

COLLECTING AND EXHIBITING CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART



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'Contemporary art and particularly Asian contemporary art is a very rapidly developing cultural language. We need to be part of these changes. We need to make use of the diversity that exists inside this country to help us strengthen the traffic of ideas between here and other parts of the world.'

Binghui Huangfu, from 'Exhibiting contemporary Asian art: a curator's perspective', Case Studies: Asia and the Contemporary World lecture series, AGNSW 2004

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Binghui Huangfu:

'Exhibiting contemporary Asian art: a curator's perspective'

Craig Judd:

'The Biennale of Sydney and the contemporary Asian artist'

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'AGNSW as an arena for practice: the Asian collections'

Articles

Jackie Menzies:

'The Nanhai trade'

'A lantern on the Domain'

from *TAASA Review: the Journal of The Asian Art Society of Australia*

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Suggested artists for study from the AGNSW permanent collection

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This case study is part of a series developed from the short course **Case Studies: Asia and the Contemporary World**, designed for secondary visual arts teachers and held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in August 2004. Over four weeks of lectures by curators, artists and educators, several unifying themes emerged relating to the collecting and exhibiting of contemporary Asian art. These themes have become the framing questions for this case study, which is supported in the Key Resources section by edited lecture transcripts and articles.

Syllabus content areas:

Practice: Critical / Historical / Making

Frames: Structural / Cultural/ Subjective/ Post Modern

Conceptual framework: Artist/ World/ Artwork /Audience

Audience:

Visual Arts (Stages 5 & 6)

Photographic and Digital Media (Stage 5)

Photographic, Video and Digital Imaging (Stage 6)

Duration:

2–10 hours

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Celebrating Asian Art and Culture

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IDENTITIES

'One of the catchwords that emerges in the 1990s when looking at Asian art and non-European art is the catchword of identity. Now interestingly enough, Jimmy Durham, one of the lynch-pins of the Biennale of Sydney, said, forget about identity, it doesn't exist, there's no point thinking about it anymore. But for a lot of artists, identity is still very important.'

Craig Judd, 'The Biennale of Sydney and the contemporary Asian artist', *Case Studies: Asia and the Contemporary World* lecture series, AGNSW 2004

> Do you agree or disagree with Jimmy Durham's comment on identity? Use at least two examples from the list below to support your case.

> Discuss how some of the following artworks from the AGNSW permanent collection represent the concept of identity:

- Liu Xiaoxian *Our gods* 2000
- Yasumasa Morimura *Slaughter cabinet II* 1991
- Anish Kapoor *Void field* 1989
- Montien Boonma *Untitled: two acts II* 1996
- Michiko Kon *Boot of shrimps* 1992

GLOBALISATION AND DIASPORA

• The term **diaspora** is derived from the Greek word meaning a scattering or sowing of seeds. The term is used to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional homelands, being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture.

• **Globalisation** is a term used to describe the changes in societies and the world economy that result from dramatically increased trade and cultural exchange.

> Why is the term diaspora used when discussing contemporary Asian art practice? Refer to at least two artists in your argument.

> In what way has globalisation influenced contemporary artists? Discuss an Asian artist who has been influenced by global themes. Investigate his or her work in your discussion.

• Read the transcript of Binghui Huangfu's lecture 'Collecting and exhibiting contemporary Asian art: a curator's perspective', which discusses the exhibition *Asian traffic* and consider the following:

> *Asian traffic* is a response to the 2004 Biennale of Sydney. How does the exhibition's curator Binghui Huangfu respond to the biennale's theme 'on reason and emotion'?

> Why did Binghui Huangfu name the exhibition *Asian traffic*? In what way is this a response to her comment, 'The use of contemporary art as communication of cultural change is one of Asian contemporary art's most apparent forms.'

> What is Binghui Huangfu's view of the influence of globalisation on the contemporary Asian artist? How does her exhibition respond to this point of view?

ORIENTALISM, OCCIDENTALISM AND THE EXOTIC

• Read the transcript of Craig Judd's lecture 'The Biennale of Sydney and the contemporary Asian artist'. Consider the following:

> Discuss the terms orientalism, occidentalism and the exotic. Refer to specific artists in your discussion.

> In what way can these terms be associated with the 2004 Biennale of Sydney theme 'on reason and emotion'?

> Investigate one artist Craig Judd refers to in his lecture and develop an in-depth study. Write a report on the artist's most recent exhibition. Discuss how the artist uses the theme of the exotic.

INTERNATIONAL ART SCENE

'...we have collections from Korea, China, Japan, India, our Southeast Asian neighbours, and while these collections are not encyclopaedic, they are now significantly rich and diverse for audiences to experience regional, chronological, thematic, religious and formal relationships within and amongst these objects. The interests of the connoisseur no longer dominate, although they certainly are still there and should be still there. Cultural imperatives and connections are being better translated for the viewer by the curatorial philosophy that underlies these displays.'

Dr Penny McKeon, 'AGNSW as an arena for practice: the Asian Collections', *Case studies: Asia and the Contemporary world* lecture series, AGNSW 2004

• Artworks by contemporary Asian artists are currently being collected by major art galleries around the world.

> What types of audiences are viewing these works?

> How might the context (time and place) affect the understanding of these works for these audiences?

> Do you think the different types of audiences distinguish alternate meanings of artworks?

• Select one artwork from the list below.

> Discuss the relationship between audience and artwork.

> What role could the viewer take to distinguish the meaning of contemporary art?

• Dadang Christanto *They give evidence* 1996–97

• Guan Wei *Revisionary* 1998

• Nam June Paik *Buddha game* 1991

• Yasumasa Morimura *Slaughter cabinet II* 1991

• Miwa Yanagi *Sachiko* from the series *My Grandmothers* 2000

THE ROLE OF THE BIENNALE

- The aim of a biennale is to showcase contemporary art, to challenge traditional thinking and to promote cultural exchange through the visual arts.

> How does a biennale exhibition challenge traditional or mainstream thinking?

> Investigate biennale exhibitions from around the world. Research the number and national origins of the participating artists. What contribution has the contemporary Asian artist made in these exhibitions?

> Choose an international biennale exhibition for an in-depth study. Collect advertisements, newspaper and magazine articles, press releases, catalogue essays and other related material to show a variety of approaches to interpreting this biennale exhibition. Specifically discuss the work of contemporary Asian artists.

left: Yin Xiuzhen *International flight* 2002
steel, used clothing
600 x 750 x 200 cm each

right: Emiko Kasahara *La Charme* 2001
synthetic hair, cloth, plywood, DVD, monitor



BIENNALE OF SYDNEY

The Biennale of Sydney is considered a major arts event in the Southern hemisphere.

‘People in our contemporary setting have moved from residing in a static environment to becoming souls in a constantly shifting transience...’

Yin Xiuzhen (China), artist, Biennale of Sydney 2004, *On reason and emotion*, catalogue of the 2004 Biennale of Sydney, p222

‘Her work raises questions about self-image and the relationships between body and mind, object and subject, artificial and natural, and the public and private – to show the complexity and diversity of our culture.’

Biennale of Sydney 2004 media kit describing Emiko Kasahara’s *La Charme* #3

- Read the Biennale of Sydney 2004 Online Education Kit www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/kits/biennale_04 and catalogue and consider the following:

> Compare the art practice and influences of Yin Xiuzhen and Emiko Kasahara. Use particular examples from the Biennale of Sydney 2004 and refer to the quotes above in your comparison.

‘The Biennale of Sydney, has since 1973, shown the work of 110 Asian artists. The majority of artists come from Japan, 67, 13 Korean artists, 11 Thai artists, 1 from Vietnam, 1 from India, 11 artists from China, 4 from Indonesia, 1 from Iran and 1 from Malaysia. Asian artists account for just over one tenth of the number of artists that have been included in the Biennale of Sydney since 1973.’

Craig Judd, ‘The Biennale of Sydney and the contemporary Asian artist’, *Case studies: Asia and the Contemporary world* lecture series, AGNSW 2004

- Research a body of work by a contemporary Asian artist that was exhibited in the 2004 Biennale of Sydney.
- > In what way has this artist explored the theme 'on reason and emotion'?
- > Why has the curator Isabel Carlos chosen this particular artist for the exhibition?

TRADITIONAL ART IN A CONTEMPORARY SPACE

- Investigate the arrangement of works in the AGNSW's new Asian galleries.
- > How has curator Jackie Menzies unified the traditional and contemporary collections?
- Read the articles below, visit the Asian galleries and consider the following questions:

Jackie Menzies, 'The Nanhai trade', *TAASA Review: The Journal of The Asian Arts Society of Australia*, vol 13, no 1, Dec 2004 (explains export ceramics in the AGNSW collection)

Jackie Menzies, 'A lantern on the Domain' *TAASA Review: The Journal of The Asian Arts Society of Australia*, vol 12, no 3, Sept 2003 (describes the new Asian gallery at the AGNSW)

- > How do collections begin? How do they evolve? Form an opinion on the future of the AGNSW Asian collection.
- > Where did the concept for the display of export ceramics come from? Give some examples of why these ceramics were produced and how they were used.
- > How did the Gallery acquire the collection of export ceramics?

- In the 19th century, Japanese export ceramics catered specifically for the European market.
- > Compare the two ceramics from the AGNSW permanent collection below. What are the aesthetic qualities of Japanese export ceramics (right) and traditional Japanese ceramics (left). In what way did these artists respond to their particular audiences?

- Jackie Menzies considers this quote by Picasso to be significant in understanding the Asian collection: 'To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present, it must not be considered at all.'

Terence Maloon (ed) *Picasso: the last decades*, exhibition catalogue, AGNSW Sydney 2002, p53 (originally published in *The Arts*, May 1923)

- > Why does Jackie Menzies feel so strongly about this quote?
- > How does the arrangement of artworks in the Asian galleries reflect this understanding of art?
- > What role does traditional Asian art have in the contemporary world?
- > What are the links and connections within the Asian collection?

- Consider the exhibition layout of the Asian galleries and the interplay of spaces and corridors.
- > Where are contemporary Asian artists drawing inspiration from – Western or other cultural traditions? Choose two contemporary artists and compare their bodies of work.

