

ASIAN ART

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NETHERLANDS RETURNS COLONIAL OBJECTS TO ASIA

At the request of Indonesian and Sri Lankan governments, museums in the Netherlands are returning 478 objects of cultural significance to Indonesia and to Sri Lanka, the bulk of which comprises the Lombok Treasure (335), which is being repatriated to Indonesia. A Dutch government statement explained, 'These objects were wrongfully brought to the Netherlands during the colonial period, acquired under duress or by looting'. The Minister of Culture, Gunay Uslu continued, 'This is the first time that we are returning objects that should never have been in the Netherlands. We are not just returning objects, we are actually starting a period in which we are more intensively co-operating with Indonesia and Sri Lanka'.

In 2017, the Rijksmuseum began its investigations into the provenance of colonial objects, working in collaboration with researchers in countries of origin. This resulted in further research for the project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPOCE) that

was started in 2019. As a culmination of this research, the Rijksmuseum has returned six, 18th-century objects from its collection to Sri Lanka over the summer: the Cannon of Kandy; two swords (*kastane*); two rifles (*gingal*); and a dagger (*pibiya*).

The small bronze cannon, often referred to as Lewke's Cannon, is richly decorated with silver, gold, and gemstones and carries a shield that resembles Kandyan royal emblems. It is also embellished with typical Kandyan motifs such as *liyawel*, *kalpa vruksbaya*, and *nari lata*. It is also called Lewke's Cannon as Lewke Disava is mentioned as the donor in the Sinhala inscription on the cannon. Lewke was an aristocrat in the Kandyan Kingdom and held the honorary title of *Disava* (provincial governor). It was only around the 1880s that the Sri Lankan origin of the cannon was rediscovered and in 1894 the inscription was translated for the first time from Sinhala to English.

The inscription has been subject to various interpretations and one of the



It was agreed this July that the Cannon of Kandy, also known as Lewke's Cannon, will be returned by the Dutch government to Sri Lanka along with other objects

main questions has been whether Lewke gifted the cannon to the Dutch, or whether the Dutch had taken the cannon as war booty during the Kandyan-Dutch war (1762-1766).

The report brings to light the hitherto unknown history of the cannon prior to the moment it was taken and sent to the Dutch Republic. Further analysis showed that the

cannon was made in a foundry in the Dutch Republic, or Batavia, probably as a gift for (or on the orders of), the king of Kandy at an unknown date. The inscription allowed the museum to conclude that Lewke Disava had the elaborate decoration added to the cannon as a gift for King Sri Vijajaya Rajasinghe (r 1739-1747) between 15 April 1745 and 15 April 1746. It was

then probably recorded by the Dutch as war booty in 1765, after the Dutch siege and destruction of the palace of Kandy.

In 1766, the cannon served once more as a gift, this time from the Dutch governor, Lubbert Jan van Eck of Ceylon, to the guardian of the Dutch Stadtholder Duke Louis Ernest of Brunswick-Lüneburg. After its arrival in the Dutch Republic, it was presented as a war trophy in the Cabinet of Curiosities of the Dutch Stadtholder Willem V.

One of the crucial moments in the research was the weighing of the cannon, as it allowed the researchers to identify the cannon described in the records as war booty with Lewke's cannon in the Rijksmuseum with near certainty.

On the basis of the object analysis and archival evidence, this report can dismiss the thesis that the cannon had been presented to the Dutch as a gift from Lewke Disava or the king of Kandy, and confirms to the thesis that the cannon was sent to the Dutch republic as war booty.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PHOENIX ART MUSEUM, ARIZONA

The Phoenix Art Museum has announced that Dr Janet Baker has been named Curator Emerita of Asian Art, in honour of her distinguished service during her more than two decades as the museum's curator of Asian art. Baker, who retired at the end of August, 2023, joined the museum in 2000 and over tenure guided the expansion of the museum's holdings in Chinese, Japanese, Sri Lankan, Indian, and contemporary Asian art, more than doubling the collection by adding 3,000+ objects. She also organised wide-ranging exhibitions that explored art forms from across the Asian continent spanning from antiquity to the present. Recently, Baker stewarded a major acquisition of more than 50 Indonesian textiles, the first works from Indonesia acquired into the museum's Asian art collection. As Curator Emerita, Baker will remain an advisor on the museum's Art of Asia collection and exhibition programme. The museum has launched a national search for its next curator of Asian art.

