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CONTENTS

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3	EDITORIAL Josefa Green, Editor
4	CREATIVE ACTS AT THE SLV: EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY AT THE CORE OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS Nandini Sathyamurthy
7	WORKING IN FESTIVAL TIME: A COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE AROUND THEYAM Diana Chester and Dhanaraj Keezhara
10	PREVAILING GALES: AN EXHIBITION EXPLORING COLLIDING CULTURAL WORLDS Ann Proctor
12	KIMONO AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA Josephine Rout
14	IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: HISTORIC JAPANESE SHIPPING POSTCARDS AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM Linda Bretherton
16	FROM GALLERY WALL TO SYDNEY STREETS: THE PUBLIC ART OF LOUISE ZHANG Matt Cox
19	BOOK REVIEW: LATER CHINESE BRONZES FOR THE SCHOLAR'S STUDIO Jackie Menzies
20	BOOK REVIEW: HOKUEI: MASTER OF OSAKA KABUKI PRINTS Russell Kelty
22	COLLECTOR'S CHOICE: A JAPANESE BRONZE BUST OF NAPOLEON Shane Paget
23	PAPER MOON: IMAGES OF JAPAN Kathryn Hunyor
24	VALE JIM (JAMES COSMAS) MASSELOS (1940-2025) Jackie Menzies
26	RECENT TAASA ACTIVITIES
28	TAASA MEMBERS' DIARY: DECEMBER 2025 – FEBRUARY 2026
30	WHAT'S ON: DECEMBER 2025 – FEBRUARY 2026

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EDITORIAL • email: editorial@taasa.org.au
General editor, Josefa Green

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Josefa Green (convenor) • Carol Cains
Shuxia Chen • Charlotte Galloway
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DESIGN/LAYOUT

Ingo Voss, VossDesign

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ARASHI RIKAN II AS HIRAI GONPACHI (RIGHT) AND NAKAMURA TOMIJURŌ II AS KOMURASAKI (LEFT) IN BROCADE PICTURE OF LOVERS' CRESTS IN THE PLEASURE QUARTERS (DETAIL), NAKA THEATRE, OSAKA, 8/1835. SHUNBAISAI HOKUEI, ACTIVE 1828-36, COLOUR WOODBLOCK PRINT, ŌBAN ŌKUBI NISHIKI-E, INK, COLOUR, AND METALLIC PIGMENTS ON PAPER, TETRAPTYCH. COLLECTION OF JOHN FIORILLO. SEE PP20-21 IN THIS ISSUE.

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EDITORIAL

Josefa Green, Editor

As the year draws to an end, the *TAASA Review* – both this December issue and the planned March 2026 issue – aims to cover some of the Asian art exhibitions that can be seen over the holiday period and into the new year.

One such exhibition is currently at the State Library of Victoria – an innovative exploration of the different creative processes used by five Australian artists to produce their work, whether in the visual arts, dance or literature. Curator Nandini Sathiyamurthy covers the two Asian background artists in this exhibition: Thai-Australian visual artist Bundit Puangthong and Bharatanāṭyam classical Indian dance specialist Dr Chandrabhanu.

Prevailing Gales is an exhibition opening next February in Hobart after showing in Japan in March this year. It is based on the intriguing story of the encounter between some samurai and Japanese fishermen with a group of convicts turned pirates who had seized control of the ship that was relocating them, arriving at Teba Jima island off Shikoku in 1829. Ann Proctor describes how Tasmanian born artist, Sue Pedley explores the theme of colliding cultural worlds in her exhibition, drawing on her family history, the sea and this link to Asia.

Should TAASA members find themselves in India in the new year, you may be able to experience the Theyyam Festival in Kerala, a ritualistic folk festival which combines oral tradition, music, embodiment and dance entangled with Hindu mythology. Diana Chester, a New York born sound artist based in Sydney and Dhanaraj Keezhara, a visual artist from Kerala, write of their collaborative work in relation to the Theyyam Festival as held in Keezhara, Kerala in February each year. They emphasise that they aim, as they put it, ‘not to explain Theyyam but to make works that echo its textures and invite audiences into a relationship with the practice’.

Two other exhibitions that are covered in this issue, while already over, are very much worth reviewing. Curator Josephine Rout walks us through the well-received *Kimono* exhibition recently held at the NGV, while Japanese expert Kathryn Hunyor describes the photography exhibition *Paper Moon: images of Japan* she curated at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre Gallery in Sydney, a selection of recent works by photographer Tony Maniati. She describes these enigmatic images as capturing ‘beautifully composed in-between spaces, where the confluence of light, shade and texture conveyed to me that very Japanese sense of “mono-no-aware”’.

Also accessible to interested members, though perhaps only by request, is the collection of historic Japanese shipping postcards held at the Australian National Maritime Museum. Linda Bretherton’s *In the Public Domain* article is a testimony to the value of ‘ephemera’ in fleshing out our understanding of a particular culture at a particular time – a point well made by Asia Bookroom proprietor Sally Burden in her recent TAASA talk.

Public art is of course accessible to all. Matt Cox covers the public work of Sydney based artist Louise Zhang, focusing particularly on the way her work straddles two domains: the contemporary museum or gallery where artistic works are framed by the gallery space and shaped by curatorial and collector interests and the public realm where work is constrained by the built environment and other practical concerns. He discusses what drives this artist’s creativity and how this manifests itself across these two domains.

We offer two book reviews in this issue. Jackie Menzies reviews Paul Bromberg’s latest scholarly work *Later Chinese Bronzes for the Scholar’s Studio*, based on objects drawn from his own collection. Russell Kelty introduces us to the work of Osaka based, less well known woodblock print artist Shunbaisai Hokuei through his review of John Fiorillo’s publication *Hokuei: Master of Osaka Kabuki Prints*. This is another example of how passionate collectors significantly contribute to scholarship through researching their own collections.

Another self-described ‘hands on collector’ is Shane Paget who presents one of the more unusual objects that the *TAASA Review* has covered – a Japanese made bronze bust of Napoleon from the late 19th century bought by chance at a garage sale in Sydney. As far as his extensive research has uncovered, this seems to be the only extant bust of Napoleon made in Japan.

This issue ends on a sad note – a heart felt tribute to Jim Masselos by his long time friend, Jackie Menzies. Jim was with TAASA from the start and was a most supportive member of the *TAASA Review* Publications Committee for decades.

The TAASA team would like to wish all members an enjoyable and healthy holiday season and looks forward to welcoming members to the many TAASA events being planned for 2026.

CREATIVE ACTS AT THE SLV: EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY AT THE CORE OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Nandini Sathyamurthy

Developed by a team of curators at State Library Victoria (SLV), *Creative Acts: Artists and their inspirations* explores the creative processes of artists, writers and dancers based in Victoria. As it evolved, a particular focus on creative processes at the intersection of European and Asian religions and spirituality emerged.

The exhibition's structure is similar to a book, starting with a 'glossary' section featuring various cases that examine specific exhibition themes, followed by six 'chapters' that explore the work of Barry William Hale, Bundit Puangthong, Dr Deanne Gilson, Peter Carey, Dr Chandrabhanu OAM and Vali Myers. Each story is told using commissioned works of art accompanied by objects from the State Collection that reference the artist's journey or have directly shaped the commission itself.

As an emerging curator from India, I have found that curating stories centred on religion can be a double-edged sword. In co-curating *Creative Acts*, I witnessed how intersections between creative practice and spirituality are perceived differently across cultures. In many Asian contexts, particularly India and Thailand, religion is often a significant lens through which art history has been understood. Religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism offer rich visual languages for devotion in sacred sites and storytelling in museum settings, but they also carry political and social complexities.

In the context of decolonisation, there is a growing need to question the implications of framing cultural identities through religion. For curators and artists in the diaspora, this responsibility is inescapable. We are often tasked with representing our cultures in Western arenas. This opens a Pandora's box of conversations, ranging from celebration to critique of religion as a marker of identity. *Creative Acts* allowed me to bring this discourse into focus through the works of Bundit Puangthong and Dr Chandrabhanu. Through our conversations, I gained insight into how they navigate religion, politics, gender and assimilation within their practice.

The glossary concept provided an opportunity for me to select two objects that sparked complex discussions between the words 'religion' and 'devotion'. While 'religion' suggests a structure or framework, 'devotion' shows how one can



position oneself within or outside of those structures. 'Devotion' felt the most appropriate term, as it offered space to curate artworks that viewed religion through an artist's or community's perspective and experience.

I selected a Kalighat painting of Hanuman tearing open his chest to reveal his devotion to Rama and Sita to visually define devotion. Behind this painting is a block-printed textile that unfolds as a book-shaped shrine, titled *Mata ni Pachedi (The Cloth of the Mother Goddess)*. It depicts the goddess Durga and was created by Jagdish Chitara, an artisan from the Vaghari community in Gujarat, India. Historically, these textiles were used by devotees marginalised by the caste system and excluded from Hindu temples. In response, the Vaghari community created an art form that allowed them to worship beyond institutional barriers. This nomadic community continues to produce ritual textiles which invoke the goddesses printed on the cloth (Wolf 2025). I was able to use this object to express how an art form can be born out of devotion and also act as a quiet rebellion against religious structures.

Another case in the glossary features a translated copy of the *Kamasutra* by Vatsyayana, a text long misinterpreted as erotica. In truth, the *Kamasutra* is an instructional guide that presents the value of pleasure and the pursuit of balance through mutual desire in relationships (Anand 2022). By presenting the *Kamasutra* under the term 'self-help', I invite visitors to re-examine the text in a broader context.

The glossary concept offered room to examine themes such as divination, chance and dreams: threads that helped build a curatorial background for the exhibition's chapters, starting with Bundit Puangthong. Bundit's practice embraces the in-betweenness of living within two cultures, Thai and Australian. Born in Cha-uat, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand, Bundit comes from a family of fortune tellers and healers and was trained in traditional temple painting. Mastering this art requires consistent practice to perfect the iconography



SARONGS LOANED BY BUNDIT PUANGTHONG ON DISPLAY ALONGSIDE STATE COLLECTION ITEMS IN *CREATIVE ACTS*.

PHOTO: EUGENE HYLAND. SOURCE STATE LIBRARY VICTORIA



and imagery used for centuries to convey Buddhist and Hindu mythology.

Thai temple painting is created in service and devotion to convey religious stories; the painter's identity remains invisible. In the 2000s, Bundit migrated to Melbourne, where he was exposed to the city's graffiti culture. He drew parallels between graffiti and his training as a temple painter. Unlike temple painting, however, graffiti centres the artist within the culture. Additionally influenced by Western artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Bundit has developed a distinctive contemporary painting practice, one that permeates his own identity and is accented by Thai symbolism and graffiti influences.

'I used to stencil everywhere, and my street name was "Siam Iam" When I had a child, I called him Siam. And then I had to stop'. (Bundit Puangthong, ArtsHub 2025)

In *Creative Acts*, Bundit's commission reflects his role as a storyteller, stitching together images that illustrate memories of people who have shaped him as an artist. At the centre of the painting is Bundit's grandmother, Obchey, after whom the commission is named. She was a Buddhist healing practitioner whose spiritual presence appears in many forms beyond her portrait in Bundit's painting. She emerges as bandages wrapped around animals, as tools she used to prepare herbal medicine, and as objects that belonged to her that remind Bundit of her presence. Bundit's grandfather, who taught him how to make shadow puppets, also appears, linking to Bundit's later use of stencils in graffiti. The figure

of Hanuman, the Monkey God, is another recurring presence - part personal symbol, part cultural inheritance.

The making of this commissioned work was symbiotic with the curation of the objects. While I referred to the curatorial process as 'Bundit's annotated bibliography', Bundit described the objects as 'ingredients' for his painting. Together, we explored unexpected visual references, such as illustrations of the mythical 'vegetable lamb' - a medieval misinterpretation of the cotton plant, depicted as a sheep sprouting from a stalk. From there, we discovered similar hybrid imagery, such as the *Al-Waq-Waq* from the *Kitab al-Bulhan* (Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. Or. 133, n.d.) and the Nariphons from Bundit's book of Thai paintings.

'I saw the plant that grows a human female body in my [Thai] book and then I saw the same plant in another [Persian] book. And how amazing is that? One story just connected another story in a different part of the world. And [in the] old days, no network, no social media. But how did this happen? And in State Library book there is the vegetable lamb, that grows sheep from a plant. And after thousands of years later they all connect in my painting'. (Bundit Puangthong, personal communication, 2025)

Bundit intentionally chose to leave these coincidences unexplained, allowing space to delight in their wonder. This sets him apart from the other artists in the room. Including an image simply because it sparks joy serves as his reminder that creative practice must

involve finding joy, a quiet rebuke to the myth of the 'tortured artist'.

A key feature of *Creative Acts* is highlighting the Library as a repository of knowledge. Objects from the collection act as footnotes and springboards for artistic exploration, helping shape many of the commissions in the exhibition. The collection is abundant and every object has the potential to tell a story. Two folios in the SLV collection (barcode numbers 1916361 and 2038864) contain theatre programs belonging to the Bharatam Dance Company. These trace the work of Dr Chandrabhanu from the 1970s to the 2000s. The folios became a window through which I was able to open a new chapter in *Creative Acts* featuring the significant work of Dr Chandrabhanu and his dance company,



VIDEO STILL FROM DR CHANDRABHANU OAM'S
DASAMAHVIDYA (DANCE PERFORMANCE 2025),

COMMISSIONED AND DOCUMENTED BY STATE LIBRARY VICTORIA

ODISSI DANCE JEWELLERY LOANED BY DR CHANDRABHANU
ON DISPLAY ALONGSIDE STATE COLLECTION ITEMS IN *CREATIVE ACTS*. PHOTO: EUGENE HYLAND. SOURCE STATE LIBRARY VICTORIA



which has established and shaped the field of Indian classical dance in Melbourne.

Dr Chandrabhanu is a Malaysian-Australian dancer and teacher of Indian ancestry who specialises in Bharatanāṭyam, a classical Indian dance form that originated in Tamil Nadu and Odissi. This is the oldest surviving classical dance from the temples of Odisha, home to the Maharis - artists who sang and danced in devotion to Jagannatha, a form of Krishna also regarded as an avatār of Vishnu.

Chandrabhanu's practice oscillates between research and *sadhana* (spiritual practice). His work is indebted to the profound influence of his late partner, Geoffrey Goldie, who played an integral role in the production of many performances. In 1973, Goldie provided a teaching space in his Melbourne home to a small group of students. This became the first dance studio of Chandrabhanu's Bharatalaya Academy, which continues to offer lessons in Bharatanāṭyam, Odissi and Indian classical music under Chandrabhanu's direction.