- Read the transcript of Penny McKeon's case study 'AGNSW as an arena for practice: the Asian collections'.
- > Discuss the evolution of the Asian collection.

left: Kato Shuntai (Japan, 1802–77) *Tea bowl* stoneware with Shino-type glaze, 7.3 x 11cm
Gift of Mr F Storch 1987 442.1987

right: Kanzan Denshichi (Japan, 1821–90) *Kutani ware vase* Porcelain enamel and gilt decoration, 24.8 x 14 cm
Gift of the Japanese commissioners at the International Exhibition 1881 2465

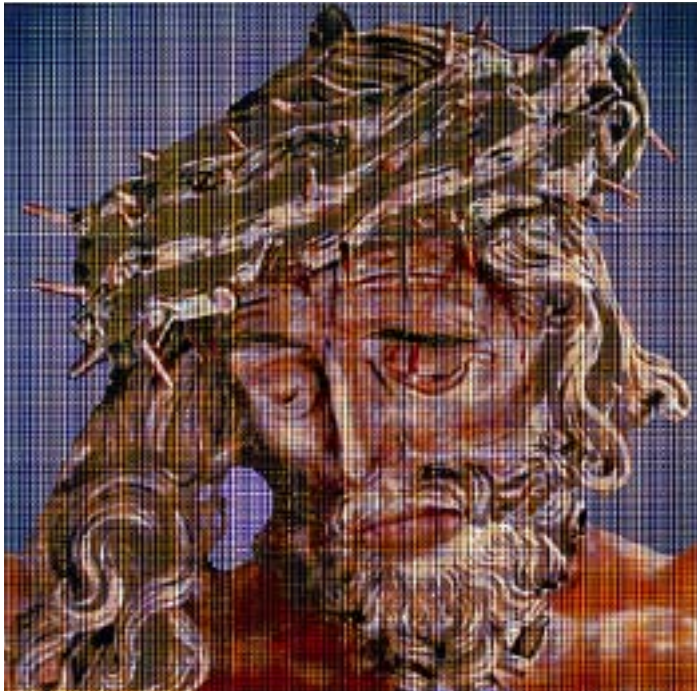




ANISH KAPOOR (India, England, b1954)

Void field 1989

four blocks of Northumbrian sandstone and pigment
106 x 330 x 330 cm installed (installation dimensions variable
according to room size)
Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1990
215.1990.a-d © Anish Kapoor



LIU XIAOXIAN (China, Australia, b1963)

Our gods 2000

18 type C photographs
100 x 100 cm each panel/photograph
Purchased with DG Wilson Bequest Fund 2000
168.2000 © LIU Xiaoxian



YASUMASA MORIMURA (Japan, b1951)

Slaughter cabinet II 1991

wood, lightbox, gelatin silver photograph
58 x 43 x 43 cm

Purchased with funds provided by the Young Friends of the
Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 1996
506.1996 © Yasumasa Morimura



MONTIEN BOONMA (Thailand, 1953–2000)

Untitled: two acts II 1996

brass
33.0 x 90.0 x 90.0cm
Purchased 2002
216.2002.a-m © Montien Boonma Estate



MICHIKO KON (Japan, b1955)

Boot of shrimps 1992

gelatin silver photograph
51.1 x 41.3 cm image; 60.7 x 50.8 cm sheet
Purchased 1995
205.1995 © KON Michiko



NAM JUNE PAIK (Korea, USA, b1932)

Buddha game 1991

television set, pages from a printed book, 2 gold leaf wooden
Buddhas, neon, antennae, 5 television monitors, laser disc
player and laser disc
147.3 x 92.7 x 59.7 cm
Purchased 2002
10.2002 © Nam June Paik



DADANG CHRISTANTO (Indonesia, Australia, b1957)

They give evidence 1996–97

16 standing figures holding clothes; figures made from terracotta powder mixed with resin/fibreglass; 22 pieces of clothing made from cloth and resin
height: 200 cm (male); 190 cm (female); 100 x 150 cm
Purchased 2003
337.2003.a-II © Dadang Christanto



SACHIKO

Even though I thought that I had become totally used to living alone by now,
yesterday, no matter how hard I tried, I just could not stand being in the house by myself.
It seemed as if the winter sunset had overtaken the entire world,
and was, little by little, scorching everything in its path.
I got up and drove to the airport, and, not surprisingly, got on the first airplane I could find.
I was trying to escape from the sun, but now I was the one chasing it.

Among all the skies I've seen so far, this is the most extraordinarily divine.
At this very moment, this is probably the most beautiful brightness.
Although I used to hope I would die while gazing upon such a heavenly sky,
my bearing witness to this brilliance right now makes my prior wish nothing but a trivial dream.

As I was about to depart from the airport, I called my friend Kiriko and
told her that I was on my way...and my, was she surprised!!
Since I chose this airplane at random, my trip has encountered quite a detour.
I wonder how many hours it will take to get to Iwata via Singapore?
Until I reach that far away island where Kiriko resides, I shall surrender myself to the flight.

MIWA YANAGI (Japan, b1967)

Sachiko
from the series **My Grandmothers** 2000

type C photograph, text
Purchased with funds provided by Naomi Kaldor, Penelope Seidler,
The Freedman Foundation, Peter & Thea Markus, Candice Bruce
& Michael Whitworth, Geoff & Vicki Ainsworth, Stephen Ainsworth,
Gary Langsford, Luca & Anita Belgiorio-Nettis and the
Photography Collection Benefactors' Program 2002
153.2002.2.a-b © YANAGI Miwa



GUAN WEI (China, Australia, b1957)

Revisionary 1998

26 panels; synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Installation dimensions variable
Purchased with funds provided by the
Rudy Komon Memorial Fund 1999
173.1999.a-z © Guan Wei

KEY RESOURCES

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LECTURE

EXHIBITING CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART: A CURATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Binghui Huangfu Director, Gallery 4A

Edited transcript of a lecture delivered 3 August 2004 as part of the *Case studies: Asia and the Contemporary world* short course, Art Gallery of New South Wales

ASIAN TRAFFIC: Official parallel event of the Sydney Biennale
4 June – 2 October 2004

Asian traffic was the Asia-Australia Arts Centre's contribution to the 2004 Biennale of Sydney. As an Official Parallel event, the centre presented an exhibition showcasing 30 of the most powerful and innovative Asian and Asian-Australian artists working in contemporary art today. As the title suggests, *Asian Traffic* implies exchanges and movement in contemporary thinking within and beyond the region. Like the traffic jams in any Asian metropolis, *Asian traffic* illustrates the density and depth of art that is being produced today. The many Asian artists moving out of and back into Asia are having a dramatic influence on centres once considered leaders in modern thinking. *Asian traffic* illustrates Asian culture and thinking as contemporary, diverse and constantly changing. <http://www.4a.com.au/asiantraffic.html>

I will use the *Asian traffic* exhibition currently on view at Gallery 4A as a case study to discuss some of the issues that impact upon Asian contemporary art practice. When we talk about the idea of traffic, one of the important phenomena affecting the traffic of today is diaspora. I will begin with the issue of diaspora and then explore the differences in motivation of contemporary Asian art.

It is interesting to talk about the diasporic experience and how it affects contemporary art. In fact the word has been used so often now that it has begun to sound like a social condition all of its own. In reality it is a circumstance which can affect cultural development in various ways and seems to be a formula based on place, time and the combination of cultures which are pushed together by the experience.

The more I think about the impact of the diaspora experience, particularly as it affects cultural developments and more particularly contemporary art as an expression of that development, the more I believe it is the individual response that makes it a positive or negative effector. Contemporary art is probably a peculiar realm in which to consider its impacts. Here in Australia we can see a number of different examples, some where that experience has been positive and others where the experience has been too confronting.

Maybe one of the most significant factors is the amount of choice somebody has had in becoming a part of a diaspora rather than the condition of the diaspora itself. My own experience is common with artists Guan Wei, Ah Xian and Shen Shaomin was coming to Australia by choice. I don't know if, when any of us arrived, we could have imagined that 15 years later we would still be here. At the time it was as much about simply being away from China and exploring the world. For us Tiananmen Square became a tuning point that allowed us to choose whether we

stayed or whether we went back.

There has been lots of discussion on the importance of being able to speak the language of your cultural origin. Clearly, for the group that came to Australia at the same time as myself, it was speaking the language of the new culture that was the issue. The notion that the language is a barrier really depends upon the individual. It also depends upon timing. For us at the time, we tended to continue doing what we had been doing in China but simply in a different environment. The influences on us of Western culture represented by Australia were far more visual than they were verbal. Our interpretations of Western culture were more like those of any group travelling in the world. Unable to engage in English, we discussed with each other our Chinese interpretations of what we were seeing. This I believe is more typical of a first generation experience than an idealised concept of rapid intercultural discourse.

Timing also becomes an important part this formula. I think the experience of Chinese expats who arrived in various parts of the world around 1989 and into the early 1990s was quite different from a broad experience of the diaspora. In a peculiar way, we were arriving at the time which had the potential of getting us opportunities that would not normally have been available for new immigrants. We arrived when being Chinese was seen as exotic rather than as a threat. We found it difficult to understand the Western curiosity for China and things post-Maoist as that was all we had ever known and did not see it as exceptional. Again it was timing that allowed us the choice to stay. Now I understand it was the conjunction of the embracing of multiculturalism in this country and the heightened exoticism of things Chinese, particularly after Tiananmen Square, that made our experience different from that of somebody not fitting this strange criteria. This is where the importance of choice comes in: we arrived in circumstances where we went from curious traveller to having the power to choose to stay or leave, caused by what happened around us. We already had our chosen artistic careers and even our own loose networking system which we had brought with us. This is not the case for the broader membership of any culturally defined diaspora and as such makes our experience the exception rather than the rule. This I now believe is in stark contrast to other diasporic experiences. Importantly, in contrast to the broader diaspora experience, we were determined to continue our artistic practice and so the usual economic and cultural difficulties were compensated for by the underlying clarity of what we wanted to achieve.