NEW ART FAIR FOR INDIA, MUMBAI

The inaugural Art Mumbai is set to open in India's most populous from 16 to 19 November, 2023. The fair is being created by SaffronArt, the Grosvenor Gallery, and the online sales platform Global Art Hub. Art Mumbai will celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Mumbai through a focus on South Asian modern, contemporary, and indigenous art. The event will take place at the iconic Mahalaxmi Racecourse Members' Enclosure. The fair has attracted a number of galleries, including Akar Prakar, Apparao, Chatterjee & Lal, Chemould Prescott Road, DAG, Gallery Espace, Jhaveri Contemporary and Nature Morte. More information on artmumbai.com.

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UDAIPUR Painted and Printed Maps at the Udaipur Court

Funded by The Getty Foundation, under The Paper Project, this exhibition brings together rare printed maps, painted maps and cartographic documents from the Mewar Royal Collection in the Mardana Mahal in the city palace complex.

The display gives visitors a fascinating insight into how places, landscapes, and the topography of the State of Mewar were produced on maps, paintings, and other related documents. The iconic architecture of Udaipur's palaces can also be seen in these maps, as depicted by the cartographic printers and painters of the past.

Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation (MMCF), Udaipur received a grant in 2021 from The Getty Foundation for an exhibition of these rare, and never-seen-before, collection of maps and cartography-related documents. Curatorial and research teams from the

City Palace Museum have been working on preserving the materials dating back to the 1700s in the collection.

The late 19th and early 20th century was a period of cultural resurgence and linguistic movements in India. These maps of Mewar, in Hindi and English, reflect the growing interest in regional histories and cultural identities. During this period, historians were able to consult regional histories, exploring local narratives, dynasties, and cultural developments within specific regions, to challenge colonial narratives and celebrate indigenous histories, that had often faded into the past.

Maps of historical kingdoms like Mewar with its boundaries, landmarks, and cultural sites gained in popularity, reflecting the interest in the region's rich legacy. Hindi emerged as a prominent language during India's independence



Mewar State (1945), published by Hiteshi Pustak Prakashan, The City Palace Museum © MMCF

movement, and the demand for maps in Hindi soared. By 1937, Hindi maps were locally available in Udaipur, emphasising Mewar's identity

within Rajasthan and India. These maps showcased administrative units, physical features, local produce, economy, infrastructure,

colleges, population, and mines, offering fascinating insights into the Kingdom's vibrant past.
Dr Shaikha Mishra,

consultant curator for the project, explained, 'The exhibition has been curated in different themes. We have showcased some 53 objects including a diverse array of maps meticulously commissioned and collected by the Maharanas of Mewar. There are details of topographical maps, landscape paintings, the cartographic works of British painters on Mewar and Udaipur, besides the early printed maps of India, world maps, and local district maps created for revenue administration are on display. These maps are historical documents and have tremendous archival value,' said Dr Mishra. 'We have innumerable other court records like *babidas* or daily dairies, architectural drawings, photographs and paintings: these maps complement and complete our understanding of the past.'

● The City Palace Museum, Udaipur, ongoing

TEA BOWLS FOR CHANOYU

In the practice of *chanoyu* (tea ceremony), the tea bowl is more than simply a vessel for drinking tea. It also serves as an important object of aesthetic appreciation during a tea gathering. A tea bowl is something that can be held in the hands and admired, providing a point of connection between host (*teishu*) and guests (*kyaku*). Among the many bowls that have been used to serve tea in

the context of chanoyu, those revered as 'famous bowls' (*meizan*) have an especially rich history. These bowls are marked by their unique style and elegance, and by the countless hands that have held, cherished, and prized them over decades and centuries.

The exhibition highlights a number of famous bowls of distinguished provenance, categorised either as Chinese

'karamon' tea bowls, Korean 'korai' tea bowls, or Japanese 'wamono' tea bowls. By highlighting the diverse types, unique characteristics, origins, and stories associated with these exemplary ceramics, we hope to help visitors learn about and reflect on the role of the tea bowl in Japan's culture of tea.

