twentieth century, as well as an abashed interest in the power of pure geometry.

Steven: Looking toward Islamic art as well as modernist architecture.

Beth: In fact, she mentions the importance of having seen the minaret at Samarra. This massive figure that creates very clean, stark geometric lines and that creates a ribbon for people to walk up.

Beth: There is that sense of ribbons of space, that path around the minaret coming undone and branching out when we walk through the spaces of the museum. There is something very exciting about moving through this building and not knowing what one will come across next. No matter which galleries we go into, we're drawn back to these fabulous stairways that are black but lit underneath with white light.



Zaha Hadid, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, 1998 – 2009 (opened 2010), Via Guido Reni, Rome. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/nCDZeH>

Steven: We're walking on metal grids and this entire interior space seems to be a contrast between this wonderful curvilinear ribbons and strict rectilinear geometries.

Beth: We see those rectilinear geometries in the walls with the blocks of concrete, in the stairs and in the concrete beams that almost read these blades along the ceiling.

Steven: Our eye shoots along those beams and are slowed only by the thins of the louvers.

Beth: The stairways move like bands in and around those rectilinear shapes and feel very playful.

Steven: The staircase is not only bent but also double back creating sharp angles. They do feel playful, almost as if you could have a huge metal ball that runs along as if they were a track. There's also a hint of the sinister and at least one critic has likened it to the Prince of Piranesi in the way that they seem to move in every direction with endless multiplication.

Beth: Of different spaces weaving together and going back out again.

Steven: Sometimes rushing from one space to another and sometimes slowing down.

Beth: The architect said, and I'm quoting here, "My first idea was about a delta where the mainstreams become the galleries and minor ones become bridges which connect to them." Of course, a delta is a river that forks and flows into the sea.



Zaha Hadid, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, 1998 – 2009 (opened 2010), Via Guido Reni, Rome (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/nCDP3a>

Steven: What does it mean to design a museum in the twenty-first century? If you think about the history of museums, they're generally palaces that have been re-purposed. For example, the Leuven, Paris which was the royal residence of the King fo France or here in Rome, the Vatican Museum is the Papal palace.

Beth: You could think about many of the palazzi in Rome that were once family palaces that are now museums.

Steven: The Barberini Palace, for example.

Beth: We could think about the early modernist architecture of the Museum of Modern Art. Museum architecture says a lot about how we see ourselves and how we see our cultural heritage and how we move into the future. Do we look to the past? Do we look forward?

Steven: That's an especially salient issue here in Rome. A city with an overwhelming history.

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/Kv3feYibIUk>.

250. Ai Weiwei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)

Megan Lorraine Debin

Subversive seeds

Ai Weiwei often uses his art to critique political and economic injustice. This can be seen in work such as his 2010 installation, *Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)* at Tate Modern, London.



Ai Weiwei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds), 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (photo: Drew Bates, CC BY 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8VxZDM>

Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds) consists of more than 100 million tiny, handmade porcelain sunflower seeds, originally weighing in at 150 tons. They filled the enormous Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, an industrial building-turned-contemporary art space. Sunflower seeds evoke a warm personal memory for the artist, who recalls that while he was growing up, even the poorest in China would share sunflower seeds as a treat among friends. The use of sunflower seeds as the basis of his installation was also designed to subvert popular imagery rooted in the artist's childhood. Communist propaganda optimistically depicted leader Mao Zedong as the sun and the citizens of the People's Republic of China as sunflowers, turning toward their chairman. Ai Weiwei reasserts the sunflower seed as a symbol of camaraderie during difficult times.



Ai Weiwei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds), 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern, London)

Though each of the 100 million carefully crafted individual seeds can draw the viewer's attention, once arranged together in a neat rectangle, or covering the floor of an entire room, the hyper-realistic seeds create a sense of vastness. In the Tate installation, there was a sense of precision in the arrangement of the seeds, creating visual order and uniformity. The individual seed is lost among the millions, a critique of the conformity and censorship inherent in modern China.