Our experience makes up only one aspect of the ideas of traffic that are considered in the *Asian traffic* exhibition. I think the Chinese experience in the late 20th century of becoming diasporic groups in various parts of the world has not been the same as the pressures on other groups in other times. The main difference is that we now have conditions that are underpinned by mobility and communication. This is hastening the notion of the trafficking in ideas, particularly those coming of and from an Asian base. There has never been a time before now when ideas can move so easily around the world. In relative terms it is simple to bring together discussions today featuring people from China, Europe and the Americas.

LECTURE

EXHIBITING CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART: A CURATOR'S PERSPECTIVE BINGHUI HUANGFU

The real question is how important is this traffic in ideas to the world community. We are certainly living in a time when cultural misunderstanding seems to be a cause for conflict as much as he or she ever has. The artist as activist is probably as relevant today as it ever has been. The major difference is that the scope of this activism can now exist on a global scale and the nature of that activism can take many forms. Part of the role, I believe, of diasporic cultural workers is their capacity to consider more than one culture at one time. It is within their power to promote understanding and highlight issues, be they positive or negative.

We developed *Asian traffic* as a response to this year's Biennale of Sydney. The central theme we were presented with was that of a geographic divide between emotion and reason. Having already agreed to make an exhibition parallel event for this biennale, I found myself wondering what relationship the theme of the biennale had to my understanding of contemporary art practice in Asia and, because of the positioning of the Asia Australia Art Centre, its impact upon diasporic Asian artists here. I came to the conclusion that I could not see much evidence for a correlation between philosophical stances and physical location. The traditional understandings of north-south and east-west, particularly as related to contemporary art practice, are rapidly disappearing.

It is the nature of contemporary art practice that it is constantly on the move. It is rare these days to find artists able to establish a practice and exist in one place. This being the case, the factors informing contemporary art are complex and multi-dimensional. Probably the most significant development in new art practice has been the emergence of contemporary art as world language. The only other example of such a language that I can think of was in the era of silent movies. This was a time when cultural expression could be experienced outside its cultural origins without being encumbered by language barriers. The movies themselves could be culturally very specific by relying on the visual rather than the verbal to give access to anyone wishing to penetrate their themes. I think that is the point we are at now with contemporary art.

It is interesting to consider where contemporary art comes from in Asia. Clearly our information age and the amount of intercultural contact we have had made it possible for contemporary art to find expressions globally. It is also now impossible to establish that what are seeing as contemporary art is any longer a purely Western construct. While it could be argued that the initial language of contemporary art in Asia was appropriation of Western postmodernist thinking, it has evolved into a form in which practitioners from non-Western cultures no longer feel the need to pay homage to their Western antecedents.

The use of contemporary art as communication of cultural change is one of Asian contemporary art's most apparent forms. I am often asked if there is a definable difference between contemporary Asian art and contemporary Western art. The more I consider the question, the more I realise that there is a difference and the difference is in the motivation of the artists. Contemporary Asian artists come from an environment that is undergoing extraordinary

change. This background influences their work and is underpinned by a belief that what they are doing has a real possibility of participating in those changes. It would be difficult to believe that Western artists truly think that they have any power to make social change. It is equally interesting to watch audiences as they react to an Asian contemporary art setting.

We have now been running *Asian traffic* for seven weeks now. We have the advantage of having a shop-front window in a very high pedestrian traffic area of Sydney. The response has been extraordinary. We have unashamedly used artists that can intrigue a passing audience and prompt them to enter that space and engage with the ideas that are being expressed. I think the proof of this philosophy has been an almost ten-fold increase in audience numbers visiting this exhibition together with a 15% increase in memberships of our association. We are seeing often 200 visitors a day. More significantly, not only are the general public coming into the space but also they are stopping and asking questions about the work on display.

The weekend before last I had a very pleasant experience of two elderly women coming into the gallery simply because they wondered why we had 80 babies' heads in the street-level gallery. When they came in, I took the opportunity to explain to them what the artist was trying to achieve. This meant talking about the issues of China's one child policy in China and adoption by foreigners, particularly of female children and those with birth defects. By extension this meant going into the potential complexities caused by changing Chinese population demographics. For both women this discussion put a very human aspect to social conditions in China, which previously they had only considered in passing. And they went on to spend 45 minutes in the gallery looking at and questioning the work of other artists. The artwork had touched them as human beings. For the artists, this could only be one of the satisfactory outcomes that can result from making expressions of one culture to an audience of another. I am also pleased to say that this was not an isolated incident but has proved to be a daily norm.

The passionate belief in the power of contemporary art to make social change seems to be reflected in the passion evident in the work itself. There seems to be a humanity existing in contemporary Asian art that causes people to want to understand. I believe that we are going through a time of rapid acceptance and then rejection of cultural difference. I am seeing from the reaction our audiences are having to the *Asian traffic* exhibition that contemporary art can and does have an activist role even in this Western setting.

In a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by its art commentator Peter Hill, I read that in his opinion this year's Biennale of Sydney and associated programs could be summed up as dealing with post-painterly abstraction. I stood with the staff of our centre as we looked at Thai artist Vasan's political indictment using traditional Thai shadow puppets of George Bush's foreign policy, Manites's *Pink man in paradise* wandering through a post-Bali bombing's vacant landscape, Shen Shaomin's eight-metre long, three-headed, eight-legged expression of a beast divided by

LECTURE

EXHIBITING CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART: A CURATOR'S PERSPECTIVE BINGHUI HUANGFU

human intervention in religious belief, and we could only say that clearly Peter Hill had not visited *Asian traffic*.

In fact, as I considered the proposition of putting together an exhibition of post-painterly abstraction emanating from Asia I realised how alien and difficult such a proposition would be. The idea of post-painterly abstraction relies on cultural dialogue based upon reinterpretations of past cultural practices. While I believe a strong thesis could be developed to say that contemporary Asian art is an extension of visual languages developed over the long history of Asian culture, I do not believe that the social imperative of contemporary Asian life would allow Asian artists to consider such an esoteric platform for very long. Rather Asian contemporary artists are using contemporary forms to continue the tradition of the visual being the art of activism.

Very little Asian contemporary art practice carries with it notions of reinterpretations of itself. The complex environment of change I spoke of earlier doesn't seem to allow artists to consider anything other than their direct reactions to the environments around them. By this I am not saying that Asian contemporary art is simply a platform to illustrate social issues. The language that has developed uses a rich subtlety to allow it to approach issues. This is not art of the obvious. In many ways contemporary art language taps into an Asian tradition of allusion. Contemporary art as practised by Asians has many similarities with traditional Asian poetry in the use of metaphor and similes.

The inclusion of this Asian expression seems to be a stop-start affair. In this country we are going through a time when our politicians are telling us that issues of cultural diversity are no longer issues to deal with. Both sides of the political spectrum are suggesting that we have achieved a form of cultural assimilation and it is now time to move on to the other things. This is at the same time that we are involved in conflicts that have at their root cultural misunderstanding. I believe that it is only via exposure to different ways of considering problems – particularly when these considerations come from different cultural standpoints – that we can begin to understand our collective humanity.

Asian traffic was deliberately intended to show the complexity of ideas arising from Asian perspectives. The exhibition does not provide a single view of the world. It shows a diverse range of concerns. Nor is it an end in itself but rather one part of an ongoing dialogue. It also shows that problems inherent in cultural difference are not as easily dismissed as our current politicians on both sides of the political fence may wish to believe.

I have said before that I believe that Asia is going to be the most important region influencing cultural development in this country for the foreseeable future. There is no such thing as an end to the discussion of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. The moment we believe these are non-issues will be the time we have decided to stop trying to understand.

I think that it is important, though, that we keep making opportunities to bring vibrant different ideas into our cultural discussions.

Contemporary art and particularly Asian contemporary art is a very rapidly developing cultural language. We need to be part of these changes. We need to make use of the diversity that exists inside this country to help us strengthen the traffic of ideas between here and other parts of the world.

It is important that we find opportunities to engage with the cultural thinkers who are making the living contemporary art that I am referring to. This is not done by simply having very high-profile established artists as the only representatives of alternate thinking. We need to establish a continuous traffic between alternative ideas and ourselves. This means that we need to be opening up avenues to constantly engage in new ideas from other cultures as well as see those ideas as essential to our own cultural development. Important to this mix is the appreciation of the diversity we have locally and encouragement of those local artists as a key to understanding different ways of thinking.

The non-Western contribution to Australian cultural development has been significant. I believe it will continue to be significant and I believe that contemporary art has an important role to play in these developments. I said earlier that few Western artists would honestly believe that they could make contributions to political and cultural change. Maybe the reaction we are seeing to the expressions demonstrated by the artists in the *Asian traffic* shows that it is possible for contemporary art to reassume that role.



Binghui Huangfu has an international reputation for her work with contemporary Asian arts practice. She was previously the director and curator of the Earl Lu Gallery, Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts, Singapore and has recently taken up the directorship of the Asia Australia Art Centre (Gallery 4A) in Sydney.

Binghui has curated major exhibitions of Asian contemporary art shown extensively in Asia, Europe and Australia. Exhibitions include *In and Out* (Chinese artists of the mainland and the diaspora), *Text & Subtext* (women's contemporary art), *Site + Sight – Translating Cultures* (exploring the impact of globalisation on visual art and culture), *Video Art From Asia, Next Move – Contemporary Art from Thailand* and *Science Fictions*.

Articles by Binghui have been included in *Art Asia Pacific*, *Australian Art Monthly*, *Asian Art News*, *The Observation* (New York) and *The New Observation* (China). She has written for a number of books including: *Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art*, the 1st Guangzhou Triennial, *Chinese Art at the Crossroads: Between Past and Future, Between East and West*, edited by Wu Hung. She has produced essays for more than twenty catalogues for galleries, museums and art organisations including the *Site + Sight* research book and the *Text & Subtext* research book.

Binghui was the curator of *Asian Traffic* a parallel exhibition at Gallery 4A for the 2004 Biennale of Sydney.