● Until 10 September, Kyoto National Museum, kyohaku.go.jp



Taihi tenmoku teabowl with a phoenix design, Kyoto National Museum

WASHI TRANSFORMED New Expressions in Japanese Paper

In this exhibition, nine Japanese artists go far beyond the folding traditions of origami and explore the seemingly infinite possibilities of the medium, giving this ancient artform renewed relevance in the realm of international contemporary art. The artworks and installations in the exhibition show the potential of this traditional medium in the hands of these innovative artists, who have made *washi* their own. The artists are Hina Aoyama, Eriko Horiki, Kyoko Ibe, Yoshio Ikezaki, Kakuko Ishii, Yuko Kimura, Yuko Nishimura, Takaaki Tanaka, and Ayomi Yoshida.

Washi, which translates to 'Japanese paper', has been integral to Japanese culture for over a thousand years, and the strength, translucency, and malleability of this one-of-a-kind paper have made it extraordinarily versatile, as well as ubiquitous. Historically, washi has been used as a base for Japanese calligraphy, painting, and printmaking; but when oiled, lacquered, or otherwise



Six-panel folding screen (2019) by Eriko Horiki, washi and steel frame, courtesy of the artist

altered, it has other fascinating applications in architecture, religious ritual, fashion, and art. Despite the increased mechanization of papermaking in Japan over the last century, contemporary Japanese artists have turned to this supple yet sturdy paper to express their artistic visions.

According to early Japanese texts, Chinese papermaking techniques were first brought to Japan in the early 7th century by a Korean Buddhist monk. For more than a thousand years, washi has claimed an important place in

Japanese culture, and the methods used to produce this beautiful, yet utilitarian, paper remain essentially unaltered.

Three principal plant fibres are used in the production of washi: *kozo* (Japanese mulberry) and *mitsumata*, both of which are cultivated; and *gampi*, which is typically found in the wild. Traditional paper production is labour-intensive and complex. First, lengths of the three plants are steamed, so that the dark outer bark can be removed. The remaining fibres are then boiled and beaten into a pulp

made up of thin strands, which is then placed in a bath of water, where it is skilfully strained through a bamboo screen. This process disperses the fibres evenly to form thin sheets, which are then bleached and dried by the sun.

Washi was typically produced by farmers in winter, as an alternate source of income; the cold weather had the added benefit of keeping the fibres fresh, as well as shrinking the pulp, resulting in a stronger paper. This inherent durability has historically made washi an ideal resource for such fixtures of Japanese culture as sliding screens, room dividers, and lanterns, as well as a host of everyday objects including fans, furniture, bowls, tape, umbrellas, and kites.

The striking work of Kakuko Ishii (b 1952) is one of the artists using the *mizuhiki* technique. Most of Ishii's works are fashioned from paper cords called *mizuhiki*, which are created by tightly winding rice paper and adding starch (to give it stiffness) and then the desired

colour. For many of her works, she weaves the cords together to create structure and form; but once she has shaped the base, she typically allows the cords the freedom to spread dynamically into abstract forms. She is based in Fukuoka, Japan, where she works as an artist, and recently retired from teaching at Kyushu Sangyo (Industrial) University. Since 1978, she has shown her work in fibre-art exhibitions around the world, and has held several solo exhibitions throughout Japan and in Korea.

Other works, such as that of Eriko Horiki (b 1962) seek to find innovative ways to incorporate traditional washi into modern interior spaces. Having left a career in banking when she was in her twenties, Horiki began learning traditional washi paper-making, hoping not only to master the skill but to keep it alive for future generations. Working with a team of paper artisans and artists, she creates large-scale sheets of exquisitely textured mulberry paper whose

intricate patterns are designed to catch the light. Her works are typically installed as features of architecture—ceilings, walls, room dividers, windows, lamps—in restaurants, hotel lobbies, and public spaces throughout Japan. Meticulously layered, tinted, and backlit to create specific moods and environments, Horiki's paper sheets are a modern tribute to Japan's traditional *shoji* screen doors and folding paper *byōbu* screens. Her smaller-scale works mostly comprise paper sculptures that, like her large-scale sheets, are artfully illuminated to create distinctive atmospheres in specific architectural spaces.