In *Creative Acts*, Chandrabhanu and Geoffrey Goldie's collaborative work *Dasamahavidya* took centre stage. *Dasamahavidya* (Ten Great Paths of Wisdom), is about the 10 forms of Ma Kali and how each embodies an aspect of the human conscience. In 1985, Chandrabhanu spent three weeks in Puri, Odisha, choreographing this piece. He was initiated into Tantric *sadhana*, a spiritual practice that requires one to meditate on each form of Kali.

'When I was introduced to the Dasamahavidya, that was it – I knew straight away this was where my path in Odissi was leading me. I was so involved with research into Shakti worship academically. Combined

CREATIVE ACTS FEATURES ALMOST 600 OBJECTS ON DISPLAY. PHOTO: EUGENE HYLAND. SOURCE STATE LIBRARY VICTORIA



with the tantric *sadhana*, it brought home the knowledge into practice. By learning the Dasamahavidya *sadhana* and creating the dance, my life changed. And I was going to find that it was going to be the same for Geoffrey. His creativity just expanded. He took all my research notes, studied them, and then he decided first to create the set of banners to use as stage backdrops. And then he created his own paintings, etchings, and drawings. He never stopped. Right up until the end of his life, he just kept going on exploring how to portray those 10 forms of the goddess. Many years later, I looked at my choreography and I said, "Look, I choreograph like a painter". (Dr Chandrabhanu, Personal communication, 2025)

Dasamahavidya is a strong example of how Dr Chandrabhanu's extensive research practice went beyond the prescribed narratives of Odissi and Bharatanāṭyam, usually performed in devotion to male Hindu deities. His guru, Adyar K. Lakshman, taught him pieces on Durga, which opened Chandrabhanu to a different perspective on Hinduism. He came to understand that female metaphorism in songs and mantras was the original primeval spirituality. His androgynous identity and rich cultural heritage revealed barriers within dance traditions.

Indian classical dance is generative. Dancers are required to choreograph using a prescribed set of movements, rhythms and expressions while also permitted to innovate within that framework. The curatorial objective was to explore Dr Chandrabhanu's unique process to accomplish this. To achieve this, I needed to unlearn certain assumptions and broaden my understanding of Hinduism in India. Many of Dr Chandrabhanu's dance pieces were unfamiliar

to me. In selecting objects for his story, I ended up learning more about Hinduism than I ever did when I lived in India. I initially approached his story with a sense of cultural familiarity but found myself continually challenged in ways that reshaped everything I thought I knew about the Goddesses in Hinduism.

Through the stories of Bundit Puangthong and Dr Chandrabhanu, *Creative Acts* demonstrates art as a kaleidoscopic reflection of culture, spirituality and identity. As the kaleidoscope turns, the patterns shift. I have found that curating Asian art requires being an eternal student: it is not just about presenting an object or artwork, but about creating a space for dialogue between artist, culture and oneself. The process reminded me that learning is never complete, even within familiar cultural frameworks: there are always new perspectives, hidden histories and subtle complexities waiting to be discovered.

Creative Acts is a free exhibition open daily at State Library Victoria until May 2026.

Nandini Sathyamurthy is a curator living and working in Naarm/Melbourne. She was a key curator on *Creative Acts*, alongside Michelle Moo (Lead), Caroline Tully, Angela Bailey and Dr Kate Rhodes.

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WORKING IN FESTIVAL TIME: A COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE AROUND THEYYAM

Diana Chester and Dhanaraj Keezhara

We write as collaborators who came to each other through making. Diana is a New York born sound artist based in Sydney, Australia and Dhanaraj is a visual artist from Kerala who lives in Bangalore, India. We first worked together on a youth media project in Bangalore in 2007–08, which set the groundwork for our collaborative practice making work in, of, and about the Theyyam Festival of Keezhara, Kerala.

Theyyam is a ritualistic folk festival dating back to when people first settled the areas of the Malabar region of Kerala, about 1500 to 2000 years ago. Meaning ‘God’ or the ‘incarnation of God’, Theyyam combines oral tradition, music, embodiment and dance entangled with Hindu mythology. Theyyam rituals vary but generally culminate when performers (*kolams*) adorned with intricate detailed face and body paint and elaborate costuming become embodied by gods while in trance-like states, performing stories and ritual dances that remember historical conflicts and relationships between people and the more-than-human world.

The village of Keezhara, where Dhanaraj was born and raised, is one of over 400 villages that holds the Theyyam festival annually. In Keezhara Theyyam happens for one week in February and is treated as a major festival when family members travel from across the world to be together. This article is a reflection on our 12 years of collaboration that sits alongside the Theyyam festival where we treat lived practice as the condition of our art.

For Dhanaraj, grounding to place is critical, so much so that he chose to change his family name to Keezhara to reflect the importance his village holds. ‘Theyyam has never been just a seasonal ritual for me, it is woven into my everyday existence. Growing up in Keezhara, I saw how it shaped time, space, and community life, influencing everything from the rhythm of our days to the arrangement of our homes. What inspires me most is not the striking colours and movement, but the essence, resilience, community, ecological awareness, memory, and voices of the marginalised. These values and atmospheres flow naturally into my art, which I see not as representing Theyyam from outside, but as an extension of the life and soil from which it grows’.

In the northern Malabar districts of Kerala, the annual cycle of Theyyam transforms village temples into festivals of sound and image. Drums, voices, bells, footsteps and the rustle of costume material accumulate into a tactile atmosphere. The performer’s transformation from human to God exemplifies what Diane Mines (2010) describes as ritual embodiment, a convergence of body, sound and image that allows the human performer to become a vessel for divine presence. We understand our collaboration as a response to this atmosphere of transformation; a way of making that is porous, receptive and dialogic.

The art and practice of Theyyam is passed down only between performance family members, who belong to the Pulaya agricultural caste. This complicates the traditional caste structure of the village by bestowing godly reverence upon performance families during the festival. As anthropologist Mattison Mines notes, festival time in South India produces a temporary reordering of social hierarchies in which everyday distinctions of caste and status are overturned or suspended (Mines 2005:101). This inversion creates a fleeting space of equality, where the artistry of performers commands reverence from the entire community. It was within this altered social field that our collaboration found its footing. We call this ‘working in festival time’: a mode that is site-specific, temporary and heightened, where ordinary and extraordinary merge.

Our methods are simple and compatible. Dhanaraj’s practice attends to gesture, pattern and community knowledge of drawing and painting. Diana’s practice begins from listening, and evolves into recording as a form of participation, and spatial sound as a way to invite audiences into relation. Our collaboration aims for dialogue-based decision making. Rather than interpret the ritual, we create parallel works that register the atmospheres and relations that hold it together, drawing attention to the people behind the costumes.

Exhibition I: Everyday Life: A Repertoire of Ritual and Performance, Kannur (2014)

Our first joint exhibition focused on the humanness of performance families. We presented drawings and paintings of performers before and beyond the moment of possession, alongside an immersive

THEYYAM VETAKKORUMAKAN, THEYYAM FESTIVAL, 2016. PHOTO DIANA CHESTER



quadrophonic soundscape of the preparing, the painting and dressing, recorded in and around the festival grounds. Installed at the IMA Hall in Kannur, the works moved visitors between two temporal registers: ritual time, in which the performer is revered, and everyday time, to which they return once the costume and make-up are set aside.

As John and Jacob note, the same performer who is revered as a living deity during the ritual, must return to ordinary life and social marginality once the costume and make-up are set aside (2010). The paradox of divinity contained within everyday humanness became the central theme of our first exhibition. This is captured in *Wounded Souls*, where three Theyyam performers sit on a short wall in the temple grounds, one in partial costume and face makeup, one in face make up alone, and the third with neither. This is a common scene during the Theyyam festival where performers spend long days rotating through myriad stages of supporting others, preparing to perform, and performing.

Dhanaraj describes how the balance between sacred and ordinary life shapes his practice: ‘Theyyam and everyday life flow into one another, and in my paintings, I try to hold that rhythm where the sacred and the ordinary continually merge. Drawing has always been my foundation. Long before I had a camera, I carried a sketchbook to the performances, sketching gestures, movements and flames. A line is never static for me; it is alive like a pulse,



echoing the circling steps of performers, the sweep of cloth, or the sudden spark of fire. Through line, I seek to carry forward the energy of Theyyam, not as representation, but as a continuation of its gestures on paper and canvas'.

Transformation, composed of ink and digital photography, explores the creative tension that arises for performance families between their everyday humanness and the godly embodiment they undergo during the festival ceremonies.

Dhanaraj's approach to line and rhythm shaped how the exhibition was presented. Its opening ceremony was marked by a square enclosure constructed from banana stems borrowed from the festival, signaling our orientation and respect for the ritual frame and a desire to let the works speak from within it. Visitors circulated through the gallery space immersed in images and sound simultaneously, encountering the exhibition not as explanation of the festival, but as experience. The exhibition catalogue described the works as parallel acts of making, situated within the temporality of festival time (Chester & Keezhara 2014).

Exhibition II: Theyyam Nilathezhuthu, Keezhara (2016)

Two years later we moved from IMA Hall in Kannur, 12 kilometers from Keezhara, to the mud floor outside Dhanaraj's mother's home. Theyyam Nilathezhuthu or 'writing on the ground' is a traditional drawing practice in Kerala closely linked to ritual, using natural pigments on mud or cow-dung floors. We created a 10 x 40 foot mural that depicted core stories and scenes from Theyyam, painted



directly on a packed mud and cow-dung floor Dhanaraj prepared. The decision to work on the earth was both practical and conceptual: it acknowledged traditional drawing practices while leaning into both the impermanence of festival time, and the time-based nature of painting on the earth. Proximity to the temple ground served as our soundscape, as each Theyyam ritual unfolded and stories, music, and sounds of dancing carried across the road to the mural throughout the festival.

This work was intentionally ephemeral, altered by footsteps and weather. The question many asked, why invest so much effort in something that will fade, became part of the work's life. Our response was that process and presence were the point. Making a mural in public, at the pace of the village day, invited conversation. Children paused

on their way to rehearsals; elders stopped to compare techniques; performers discussed how the drawing resonated with their own preparations. The floor painting and discussions about the stories emblazoned on the earth in primary colours became a point of gathering for the community.

Exhibition III: Theyyam, Ritual, Nature, and People (2017)

Our third project extended drawing into the environment. We built a labyrinthine installation entitled *Theyyam, Ritual, Nature, and People*. A circular pathway of Theyyam stories translated into drawing and imagery, using 40 metres of cotton fabric, wound between trees and bamboo stakes. Moving through it, visitors glimpsed images layered in shifting light and arrived at a mirror placed at the centre of the maze: a simple



THEYYAM NILATHEZHUTHU, (TWO IMAGES), 10' X 40' ACRYLIC ON MUD FLOOR, KEEZHARA, INDIA, 2016. ARTISTS DIANA CHESTER AND DHANARAJ KEEZHARA. PHOTO: DIANA CHESTER



invitation to recognise oneself framed by ritual motifs and consider one's own place in the Theyyam Festival.

As scholar S. Vadakkiniyil (2014) has observed, Theyyam endures not as a static ritual but as a living tradition, continually sustained by the community's commitment to its renewal. This emphasis on continuity was particularly evident as the exhibition coincided with local initiatives to involve younger performers in training and dialogue about the future of the practice. In this setting, the installation became a site for conversation about inheritance, care and renewal.

What binds these projects is a way of working together. We begin from situated listening and from an ethics of relation to each other, to Keezhara, and to the performance families.

Working in festival time has taught us to accept contingency, to trust the slow build of collaboration and to see each exhibition as both outcome and rehearsal for what might come next.

Collaboration has also led to new ways of seeing Theyyam, as Dhanaraj explains: 'Theyyam has taught me that my role as an artist is never isolated, it is sustained collectively, through community, dialogue, and exchange. Collaborating with Diana was especially important because it gave me the chance to view Theyyam through an external perspective. I have always been curious about how someone who doesn't know anything about Theyyam might first encounter it, what they see, hear, or feel. For Diana, as a sound artist, it wasn't only the visual power that spoke to her, but also the soundscape,

the drums, chants, silences, and even the marginalised sounds of everyday life that are part of the performance but often unnoticed. That helped me reflect on my own practice, reminding me that art is not only about representation but about carrying forward the spirit of Theyyam: its resilience, its inclusivity, and its ability to speak across boundaries'.

These insights continue to shape the balance between our practices. Our roles are complementary but permeable. The hand that draws learns to listen differently; the ear that records learns to see pattern and gesture.

2026 will mark our first in person collaboration since the pandemic and we intend to meet in Keezhara to develop a new work during the festival. Over the past 12 years, the line between insider and outsider has been negotiated with care, through showing up and listening. Together we aim not to explain Theyyam but to make works that echo its textures and invite audiences into a relationship with the practice. This is a parallel making of art that is responsive rather than extractive, and accountable to the people with whom it is made. In festival time, everything sharpens: colour, sound and community attention. That heightened state of awareness is what we work to represent in drawings, installations and sound. We hope the exhibitions described here convey the shape of that work and our commitment to it, the festival, and each other.

Diana Chester is a sound artist and senior lecturer at the University of Sydney. Her work explores sonic cultures, sounds of the more-than-human world, and collaborative practice. Dhanaraj Keezhara is a visual artist from Keezhara, Kerala, and an art teacher at Christel House India in Bangalore. His practice bridges painting, installation, and community-based art making.

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THEYYAM, RITUAL, NATURE, AND PEOPLE, ACRYLIC ON COTTON, KEEZHARA, INDIA, 2017. ARTISTS DIANA CHESTER AND DHANARAJ KEEZHARA. PHOTO: DIANA CHESTER

PREVAILING GALES: AN EXHIBITION EXPLORING COLLIDING CULTURAL WORLDS

Ann Proctor

Sue Pedley is a Sydney based, Tasmanian born artist. Her family traces back over six generations to convicts who were transported to the then penal colony of Tasmania. The connection to her Tasmanian history, the sea and also to Asia have been focal aspects of Pedley's artistic practice over many years.