LECTURE

THE BIENNALE OF SYDNEY AND CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ARTISTS

Craig Judd Public programs/education coordinator,
Biennale of Sydney

Edited transcript of a lecture delivered 18 August 2004, as part of the *Case Studies: Asia and the Contemporary World* short course, Art Gallery of New South Wales

In terms of introducing contemporary Asian art to students, the key question of orientalism and occidentalism is still at play. In the school yard you would notice yourself that students are Asian. There's a lot more happening in this place Asia than just Asian-ness. There is no such thing as Asian-ness, so coming back to this subject, what I'm going to do is talk a little about how Europeans regard contemporary Asian art, because contemporary Asian art is actually operating within a language by in large that has been created and is still dominated by Europeans and Americans. Obviously, Asian artists interpret that dominant language for their own particular aims and their own particular locations of making.

So obviously when we're looking at and thinking about contemporary Asian art, as mostly Europeans, we also consider the question of exoticism. 'What makes something exotic?' is a question that you may ask your students. Exoticism is about recognition of excess, a possible recognition of confusion, a recognition of the precious, the rare, the new, and more particularly, the unknown. In terms of Eurocentric culture, what has been considered exotic throughout thousands of years has been nature, and the past. Nature is always going to be exotic because we can't contain it, we can't actually own it and we don't control it. The past is exotic because the past is over. We can recreate it in any way we like. Contemporary Australian artworks like the ponderously named *Libation vessels*, by Peter Tully, and *Gauguin sweet large beetles*, by the Sydney artist Fiona McDonald, illustrate, in my mind, ideas of excess. There is a sense of confusion because of that excess of information and excess of decoration. There is also an emphasis on the rare and precious in both these works.

Europeans started moving out of continental Europe in the 1200s, and from that time have collected natural objects and made them more exotic. Shells from the oceans in and around the Gulf of Bengal and near Malaysia were reworked in the 16th century and made more exotic, more extreme; they have been given more power by the European craftsman. I don't mean to invoke Freud here, but Freud says 'we define ourselves by what we are not'. Seventeenth-century Italian sculptures can be seen on a wooden base covered with shells not from Europe but collected elsewhere. We see an image of the savage and savagery. If you are interested in this area, one of the things that you can talk about with students this quality called 'otherness'. We define ourselves by what we are not. What makes me myself, what makes other people different? The person who has been the most influential in defining this

discourse is Edward Said, who died last year. Said was born an Egyptian, lived a lot of his time in England and America and wrote a very influential series of books and articles in the 1980s on what we now know as post-colonial discourse. Said exposed that we have defined the orient as backward and decaying and in need of European improvement. The orient is cast as eccentric, passive, silently different and quite often feminine.

In the 19th century orientalism was a very important force in European art, and it comes and goes through the 20th century. What is interesting about contemporary Asian art as a phenomenon is that it only starts to be recognised as a phenomenon in the late 1980s. There are broader socio-political conditions that enforce that interest. But a fascination with otherness works both ways, and this is what occidentalism is all about. The beautiful miniature paintings made in the Mughal courts of India are an example. The Mughal princes and potentates were very interested in European art and in fact they had an extensive collection of engravings. They imported into their courts European artists, who taught local artists the new techniques of illusionism. The techniques were readily accepted, developed and synthesised. In Indian miniatures you can see the work of many hands, but the point that I'm making is that orientalism, this fascination with the exotic and the unknown, operates as a dualism.

This brings me back to the 2004 Biennale of Sydney *On reason and emotion*. Its title is in fact a dualist proposition. Curator Isobel Carlos wanted us to consider that there are actually more connections between things that we think are known and unknown; there is a dynamic relationship between things that we think are in opposition, whether they be reason and emotion, or the north and the south. The Biennale of Sydney has since 1973 shown the work of 110 Asian artists. The majority of artists come from Japan, 67, 13 Korean artists, 11 Thai artists, 1 from Vietnam, 1 from India, 11 artists from China, 4 from Indonesia, 1 from Iran and 1 from Malaysia. Asian artists account for just over one tenth of the number of artists that have been included in the Biennale of Sydney since 1973.

Indeed, in the first couple of years of the Biennale, from 1973 to 1982, a major emphasis was put on showing work from the Asia-Pacific region. This emphasis has been taken over by the Queensland Art Gallery and the Australia-Pacific Triennial (APT). It will be interesting to see what Charles Merewether, the next curator of the Biennale of Sydney does in relation to his theme – *Contact zones* – in that he wants to show a lot of work from the Pacific, North Asia and the Pacific coast of Russia. It will be very interesting to see how that sits with the APT, or whether there is any conflict.

Probably the first most famous of Asian artists in the Biennale of Sydney is an artist called Nakaya, who made a fog sculpture in the Domain, the park opposite the AGNSW in 1976. The 1970s was when people started to look to Asia, for fashion advice, for political advice. There was still a lot of misinformation about what was actually happening in the, then, People's Republic of China.

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But now in the 1990s and into the new millennium we imagine the economic power of Japan, China and Asia generally as it is portrayed in a fantastic large-scale photograph of the Hong Kong stock exchange by Andreas Gersky. This cross-over between East and West is a very important quality to consider when you're talking to your students. We can observe a crossover and a series of appropriations of languages, in this case the language of pop art, in work by Japanese artist Tadanori Yokoo, who was in California and New York in the 1960s and 70s, and in the work called *Welcome to the world 1997* by the Luo Brothers.

So, what is it about the exotic? The exotic is inspirational because it's new, and a lot of artists in Asia have worked with a taste for the West. One of the most important artists involved in looking at the West is Yasumasa Morimura. He has worked on his series since the 1990s looking at desire. And here we see Cranak image of Judith and Halothanes and here you see the artist posed in a similar picture. Desire. How is desire expressed? Or in this work. Furthest away from me is the original work *Monavana* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and closest to me is the work by Morimura. Morimura was born in 1951, and it's quite interesting to note that the most advanced, the most developed contemporary art working within the discourses that we know in the West comes from Kyoto, rather than from Tokyo. Morimura and Miwa Yanagi live in Kyoto, which is the old imperial capital, the site of culture.

How do you define Asian-ness? The question comes up in my mind all the time. Is Yoko Ono an Asian artist? Is she a European artist? What are these classification systems doing? Yoko Ono's *Exit* appeared in the 2000 Sydney Biennale in the central court at the AGNSW. Yoko Ono wanted us to use native trees coming out of the coffins, but because unfortunately native trees in Australia do not grow indoors, the trees that we planted in the coffins kept on dying, creating a new sense altogether of the work which was meant to have an idea of re-growth and re-birth. Yoko Ono's career has been going on since the late 1950s. She has been involved in the Fluxus group in Europe, was quite a well-known artist in Europe and in England in the 1960s. So, is she Asian or European or English? What is her work about?

One of the catchwords that emerges in the 1990s when looking at Asian art and non-European art is identity. Interestingly enough, Jimmy Durham, one of the lynch-pins of the 2004 Biennale of Sydney, said, forget about identity, it doesn't exist, there's no point thinking about it anymore. However, for a lot of artists, identity is still very important. Also in the 2000 Biennale of Sydney is the work of Yayoi Kusama (b1929), whose early works date from the 1950s. Yayoi Kusama's mother didn't want her to be an artist and constantly destroyed her work. Most of her work, indeed the development of the dot motif, was a way to destroy and obliterate the memory of her mother. In 1958 she escaped to America, where she gained quick notice of critics and artists alike with her meticulous and obsessive technique. Her work was juxtaposed against that of Agnes Martin at the time.

But in the 1960s she started to work with more problematic sculptural pieces that combine various references. These

accumulation pieces are dealing also with excess, with the exotic, with the unknown. Yayoi Kusama is very, very important for the popularisation of pop art and pop ideals in Europe, particularly through the 1960s when she organised performance works there. In the late 1980s she finally returned to Japan, where she lives in a mental institution, because she's taken care of. She's a princess, quite literally, she's a Japanese princess. That also accounts for the opposition of her mother in relation to her art practice. But this opposition to women is quite a strong cultural force in Japan in contemporary art.

The Kusama works shown in 2000 were the *Infinity field*, a reworked version of this work which was at the MCA, and some balloons that were at Customs House. Her work was among the most popular of the works in the 2000 Biennale. Yayoi Kusama made a memorable appearance here. She didn't speak but she sat watching everyone looking at her and looking at her work.

In the 2002 Biennale, again in terms of popular appeal, I would pick the *My grandmothers* series by Miwa Yanagi. The AGNSW has bought a number of these for its permanent collection, a testament to the skill and taste of Judy Annear, whose exhibition *Zones of love* at the Museum of Contemporary Art (1991) is probably the most successful and the most intriguing exhibition of contemporary Asian art in Australia. Miwa Yanagi has a website which is called 'My Grandmothers' where you can read the texts that accompany the images. Miwa Yanagi's early works also deal with the role and position of women in Japanese society. In many ways, these texts present a very idealised view of women ageing, women in Japanese culture, their freedom and the potential of their life in contemporary Japanese society. The texts were developed in collaboration: Miwa Yanagi consulted lots of young girls and asked them what they wanted to be when they were old, and then she gathered together all of their ideas and drew up these texts. She actually used some of the women to pose for *My grandmothers*. The series that she made before this was one of elevator girls, and rather than women being active, they were passive. They were almost like automatons in the world of the department store. Interestingly enough Miwa Yanagi has gone on to develop this series. She has made a fantastic video work also called *My grandmothers* using women who are in their mid 80s and she's asked them to sing songs that they knew as young girls. But their voices are actual voices of 14 to 15 year old girls. There is this strange discrepancy between the visual images of older women with the voices of the young.

Yanagi is very intrigued with how, in some European cultures, older women are much more respected. In the *My grandmothers* series we see Yuka, the woman who was very rich and went around the world with the youngest, most handsome men with her gold teeth flashing, and Minami, who made money from having her own theme parks. All of these are images of a world of the future, a more positive world of the future than is perhaps possible in the reality of contemporary Japan.

Interestingly enough, and this is quite significant, Miwa Yanagi lives in Japan. Most of the other contemporary women artists only

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become known as Japanese artists in New York or Europe. They actually see their Japanese-ness by their distance. Other words that crop up a lot in the 1990s are 'diaspora' and 'migration'. How do they affect people's view of the world and obviously their art? These are quite good questions, I think to ask your students.