The creativity of these artistic visionaries deepens our understanding of how the past informs the present, and how it can build lasting cultural bridges out of something as apparently simple and ephemeral as paper.
● Until 17 September, Dayton Art Institute, Ohio daytonartinstitute.org

LA MAKAN Cosmic Corporeality

In his reflections on soul and body, the Kazakh poet and philosopher Abai Qunanbauly, does not separate the soul and mind but defines them as one – 'T'. In his concept of 'T', if the soul is immortal then the mind, too, becomes eternal. Abai, continues this thought in his best-known body of work, *The Book of Words*, a collection of poems and theological and philosophic treatises. There he defines a place of dwelling of the soul and mind – 'la makan' – the place outside of human perception of space and time.

La makan, as an undefined place might bring an idea of an infinite universe, the cosmos. This mysterious space captivated and inspired many human cultures from the scientific, as well as philosophical, spiritual and religious points of view. Certainly, Cosmos has always played an essential role in the daily life of Central Asian nomads. They had to know the night sky and read it as a map to find directions and also follow the movements of the Sun, Moon, Earth, and Jupiter to understand the changes and their effects on nature. The philosophy of nomads was to be at one with nature, with the universe, which reflected in their worldview, Tengriism, worshipping of the Sky deity Tengri, the Mother Earth Umai, and ancestral spirits.

According to the Kazakh professor and musicologist, Bahtiyar Amanzhol, understanding and appreciation of the importance of the Tengriist beliefs is happening now: 'Tengriism is the worldview, where the complex relationship with nature and landscape formed the ethnos - its Picture of the World allows this belief system to be in the layers of later coming Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.'

In this exhibition, the works of the two artists, Aigana Gali and Gulnur Mukazhanova, derive inspiration from and illustrate this complex relationship of micro and macrocosms. In conversations relating to their creative processes, Mukazhanova and Gali often mention the connection with ancestor. The connection points or 'portals' can be vividly seen in their works, whether in Mukazhanova's portal shape of the work itself or the rectangular or circular shapes and details that are often present in Gali's works.

Gulnur Mukazhanova (b 1984, Karaganda, Kazakhstan) is an artist who uses the materials of traditional Kazakh handicrafts to explore the complexities of post-nomadic identities, cultural alienation, and the effects of globalisation. Born shortly before the collapse of the USSR, she was raised in the volatility of the newly formed Kazakhstan. Working in felt, the textile recalls and connects to the



Star Seed (2023) by Aigana Gali, 190 x 150 cm, oil, acrylic on canvas

origins, traditions and customs of her native country. Mukazhanova prefers to work with tactile mediums, such as fabrics and Kazakh traditional organic material, felt. Mukazhanova's haptic sensibility allows her to catch the material in its transitional state and create complex textured compositions and installation.



Solar by Gulnur Mukazhanova, from the Post-Nomadic Reality series, 2020-23, silk and felt

The exhibition was conceived with Ainalai'n Space, which was established in 2022 by Indira Dyussebayeva-Ziyabek. It is a nomadic arts project that showcases contemporary art from an interdisciplinary perspective.
● Until 13 September, Three Highgate Gallery, London, threehighgate.com

YOSHITOMO NARA Ceramic Works

Ceramic Works coincides with Frieze Seoul and marks Yoshitomo Nara's (b 1959) first solo show in Korea since 2005. In this upcoming exhibition in Seoul, Nara presents some 140 ceramics and 30 drawings on paper and cardboard – along with selected items from his personal collection – as part of an installation that captures the essence of environment as well as his ideas, feelings, and creative impulses.

Nara rose to prominence in the late 1990s, when he became internationally known for his emotionally resonant, stylised images of child-like characters set against monochromatic backgrounds. Drawing

inspiration from various sources – including politics, punk rock, folk music, 1960s counterculture, and his own memories and experiences from childhood – Nara developed a signature style that celebrates the introspective freedom of the imagination and the individual. The children in his works are depicted in a range of psychic states, from rebellious and resistant to quiet, contemplative, and lonely.