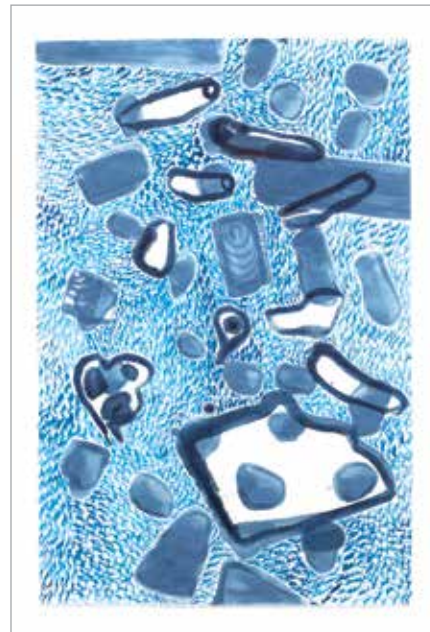
This year she exhibited her work *Prevailing Gales* in Japan at the Teba Jima Art Festival in March and will exhibit the collection again in a different iteration from February 2026 at the Maritime Museum of Tasmania in Hobart. *Prevailing Gales*, a collection of prints, sculpture and installation, deals with an extraordinary tale of convicts turned pirates who sailed from Recherche Bay, Van Dieman's Land (Lutruwita/Tasmania) to Awa Domain (Tokushima Prefecture) Japan, at a time when Japan was basically closed to foreigners through its *sakoku* or self isolation policy.

In the artist's words from her website: '*Prevailing Gales* builds on previous work addressing the settler and maritime history of my family in Tasmania; the environmental degradation of water and its impact on communities and the natural world; and historical links between Tasmania and Japan'. This article outlines the pirate tale followed by a discussion of how the artist has responded to the story in her art works.

Pedley drew on the work of independent researcher, Nicholas Russell, who is based in Japan and who documented the adventurous tale. He uncovered and translated into English the eight manuscripts from the Edo period which detail the encounter between the samurai and some Japanese fishermen with the pirates. An online publication entitled *Pirates and Samurai* written by Russell includes translations of the manuscripts. The original records of the encounter unearthed in 2017 are held in the Tokushima Prefectural Museum, the Tokushima Prefecture Archive and in private collections. These written accounts by samurai officials also include a number of illustrations of the 'barbarian' seafarers, the ship and maps of their location.

This extraordinary tale relates how, in 1829, the colonial supply vessel *Cyprus* was taken over by convicts who were being moved from Hobart to Macquarie Harbour for having offended. The convicts overthrew the *Cyprus*' guards, forcibly disembarking

PREVAILING GALES, 2025, SUE PEDLEY, WATER COLOUR ON KOZO PAPER. H 66 CM X W 98 CM; H 76 CM X W 56 CM. PHOTO: TINA FIVEASH

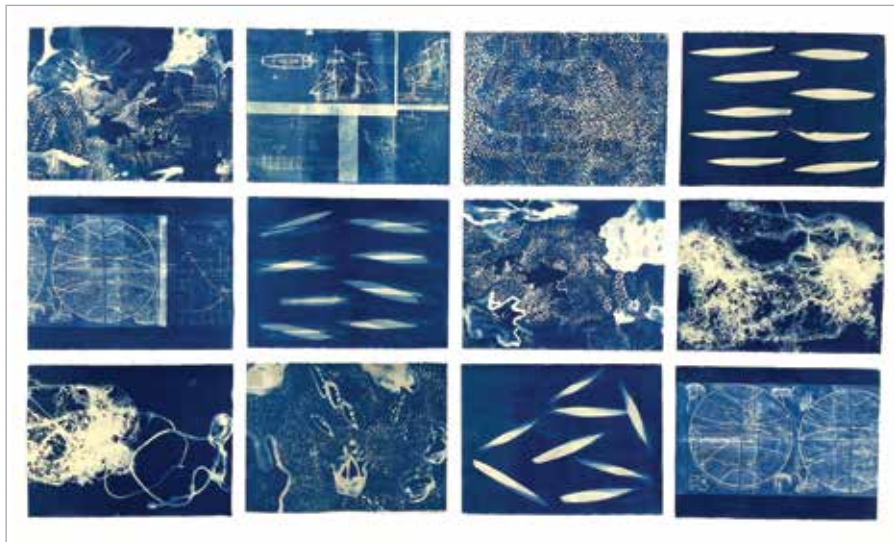


the crew and other passengers to the shores of Recherche Bay. The pirates then sailed to New Zealand, Tahiti, Tonga and eventually reached Japan in 1830. They anchored near Teba Jima, a small island off the coast of Shikoku, where they stayed for five days before being repelled. They could not go ashore whilst in Japan, however the samurai provided them with water and firewood. A secretary to the samurai field commander, Makita Hamaguchi, disguised himself as a fisherman and boarded the *Cyprus* to search for weapons, an event that was later recorded in great detail. Finally, however, the samurai fired canons to repel the foreigners. The *Cyprus* then sailed to Canton where it sank

and was abandoned. The convicts turned pirates were apprehended by the British and eventually taken back to the UK where some were executed.

Pedley's work explores the theme of colliding cultural worlds, drawing on the translated manuscript accounts that offer a unique record of how Japanese samurai perceived the barbarians aboard the ship *Cyprus* when it encroached on Japan's closed borders. She also responds to elements of the narrative such as time, wind, water and map-making.

In Japan, her exhibition of watercolours and cyanotypes (blueprints) was displayed in



PREVAILING GALES, 2025, SUE PEDLEY, CYANOTYPES ON PAPER, EACH 76 CM X W 56 CM. PHOTO: SUE PEDLEY

Meiji-period house in a fishing village for the Teba Jima Art Festival in March 2025. During the festival, Pedley led bookbinding and seafaring storytelling workshops for both local residents and visitors. The books, inspired by the design of samurai manuscripts, were stitched together with red wool as a reference to British uniforms worn by the pirate/convicts, as illustrated in the Edo manuscripts.

One of the ways Pedley has marked each of these places – Recherche Bay and Teba Jima – and their relationship is through the detritus that continues to wash up in both places today. During her residency on Teba Jima and a site visit to Recherche Bay the artist collected non degradable rubbish (ropes, nets, polystyrene fragments, rubber thongs etc) that had washed up on the coastal locations where the samurai fired canons at the barbarians in Japan and where the mutiny occurred in Tasmania. Each day of the residency in Japan she traced with ink and water colour around the edges of the daily collection of flotsam and jetsam as a visual connection between the past and the present.

The artist has been working with various materials that are common to both Australian and Japanese artistic practices. The water colours are created on kozo paper made locally in Tokushima Prefecture that is similar to the paper of the samurai documents. The samurai accounts of the incident were written in black ink and illustrated with indigo dye and coloured pigments. Indigo was widely cultivated in Tokushima, which was known for its high-quality indigo dye, whereas Prussian Blue (a synthetic pigment) was introduced by ocean trade via the Dutch through Nagasaki in the 1820s. Blue, of course, has strong connotations with the ocean and is used by the artist in her works on paper.

Works in the exhibition *Prevailing Gales* include maps, diagrams of ships and more abstract works that evoke the ocean currents. Some of the works on paper are cyanotypes, a 19th century photographic process commonly known as a 'blue print'. The process was originally used to copy architectural plans, astronomical diagrams and biological specimens. The cyanotype process involves a procedure in which the paper is painted with light sensitive chemicals in the dark. The paper is then exposed to ultraviolet light which causes a reaction that creates the images. The work is then washed and when it oxidises, turns blue, except for where the light has been blocked. Thus the work itself, through its exposure to light and water, is subject to the forces of nature in its production.

Pedley also uses photogram techniques in placing objects and drawings on sensitised



paper. These are exposed to sunlight, letting unpredictable environmental factors such as wind, clouds and water affect the works: a process that again underlines natural effects on the outcome of exhibited pieces. Sisal leaves, used in colonial times to make ships rigging, appear in photogram form echoing the shape of the Edo-period boats. Other cyanotypes use flotsam and jetsam washed up on the beaches, further emphasising the natural effects of light, winds and ocean currents.

The artist's interest in borders and their histories is mirrored in the subtle juxtapositioning of references in her works such as words and images from the manuscripts and overlapping images of maps. Pedley, in a series of colourful paintings, combined fragments of written experts in Japanese and English, overlayed on a ground of bitumen with colour and collage. The samurai observed the pirates painting bitumen (tar) onto the hull of the Cyprus for maintenance while anchored off Teba Jima.

For her 2026 exhibition at the Maritime Museum of Tasmania, she will create an installation that incorporates maritime ropes utilizing a partition wall in the 19th century gallery overlooking Constitution Dock at Sullivan's Cove. The wall will be painted indigo blue and function as a border-like structure. It will support a network of knotted ropes

and suspended plaster forms cast from sisal leaves. This spatial intervention will evoke the intricate tangle of ropes used in rigging, the nautical practice of measuring speed in knots, the sounding of ocean depths, historical cartography and the elemental forces that underline the artist's visual language.

The installation will invite the audience to consider the ways in which oceans function as both barriers and bridges: fluid frontiers that connect histories, geographies and cultures. Her subtle layering of maps, manuscript references and maritime materials builds a poetic dialogue between Japan and Tasmania. Thus, Sue Pedley's works admirably reflect the vicissitudes of nature and humans on interactions that continue to occur over the Earth's vast oceans.

Ann Proctor, is an art historian specialising in Southeast Asia. She acknowledges the collaboration of the Sue Pedley in this article.

The exhibition *Prevailing Gales* at the Maritime Museum of Tasmania from 20/02/2026 to 24/05/2026 is being funded by Creative Australia.

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KIMONO AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

Josephine Rout

Nestled within the National Gallery of Victoria's (NGV) seemingly relentless tide of blockbuster exhibitions are smaller curatorial gems such as their latest offering, *Kimono*. Such programming balances the broad appeal and often loan-heavy extravaganzas with more modest, yet carefully considered exhibitions based on research and collections.

Simply titled *Kimono* with no tagline, just the *kanji* that express *ki* (to wear) and *mono* (thing), the exhibition rightfully assumes that this term is familiar to the general public. Indeed, the word gained notoriety in 2019 when a reality star and influencer attempted to trademark 'Kimono' for her shapewear line, only to be met with global outrage and an open letter from the then Mayor of Kyoto, Kadokawa Daisaku. While this may have been a well-planned publicity stunt, Kadokawa's mention of his office's efforts to register the kimono as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage item reflects the status of the word in Japan.

However, while kimono has a very fixed meaning in Japan, outside the country it is a more recently adopted umbrella term that does not do justice to the myriad clothing styles that were worn in Japan before the adoption of European dress. Conversely, the word kimono has gained numerous definitions and applications outside Japan, with items from the dressing gown to the *qipao*, a Chinese fitted woman's dress, being mistaken as Japanese, while East Asian fashion references are often described as being influenced by kimono.

NGV KIMONO EXHIBITION, EDO PERIOD DISPLAY. PHOTO: MITCH FONG



This complicated history is explored throughout the exhibition, which starts in the Edo period (1615-1868) and concludes with the latest kimono fashions by Tokyo designer Hiroko Takahashi. Curated by Wayne Crothers, Senior Curator of Asian Art and Charlotte Botica, Curatorial Project Officer of Fashion and Textiles, the exhibition is an important opportunity for the NGV to build on its rich Asian holdings through a focus on Japanese fashion. One of the key opportunities of thematic, in-house exhibitions such as *Kimono* is to facilitate targeted acquisitions. This is made clear to the visitor as new acquisitions are labelled in a way that I am sure will please their donors.

The exhibition opens with a dazzling scene of luxury kimono, pairing the fine court wear of high-ranking samurai women depicting delicately detailed literary scenes known

as *goshodoki* (palace landscape), with the ostentatious glamour of a wealthy merchant's bridal outfit, *uchikake furisode*, lavishly dyed in red with all-over *shibori* (tie-dye).

Instantly, the scene is set for what drove the fashion system of the Edo period – the constant battle between the classes. Despite its peace and stability, rapid urbanisation fuelled a sartorial battle that disrupted the feudal class system, particularly between the socially superior samurai and the prosperous merchant class. But it was the demi-monde of kabuki actors and courtesans who really drove the fashion system. They were the original influencers, represented nearby in the woodblock prints that circulated their images.

The challenge of exhibiting what is essentially the same shaped garment is remedied by



NGV KIMONO EXHIBITION, 1920S-30S MODERNISM DISPLAY. PHOTO: MITCH FONG

having a few displayed on mannequins, some on lavishly lacquered kimono stands and the majority suspended, thereby creating rhythm and depth to what can sometimes be a flat display. This has also been avoided through the inclusion of other types of objects, including lacquer, ceramics, cloisonne, prints and a superb selection of dress accessories.

Establishing curatorial parameters is necessary when determining the scope of an exhibition. In my own experience of curating kimono, our high fashion angle meant that we omitted theatre costumes and dress of the working classes. Hence, it was interesting to see both included at the NGV. Crother's rationale for including Noh costume was a very astute one – that these represented fashions of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and that such styles are only extant thanks to Noh theatre's preservation of historic fashions.

Japanese country textiles, the clothing of the urban working-class and Ainu dress worn by the indigenous people of Hokkaido, are grouped together as they often are by curators as a collective 'other'. This is understandable, although important to remember that Ainu robes such as the one included here would have been worn by high-ranking members of the community and are possibly not technically kimono at all.

The section that I was most delighted by was the early 20th century examples of kimono as a vehicle for individual expression through fashion, such as the morbid humour of a man's *nagajuban* (under kimono) decorated with skulls in a graveyard under a crescent moon. Paired with this is every kimono curator's dream – the matching design from a kimono pattern book. Centred within the display is an extremely elegant *kurotomesode* (formal black crested kimono), decorated with scenes from *The Heron Maiden* (*Sagi Musume*), first performed at the kabuki theatre in 1762. Popularity of this play during the Taisho period (1912–1926) saw it reinterpreted on kimono in the Art Nouveau style, an artistic ouroboros as the aesthetic was initially developed by Europeans influenced by Japan.

A short corridor between galleries, utilised to include early photography of Japan and a video on kimono techniques, prepares the visitor for the next gallery that opens with a brilliant display of early 20th century *meisen* kimono, *haori* and accessories. While striking, its layout is somewhat challenging for those of us wanting to see the *haori* lining designs in detail.

Around the corner, we encounter the influence of kimono on European fashion and, after the



dazzling modernity of the previous display, this is a stark reminder of how more conservative Western fashion embraced the kimono. Philip Wilson Steer's painting *The Japanese gown*, depicts a woman wearing what is clearly a *goshodoki* kimono, the type made for high-ranking samurai women. When created in 1896, the samurai class system had been abolished, removing the need for kimono making such distinctions. Upon realising their popularity, Japanese merchants started making kimono especially for export. Two such examples are displayed nearby. Made from silk satin with heavy embroidery, they are typical of their type as their quality is inferior to domestic kimono.