An artist who has lived away, quite self-consciously, from Japan really for the last 15 years has been Emiko Kasahara, whose work *Pink* and *La charme no 3* was included in the 2004 Biennale of Sydney. The Queensland Art Gallery has a collection of marble carvings by Emiko Kasahara, which deal with the same themes as the Biennale work, that is with ideas of inside and outside, the artificial and the natural. In *La charme no 3* there is a very deliberate juxtaposition of the colours with the drained blond fake hair. As the title suggests, this is the third time this work has been shown. 'La charme' is the name of a brand of cheap cosmetics manufactured in China and sold in Japan. What do cosmetics do? They protect, they mask – they question the artificial and the natural. Emiko Kasahara has asked young women to hang out in these circles of fake hair. These women are types of women: the business woman, the school girl, the lesbian, the Aboriginal. All of these women have their hair dyed the same colour as these hair circles. The hair circles are placed in a rough equivalent to a Zen stone garden in the Ryoanji temple in Kyoto. There's a real foreignness to Emiko Kasahara's work, and when the models go, audiences can see a trace of the performance in the plasma screen behind.

Pink is series of photographs. Emiko Kasahara paid a group of 40 women to have pap smears and asked the gynecologist and the women for photographs of their cervixes which were enlarged and hand-coloured. Again we see the theme of inside outside, the hidden and the revealed. Julie Ewington, who is the head of Australian art at the Queensland Art Gallery gave a very impressive paper about Emiko Kasahara's work and this particular installation. She said that, significantly these circles of hair are like lily-pads, and the lily is quite an important motif in Japanese and Chinese art because of the way it grows and where it grows. And also, the conjunction of the *Pink* series with the circles of hair relates almost to lotus flowers and the bloom of a flower generally. By the way, pink in Japanese refers to sex, the sex industry.

Also dealing with pink, but in a more overt way is the Korean artist Yun Suk Nam. Yun Suk Nam is an artist who was born in 1937 and is one of the elder stateswomen of contemporary art in Korea. Her work also deals with the position and role of women in society. She is interested in mothers and grandmothers and what they do in the home. However, all of her work has an air of threat. You wouldn't want to sit down on the couches and chairs in amongst this beautiful treasure as they are covered with hooks. She often juxtaposes these expressive figures with manufactured, quite deliberately European furniture. If you look closely the furniture appears somehow de-stabilised, given an animation with the fine points. There is an air of fetishness, an air of threat in her work. Yun Suk Nan is a very interesting artist in relation to recent developments.

An artist whose work you may have seen in the glasshouse of the Royal Botanic Gardens is Koo Jeong-a. She is a Korean artist who is based in Paris. Her work has been called an intimate psycho-geography. She maps spaces. And if you're thinking about talking about the effect of diasporas and migration and globalisation, one of the key themes that emerges in contemporary Asian art and Asian art that is made outside of Asia is habitation. We can see questions of how habitation affects the psyche, how it affects experience, how we can mark habitation, that is, lived experience. This is the interest of Koo Jeong-a. She literally moves into the exhibition space where she has her works and she does these quite subtle and humble interventions into that space. Think about your own home: you know intimately the stain on the carpet, when it happened, or the scratch on the wall, or the stove door that doesn't close exactly but you can get it to work anyway. They are all signs of habitation. They are quite subtle and intimate. These are subtle and intimate works, too. You have never seen a camembert used as a light before or a series of leads used to indicate a garden environment. Koo Jeong-a lived for six weeks the glasshouse of the Royal Botanic Gardens. We are in the process of shipping back to the artist Paris all of the dust, all of the detritus. She doesn't want to let go of these traces, these marks of the time that she has spent in this room. When she lived in this large space she made coloured paper by drawing on paper with chalk, and stuck it to the wall. She also created other markers of her experience in that space related to her relationship to the birds that came in, her relationship to people that looked into the building. If you went into that space you'd see these sorts of strange codes, strange interventions of space, masking tape, cut paper. In other parts of the room there'd be little potato chips arranged very carefully almost like a code. What we are looking at is a trace of a performance, a trace of habitation. It is almost archeological, almost ethnographic, but it is ephemeral, just for the moment.

More permanent is the work of Yutaka Sone (b1965), a Japanese artist who lives mostly in Europe. In his works made in the late 1990s Sone asked Chinese craftsmen to carve this marble amusement park. He likes to put these and other marble environments in a garden setting. So you get a contrast of hard and soft, you get a play of surfaces, of the living and the dead, quite possibly. He is more well known for his performance works. In the 2002 Biennale, we had a repetition of the *Throw of the dice* performance in which dice were thrown down the steps of the Sydney Opera House into the forecourt. In an earlier version performed in Stuttgart a couple of the dice unfortunately knocked over an old woman and a pregnant woman. In the Las Vegas performance he had the dice lifted by helicopter and dropped in the desert. Meanwhile there's a posse of 80 men on horseback to see where the dice fell. The dice are made out of foam. His other performance works are quite interesting. His most famous work is called *The birthday party* where he goes to 70 different houses and has 70 different birthday parties where people sing him 'happy birthday'. So his work is deliberate and he is playing into a whole range of Eurocentric languages of art – abstraction, dadaism, lots of things.

A Korean artist whose work has become much loved because of

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its high finish and his attention to craft skills is Do-Ho Suh. He was born in Seoul in 1962 and has lived most of his life in New York. His work started to become known in the late 1990s because of its combination of accumulation and absence. You may have seen his *Blue-green bridge* 2000, which speaks about the threshold and the journey. However in his work of the 2002 Biennale, which was called *The world may be fantastic*, he said that he was travelling so much he didn't know where he was. What he wanted was to have a trace or sense of his permanent location, so he had his New York apartment made in silk so it could fit into a suitcase. In this work we look to Claes Oldenburg, but we also look to a record of the effects of globalisation and international and intra-national travel. We can also consider craft skills and the role of the artist as a mediator and negotiator, rather than as the original maker.

An artist whose work was in the Biennale of Sydney 2004 is Yin Xiuzhen, who is one of a whole group of artists to emerge in Beijing in the early 1990s. She is very interested in the effects of globalisation in the city of Beijing and its changes are one of her main subjects. She is also interested in how community can be represented in art. A piece that she had in Beijing called *Peking view* deals with memory and the changes of the cityscape. What you see is a woman on top of a building looking at people playing in the park in perhaps more happy, more rigorously communist days. The work that she is more well known for is animating domestic objects with fabric, as in the suitcases she made for the 2004 Biennale of Sydney. Again, the map behind the suitcases relates to the suitcases in the foreground. In terms of the display of this work, the artist chose to have the work on the floor. She chose not to have it on plinths, so that people could see it. The suitcases represent different cities of the world, indicated on the map behind. They are made with fabric donated from those cities. The work also had a sound element which was largely lost in the through traffic of the display.

If you think about habitation as a subject in contemporary art, what is the most obvious sign of our habitation? It is the rubbish that we throw out at night, the clothes that we wear and the smell of ourselves on those clothes. Clothes are the most intimate contact that we have. This work relates to intimate contact, but external contact as well. Suitcases are containers. They are not only containers of fabric, but they are containers of memory. This work looks back to *arte povera*, the poor art of Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. Originally these works were hung above a factory in Singapore and the workers donated their clothes to cover the metal frames. In terms of the work in relation to the theme *On reason and emotion*, Isobel Carlos wanted to ask audiences to think about the true function of objects. These 747s are containers of people, that's what they do. This work in some ways softens the harshness of the machine, the aeroplane.

Finally, on a lighter note, is the work of Cang Xin from the 2002 Biennale. He has been going around the world licking things. In his series 'communication', he has done a whole series of quite interesting almost abject performance pieces. Now none of us would like to do this, this artist is paying homage. It also an

intimate communion with his environment. Cang Xin came to make this project when he was going through the streets of Beijing and to the markets with his mother, and he noticed that some of the stalls, on certain days, had flags, different flags hanging. He asked his mother what that was about and she said that this is the day that some spirits can be released if you can perform the right ritual acts. In Daoism, all material objects are invested with the souls of people who have passed on, and at certain times of the year you can release those souls by performing ritual acts like this. So even though many contemporary Asian artists are working within a Eurocentric contemporary art discourse, they are also developing and reworking those discourses for their own ends and for their own purposes.

To wrap up, I began my talk by saying that there are lots of classifications and lots of things to draw students' attention to. I think that one of the most important things for students to look at is the way Asian artists are using and enhancing and developing Eurocentric discourses, of which they are very much part and parcel.



Craig Judd is co-ordinating curator of art at the Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery and was education and public programs manager, Biennale of Sydney until 2005. He coordinated dynamic programs of lectures, performances, screenings, artists' talks, and web casts for the Biennale of Sydney. In addition he has produced a number of education resources documenting the past three Biennale of Sydney exhibitions. Also a curator, his art historical exhibitions – *Wild Thang: Post Pop from the MCA*, *People and Destiny: George Lambert and Federation* – have toured New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland regional galleries. He was also the coordinating curator of *The Arts of Islam: Treasures from Kuwait* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, as well as co-curator (with Amanda Lawson) for *The Gold Project* Bathurst Regional Gallery. Craig Judd writes extensively on contemporary and historical art in catalogue essays and feature articles and lectures in art history throughout New South Wales.

LECTURE

AGNSW AS AN ARENA FOR PRACTICE: THE ASIAN COLLECTIONS

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Edited transcript of a lecture delivered 25 August 2004, as part of the *Case Studies: Asia and the Contemporary World* short course, Art Gallery of New South Wales

I think this short course is a really good initiative and I am particularly pleased to see Asian art being given some oxygen and visibility. It is a great pleasure to talk about the Asian collections and their potential for visual arts and design teachers in secondary schools. I am going to take a slightly unexpected spin on this. I want to talk initially from a personal perspective or, if you're sitting there ticking off your syllabus components, the subjective frame. But it is really just my personal perspective.

I'm old enough to have witnessed a significant slab of the evolutions of the Art Gallery's Asian collection and the manner of its display. This interests me because the evolution of how and even where the collection is located in many, many ways reflects the rise of our national consciousness regarding these objects of material culture and their significance for an Australian audience. And as teachers, that's an important subtext of a lot of the things that we are about.