Ai Weiwei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds), 2010, one hundred million hand painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern, London) (photo: Waldopepper, CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/9dqyBh>

Made In China

More than 1,600 artisans worked to make the individual porcelain seeds by hand in Jingdzhen, the city known as the "Porcelain Capital," where artists have been producing pottery for nearly 2000 years. Porcelain, first produced during the Han dynasty in about 200 B.C.E. and later mastered during the Tang dynasty, is made by heating white clay (kaolin) to a temperature over 1200 degrees Celsius. The fusion of the particles within the clay during firing allowed artists to create vessels with thin but strong walls. Porcelain— a symbol of imperial culture in China—was also made for export via the Silk Road and became important to the creation of the idea of China in the West.



Some of the 1,600 highly skilled craftspeople from Jingdezhen hired to create and paint porcelain sunflower seeds

Ai Weiwei's use of porcelain comments on the long history of this prized material while also rejecting the common negative connotations of the modern term "Made in China." Utilizing skilled artisans known for their exquisite craftsmanship to make objects that can only be differentiated one from another upon close inspection, alludes to the important porcelain tradition in Jingdzhen, as well as to the uniformity and diffusion of modern (cheap and fast) labor that is responsible for China's hard-won place in the world economy. *Sunflower Seeds* asks us to examine how our consumption of foreign-made goods affects the lives of others across the globe.

How we experience an artwork impacts our perception of the work. In the tradition of participatory contemporary art, *Sunflower Seeds* asks the public to physically interact with the art. Initially, Tate visitors were invited to walk over and lie on the seeds, though the museum, in consultation with the artist, suspended this opportunity about a week into the exhibition because of safety concerns.

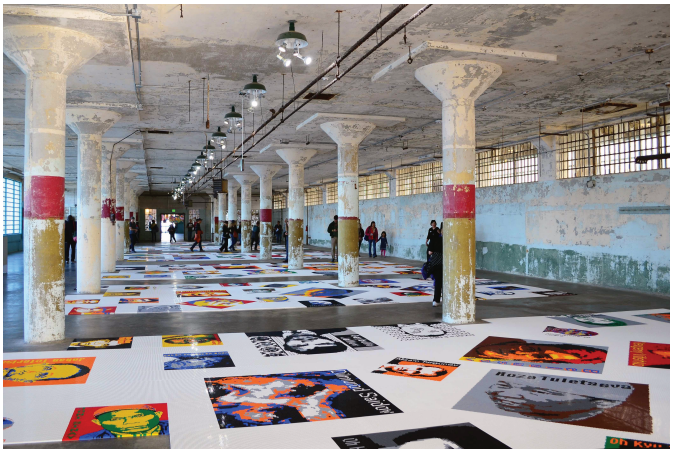
Art and activism

Ai Weiwei was arrested at the Beijing Capital International Airport on April 3, 2011, during his Tate exhibition.[1] He was detained for 81 days. The artist, along with many in the international community, asserted that his true offense was his political activism for democracy and human rights. Ai Weiwei had blogged for four years—investigating cover-ups and corruption in the government's handling of a devastating 2008 earthquake in Sichuan and the country's hosting of the Olympics. Ai Weiwei's blog was shut down in 2009. Since then, he has turned to Twitter and Instagram. During his detention, the international community, including major US art institutions, rallied for his release. Officials eventually released him, charging Ai Weiwei with tax evasion, but his passport was withheld, preventing him from leaving the country for four years. It was returned in 2015.



Ai Weiwei, Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds), 2010, one hundred million hand-painted porcelain seeds (Tate Modern, London) (photo: Loz Flowers, CC BY-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/8Jv6Wx>

Ai Weiwei's continues to address issues of human rights in his work. The 2015 exhibit *@Large*, installed on Alcatraz, the former island prison in the San Francisco Bay, comments on surveillance, freedom, and political prisoners by mixing fine and traditional arts with pop culture materials including silk dragon kites and Lego portraits (below).



Ai Weiwei, @Large, 2015, Alcatraz, trace, Legos (photo: Ian Abbott, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/pSzMWK>

[1] Andrew Jacobs, "China Takes Dissident Artist Into Custody," <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/04/world/asia/04china.html> *The New York Times*, 4/3/11, A4.

Book cover design by Susan Zucker.

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