Attempts were made to introduce European fashion to Japan in the early Meiji period (1868–1912), as shown in Oju Shogetsu's woodblock print *Honour of education: Dressmaking*, (1890), aimed at encouraging women to learn how to make and wear Western fashions. However, the corsets and crinolines of Victorian fashion were off-putting to Japanese women. It was not until the early 20th century, when the kimono had changed the shape of Western women's fashion, that European styles were adopted. This sartorial convergence is made clear through the covers of fashion magazines from Japan and France, *Fujin Gurafu* and *Art-Goût-Beauté*, that are almost indistinguishable from each other, providing a neat curatorial pairing.

The mid-20th century was a challenging period for kimono as the garment no longer served as a form of dress, becoming either a ceremonial costume or canvas for textile artisans. I commend Crothers for letting the objects show this disparity by including a bridal kimono by Saito Fumiko, that, while being beautifully embroidered, represents the conservatism that took hold of kimono and stands in stark contrast with the singular visions of Living National Treasures Serizawa Keisuke and Shimura Fukumi.

Indeed, as kimono became less worn in Japan, they served more as inspiration to global fashion designers. For those of European heritage, such as Rudi Gernreich and later John Galiano and Alexander McQueen, it was a garment laced with exoticism, while for those of Japanese descent such as Yohji Yamamoto and Akira Isogawa, it was a familiar garment to be deconstructed. I must admit that I had been hoping for more pieces by Isogawa as his intimate knowledge of the nuances of Japanese dress has underpinned his incredible reinterpretations of kimono fashion.

However, Isogawa is also one of Australia's leading designers, offering plenty of opportunities for local audiences to see his work. Hitherto, not so the case with contemporary kimono fashion from Japan. And so the exhibition concludes with a grand finale showcasing the optimism and diversity in new wave kimono style with designers Rumi Rock, Tamao Shigemune, Hiroko Takahashi, Jotaro Saito, Y & Sons, Modern Antenna and Robe Japonica.

On 3 August the NGV held a brilliant day-long public program with three women designers Rumi Rock, Tamao Shigemune and Hiroko Takahashi. Days later news broke that the designer for Robe Japonica, Taro Ueoka had died. His kimono, decorated with skulls as a contemporary memento mori, is now in the permanent collection of the NGV, a timely reminder of the fragility of life and importance of celebrating and collecting artists while they are alive.

Josephine Rout is Senior Curator at the National Wool Museum in Geelong. Previously, she was Curator in the Victoria and Albert Museum's Asian Department where she co-curated *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* (2020). She is author of *Japanese Dress in Detail* (Thames and Hudson, 2020).

IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: HISTORIC JAPANESE SHIPPING POSTCARDS AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

Linda Bretherton

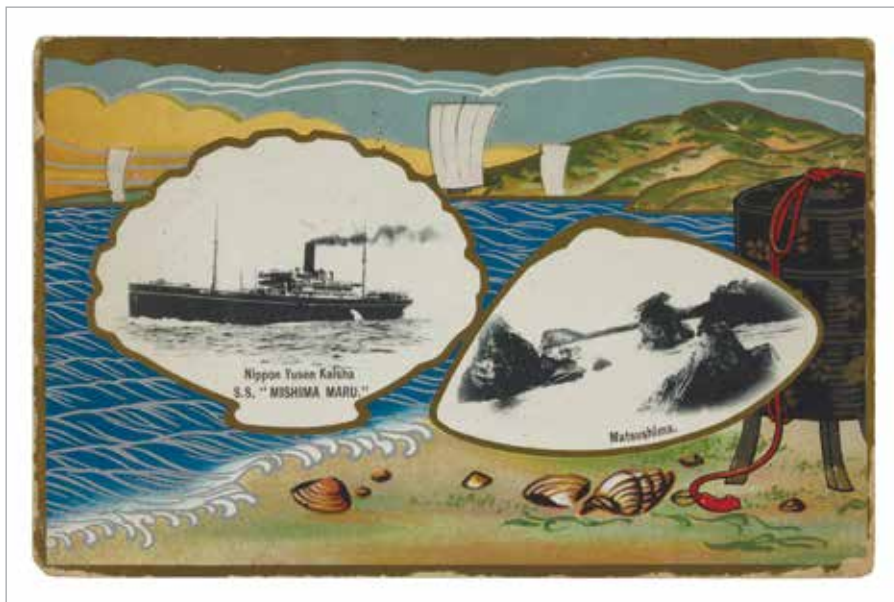
A collection of historic shipping postcards produced by the Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) is held at the Australian National Maritime Museum. Dating from the early 1900s, the collection represents cultural and artistic developments in Japan during the Meiji period (1868–1912). The distinctive design and aesthetic choices evident in the series reflect the Meiji Government's modernisation agenda and international ambitions, representing social and political developments. According to the NYK company website: 'the history of NYK has paralleled that of Japan, a maritime nation, ever since the company's founding in 1885' (NYK Line, no date).

In 1853 Commodore Perry, on behalf of the U.S Government conducted his first expedition to Japan, followed by another in 1854 (Davies, P. 2010:114). In the years between the first expedition and the inauguration of the Meiji period in 1868, the Tokugawa Shogunate had opened Japan to international trade, ending 200 years of relative isolation. From this time, Japanese artists were free to study Western art, while the access to Japanese art and crafts brought about a fascination for Japanese art and culture (Japonisme) which influenced European artists and designers.

Meiji's government was determined to 'modernise' Japan and drove major political, economic and social changes. This included actively encouraging artists to travel abroad for Western-style training. Proponents of a Western-influenced style, including artists Asai Chu (1856-1907) and Wada Eisaku (1874-1959), who studied European techniques in France, became known as *yoga* painters. They established the Meiji Art Society in the 1880s, later absorbed by Kuroda Seiki's Hakubakai (White Horse Society) in 1896. However as *yoga* gained popularity and influence, traditionalists including Kano Hōgai (1828-1888) and Hashimoto Gahō (1835-1908) opposed these developments and promoted an indigenous style of painting that came to be known as *nihonga*. This group came under the leadership of Okakura Kakuzō (1862-1913) in the 1890s. Okakura later wrote *The Book of Tea*, published in 1906.

Having established a national postal system in 1870, the government introduced the postcard in 1873. The government-issued card was based on the simple, typographic

NYK SS MISHIMA MARU, UNKNOWN ARTIST (N.D.). NYK. AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM POSTCARD COLLECTION. PHOTO: JASMINE POOLE, 2024



Austro-Hungarian style which was emulated by many European countries. In 1900, the Meiji government relinquished its control of postcard design and prominent Japanese artists (of both *yoga* and *nihonga* styles) were encouraged to utilise the medium.

The engagement by European artists in postcard design also encouraged Japanese artists, described as an 'unparalleled group of artists whose careers define the history of modern art in Japan' (Morse et al 2004:16), to engage in postcard design in Japan. In addition to artists such as Asai and Wada, who had been introduced to graphic postcards during

their European studies, artists Nakamura Fusetsu (1866-1943), Nakazawa Hiromitsu (1874-1964), Hashimoto Gahō (1835-1908), Terasaki Kōgyō (1866-1919), Uemura Shōen (1875-1949), Mizuno Toshikata (1866-1908) and others created such designs.

Experimental and innovative designs were composed specifically for the new, intimate format, leading to an exciting fusion of creative and aesthetic influences. Japonisme (1850s to 1890s) is attributed with the development of Art Nouveau (1890s to 1910s), but while Japanese artists experimented with Art Nouveau and subsequent Art Deco styles



NYK SS KAGU MARU, UNKNOWN ARTIST (N.D.). NYK. AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM POSTCARD COLLECTION. PHOTO: JASMINE POOLE, 2024

in postcard design (Dunsmore and Leahy 2023), it is notable that neither Asai nor painter and designer Kamisaka Sekka (1866–1942) endorsed this style, confronted by its reliance on Asian art and ‘scent of Japonisme’ (Saunders, R. 2013:20).

Between 1900 and 1940, as Japan transformed into an international, industrial, modern society, postcards increasingly became a visual expression of this evolution. An affordable, mass-produced and mobile advertising medium, promotional gift, souvenir of travel, and vehicle for communicating with loved ones (albeit a very public communication) the popularity of the postcard was further enhanced by the introduction of the fountain pen. Its portability offered a far more convenient writing implement than the *fude* (Japanese writing brush).

Combining traditional Japanese motifs and symbolic elements, such as the chrysanthemum (Imperial symbol) and cherry blossom (said to symbolise impermanence, beauty and mortality), with design elements of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, the NYK postcard collection also includes monotone collotype inserts.

This photographic printing technique, invented by Alphonse-Louis Poitevin (French, 1819–1882) in 1855, was further developed over the following two decades by Joseph Albert and Jakub Husnik to enable its mass production (Stulik and Kaplan 2013). Graphically, it enabled the artist to feature images of significant geographic landmarks, ships or military leaders, positioned within a frame of colourful, symbolic, descriptive and decorative imagery. Significantly, it also served political objectives: to convey the modernisation of Japan while promoting Japan’s military victories and developing maritime prowess.

Taking advantage of a rapidly expanding publishing industry, the Ministry of Communications reportedly issued five different sets of postcards between 1904 and 1906 to celebrate the successes of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). The popularity of these postcards – designed to express national pride following military victories – was so great that an eager public queued for hours to purchase hundreds of thousands of individual cards. Japan’s victory over Russia not only boosted national confidence and pride it reflected a new international power; sentiments celebrated and shared through postcards as an inexpensive and effective mass-communication device. Commemorative postcards became institutionalised representations serving



political agendas and social, cultural developments. By 1905 Japan’s postcard ‘boom’ had been established and would extend through the next three decades.

The reputations of celebrated artists were often enhanced by their postcards, and many supplemented their income from formal paintings with income derived from illustrations and graphic design, including postcard production. Privately produced postcards sometimes introduced costly materials. Examples in the NYK collection include the use of metallic inks to define shapes, including the outlines of seashells to contain photographic images and borders.

Merging the aesthetic influences of Japan’s traditional ukiyo-e woodblock prints (floating world pictures) with the use of photography to centre the gaze on the ships and destination highlights, most of the cards in the Australian National Maritime Museum’s NYK collection were, apparently, collected as souvenirs by passengers on NYK merchant vessels. Postcards were sent to friends and family during stops at ports or bought and sold as collectable items. European shipping companies were similarly using postcards as advertising and promotional mediums, but often as hand-coloured photographs sold as souvenirs on board.

The Museum’s collection dates from the first two decades of the 20th century and represents a period in which Japan was considered, initially, as an ally and major trading partner through to a period in which Japan’s increasing naval prowess and ambition began to provoke suspicion. This particular collection of postcards is the combination of private collections donated by

the family of the late Warren Bowden and by Roy Fernandez. The latter was part of a larger donation of books to the Vaughan Evans Library in 2013.

As primary documents, these postcards are therefore relevant as historical documents and as a reflection of developing Japanese aesthetic interests and influences. Offering insights into political, geopolitical and cultural contexts, they reflect the development of technologies, industry, transportation and tourism and a society balancing a new international relevance with tradition.

Linda M Bretherton is a Sydney-based researcher, writer and curator, with an interest in bringing archives to life through storytelling.

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FROM GALLERY WALL TO SYDNEY STREETS: THE PUBLIC ART OF LOUISE ZHANG

Matt Cox

My interest in art, like many others I imagine, is not bound by whether it is found in the private or public domain, or exists within or outside gallery and museum spaces. Having recently made the move from a major state institution to the world of public art, however, I have noticed tangible differences in the reception of artists working across these two domains. In particular I've noticed the ways that an artist's practice changes according to the challenges of each environment and the way the public response changes according to its context and setting.

Whereas in the contemporary museum or gallery an artist's work is framed by the white cube of the gallery space and its value shaped by curatorial and collector interests, in the public realm the response to artwork is conditioned by its interaction with the built environment and frequently measured against the metrics of council spending, relevance and other infrastructure needs.

There are of course artists who manage to straddle the two worlds. Among them is Louise Zhang, a Sydney-based artist with family hailing from the small island of Qidu in Wenzhou, China. Graduating in 2016 from UNSW with a MA in fine art, she showed work at the NGV while simultaneously undertaking projects in public art.

Zhang's early works explored publicly accepted norms related to beauty and kitsch through the genre of horror and other forms of popular culture. The issues of cultural identity as a child of migrant parents have also been a central theme of her work, further stimulated by two residencies in which she discovered the breadth and complexity of China's vast cultural landscape.

It appears, however, that her interest in Chinese cosmology as it manifests in art, architecture and botany has been the most significant influence on her public art which explores the dynamic between colourfully painted surface, form and space. One of the three works by Zhang in the NGV collection made between 2018-2020 is an early sculptural experimentation inspired by the form of Chinese scholar rocks. Scholars Mounds #3 (2019) is an interesting example of the collision between Chinese tradition and Zhang's love for flamboyant colour.

The sculptural and architectural components connected to the traditional Chinese scholar's garden were further explored in her first forays into public art, commissioned in 2019 by the City of Sydney and Parramatta Artist Studios to make work to celebrate Lunar New Year and an activation at Batman walk respectively.

Even for Zhang who finds the transition between materials and the adoption of new materials an integral part of her creative development, moving between studio work and public art still presents challenges.

Reflecting on her painting practice, Zhang finds that while she can easily bring canvas, paint and colour together in a fluid process to make an image, her experiences in public art are more demanding as she navigates and negotiates external factors. Having said that, she believes public art provides opportunities to resolve painterly considerations and aesthetic decisions in ways that are affected by scale and immediacy to their publics that is not only different but an exciting and complementary mode of working to her studio practice.

Across her public and studio work, Zhang's interests in Chinese gardens and *shan shui* landscape paintings underly her investigation of the relationship between natural elements and how this contemplation of the micro can help us better situate ourselves within the cosmos.

SCHOLAR MOUND STUDY #3, 2019, LOUISE ZHANG, FOAM CLAY, POLYURETHANE, SYNTHETIC POLYMER PAINT, PIGMENT, TRANSPARENT SYNTHETIC POLYMER RESIN, WOOD, GLASS, FLAT BACK PEARLS, 43.0 X 36.0 X 35.0 CM. PROPOSED ACQUISITION PURCHASED WITH FUNDS DONATED BY JO HORGAN AND MECCA BRANDS, 2020 © COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ARTEREAL GALLERY, SYDNEY. PHOTO: SILVERSALT PHOTOGRAPHY



Historically, the landscape painter in China was celebrated as a cultivated figure who created idyllic images of contemplation and philosophical musing rather than faithful representations of the landscape. The paintings merge different perspectives not usually perceived by the human eye; as Zhang reminded me, 'these are not real landscapes but imagined, as though seen by a bird'.