When I was a young child, my mother and I would make an annual pilgrimage to the Art Gallery of New South Wales from the suburbs. We'd come by bus, and then by train and finally on foot from our home in Greenacre in the south-west. This was the height of adventure and exotica for me at the age of five in about 1954. The Art Gallery was a more modest cultural repository then. We had the sandstone and the reliefs and the *Fortunes of war* and the *Fortunes of peace*. And we had, of course, the beautiful Domain setting. But once you walked through the door and passed through that cave-like foyer, the interior presented a rather incomplete environment for this member of the public. I recall vividly how hot the Art Gallery was, because there was no climate control in those days and at least part of the roof was constructed of metal.

Mother and daughter would meander around the 19th-century wing, renewing acquaintances with familiar works such as *Bailed up* by Tom Roberts, *The sons of Clovis* by Everest Luminas and the aloof neoclassical marbles which were then dotted around the European display. Of course, *The Queen of Sheba* by Edward Pointer and *Chaucer at the court of King Edward III* by Ford Maddox Brown also made up the real art in the Gallery for me. It was awe-inspiring and I was gob-smacked. I'd sit there, a very small five-year-old with these big works that had lots of figures in them that looked so awesomely real. And of course one of the works that still fascinates me in a slightly ambivalent way is Alfonso de Novell's *Defense of Rourke's Drift* 1879, which very much punctuates the main part of the European gallery as we see it today.

After we'd done all that, in about an hour or so, we'd find ourselves at the end of the European collection, standing before a modest wood-framed doorway into a small, square gallery. It was more of an annex really. Housed within the glass cabinets of this gallery was a very, very modest collection of oriental art. All of it was cased, as I recall, behind glass. Today, that gallery is still there: it is behind the Fairfax Gallery and, if you walk in, it's got a nice little suite of mostly Netherlandish portraits and landscapes that are of a fairly intimate scale and so they benefit well from that smaller space. When you walk through the Gallery as I did as a child, and as I just did this afternoon before we started, there is a big plaque over the top of the door which commemorates the completion of the first part of the Gallery. In talking about consciousness and values, it very much tells us where this was as a cultural institution in the 1950s. The plaque was dedicated by Viscount Hamden and names Jacob Garrard – Jacob Garrard may well be one of the footnotes of history for most of us, but he was the Minister for Public Instruction in the 1890s. This Gallery came under the authority of what would have been the equivalent of today's Department of Education and Training. And to that point, that was as much of the Gallery that was actually complete.

I was, as a small child drawn to these holdings. They seemed to me very aloof and somewhat enigmatic. They certainly were exotic because they were mostly Japanese ceramics, bronzes and that wonderfully obsessive cloisonné enamel work and enamel ware. What I didn't realise until I opened the excellent catalogue that's been produced by the Art Gallery to mark the opening of the new Asian galleries, was that this plaque, which was commissioned in 1879 was matched by the age of the ceramics and the other objects that were in these glass cases. They entered the collection in 1879, having first been displayed at the Sydney International Exhibition of that same year, which was housed in the Garden Palace in what is now the Domain across the way.

This was Sydney's first public collection of Asian art objects. Just as everything that is now historical once upon a time was cotemporary, it was a contemporary collection. I think that's really interesting. In terms of the values that were being projected we know that Prince Albert, the Prince Consort in England, had initiated London's Great Exhibition of 1851 with the view of bringing together the best of industry and manufacture, of design and craft, to showcase the British Empire and also to give a bit of a boost to industry. Just as our modest little group of ceramics and bowls and other vessels found its way into the AGNSW, so the core of the great exhibition in the Crystal Palace became the beginning of the Victoria & Albert Museum, or the South Kensington Museum as it was known at the time. There's a kind of an echo here. It's not an echo that's coincidental; I think it is quite deliberate in terms of us as this antipodean outpost of Empire trying to emulate and live up to the standards of mother country.

Now I can recall my attraction. The intimacy of the space was really neat for a child, but also the objects were very puzzling. They were obviously rare and precious because they were behind glass. They were safe from curious hands and careless gestures.

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But that lent them two qualities that were difficult for me: one was their remoteness and the other was a kind of enigmatic absence of meaning. Obviously these things had been made by human hands and they were very skilled and well crafted, but clearly they were also meant to be used for things, and some of the uses were not particularly obvious to an Anglo kindergarten or year 1 student. They were so different from the works in the rest of the Gallery, and indeed the space itself was so different – such a little kind of comma against the sentence that was the rest of the space. I could not discern their meaning and I couldn't necessarily understand their purpose. Looking back with the wisdom of hindsight, this is not surprising. This was the age where Australia itself was looking to England and Britain for inspiration, for values and ideals and the era of the Menzies Liberal/National government and the White Australia policy. So the objects were kind of culture-less in many ways and my subjective response to them was, unless you were a connoisseur, which in itself is a kind of subjective set of expertise, they were really opaque. The idea of the culture that sustained them, the Japanese culture that sustained them, was not evident. And of course the signage which, as we walk around the Gallery these days is discreet, but is there, was distinctly absent. That was an era when didactic wall panels or extended labels really had not been thought of yet.

So that's the beginning of Asian art and my journey. I suppose, my mother and I through our own interests taught ourselves in a funny ad hoc kind of a way. In 1962 the Sydney Cooper gift of Chinese ceramics came to the Gallery. This is an installation shot of those things when they were somewhat later displayed upstairs in the level that is now Education and Public Programs offices. Sydney Cooper is one of those rare things in Sydney cultural circles – a beneficent philanthropist – so that was an interesting move. Somebody had collected these things, held them as precious and dear and then gifted them to the public. But we still had at that time, 1962, a collection that was very much formed through the eyes of one enthusiast. It reflects passion, it reflects preference and taste and his knowledge, but it doesn't generalise to a sort of a textbook collection, which of course is what many museums aspire to. These were the objects that we scrutinised in my high school years, and we looked at them under the somewhat pejorative classification of 'non-European'. So Asian art had its place determined by syllabus documents.

Fast forward to 1979, where the brief and glorious Whitlam administration, which had so boldly recognised the People's Republic of China and confirmed a commitment to a National Gallery in Canberra, building the collection before the building itself was complete. That administration has come and gone, but culturally our perception of our place in Asia has changed irrevocably. The first round of bicentennials, in this case the 1770–1970 anniversary of Captain Cook's southern journeys made a perfect excuse for refurbishment and extension of our civil cultural organisations, including the AGNSW and the bicentennial extension was undertaken. By 1979, a more business-like department of Asian art, as we see here, was established under the patronage of the then new director, Edmond Capon, who

came here straight from being the keeper of Asian art at London's Victoria & Albert Museum. So there's a very faint echo of an earlier moment there. The Art Gallery now had a state of the art climate control system, and was included in the international loop of travelling exhibitions. With these new resources, teachers incorporated Asian content into their programs of work and into their excursion destinations. Syllabuses and HSC examinations from about 1978 prescribed the inclusion of some still non-European content study in the senior years. Anyone who was around then, in either their capacity as a student or as a teacher, will remember that it was very regionally set up. China and Japan, pre-Columbian, the Americas, India. You were then expected to become kind of a junior Sherman Lee of expertise in which every one of those regions that your teacher determined would be studied.

By 1998 the serene and contemplative zone at the right-hand side of the second level was well and truly established. Paradoxically, at the moment that these collections became more substantial and accessible to the public, the cycle of curriculum and syllabus development changed. The relevance of their study diminished in favour of focus areas of Australia, Art and Culture, Media and Design. Yes, I know Asian cultures are in there somewhere, but they were not particularly powerful or targeted and tended to be reduced to one of the eight plates in the second half of the paper. So there was a bit of a lottery implicit in that. It is on the platform of the 1998 wing literally and metaphorically, that the Art Gallery's luminous pavilion opened at the end of 2003. So we now have this gorgeous creature. While it is difficult to track some of the earlier iterations of Asian art as represented in this museum, it is an interesting thing to perhaps contemplate with students because you have, just as when I was here in 1954, the grand façade with just a tin shed behind it, we now have a new part of the organisation that's having a playful dialogue with the rest of the architectural vocabulary. It is transparent and translucent, it sits atop this very solid, stodgy classical pile, it plays with the high modern rhetoric of the grid and yet at the same time it is playfully undercutting or subverting its own structure. I have come to think that it is useful, to not just look at the objects inside the white cube, but to consider and draw to the attention of our students, the white cube itself.

There are a couple of salient points for educators in these four Asias of the AGNSW Asian collection. The first is that from the beginning, this is a contemporary collection. Even though that might have been rather instrumentally construed in terms of manufacture and craft, it is still an important focus for us, not least because we are a neighbour in the Asian region. It is also a significant part of the art educational mission to make each generation of students familiar with and comfortable with their own cultural time and milieu. I guess everybody has a great aunt lurking around somewhere, I certainly do, who thinks that 'all the art today is so awful, it's so ugly, it's loud and I can't put it over my fireplace in the living room'. OK, if you're 85, we can't teach old dogs new tricks, but if you're 18, there's a bit of a tragedy implicit in that.

It also behoves museums to conserve and protect the objects of ancient cultures and I think that in this post 9/11 era that is evermore

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critical. Cultural objects are becoming increasingly symbolic targets of terrorism and dissenting violence. While we protect the historically venerable, the museum must introduce and remind its public that the cultures from which objects come are living, continuously evolving entities. In Australia, in our lifetime we've seen this happen with Indigenous art. Indigenous art has gone from being in the basement of this institution to having the whole rear end, the grounding part of the Gallery. Yiribana displays contemporary and historical Aboriginal art side by side according to various sensible connections, that don't necessarily entail a timeline.

Lately we have seen, particularly with the new Asian galleries, the cultures of our own regional neighbours becoming a similar centre of attention. And of course the Art Gallery is one act in a cultural set of repositories that go from the National Gallery of Victoria, with its refurbished holdings, the National Gallery of Australia, which has a wonderful collection of particularly Indonesian art which it intends to focus upon and, of course, the Queensland Art Gallery with its Asia-Pacific Triennial, which allows it to add significant masterworks to its collection each three years. We really have quite a coherent repository and resource for ourselves, both in the exhibitions in those places themselves, in their websites and in the catalogues that are produced. It is not beyond an art department's resources anymore to make Asian art a doable thing.