The artist's practice encompasses not only painting but also drawing, photography, large-scale installation, and sculpture in ceramic, bronze, and fibre-reinforced plastic. It was during Nara's 2007 residency

in Shigaraki, Japan (home to one of the country's six ancient kilns, where the artist has since returned to work) that he began experimenting with clay, a medium that allowed him to engage new modes of creating three-dimensional forms. The collaborative, community-oriented ethos of the residency also influenced Nara's early work in ceramic, which included handmade sculptures as well as plates and cups produced on the wheel.

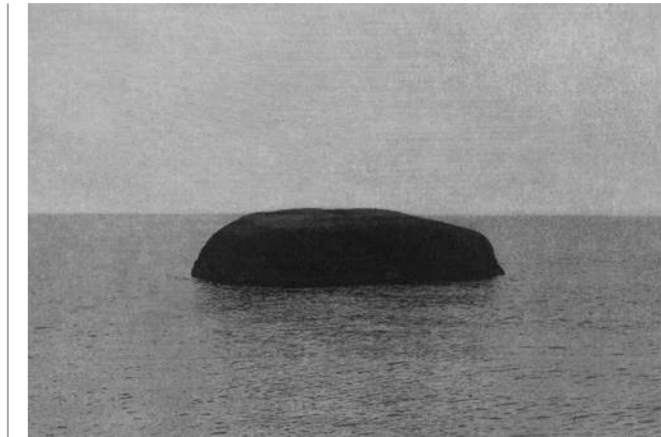
Nara's forthcoming presentation with Pace in Seoul highlights the expressive and material qualities of his ceramics. In addition to idiosyncratic plays of shape and texture,

Felt, a textile made of animal hair, had a particularly important meaning for nomads, whose way of life has always been caring towards, and at one with, nature. It was used almost everywhere, in making their clothing, their bedding, their homes (yurts). Yurt is both a life-sustaining membrane that protected nomads from the element and a sacred space, the vertical coordinate between Umai (Mother Earth) and Tengri (Sky). In the sculptural works of Mukazhanova the choice of this uncanny material is not accidental.

Several of the works at the exhibitions, Mukazhanova created in the form of Tuskiz. Tuskiz is an ornamented Kazakh traditional wall hanging, that was often hung near beds. Tuskiz had a rectangular shape where the lower part of it was intentionally left open. The reason for that was a spiritual belief that as one dreams, their soul should be allowed to travel. Perhaps that the place of such travels is la makan, where the soul could meet with the spirits of its ancestors.

Aigana Gali (b 1982, Almaty, Kazakhstan) is a multidisciplinary artist who works across a wide range of media, from canvas and paper to textiles and bronze. Trained as a painter and a dancer from the age of seven, her artistic sensibility was fine-tuned to the rhythmic character of place, in particular the vibrational quality of light. Her work explores some of the deep, recurring themes in art and spirituality, of how we experience the mysterious laws of nature and find our place in the world.

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● Until 13 September, Three Highgate Gallery, London, threehighgate.com



Voice 1 by Jungjin Lee

JUNGIN LEE Voice

Voice features large and monumental photographs of deserts, mountains, oceans, forests, and plains from 2018 and 2019 captured by Jungjin Lee (b 1961, Korea). With an approach that combines the aesthetics of her heritage with 21st-century techniques, Lee's lush and velvety landscapes possess a painterly quality and reveal a quiet and profound depth. Meditative, and introspective, Lee's photographs in *Voice* capture extraordinary moments in the natural world, vast scenes that are both powerful and serene. Her photography goes beyond a sense of time and place, as if she is asking the viewer to enter an eternal realm with her, one that is deep and contemplative.

Lee began photographing in the early 1980s while a ceramics major at Hongik University in Seoul. She earned an MFA in Photography from

New York University and was an assistant to Robert Frank. Later, she travelled across the United States and was deeply moved by the American desert, which became the subject of several of her photographic series.

Combining tradition and innovation, Lee expands the boundaries of photographic methods creating images that are simultaneously textural and minimalist. She has developed her own unique process: after printing an image on hand-embellished cotton or mulberry paper, she then re-photographs the work, altering its finish using chemical and digital technological processes that result in a distinct, high contrast image with a tactile material quality.

● From 23 September to 21 November, Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York, howardgreenberg.com



Voice 2 by Jungjin Lee