Designed to conjure the abode of sages, the vertically orientated scroll paintings operate as a kind of virtual reality where viewers



MOON GATES 2020, LOUISE ZHANG, INSTALLATION AT DARLING HARBOUR COMMISSIONED BY 4A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART FOR THE LUNAR NEW YEAR. COURTESY THE ARTIST. PHOTO: ANNA KUCERA

can lose themselves in an imagined journey of spiritual and cultural enlightenment. Typically, the viewer's eye is encouraged to follow a winding river from the foreground of the painting, into the craggy peaks where they can hide themselves away from the material world in the pursuit of more lofty concerns. The term *shan shui*, meaning 'mountains and water', became a central feature of literati paintings, used to describe the relationship between stillness and movement.

While maintaining this affection for the marriage of mountains and water and some of the pictorial devices for drawing one's eye across the surface of the painting, Zhang has transformed this codified and ideal visual language into an explosion of colour. In an interview with the developer Lendlease, Zhang describes colour as: 'The greatest tool in painting' and 'the best way of manipulating perspective'. Her public artworks are designed to excite the senses within a lived experience of the urban environment - there are no airs of intellectual stuffiness or allusions to spiritual transformation found in Zhang's vibrant works, but unabashed desire to bring joy and colour into the lives of all who view them.

Looking for meaning in Zhang's work, colour has sometime been reductively interpreted as signifying an imagined feminine domesticity or sensibility. Equally, her use of colour has been relegated to more decorative domains, but for Zhang, colour has strong foundations in Chinese art with great historical implications that speak to cross-cultural dialogue, as exemplified by 17th and 18th century Europe's fascination with Chinese art and aesthetics.

Reflecting more generally on the role of art and colour, Zhang feels that although art can reflect current cultural and societal changes, in both the gallery and public art world there is an increasing pressure to make art that speaks to contemporary issues. In fact, sometimes these things are invoked to legitimise a project. While Zhang makes clear she can only speak to her own personal experiences, she feels humour and joy are not attributed the same value and are regarded as less serious even though they can have a profound impact on our wellbeing.

So how does Zhang bring joy to the public? Movement is a big factor. From the genre of literati painting where the eye is encouraged to follow a bend in the river or a wispy cloud in the sky, Zhang's public art is about creating spaces for bodily engagement - spaces for people to walk around, walk through, sit on and generally enjoy, creating meaning



through their own movement. Her moon gates are a great example.

Historically, the moon gate was designed as a visual framing of the space beyond it. As an architectural intervention that creates spatial division between foreground, middle and background it enhances our awareness and aesthetic appreciation of the world around us. By helping to focus our eye on the cultivated landscape within the circular frame (echoing the ocular sphere) the world is perceived as image. This is an interesting manifestation of the inherent tension between culture and nature - or an ironic desire to know nature through an act of separation and control - and reveals a strange dynamic that exists between image and life that can cause many to confuse the two.

However, this tension is collapsed as one walks through the moon gate and into the landscaped garden beyond. Upon approaching and entering the framed circle we pass through a threshold - the mirage is ruptured and the image is discarded in favour of a lived experience. In this way the gate operates as kind of portal between our imagination of the world and its lived reality and there is something wonderful about the moment when we cross from one to the other whether perceived or experienced unconsciously.

Zhang's series *Lunar New Year Moon Gates* harnesses this collision of the real and imagined as a moment of delightful self-recognition. Surrounded by intense swirls of colour, each gate opening is aligned with the



TEMPLE 2023, LOUISE ZHANG FROM NO DUST LEFT IN THE LILIES (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2023.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND 4A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY. PHOTO: JESSICA MAURER



next to create a tunnel, and as visitors travel through the series of apertures they are seen and see themselves undertaking a passage signalling a metaphorical transition from one calendar year to another: a celebration of the old year passing and an embrace of the new.

This idea of a symbolic threshold is also found in a *paifong*, or a traditional Chinese architectural gateway, designed as a practical division between different municipal zones. In Zhang's 2023 show at Gallery 4A, *Louise Zhang: No dust left in the lilies*, she took the opportunity to explore the symbolic significance of this architectural device, borrowed from public spaces, in a gallery setting.

Zhang's work *Temple* combined elements borrowed from a *paifang* with adornments emulating those from her family temple on Qidu. With assistance from family photographs, the temple was largely reconstructed from memory and serves to document this collaboration between generations. However, the opportunity to walk under the archway is prevented by what appears to be a small table with offerings. On closer inspection, one of the votives takes the form of a crucifix making reference to Christianity and to Zhang's parents who forbade her entry, as practicing Christians, to the ancestral shrine. The symbolism of the portal is thereby denied and, as curator of the show Kon Gerakaris writes: 'Through its recreation in the gallery, [Zhang] attempts to rebuild what has been lost – a missing link between Zhang and her ancestors'.

Made in the same year, Zhang's work *Hidden Realms* commissioned by Lendlease

for Sydney Place employs some similar architectural elements. Drawing inspiration from Chinese architectural openwork carving, Zhang created an arched frame surrounded by glowing neon clouds that float above passersby. Working with Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay artist, Dennis Golding, Zhang imbedded references to place within the frame in the form of the Gynea lily, native only to the Sydney region, and Willow tree branches, a Chinese symbol of friendship.

Following her interest in botany and the power of gardens to generate community, Zhang's most recent work for the exhibition *Celestial Tapestry* at Fairfield City Museum & Gallery creates a space for connecting experiences of gardening and the cultivation of plants with her practice as an artist, both expressing ways to bring people together to share time and ideas. Here the spatial framing present in the moon gate and the architectural features present in *Hidden Realms* come together to enable the painted canvases to be self-supporting and free-standing.

The painted green timber frames support the movement of the painting off the wall and onto the floor. This simple gesture transforms the painted surface and encourages a bodily reading of the painting as an object to be navigated spatially, to be experienced while walking. By revealing the painting as an object with depth, volume and a verso the upright frame creates a tension between the two dimensionality of the surface and the architecture of the gallery space in a way that a work hung on a wall simply cannot. Similarly, the archival photos of market gardeners presented on an adjacent wall



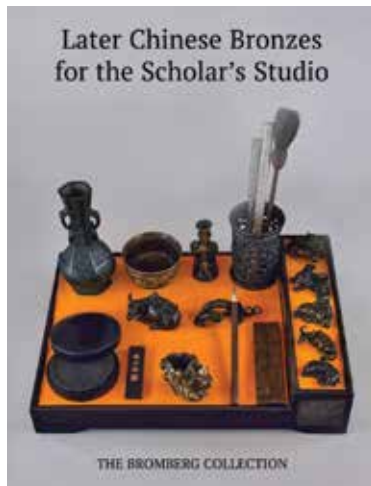
establish an interesting relationship between their spectral presence and the living plants growing in the middle of the gallery space that reminds us of the dynamic link between image and lived experience.

In this exhibition Zhang's emphasis on community made with references to place, plants and people creates a landscape to be walked through not dissimilar to a *shan shui* landscape painting in which one is invited to wonder through an imagined landscape, and in doing so one is afforded an opportunity to reflect on its relationship to the larger world around them. As Zhang knows full well it is sometimes the bodily experience of 'walking through' an artwork that introduces the public to different ideas, offering moments of joy along the way.

Dr Matt Cox is Senior Curator and Artist Liaison at Tilt Industrial Design. He comes to Tilt from the Art Gallery of New South Wales where he was Curator, Asian Art. Matt regularly teaches subjects on contemporary art and curating at the University of Sydney and Monash University and has presented lectures on the intersection of public art, urban development and climate change.

BOOK REVIEW: LATER CHINESE BRONZES FOR THE SCHOLAR'S STUDIO

Jackie Menzies



Later Chinese Bronzes for the Scholar's Studio

Paul Bromberg

Arts of Asia Publications Ltd, Hong Kong

RRP: US \$80, Hardcover, 172 pages, English with

Chinese captions

This engaging book focuses on one distinct aspect of later Chinese bronzes: the small, utilitarian desk pieces of great visual, tactile and literary appeal created for the delectation of the literati class of the Ming and Qing dynasties. It covers bronzes created 1100 to 1900, from the Song to Qing dynasties, referencing an area of collecting that has been gaining more attention amongst collectors, dealers and curators since the 1980s, capped by a show earlier this year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Lu 2025).

This publication presents 122 later Chinese bronzes from the collection of the author Paul Bromberg, formed between 2018 and 2024. Each piece has its own half-page illustration and is catalogued meticulously, including details of provenance and comparable pieces in publications on public and private collections, as well as dealer and auction catalogues. A comprehensive bibliography entices further exploration of the subject.

The author/collector's passion and enthusiasm are conveyed from his foreword and sustained through his two essays that precede the catalogue. In his foreword he informs the reader his inspiration for collecting later Chinese bronzes was triggered in 2018 when he came across a charming 19th century bronze scroll weight which he found 'highly attractive in terms of its aesthetic and tactile qualities' (p.8).

Rose Kerr, formerly Keeper of the Far Eastern Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum which published her own 1990 book on 'Later Chinese Bronzes' has written the introduction 'Later Bronzes in the Chinese Scholar's World'. This is followed by two essays by Bromberg: 'Later Bronzes for the Chinese Scholar's Studio: Form and Function' and 'Consideration of Later Bronze Paperweights'.

With his lucid and precise writing Bromberg has applied here the same detailed knowledge and enthusiasm he has brought to his other areas of collecting such as Thai art, examples of which appear in his book *THAI SILVER and Nielloware* (River Books, Bangkok, 2019) and in his article 'The Betel Set: An Icon of Thai Silverware' in the *TAASA Review* (Vol.31, No.2, June 2022).

His first essay establishes the centrality of the studio to the lifestyle of the scholar-literati class in Ming China, where all accoutrements have been carefully selected 'to be enjoyed for their aesthetic qualities and antiquarian associations' (p.12). There were style guidebooks to the choice of desktop items, collectively known as study playthings (*wenfang qingong*). The most notable of these is the *Treatise on Superfluous Things* by the 17th century connoisseur Wen Zhenheng.

Although some text in this essay overlaps with some in the next, the reader is compensated by the illustrations which include a selection of some fine paintings and bronzes in public collections. For added appreciation, there is an image of a 'Buddhist lion' censer in action, exhaling smoke, and groupings according to function such as an array of flower vases which were 'produced in prodigious numbers, as flower arranging was a popular pastime for the Ming scholar-literati' (p.19).

In the second essay, *Consideration of Later Bronze Paperweights*, much of which had appeared in *Arts of Asia*, Autumn 2021, pp.60-74, Bromberg points out that although the Four Treasures of the Study (*wenfang si bao*) – namely paper, brush, ink and inkstone – have received a lot of attention, this is not the case for paperweights, a situation he remedies in this thorough essay. He uses the term paperweights to cover water droppers, brush rests and incense holders – incense being 'a luxury at the time, used to repel insects while

simultaneously dispensing a pleasant aroma' (p.25). He informs us that it is not known where the majority of bronze paperweights were manufactured, or by whom, and that dating of these bronzes remains problematic.

Stylistically pieces range from the formal, often tinged with antiquarian allusions, to the naturalistic and whimsical. Regarding the many animals depicted, we again see his expertise: 'Chinese bronze paperweights comprise multiple zoomorphic sculpted figures – real and mythical, menacing and charming – which depict associations with philosophical, metaphorical and historical concepts' (p.27). The section on Mythical Beasts exemplifies the imagination and artistic licence applied to such figures. Rebuses and puns, 'already ingrained as standard artistic iconography by the middle of the Ming dynasty', provide rich sources of auspicious wishes and amusement.

The cover of the book references the layout of such desk delights: all bronze in this case, although typically there was a mixture of materials such as porcelain, wood and jade. The objects illustrated comprise a reticulated brush pot, an incense holder, a dated (1612) parcel-gilt bronze incense burner of a quality and design reminiscent of pieces manufactured by the renowned Hu Wenming atelier, a vase, brush rest, water dropper, scroll weights, water coupe, ink stick and inkstone (the last two not bronze). Along the right side are five desk pieces which capture the rich variety, skill, liveliness and carefully observed naturalism of many of these paperweights, as borne out by the catalogue illustrations which I guarantee will repeatedly draw back the reader and collector.

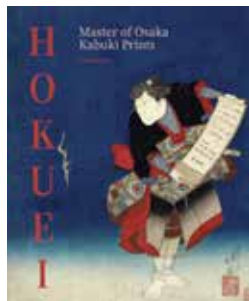
Jackie Menzies is the President of TAASA.

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BOOK REVIEW: HOKUEI: MASTER OF OSAKA KABUKI PRINTS

Russell Kelty



Hokuei: Master of Osaka Kabuki Prints

John Fiorillo

Ludion, Belgium, 2024

RRP: EUR 50, hardcover, 280p, full colour

Those who knew him realize he was a gem of a portrait painter in our time.
(Audience for Actors without Delay
(yakusha sassoku bocho), 1/1837)

At cultural institutions around the world, visitors flock to the latest exhibitions featuring woodblock prints created by the artists and artisans of the Edo period (1603-1868). The beauty and sophistication of these full colour single or multi-sheet woodblock prints (*nishiki-e*) depicting the diversions of the 'floating world' (*ukiyo-e*) were meant as ephemeral expressions appealing to the lower classes, with the most well-known readily associated with the sprawling metropolis of Edo (present day Tokyo).

Over the last five years the artistic cultures of Osaka and Kyoto, described historically as the Kamigata region, are the subject of renewed scholarly interest. The Kamigata region boasted an exceptional yet distinct

printmaking culture that thrived from c.1770 to c.1880.

Kamigata-e display a mastery of materials and novel designs, distinct from anywhere else in early modern Japan. *Kamigata-e* owed its existence to a highly-literate, cultivated community of merchants who devoted a great deal of attention to the actors of the kabuki stage (Gerstle 2005: 10-11) and who provided much of the impetus for the creation, often by highly skilled amateur designers, of these elaborate woodblock prints. This participatory culture was unique to *kamigata-e* and presages the democratisation now exemplified by social media.

Hokuei: Master of Osaka Kabuki Prints is an authoritative and unique addition to the history of woodblock prints during the Edo period, the result of three decades of assiduous collecting and ten years of research by John Fiorillo. This elegantly designed catalogue raisonné presents the 270 known woodblock print designs of one of the most prolific and talented artists of his generation, Shunbaisai Hokuei (act. 1828-1836). *Hokuei* illustrates the combination of technical sophistication and creative brilliance only achieved in 1830s Osaka fostered by the stars of the of the kabuki stage. It begs the question of why this genre of printmaking is so often left out of the grand narrative of Japanese art and relegated to the domain of a handful of scholars and collectors.