The second point for us, as educators, is that cultural artefacts are constructed by a society's view, not only of the object itself, as a valued and valuable thing, as something that is rare, but also by public understanding of the culture and people from which those objects originate. I gave you my anecdotal experiences of a five year old to show how opaque that can be. Thus the museum balances a double obligation, and so do we. Schools and museums mirror community understandings and values, while simultaneously working to amend, evolve and expand those understandings. In the 1980s for example, I was sometimes frustrated by this collection with its continuing reliance on the museum vitrine as we saw, or the glass case, which continued to aestheticise the object. I am not saying that is a bad thing in itself, but it is difficult if the aestheticisation – the treating of a thing as something that is exquisite and uniquely, rarely, well crafted and the best one of its kind – is done to the neglect of the meaning and purpose of that object within some cultural base. Then I think it's really difficult to have an emotional connection with it.

Now to balance that, there have been many significant historical and contemporary shows at the Art Gallery that have spotlighted Asian culture. The recent Japanese *Seasons* show, which coincided with the opening of the new wing, the *Art of surface: contemporary Japanese painting*, which was put on here in the late 70s, the imaginatively titled *The Chinese exhibition* of 1977 which showcased the jade princess and the entombed warriors are only a really small sample. If we look at the *Celestial silks* show that's on now, you can see this tradition of really splendid, I would dare to say 'blockbuster' shows, is continuing. The latest edition of *Asian Art* has a glowing review and description of that show and its significance internationally in terms of showcasing Asian costume. At least we get a sense of

'somebody wore this' and 'this symbolises something'. You can see wonderful hats and hat knobs and go back and look at the court paintings in the lower part of the Gallery to see how this particular official looked wearing those accessories.

The Gallery has really opened up accessibility with its wonderful characters that operate on the weekend – the temple guardian who comes out and startles young children (I had no such diversion in my day) and then takes them through as a living interpreter or translator, a guide. There are things that we can connect to from our professional past, or our set of interests that we can match with those things that are now available to us. The opening of this wing and the very moving work *They give evidence* by Dadang Christanto in the temporary exhibition space marks the shift. It certainly did for me. I was fortunate enough to be given a walk through of this gallery before it was fully installed and my goodness! The installation was only half up and I got a genuine lump in my throat and had to drop back from my colleges because I thought I was going to embarrass myself. It was so incredibly moving. And the connection that was established was instantaneous. Likewise Liu Xiao Xian's *Our Gods* 2000 represents the Christ and the Buddha, which as you walk up close realise are each made of pixilated, miniature images of the other. That is a popular work to talk about with students.

My old quibbles from my teacher's college days about why the Asian gallery was the only gallery in this place that had a carpeted floor, why everything was behind glass cases and why the lighting was dim have now been swept away. There is a genuine connection, not only between the works on display, but through the temporary exhibition space dedicated to Asian art. The Nam June Paik exhibition shown there earlier this year is an example of how we as educators have an opportunity to craft for our students experiences of sustained instances of contemporary art practices that resonate with what our artists here are doing, and of course the relationship between the permanent collection, the temporary shows and recurrent events like the Biennale are quite striking. The new Asian handbook tells us that we have collections from Korea, China, Japan, India, our Southeast Asian neighbours, and while these collections are not encyclopaedic, they are now significantly rich and diverse for audiences to experience regional, chronological, thematic, religious and formal relationships within and amongst these objects. The interests of the connoisseur no longer dominate, although they certainly are still there and should be still there. Cultural imperatives and connections are being better translated for the viewer by the curatorial philosophy that underlies these displays. At the Art Gallery, exhibitions do not stand alone. A diverse range of community and enrichment events, including this one tonight and Art After Hours each Wednesday now bracket what you see on the wall. The white cube is being challenged I think by the seminars, lectures, the film programs, the short courses, such as you are doing, the family days on Sunday, which really are quite a different look in the Gallery. There is more of an interactive community happening here. And, of course, if you come to the Gallery on any weekday, a significant part of that community are students from primary and

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high school who are seeing what the museum can do best: the artwork up close, personal and in its original state.

All of these things signal one of the critical responsibilities of museums and galleries, and this, I think, is critical to our work – the role of the museum as an arena in which to contest and debate issues of importance and concern. In this endeavour, museum and educator are allies. When such momentous shifts are occurring on the global stage, it becomes vital to know and understand not simply the objects of cultural traditions and practice, but through those objects, to recognise the people who made them, who use them, who value them as part of their lives. Objects have lives beyond their original purpose and maker. You only have to think of African art to see how that has worked over time. This is the enduring relevance of the Asian collections to the educator. The opportunity that they afford for us to talk about people that are sometimes stereotyped by our media, by our politicians, and don't have the opportunity to talk for themselves.

I want to close with something that kind of comes from my journey, and has evolved from my first encounter all those years ago with some exotic objects in a Gallery annex in glass cases. The personal and intimate nature of much of the art, craft and design of Asian regions is singular. I've brought along with me three small objects from my own 'Asian collection'. I have a glass snuff bottle, that's painted on the inside with two landscapes with cranes, a wooden toggle, or inro, in the form of a very punk, anatomically correct boar/pig, and another inro of two circling fishes. Just pass them around to get a sense of the objects while I talk. Each of these objects is very modest; nothing is precious or historically significant. One is a present from a college, and the other two I got for extremely cut-rates off e-bay. What can we see here? We have a starting point for an investigation for the personal and individual, through the Gallery, to the culture and on to the student's own frame of reference, which they can express through their artmaking and art writing practices. We have the objects themselves to explore – snuff bottles and toggles for fastening clothes. What is snuff, how does it work, who used it, where did it go? Why fasten clothes with funny little pieces of wood with a couple of holes in them? These are utilitarian, but beautiful forms. There's also the issue of craft versus art. Then we can look at their embodied themes of landscapes, of birds, pigs and fish. Each theme carries a catalogue of symbolism and ritual. Some of the animals, notably the pig, make up the Chinese astrological calendars – the year of the boar, the year of the ox, the year of the rooster and so on. Cranes and fish signify luckiness, fecundity and longevity. My pig speaks of the raucous note of vulgarity and humour that subversively lurks in the details of particularly Chinese and Japanese scrolls and paintings, those sly vulgarities that keep us grounded. As a starting point for whatever age or experience, something like this, or a postcard or a print or even a poster, provide a connection, a curiosity which I, as a five-year-old, could not have due to the impenetrable glass case.

Before this lecture I wandered through the galleries with these three objects in my handbag, looking for their parallel presence with the

works on display. The robes in the *Celestial silks* exhibition are replete with dragons, cranes and other birds, fish, flowers and other animals. I couldn't find any pigs however. Objects in the collection, whether ceramic, wood or metal or painted also host these and other images. You, I or our students could go on a hunt from a single object to a cultural tradition and uncover the evocation of cultural meanings across time and amongst regions. It's a little piece of art historical and art writing magic, so that's to be treasured. For me, from 1954 to 2004, the wonder and curiosity of Asian art has remained a constant. We now have places for these things within our syllabuses, without the constraints of chronology or periodisation. There is a greater visibility and understanding of our neighbouring cultures, although not so much that the gallery-educator coalition can feel complacent. We need, as teachers, to have opportunities to communicate the living, breathing nature of contemporary practice, which finds artists in other places sharing expressive responses to similar political and emotional issues. As you walk down from the main foyer to the new wing, you pass by a lot of Asian-Australian contemporary works including John Young, Guan Wei and others, which reminds us that we don't only have the Dadang Christanto, but we have our own contribution that we are making to this evolving dialogue within and amongst countries and within and amongst creative individuals. Using the arena presented by the museum to share and air issues of importance and concern, we bring this generation into the cultural debate. Our use of creative examples of material culture is a worthy antidote to some of the excesses of government policy and popular rhetoric.

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THE NANHAI TRADE

Jackie Menzies

EXPORT CERAMIC DISPLAY IN THE NEW ASIAN GALLERIES AT THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES (LEFT HAND SIDE). PHOTO JENNI CARTER



A dominant feature of the Art Gallery of New South Wales' new Asian gallery is the 13 metre long wall case filled with Asian export ceramics made at kilns in China, Japan, Vietnam and Thailand, and dating from the 9th to 19th centuries. The idea of displaying the ceramics densely, with many hung vertically on the wall, is indebted to Western traditions: the West was so enchanted with first Chinese, then Japanese, porcelain that whole rooms were given over to displays covering every wall. Notable examples are in the Topkapi Saray in Istanbul, with rare Yuan chargers attached to every available wall space, and the Porcelain Room in the Charlottenburg, Berlin, where Chinese and Japanese chargers, bowls, figurines and snuffbottles overflow from gilded niches and shelves in a diverting rococo extravaganza.

Although the Gallery's wall might have been inspired by early Western models, only a small section is dedicated to Chinese and Japanese ceramics exported to the West. This type of export ware is to be seen to brilliant effect in many European museum and palace displays, and the Gallery does not have a strong collection. Unique to the Gallery's display of export ceramics to the West are Japanese ceramics exhibited in the 1879

Sydney International Exhibition and subsequently donated to the Gallery by the Japanese government - an apt Australian reference within the overall fascinating story of Asian ceramic trade.

Most of the ceramics in the Gallery's export ware case were intended for various Asian markets, and the focus of the case is in fact the Nanhai (Chinese for 'Southern Seas') trade, which had existed long before Western traders entered the lucrative market in the 1500s. The Nanhai trade dates back to the early centuries of the Common Era, as demonstrated by extant Chinese chronicles such as the 'Han Shu' (History of the Han Dynasty), which documents Chinese vessels visiting Sumatra, Burma, Sri Lanka and Southeast India during the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-8CE). Non-textual references to the vast network of Indian, Arab, and Southeast Asian vessels that also plied their trade through the Nanhai region include carved stone temple reliefs such as the 9th century ones at Borobudur, where are depicted in detail what are regarded as Javanese or Sumatran vessels.

The Gallery's wall of export ceramics is grouped by kiln site and date, starting with ninth century

Chinese stonewares, moving through to 19th century porcelains and canvassing Japanese, Vietnamese and Thai wares on the way. For ease of reference, this article follows the same groupings as in the displays.