Shunbaisai Hokuei is often described as an enigma, as the details of his early life remain a mystery. As Peter Ujlaki writes in the forward, this is not uncommon during the Edo period:

'(p)rint designers were viewed by the prevailing art establishment as being far below painters and calligraphers on the scale of importance and, thus suffered a near total lack of chronicling during their lifetimes'. However, as Ujlaki also states: '...we have the works by Hokuei and that is enough' (p7). Ujlaki is correct: the quality, diversity and colours of Hokuei's prints lead one to ask how an artist of his calibre has remained hidden from the public for so long.

Hokuei's emergence is contextualized with insightful sections devoted to Artists and Publishers, Censorship, Kabuki portraits, Kabuki stars and Fan Clubs of 1830s Osaka. The catalogue also includes a range of appendices including his known seals and signatures, the publishers and block cutters, a glossary of terms and - one of the highlights of the catalogue - summary data on the subjects and formats of his prints.

John Fiorillo describes Hokuei as the preeminent artist of the 1830s and the fourth generation in a lineage of artists stretching back to Ryūkōsai Jokei (act. c. 1776-1811) often described as the father of *kamigata-e* (Yano 2009: 3-5). As Fiorillo writes, the *kamigata* tradition was catalysed (and matured) in the 1780s-90s by Ryūkōsai, a master of subtly coloured actor prints (*yakusha-e*) featuring stylized facial likeness (*nigao-e*), one of the defining features of *kamigata-e*. Second generation students Shōkōsai Hanbei (c. 1776-1809) and Yurakusai Nagahide (act. c. 1804-1848) continued to refine and expand the genre.

The third generation of artists in Osaka benefitted from the vast expansion of the



(L-R) [NAKAMURA] SHIKAN II AS KYŪMONRYŪ SHISHIN; BAIGYOKU [NAKAMURA UTAEMON III] AS NYŪUNRYŪ KŌSANSHŌ; KEISHI (NAKAMURA TOMIJŪRŌ) AS KOSANJŌ ICHIJŌSEI; AND [ARASHI] RIKAN II AS RŌRIHAKUCHŌ CHŌJUN, FROM THE SERIES 108 HEROES OF THE THEATER SUIKODEN, CA. LATE 1835, OSAKA, SHUNBAISAI HOKUEI, ACTIVE 1828-36, COLOUR WOODBLOCK PRINT, ŌBAN NISHIKI-E,

INK, COLOUR, AND METALLIC PIGMENTS ON PAPER, TETRPTYCH. COLLECTION OF JOHN FIORILLO

ARASHI RIKAN II AS ASAHINA TÔBEI IN BRILLIANT COLOURS OF A YOUNG GIR'S FOLDING FAN, SHIJÔ KITAGAWA, KYOTO, 7/1833, SHUNBAISAI HOKUEI, ACTIVE 1828-36, COLOUR WOODBLOCK PRINT, ÔBAN NISHIKI-E, INK, COLOUR, AND METALLIC PIGMENTS ON PAPER. COLLECTION OF JOHN FIORILLO



He stands to the right amidst a field of cobalt blue while a poem written in metallic pigment hovers to the left. The poem subtly alludes to the expressive gaze of Rikan. The lack of a publisher's seal is indicative of Osaka prints which were privately funded and distributed.

The catalogue devotes considerable attention to what is often described as the 'the masterwork of Osaka prints' presenting the two kabuki idols Shikan II and Utaemon III as characters from the highly popular and influential *108 Heroes of the Water Margin*, known simply as the *Suikoden* (p122), a rousing, bloody epic set in Song dynasty China glorifying the exploits of a band of righteous outlaws led by Song Jiang (p126).

This four sheet composition, published c. late 1835, is a *mitate-e* or 'imagined staging' by these two leading actors of the day (Schwaab 1989: 172-173). The dramatic contrast of light and dark is one of the defining characteristics of kabuki *kamigata-e*. Hokuëi has placed looming black clouds over a landscape imbued with Western perspective. The four characters are depicted in dramatic poses each featuring distinctive facial features and clad in tattoos and dynamic costumes.

Hokuëi died in late 1836 at the height of his powers. Contemporaneous memorial prints are evidence of his popularity in the *kamigata-e* community in Osaka. His death presages the end of an era of full sized coloured prints (*ôban*) as the Tokugawa military government (*bakufu*) enacted the Tenpō reforms (1842-47) designed to reestablish the boundary between the lascivious entertainment world and respectable everyday life governed by Confucian values.

ARASHI RIKAN II AS DANSHICHI KUROBEI IN MIRROR OF THE OSAKA SUMMER FESTIVAL, ONISHI THEATRE, OSAKA, 5/1832, SHUNBAISAI HOKUEI, ACTIVE 1828-36, COLOUR WOODBLOCK PRINT, ÔBAN NISHIKI-E, INK, COLOUR AND METALLIC PIGMENTS ON PAPER. COLLECTION OF JOHN FIORILLO



Woodblock prints in particular were perceived as a seditious influence on society and artists and publishers often resorted to avoiding scrutiny through subtle allusions. Compounded by the decline of kabuki, the woodblock industry in Osaka never fully recovered the glory of the 1830s, yet designers and artisans continued to create exceptional woodblock prints through the mid-1880s.

Hokuëi: Master of Osaka Kabuki Prints is a welcome addition to the corpus of woodblock print catalogues. It reveals the extraordinary print culture of 1830s Osaka which deserves a more dedicated examination and engagement in the English-speaking world and even in Japan.

The author would like to thank Peter Ujlaki for his assistance with this review.

Russell Keltly is Curator Asian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia.

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print industry fostered by the rivalry between supporters of the two leading actors of the kabuki stage: Arashi Kichisaburō II (1769-1821) and Nakamura Utaemon III (1778-1838), known as Rikan and Shikan.

In 1828, the first print designed by Shunbaisai Hokuëi was published. As Fiorillo notes, Hokuëi's name was derived from 'Hoku' and 'ei,' the former adopted from his master, Shunkōsai Hokushū (act. c.1802-1832), who studied with Katushika Hokusai (1760-1849) in Edo. Hokusai travelled to Nagoya and Osaka in 1870 to expand his artistic influence and patron network and in the process inspired a wealth of acolytes. His influence is evident in Hokuëi's designs which merge the genres of kabuki and landscape (*fukei-ga*).

Hokuëi's distinctive aesthetic is defined at times by dramatic contrasting colours and effects, at other times by subtle lyricism. His compositions reflect a softer style of kabuki performance known as '*wagoto*' distinct from the rougher '*aragoto*' style of Edo suiting samurai tastes. The focus on distinctive facial features is one of the defining characteristics of *kamigata-e* as well as 'bust portraits' (*okubi-e*), appearing from the 1770s. As Fiorillo points out, the print buying public expected constancy in the rendering of faces which tended to be softer and rounder in Osaka. 'The localizing of facial types helped fuel a rivalry between Kamigata and Edo based publishers, artists, actors, and theatre aficionados' (p14).

Kamigata-e were defined by the adulation of kabuki fan clubs (*hiiki renchu*) essential to the production of plays and promotion of prominent actors. Club members subsidized and attended plays, sent gifts to the actors, decorated theatres and held various kabuki related ceremonies. Without these fan clubs Osaka Kabuki would have lacked not only financial backing but also enthusiasm and support for local actors (p15). As a result, the number of prints created was modest, allowing the use of expensive floral and mineral pigments.

The technical sophistication and virtuosity of the designs illustrated in Hokuëi demonstrate the aesthetic interplay between Osaka and Edo. Often perceived as a one-way street, there is ample evidence, including in this publication, to suggest the influence of early *kamigata ukiyo-e* on Edo printmaking.

The publication's cover image depicts Arashi Rikan II as the shogun Taira Tarō Yoshikado in *Story of Tarō, Heir to the Soma Clan (Soma Taro mibae bundan)*, presented at the Naka Theatre, Osaka in the second month of 1832.

COLLECTOR'S CHOICE: A JAPANESE BRONZE BUST OF NAPOLEON

Shane Paget

In April 2017, during the clearance of a deceased estate in Turramurra, Sydney, I purchased around 20 boxes of high-end antiques for our antique shop. Amongst them was a small bronze bust of Napoleon Bonaparte. At the time, I set it aside with the intention of researching it later. For over eight years it remained in storage until, in June this year, I began a thorough investigation.

The bust is cast in bronze using the lost-wax method, a technique requiring considerable skill. It is hollow, with a single vent hole in the base, confirming it was created through a genuine casting process rather than mass production. The surface carries a deep, rich patina that has developed naturally over time. On the front, the name NAPOLEON is inscribed in serif font. Though slightly uneven, the lettering is integral to the casting.

The piece measures 230 mm in height, 150 mm in width and 80 mm in depth, with a weight of 1.280 kilograms. Despite its modest scale, the craftsmanship is striking: Napoleon's face is stern and sharply modelled, his uniform displays finely cast epaulettes, and the medals across his chest are crisp in detail.

A distinctive feature of this bust is the small oval artist's seal on the reverse. Centred with geometric precision, the seal measures only 8 mm by 5.5 mm. Its coppery-alloy (yet to be identified) tone contrasts subtly with the darker patina of the bust, and its flawless integration into the casting demonstrates a high level of skill. The two Japanese characters can be read as Seiji or Kiyoshi, names that correspond to known metalworkers of the late 19th century in Japan. The style of marking is consistent with Meiji bronzes, which were often signed to affirm quality and origin.

What sets this example apart is its subject. Japanese artisans of the Meiji period are celebrated for bronzes depicting animals, mythological creatures and finely worked vessels. A Western political figure — Napoleon Bonaparte — is extraordinary.

Extensive research has yet to uncover any other example in museum holdings, auction archives or published references. It appears to be a singular work. The authentication of its casting, patina and seal strongly supports a Meiji attribution, and it has now been formally certified as a Japanese bronze bust of

DETAIL OF OVAL

CARTOUCHE SEAL, "SEIJI" (清司)



Napoleon, Meiji period (late 19th century).

The Meiji era (1868–1912) was a period of intense modernisation and international exchange. French influence in particular was significant, shaping law, military organisation, education and art. It is within this context that a Japanese bronze bust of Napoleon can be understood. The work may have been produced as a one-off commission, or an exhibition piece or maybe an export piece ready for a European market.

In this sense, the bust is not simply a portrait but also a marker of cultural dialogue: a Japanese craftsman applying traditional bronze techniques to a Western subject. It can be seen as a reflection of both the reach of French influence in Meiji Japan and the admiration accorded to Napoleon as a symbol of reform and modernity.

This bust matters precisely because it challenges expectations of Meiji art. It is not decorative, religious or conventional. Instead, it fuses Japanese craftsmanship with European subject matter at a moment when Japan was redefining its place in the world.

For collectors, historians or museums, the bust offers an opportunity to expand our understanding of Meiji bronze work. It demonstrates that Japanese artisans were not only masters of their own traditions but were also capable of adopting and adapting foreign subjects into their repertoire.

BRONZE BUST OF NAPOLEON, MEIJI PERIOD, H. 223 MM. PRIVATE COLLECTION, SYDNEY



From a chance discovery in a Sydney estate to an object now authenticated and researched, this bronze bust of Napoleon deserves serious attention. With its Meiji-period seal, natural patina and lost-wax casting, it stands apart as a rare survival. More than a curiosity, it is a work that bridges two cultures and embodies the cross-currents of the late 19th century — a piece of genuine historical and artistic significance.

Shane is a hands on collector who likes nothing more than a good garage sale. Along with his wife Kerrie he owned an antiques and collectable shop in Umina beach.

PAPER MOON: IMAGES OF JAPAN

Kathryn Hunyor

The captivating impossibility of truly understanding, clearly defining, and creatively portraying, the country called 'Japan' lies at the heart of the exhibition *Paper Moon: images of Japan*. In his latest body of work exhibited at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre Gallery (Sydney) this November, Tony Maniaty readily surrenders to the 'unknowingness' of a country he's never previously visited, yet one that has held his interest across a lifetime.

By any measure – photographer, author, journalist and academic – Tony Maniaty has led a big life. Since his early days as an ABC journalist, and then with SBS and the BBC, he has travelled and worked in more than 30 countries, mostly as an international news correspondent. When not reporting, it was Greece (his father's ancestral land) or France (his 'spiritual home') that drew him deeper into searching for his personal and creative identity. These dual missions – self-discovery versus media demands – have often caused a conflict in his creative output.

In this context, Japan occupied a different, discreet place in his mind. From a correspondence with George Wakamatsu, his childhood pen-pal in the 1960s, to reading Mishima Yukio's work voraciously in his twenties, to then writing an award-winning short film about a Japanese businessman, Japan was imaginatively present but physically absent.

'Rather than offer any explanation about the mysteries of Japan', he says, 'Mishima opened a door into an even more obscure world, into the "unknowability" of Japan. I stared at that door for decades before deciding to go through it and see what I could find'.

In 2024 Maniaty set out to combine his myriad insights, his many disparate and at times extreme frontline experiences, and his distinctive photographic view of the world, into a single endeavour. He took his Leica cameras to Japan not as a reporter, but as a humanist, a 'painter of light and shade'.

'After a life of journalism and perpetually covering war, conflict, political, economic and social tensions, all that negativity has a profound impact on your psyche. I found myself wanting to search, in quite the opposite direction, for love and beauty'.

FLOATING LOTUS LEAVES, AKITA, JAPAN © TONY MANIATY 2025



More than 50 years after first contemplating Japan's beauty through the prism of Mishima's fiction, Maniaty's eyes (and mine, and all of ours), are now flooded daily with 'beautiful images of Japan'. He knew before setting out that finding love and beauty was still possible, but avoiding cliché would be far more difficult: 'If you're not careful, you end up looking for images you've previously seen'. Also important was his desire not to be locked into preconceptions and expectations. This itself became the catalyst for his creative mission, and my hope as curator: for images of Japan that were at once universal, but also specifically Japanese.

But Japanese to whom?

Maniaty's approach to photographing not the Japan we all assume to know, but simply 'his' Japan, resulted in a range of enigmatic images, many of which could, on first sight, be anywhere. But as I started choosing just 25 images (from a shortlist of 150 from a total of more than 1,000 taken), the ennui that usually overcomes me – exhausted by frame after frame of perfect Japanese beauty (captured mostly by fetishising foreign eyes) – didn't come. Instead, from the black-and-white moodiness, I began to draw out what I felt were small moments that intuitively felt like 'my Japan'.

Moving around the country, Maniaty captured not vistas, but beautifully composed in-between spaces, where the confluence of light, shade and texture conveyed to me that

very Japanese sense of 'mono-no-aware', a pathos of things. We feel it in the blossoms, lotus leaves and hanging aprons, at the busy railway crossing, the empty parking lot and a joyful restaurant. Through my eyes, from a lifetime attuned to a Japanese aesthetic sensibility, I knew where I was, and I saw love and beauty.

Paper Moon became a shared if somewhat contradictory space, presenting images taken by a first-time visitor and selected by a long-time devotee. In visual terms they are not always immediately recognisable as Japan, and yet they achieve something we are often striving for: a universal, shared moment in which to find our Japan, and equally ourselves.

Paper Moon was exhibited 15 - 28 November 2025 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre Gallery (Sydney), presented as part of Head On Photography Festival 2025. Quotes by the artist are all drawn from a longer interview between Kathryn Hunyor and Tony Maniaty, available online at www.artspeople.com.au/paper-moon-interview. Tony Maniaty's photographs can be viewed on his website: www.tonymaniaty.com.

Kathryn Hunyor is a Japanese-speaking curator and lecturer, and curator of *PAPER MOON*.

VALE JIM (JAMES COSMAS) MASSELOS (1940-2025)

Jackie Menzies

When word of the death of the highly respected and much-loved South Asian historian James Cosmas (Jim) Masselos spread through his extensive network of friends and colleagues around the world, the sorrow was palpable. Those who were in contact with him more recently could see his time was coming, but when it happened it was still hard to reconcile with the realisation we would no more have the pleasure of his company and the sharing of his wide-ranging knowledge of India, its people, history and culture. Jim will be missed by the many for whom he was a colleague, friend and mentor.

Jim (as he was known to everyone) was not only an historian of distinction, but a compulsive collector. He claimed that his collecting began as an adjunct to his research and teaching: in his pursuit of knowledge he built up a huge library of books, journals and photographs relating to India. Then his collecting expanded to Mughal and Rajasthani miniatures, modern art, ephemera, folk art, tribal art, carvings and Indian textiles (particularly embroideries from Kutch in Gujarat). The strength of the collection was in the works on paper, particularly photographs, posters (many valued for their political messages), ephemera and maps.

Over 60 years of collecting, mainly across India, but also in London and Australia, he amassed a large and intriguing collection. He was always delighted to share his collection. He had a passionate, if unstated, commitment to familiarising others with the creativity of the subcontinent and its myriad delights. So much did he relish sharing his collection that he was always willing to lend to exhibitions, contribute to catalogues, and even organise exhibitions himself. So unstintingly generous was he in answering queries and giving reliable advice freely that he was admired as the 'go-to' person for South Asian Studies.

It was Jim's wish that his collection go to public institutions so that more people could share his pleasure in the material culture he loved. To that end, in a gesture of great philanthropy, he started donating selections from his collection to different institutions. Beneficiaries were the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria and the University of Sydney – both Fisher Library and the Chau Chak Wing Museum.

Readers of the *TAASA Review* would be familiar with his name. Jim contributed many articles on topics as diverse as film, books and paintings. He was a founding member of TAASA in 1991, a TAASA Committee member, a member of the Publications Committee and a generous contributor of articles and suggestions. In the first issue of the *TAASA Review* in 1992 he wrote on the exhibition *Divine and Courtly Life*, the first of several exhibitions he co-curated at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and his last article in 2024 was on matchbox labels: such contrasting foci demonstrating his catholic tastes.

He co-edited three issues of the *TAASA Review*: *Tantra* (2006), *Trade and Culture* (2013) and *Performance & Narrative in Asian Art* (2015) and edited two issues: *Indian Popular* (2000) and *Photographing Asia* in 2008. Such was his generous participation in TAASA – a participation that extended to lectures and events – he was probably the only TAASA member to be accorded two profiles in the *TAASA Review*: in 1995 (vol.4 no.2) and 2010 (vol.19 no.1).

For Jim his interest in art and culture was an extension of his formal training as an historian of India. He was a highly respected historian of urban South Asia, specialising in Mumbai which he loved and understood with a deep passion. A graduate of the University of Sydney, he went to Mumbai to study at Mumbai University from 1961 to 1964. The resultant PhD on Indian nationalism was such new and insightful material it was subsequently published in many editions. He returned to a lectureship at Sydney University in 1965 and remained there for his entire career, retiring in 2001. Jim was much loved by the students he taught who found his knowledge and enthusiasm inspiring.

Jim's academic achievements received due acknowledgement. In 2008 he was appointed a Fellow of the Academy of Humanities (FAHA). In 2017 he was proud to be made an Honorary Fellow of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai. To coincide with that event there was a Festschrift in his honour, with the collected essays resulting in the publication of *Bombay before Mumbai, Essays in honour of Jim Masselos* in 2019. In 2020 Robert Aldrich, Emeritus Professor of History, the University of Sydney, organised *Power and Culture: Making Indian Identity – a conference in honour of Jim Masselos*

JIM MASSELOS CELEBRATING HIS 84TH BIRTHDAY

JULY 2024. PHOTO JACKIE MENZIES



at the University. After Jim's death, the Asiatic Society of Mumbai organised a tribute in July 2025, and Robert Aldrich organised the Memorial *Celebrating Jim Masselos* at the Chau Chak Wing Museum on 8 August this year.



EMBROIDERED COVER (DHARANIYA), KUTCH, GUJARAT, 20TH

CENTURY, EMBROIDERED COTTON, 168 X 93.5 CM, ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, GIFT OF DR JIM MASSELOS 2010. PHOTO: AGNSW

DEAD TIGER, c 1872, WILLUGHBY WALLACE HOOPER, ENGLISH, 1837-1912, ALBUMEN SILVER PRINT MOUNTED ON CARD, 18.7 X 22.5 CM (IMAGE), ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, GIFT OF DR JIM MASSELOS 2011. PHOTO AGNSW



Jim contributed to many exhibitions. His first exhibition (with Judy Birmingham) was *A Survey of Indian Art*, held in the Rare Book Library, Fisher Library in 1967. Even with that first show, documented in a roneoed check list, Jim demonstrated his wide knowledge of Indian art, culture and history. His own loans to the show reflected his idiosyncratic tastes in folk and tribal arts.

His passion for photographs and his perceptive analysis of the similarities of the worlds depicted in Indian and Australian historical photographs were on show in the 1986 exhibition *The Same but Different, Indian and Australian Photographs 1850-1925* at the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney (with Peter Stanbury and Alison Lea). Many of the Indian photographs were from Jim's own collection. He was a keen photographer, never without his camera, and apart from his own photos, taken as he travelled widely across India, he amassed a huge collection of Indian and European photographs that ranged from the 19th century to contemporary times. His collection comprised many engaging images by 19th century English photographers such as the one by Hooper illustrated. It is part of series of 12 entitled *Tiger Shooting* made for an English audience in which dead and stuffed tigers were used to dramatic effect to stage the scene of a fictionalised tiger hunt.

Textiles were another large component of Jim's collection. He worked again with the Macleay Museum on *India's Textile Heritage: a research collection* in 1990. The show comprised textiles from his own collection, such as the

one illustrated: a fine example of the many embroideries Jim collected from the former princely state of Kutch. The embroidery of Kutch was a research project that Jim was particularly proud of and wrote about in *TAASA Review* (vol.22, no.1, 2013).

In 1997 he was co-curator, with distinguished scholar Pratap Pal and myself, of the large, critically acclaimed *DANCING TO THE FLUTE: Music and Dance in Indian Art* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Other exhibitions relating to Indian art followed at the Art Gallery, including *GODDESS, Divine Energy* in 2006. Items from Jim's own collection were included in all these shows.

His last exhibition at the Gallery was *INDIAN EMPIRE: Multiple Realities* in 2010, a huge exhibition of over 200 pieces. The title was Jim's and of course it was an exact reflection of the scope of his collection, capturing the plurality of visual traditions across all media.

At the conclusion of the show, many of the exhibits, together with more from Jim's collection, were used to establish the Masselos South Asia Archive within the National Art Archive based at the Gallery. The Masselos Archive contains posters, chromolithographs and photographs, totalling over 150 items that too easily could have been dismissed as ephemera but in fact provide amazing revelations of Indian culture, politics and beliefs.

Jim's gifts to the National Gallery of Victoria included prints, such as the illustrated chromolithograph of Ganesha in the form

SIDDHI VINAYAK (A FORM OF GANESHA), LATE 19TH - EARLY 20TH CENTURY, CHROMOLITHOGRAPH, 50.3 X 38.2, NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA, FORTHCOMING GIFT OF DR JIM MASSELOS 2025



of Siddhi Vinayak he adopted to conquer demons. Siddhi Vinayak images are distinct in having a trunk that turns to the right, as represented in this print.

Through his collecting, writing, exhibitions, lectures/symposia and donations, Jim has inspired many and made an enduring contribution to our knowledge of Indian culture. Through his gifts to public collections, he has introduced us to freshly different aesthetics, laid the groundwork for future research and enriched the lives of everyone – just as he wanted!

A selection of the folk and tribal paintings Jim donated to the Art Gallery of New South Wales is currently on display in the Asian Lantern.

Jackie Menzies, Emeritus Curator of Asian Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, was a friend and colleague of Jim's for over four decades. They travelled India together, often as part of research for the several exhibitions they co-curated.

RECENT TAASA ACTIVITIES

Refresh your memory or access lectures you've missed by viewing past TAASA talks from leading experts in their field. The Video Lecture Library on the TAASA website www.taasa.org.au lists all lectures delivered up to September this year. Members can simply log in and go to 'TAASA Video Lectures' under 'Events' and click on the lecture of your choice.

BEYOND THE LENS: PHOTOGRAPHY IN ASIA TAASA Monday night lecture series

4 August 2025

Death photography: Commemorating the Dead through Photography in East Asia Jeehey Kim

In western homes, family portraits are mostly displayed as small framed side-board photos, usually limited to close family members. Being a researcher who has been immersed in Southeast Asian photography for a couple of decades, it was a pleasurable learning experience to watch Jeehey Kim's presentation on the use of East Asian photographic portraits in domestic and official commemorative contexts.

Jeehey detailed the special reverence East Asian societies have to ancestor portraits including in photographic form. She outlined how these photographic portraits fitted in with the tradition of 19th century Shini-e 'death portraits' of well-known celebrities. She included examples of painted memorial portraits with some using the faces cut out from photographs. Other examples were portraits incorporating silhouette profiles inspired by Edo period Kage-e 'shadow' pictures as well as wooden votive Kuyo-Egaku tablets donated to temples with reliefs carved after photographs of the deceased.

One of the most entertaining items was a funerary urn with a transferred photograph of renowned Japanese photographer Suzuki Shinichi who died in 1919. She also contrasted the slow acceptance of photographic portraits of the Japanese emperor with the enthusiastic adoption of staged tableaux self-portraits by Chinese Empress Cixi.

Gael Newton

1 September 2025

Popular Photography and the Making of Modern Indonesia Karen Strassler

Karen explored the role of photography in shaping modern Indonesia – not due to any

ideological or political agenda but rather in the way it depicted daily life and leisure activities. Mainly focusing on the end of the 19th century to the 1950's, studio and amateur photos, she argued, changed the way people saw themselves and identified as Indonesians at a time when the idea of one nation remained remote.

Particularly in the post-colonial period, people proudly posed in front of tropical backgrounds incorporating contemporary buildings and affluent settings, allowing them to enter aspirational spaces that defined them as modern Indonesians. An intriguing aspect was the role of Chinese, mainly Cantonese immigrants, in dominating the photography industry bringing skills gained in other centres such as Hong Kong. Transnationals with uncertain status yet they played a key role in developing idioms by which people recognised themselves as modern Indonesians.

Josefa Green

OTHER EVENTS

21 August 2025 (zoom talk)

Contemporary Japanese Gardens: A Reflection of Ancient Practices Ken Lamb

Ken Lamb, of Imperial Gardens Landscape, presented a wonderful insight into how the traditional principles of Japanese garden design still guide gardens today. Principles such as the relationship of people with nature so important in Buddhism, the flow of energy associated with *feng shui* of Chinese geomancy or Japanese aesthetics of *wabi sabi* aim to slow down the viewer or lead them on an unexpected journey whether the space is small or large. Devices such as proportion, winding paths, the layering of foliage, sensory experiences, perspective and asymmetry can create various garden styles – perhaps a stroll, tea or hillside garden.

In Australia, we are challenged by employing Japanese aesthetics using local materials such as rocks and plants. Ken showed many examples of contemporary gardens in which

he has been involved. From a tiny, inner city, mossy roof garden to a hospital garden as sanctuary for sick children, the starting point is always to create a primary viewpoint.

Margaret White

2 October 2025

Tour of Chinese Garden of Friendship, Darling Harbour, Sydney Julian Siu

A beautiful spring morning provided the backdrop to our visit to the Chinese Garden of Friendship. Trees were in bud and azaleas and iris in bloom. Our guide, heritage specialist, Julian Siu, presented an excellent overview. This gentleman's stroll or *lingnan* garden, associated with southern China, was designed by the Guangdong Landscape Bureau in Guangzhou, sister city to Sydney, as part of Australia's Bicentennial Celebrations.

The garden has evolved over time to adjust to the local environment. Being located among city buildings has also challenged the landscapers to mask views and noise to maintain the serenity within the garden. The flow of water plays a fundamental role here as well as symbolising *qi* or energy through the garden. Various features invite the stroller to pause at one of the many pavilions to quietly contemplate scenes across the lotus filled lake or climb up past a waterfall through the bamboo forest of Himalayan cedars for a view across the entire garden from its highest point, The Gurr Pavillion.

Margaret White



OUR GUIDE, JULIAN SIU, AT THE CHINESE GARDEN
OF FRIENDSHIP TAASA TOUR. PHOTO: JOSEFA GREEN



7 October 2025
The Power of Ephemera
Sally Burden

We were fortunate that Sally was able to give this talk to TAASA after her previously scheduled presentation at the AGM had to be cancelled due to the weather gods. She presented convincing evidence of the importance of ephemera in 'filling in the gaps' of our knowledge of the past. It can offer 'magic' in exhibitions.

Sally confessed to a soft spot for East Asian ephemera which she explored through a number of themes. These included 'persuasion and propaganda' such as Tiananmen Square protest handouts from 22 May to 5 June, and 'day to day

material' such as Japanese department store catalogues. As she pointed out about the former, it is difficult to refute eye witness accounts such as this. Her talk concluded with discussing the challenges of collecting and preserving digital information.
Josefa Green

TEXTILE STUDY GROUP, NSW

30 September 2025
Precious Disguises – A Deep Dive into Chinese Embroidery on Traditional Chinese Children's Hats
Suzanne Chee

In addition to being a textile conservator at the Powerhouse Museum with over 30 years' experience, our speaker, Suzanne



SUZANNE CHEE PRESENTING AT THE TSG PRECIOUS DISGUISES EVENT. PHOTO: SANDY WATSON



TRADITIONAL BOY'S PROTECTIVE EMBROIDERED SILK CAP. COLLECTION: SUZANNE CHEE. PHOTO: SANDY WATSON

Chee, is also a collector of traditional Chinese children's hats. Her presentation focused on the embroidery skills, symbolism and cultural significance of many of the hats from her collection.

The hats are intended to bestow protection from evil influences or prosperity and good fortune on the young boys for whom they are painstakingly made. Most take the form of heads of auspicious animals from the Chinese zodiac with desired qualities to pass onto the boys, such as tigers or pigs, and are covered in beautifully embroidered symbols to keep the boys safe and bring them good luck. Participants marvelled at the intricate stitching and elaborate construction of these treasures, which would have been worn only on auspicious occasions.

Chris Manning

CERAMICS STUDY GROUP

11 August 2025
Stored in Style: The Martaban Jar – zoom lecture
Margaret White

Margaret offered a thorough and well researched review of current knowledge about these characteristically large, brown glazed storage jars used on the main maritime trading routes from India through SE Asia to East Asia. Her talk covered the earliest historical evidence for these jars, how they were made, their usage (which included ritual as well as storage use), the trade routes they travelled and the archaeological evidence, especially more recently, on where they were made. Their peak production period was in the 16th and 17th centuries, with jar manufacture moving north by the 1750's. Of particular interest was Margaret's review of the evidence for where Martaban jars were manufactured.

Archaeological evidence has now established that, at their peak production and use up to the mid 18th century, Martaban jars were made at a number of kiln sites in Burma, refuting the view held until recently that the jars were made in places such as in Southern China and were merely named after the port of Martaban through which they trafficked.

Josefa Green

TAASA MEMBERS' DIARY

DECEMBER 2025 - FEBRUARY 2026

TAASA Monday Night Zoom Lectures 5.30 – 6.30pm (AEDT) ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE OF NORTHERN INDIA

Cost per lecture: Members \$15;
Non-members \$25
Special price for the whole series of 5
lectures: Members \$60; Non-Members \$85
Payment in advance essential. No refunds.

Pay by credit card via TAASA website
www.taasa.org.au.

Please visit TAASA's website for further
details. www.taasa.org.au.

Monday 16 March 2026

The images and temples of Kali Jackie Menzies

Kali belongs to the Great Goddess
(Devi) tradition that embodies *shakti*,
the feminine energy and creativity that
is the source of life. Kali is prominently
worshipped in West Bengal, particularly
at the time of the annual Kali Puja festival
when worshippers honour her by creating
vibrantly dressed clay sculptures and
multi-coloured temporary shrines known
as *pandals*. The Kalighat temple in Kolkata
gained fame for its distinctive, quickly
drawn images produced by artisans as
mementos for pilgrims. These Kalighat
paintings as well as other examples of Kali
paintings, sculptures, prints and temples
will be the subject of this talk.

Jackie Menzies researched the Indian
Goddess (Devi) tradition for the major
exhibition *Goddess, Divine Energy*, that she
curated at the AGNSW in 2007 and wrote
the catalogue essay on Kali.

Monday 20 April 2026

Awadhi style: The Indo-Islamic architecture of 18th and 19th-century Lucknow.

John Zubrzycki

Lucknow's rich architectural legacy owes
much to the Nawabs of Awadh who ruled
the state from 1722 until 1856. Nawabi
architecture can be divided into two
phases: the first towards the end of the
18th century is characterized by grandiose
and stylistic buildings; the second in

the 19th century is distinguished by the
incorporation of European elements.
Nawabi architecture adapted later Mughal
characteristics to reflect the Shia religion of
Lucknow's rulers. This talk will examine
the main elements of Nawabi architecture
from the early 18th century until Awadh's
annexation by the British.

John Zubrzycki is the acclaimed author
of seven books on India. He graduated
in South Asian history and Hindi from
the ANU and wrote his PhD on Indian
traditional magic at the UNSW. He worked
in India as a diplomat and correspondent
before joining *The Australian* as deputy
foreign editor. As well as his interest in
Indian popular culture, his research has
focused on the history of the erstwhile
princely states and India's nomadic
communities. He has led a number of
tours to India.

Monday 11 May 2026

Embellishment: the fine art of embroidery in Lucknow and Kolkata Christina Sumner

The Indian artisan's legendary skills in
creating beautiful fabrics include weaving,
mordant painting and resist dyeing, block
printing - and embroidery, the ornamental
surface embellishment of cloth, typically
with needle and thread. Lucknow and
Kolkata are home to celebrated embroi-
dery traditions: in Lucknow, the delicate
art of *chikankari*, meaning white work, and
mukaish, the decorative insertion of metal
ribbon; in Kolkata, *kantha*, originally sig-
nifying a poor man's wrap, and *satgaon*,
named for the 16th century Portuguese
trading centre Satgaon.

Christina Sumner OAM was principal
curator design and society at the
Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, where
she worked with the decorative arts and
design collections for 28 years. Christina's
research interests span the traditional
textiles and cultures of India, Central Asia
and Southeast Asia and she has curated
exhibitions, written and lectured widely
on the arts of the Asian region and led
many textile-focused tours.

Monday 15 June 2026

Hindu temple deities

Richard Barz

My talk will introduce two Hindu temples
in Odisha: Konārka (13th c) dedicated to
Sūrya the sun god and Lingarāja (11th
c) where the god Shiva is worshipped.
Konārka, a UNESCO World Heritage Site,
represents Sūrya's chariot with its wheels
and sides covered with superb carvings
and statues, some erotic. Lingarāja, one
of the magnificent temples in the city
of Bhubaneswar, is an outstanding
example of Indian architecture. However,
unlike Konārka, it is a functioning temple
attracting great numbers of pilgrims every
day: an excellent place to appreciate the
vigour of contemporary Hinduism.

Richard Barz was senior lecturer at
the ANU from 1972 to 2012, where he
taught Hindi and Urdu, Indian religion
and politics and occasionally Sanskrit.
He has also taught at the Universities of
Melbourne and Sydney and universities
in the United States and Denmark. His
publications include *The Bhakti sect of
Vallabhācārya* and, with A. Doron and
B. Nelson, *An Anthology of Writings on
the Ganga*. At present, he is engaged in
research on the yoginī temples of India.

Monday 20 July 2026

The Rajbaris of Calcutta: architectural and cultural legacy of the Bengali Badralok

John Zubrzycki

The stately mansions of Bengal's
zamindars or land-owning gentry, known
as rajbaris, are a syncretic mix of local and
Neo-classical European styles. They can
be found all over what is now the state of
West Bengal but the greatest concentration
is in north Kolkata. The most famous of
these is the Marble Palace, still owned
by the Mullick family and open to the
public. It features a Neo-classical facade
and Corinthian pillars and incorporates
a traditional Bengali plan with open
courtyards.

John Zubrzycki's biography: see above.

VISHNU TEMPLE AT HAMPI. SOURCE: AZTEC1359,
CC BY 4.0 [HTTPS://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0),
VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

SPECIAL TAASA LECTURE

Thursday 19 February 2026, 6 – 7pm

Discovering Hampi, Vijayanagara

George Michell

Annie Wyatt Room at the National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill, Millers Point Sydney

George Michell will introduce the spectacular 14th-16th-century city known today as Hampi. The ruins of this imperial capital nestle alongside a sacred river and rugged granite gorge identified with the Sanskrit epic, Ramayana. They present the history of a complete imperial city, with fortifications and defensive gateways, remains of palaces and pleasure pavilions, reservoirs and aqueducts, watchtowers and elephant stables, together with a profusion of shrines with carvings. Hampi Vijayanagara is a UNESCO World Heritage site and has become one of India's premier tourist destinations.

Dr George Michell is an architectural historian who has worked extensively in the Deccan region, beginning some



50 years ago with a doctoral thesis on Early Chalukya temples. His collaborative publications include *Hampi Vijayanagara*, the popular guidebook issued by the Deccan Heritage Foundation, and the recent *City of Victory, Hampi Vijayanagara*, both coauthored with the American archaeologist Dr John M. Fritz. Among Michell's other publications is the profusely illustrated *Temples of Deccan India*. **Light refreshments. \$30 members, \$40 non-members. All bookings and payments online via the TAASA website www.taasa.org.au.**

CERAMICS STUDY GROUP, NSW

Tuesday 24 February 2026,

5.30 - 6.30 pm AEST

My Favourite Things (zoom talk)

Museum and art gallery volunteers not only share their knowledge of the collections they are presenting to the public, they also often develop their own preferences for particular objects in those collections.

These preferences may be due to the volunteer's own expertise, the object's aesthetic appeal or its historical significance. A number of experienced gallery volunteers will present a ceramic object that they especially love and explain why this object appeals to them so strongly. Confirmed so far are: Julia Pratt, National Gallery of Australia and Margaret White, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore.

Cost: \$20 members; \$30 non-members. All bookings and payments online via the TAASA website www.taasa.org.au.

TAASA'S 2025 END OF YEAR PARTY



KRISHNA AND RADHA DANCING THE RASALILA, JAIPUR, 19TH CENTURY. SOURCE: WIKICOMMONS

Thursday 11 December 2025,

6.00 - 8.00pm AEDT

Bonhams Auction House

168 Queen Street, Woollahra

Celebrate another year of the Society's activities with fellow TAASA members and friends.

This year's party will have an Indian theme, with delicious finger food and a performance by Rajasthani dancers. Indian attire is optional. There will be a mini bazaar selling Indian and other South Asian memorabilia, textiles, art and artefacts.

Cost: Members \$55; Non-members \$65. All bookings and payments online via the TAASA website www.taasa.org.au.

Request for Donations

Donations for the bazaar would be much appreciated. The bazaar is an opportunity to donate your South Asian memorabilia to be bought and loved by other members. No books please.

If you can offer donations please email Josefa Green at proact@bigpond.com, if you live on the south side, or Karen Byatt at kbyatt@bigpond.net.au if you are on the north side, to arrange delivery.

WHAT'S ON: DECEMBER 2025 - FEBRUARY 2026

NSW

And Still I Rise

8 Nov 25 - 2026

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Presenting the work of a culturally diverse group of women artists, many internationally recognised, living in Australia. Covers a wide variety of media, including textiles, painting, metalwork, installation and video.

ACT

New Asian Art: Collection Display

13 Sep 25 – 18 Apr 27

National Gallery of Australia

Highlights recent acquisitions by artists from across Asia and the Asian diaspora in a range of media including paintings, prints, textiles, video, photography and multidisciplinary installation.

VICTORIA

Creative Acts: Artists and their inspirations

15 Aug 25 – 31 May 26

State Library Victoria

Features new commissions by visionary Australian creators alongside Library collection highlights that trace the spiritual connections, rituals and deeply personal quests behind artistic practice. Includes Peter Carey, Dr Chandrabhanu OAM, Dr Deanne Gilson, Barry William Hale and Bundit Puangthong.

SA

Touching the divine: Love and devotion in Asian art

28 Feb 25 – 26 Apr 26

Art Gallery of South Australia

Explores aspects of love and devotion expressed through art created in sacred contexts across

Asia. Featuring works of art from the AGSA collection this exhibition presents the divine and worldly aspects of devotion expressed through a wide diversity of media created in the context of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.

QLD

The God of Small Things: Faith and Popular Culture

20 Sep 25 – 5 Oct 26

Queensland Art Gallery

Centred around a rare collection of embellished oleographs by Raja Ravi Varma (India, 1848-1906), complemented by works from QAGOMA's contemporary Asian collection, the exhibition delves into the intersection between devotional imagery and popular culture, capturing the divine as a living part of everyday life.

TAASA TOUR: THE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE OF NORTHERN INDIA

devised by Christina Sumner

MAIN TOUR: 26 Oct- 9 Nov
(Delhi 4 nights; Lucknow 3 nights;
Varanasi 3 nights; Kolkata 4 nights)

Tour leader: John Zubrzycki, acclaimed author of seven books on India

An exhilarating, fully-escorted, culturally rich journey across northern India, travelling eastwards from historic Delhi to vibrant, cosmopolitan Kolkata, stopping in Lucknow, cultured city of the Nawabs, and Varanasi, holy city of Hinduism on the River Ganges.

In Delhi visit the Jama Masjid, commissioned by Shah Jehan in the 1650s; Mughal emperor Humayun's Tomb from the mid-1500s and Mehrauli Archaeological Park, with over 400 architecturally significant monuments. Visit three superb museums: the National Museum; the extensive Handcrafts Museum and the Sanskriti Kendra village complex housing the Museums of Everyday Art, Indian Terracotta and Textiles.

In Lucknow explore the cultural heritage of the Husainabad area, the grand Bara Imambara, the highly decorative Chota

Imambara complex and palatial La Martinière College. Lucknow's distinctive tabla and Kathak dance traditions are experienced at the museum of Lucknow Gharana.

In Varanasi a sunrise boat trip on the Ganges; visits to Kashi Vishwanath Temple, the Indo-Gothic Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Bharat Kala Bhawan Museum. Visit the UNESCO World Heritage Buddhist site of Sarnath and nearby Archaeological Museum, crammed with sculptural masterpieces, including the third century BCE Lion Capital, India's national symbol.

In Kolkata encounter its enthralling colonial heritage, including St John's Church, the infamous 'Black Hole of Calcutta' and St Paul's Cathedral. Visit the Indian Museum, with its classical Indian masterpieces; the Marble Palace, the most

famous of the stately mansions (rajbaris) of Bengal's land-owning gentry. Experience Kali puja festivities, including its brilliantly lit and multi-coloured temporary shrines (*pandals*). Visit the Weavers Studio and Workshop, a kantha embroidery centre, and Kumartuli, a traditional potters' quarter.

Pre- and post-tours are on offer as well:

Pre-tour 23-26 Oct: Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri, Sikandra Fort

Post-tour 9-12 Nov: Bhubaneshwar, Lingaraj Temple, Raghurajpur, Konark
Further details from Forward Travel.



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