CHINESE CHANGSHA WARE

The earliest examples of export ware on display are Tang dynasty (618-906) bowls from the Changsha kilns in present day Henan province. Most Changsha export wares were functional bowls, while the distinctive Changsha style of decoration is easily recognisable by its characteristic palette of green and brown enamels on a cream ground, applied to depict vigorously sketched yet minimal landscape and floral designs. Bowls in the Gallery's collection were acquired in 1998 from fishermen who had collected them in the sea off the Indonesian island of Belitung. Subsequent licensed German excavation at Belitung discovered a shipwreck whose whole cargo was Changsha wares, mainly bowls. Most of the bowls had been stacked inside large jars, thus preserving their glazes which are as fresh as the day they came out of the kiln. In contrast, the glaze on other bowls that had been lying unprotected in seawater since the ninth century is quite degraded. The importance of the Belitung find

is enhanced by the fact that the ship is the only example of an ancient Arab or Indian ship found to date. (For more detail, see the website on this remarkable find: <http://maritime-explorations.com/belitung.htm>).

CHINESE QINGBAI WARE

By the 11th century the Jingdezhen kilns in southern Jiangxi province in China were producing white-bodied wares with a slightly bluish glaze called *qingbai* ('bluish white') or *yingqing* ('shadowy blue'). The small, often delicate, wares soon became popular export items, particularly with markets in the Philippines and Indonesia, although they have also been excavated from Buddhist stupas in Japan and Thailand. The trade reached its peak in the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) when the Mongols then ruling China, hungry for export income, increased the number of kilns at Jingdezhen, with the Dehua kilns in Fujian province also entering this lucrative trade. In both the Philippines and Indonesia *qingbai* glazed wares were grave goods, placed around a corpse in a manner shown in a photo from the 1968 excavation of a ceramic-rich grave in Manila (illus.Guy 1980:29).

Qingbai wares were decorated with relief beading, moulded and carved designs and, unique to wares of the Nanhai trade, overglaze iron brown spots. Iron-spotting, which disappeared after the 1300s, is seen on small ewers with dragon handles (one of several innovations of the Yuan period), and on jarlets modelled in the form of the mangosteen fruit (another innovation in shapes just for the Nanhai market). It is seen to its best effect on the rare and delightful model of boys in a lotus pond, the highlight of the Gallery's *qingbai* ware display.

The trade in *qingbai* wares petered out during the 1600s as the two main markets of the Philippines and Indonesia evaporated due to changing social patterns: the spread of Christianity through the Philippines after the arrival of the Spaniards, and the spread of Islam through Indonesia. Most ceramics remained buried until the second half of the 20th century when a market for these export wares amongst collectors resulted in long-buried pieces being excavated (and looted) from gravesites.

GREENWARES

After *qingbai* wares, the largest category of Nanhai ceramic exports were greenwares (still popularly referred to as celadons) which were produced in huge quantities at the Longquan kilns in current day Zhejiang Province in China, as well as, in smaller

quantities, at Japanese kilns such as the Mitsumata kilns in the Omura fief of southern Japan and the Thai kilns of Sawankhalok. These greenwares range in date from the 1300s (for the Chinese examples) through to the 1600s. From excavations it would appear Indonesia was the largest market for greenwares. Within the repertoire of shapes, the most prevalent was undoubtedly the large shallow dish which suited the Indonesian communal style of living. Large numbers of these dishes, with moulded, relief, incised or fluidly carved designs, have survived as treasured heirlooms, handed down through successive generations.

Within Indonesia itself, usage of greenwares varied across the islands. One innovative practice occurred in Sumatra where Chinese Ming celadon jarlets, complete with locally carved wooden stoppers, were used to store *pupuk*, a powerful mixture of organic substances prepared by the *datu*, an important man in North Sumatran society who was believed to combine ritual knowledge with magic powers. *Pupuk* was ritually applied to

objects and sculpted figures in order to imbue them with supernatural forces for purposes of protection or aggression. (Capistrano-Baker 1994: 47).

BLUE AND WHITE WARES

Porcelain decorated in underglaze cobalt blue was produced in Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese kilns for the insatiable market in Asia and the West. Early Chinese examples dating to the 1300s have been found throughout Southeast Asia, although the trade peaked a few centuries later. (For more on this topic, see exhibition review on pp. 20-21 of this issue.) The repertoire of shapes in blue and white porcelain would appear more extensive than that for greenwares.

An example of a shape originating Southeast Asia, and produced by Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese kilns, is the *kendi*, a drinking water vessel with a spout but no handle. The name is thought to derive originally from the Sanskrit word *kundika* meaning a water vessel,



DRAGON EWER, VIETNAM,
1400S. PORCELAIN DECORATED
IN UNDERGLAZE BLUE, 22.7 X 17
X 7.8 CM. PURCHASED 2000
(523.2000). PHOTO JENNI CARTER

and an attribute of Hindu and Buddhist deities. The vessel was also known as a *gorgolet* (from the Portuguese word *gorgoletta*) since it was a popular export to the West as demonstrated by its frequent appearance in 17th century Dutch still life paintings.

The Gallery has a Chinese kendi dating to the late 1500s, as well as a Japanese imitation of c1660. These two kendi serve to exemplify the brief florescence of Japanese export porcelains that occurred when Chinese kilns could no longer meet orders because of the social and political disruptions concomitant with the approaching collapse of the Ming and the rise of the Manchus. While most of this trade seems to have been private, some understanding of its workings and scale has been available through records associated with the Dutch India Company (VOC -Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) which in 1621 had established Batavia as an entrepot for the lucrative spice and ceramic trades. When Jingdezhen could no longer meet its ceramic orders, the VOC, together with other private traders, turned to Japan, initially placing orders for pieces in imitation of popular Chinese types, both for Europe and other parts of Asia. The Japanese kendi is an example of this pressure for Japanese kilns to make shapes previously supplied by Chinese kilns.

In discussing blue and white porcelain, consideration must be given to Vietnamese porcelains. While numerically Chinese ceramics dominate the Nanhai trade, other

participants were the Thais and Vietnamese, and sections of the Gallery's trade wall contain examples of Thai and Vietnamese wares made for Southeast Asian markets. In regard to Vietnam, Vietnamese sources reveal that Vietnam had long participated in intra-regional trade with, for example, a steady flow of merchant ships from Java visiting the ports of Tonkin in the course of the 1300s and 1400s, selling such exotic items as pearls, sandalwood and spices. In return, Vietnamese ceramics were sent to Southeast Asia, the largest number having been found in Indonesia, especially Java and Sulawesi, but other caches being found in the Philippines and Malaysia.

Vietnamese exports included large blue and white dishes in the Chinese style, bowls and covered boxes. Ewers were not so common, and so the Gallery is proud of its dragon ewer which was part of the important Hoi An hoard of over 150,000 ceramics, the cargo of a sunken ship found near the historic port of Hoi An near Da Nang in Vietnam and brought to public attention through controlled excavations carried out from 1997 to 1999. A fascinating aspect of the Vietnamese trade to Indonesia, and one that underscores the specialised nature of the trade, is provided by ceramic wall tiles which have been found only in East Java and which, by virtue of the quantities involved, must represent a sustained and intimate trading relationship between Java and the ports of Tonkin. Details of this trade in tiles produced

expressly for the court of Majapahit at Trowulan in east Java in the 1400s are contained in an article by John Guy (Guy 1988). The article is of Australian interest because one of the tiles is now in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia, and because the rare kylin depicted on another is stylistically similar to one on a plate recently donated to the Gallery from the Bodor collection.

CHINESE SWATOW WARES

Throughout the 1500s Indonesia was a very busy base for transit trade, an entrepot for ships from China, India, Burma, Arabia and Turkey, amongst others. Islamic kingdoms, amongst which important ones were Mataram in Central Java, Aceh in North Sumatra, and Macassar in South Sulawesi, were appearing throughout the archipelago. In terms of ceramic trade, the popularity of large porcelain dishes, greenwares as well as porcelains decorated in underglaze blue, monochrome or polychrome enamels, continued unabated. A distinctive category of Chinese export porcelains were the so-called Swatow wares. Their shapes reminiscent of Longquan celadons, these porcelains were produced in a number of kilns near the port of Shantou (Swatow in Dutch records) in Guangdong province in southern China. Swatow wares are easy to recognize stylistically and technically: a varied repertoire of vibrant, schematic designs over coarse porcelain which often has grit adhering to the footrims. An idea of the extent



GROUP OF BENCHARONG WARES, THAILAND, EARLY 1800S. PORCELAIN WITH ENAMEL DECORATION. TWO COVERED JARLETS, HTS 6 CM AND 7.5 CM, GIFTS OF MR F. STORCH 1984 (68. AND 69.1984); AND SMALL TAZZA, 5.5 X 12.2 CM, GIFT OF MR F. STORCH 1987 (452.1987). PHOTO JENNI CARTER

of ceramic trade in the 1500 and 1600s is given by the invaluable analyses of T.Volker after sifting through the VOC journals' documentation of trade from China, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand and Persia in the period 1602-82. Volker estimated about 12 million pieces were transported by the VOC over that period for inter-island trade. This does not include ceramics traded by the Portuguese, British, Spanish, Arabs, Chinese and Thais. It can thus be imagined how enormous the trade was (Adhyatman 1999: 12). (See also article on Swatow ware in *TAASA Review* 12/2, June 2003.)

MARTABAN JARS

All over Asia, functional jars were traded across borders and seas, used to store and transport water, cooking oil, ceramics and foodstuffs. A fine example is the Gallery's large brown glazed stoneware jar in a case of its own. Dating to the 1100-1200s, it is typical of a type produced in the so-called Angkorean region of Southeast Asia which at its zenith extended from Cambodia to southern Laos and across to Northeast Thailand. An 1893 photo attributed to Charles Bonin in the archives of the French Foreign Service shows how jars such as this were used in Laos at festivals and celebratory events such as the rice harvest. Celebrants sat around the jar drinking the sweet, spicy rice wine through curved reeds.

However many other jars were produced for use on ships. Chinese ones were made in Guangdong province, and the Gallery now has some splendid examples. As a group, these large sturdy jars are called Martabans after the port of the same name on the west coast of Burma which was an important link in the China-India trade. Goods were transported overland from China to Martaban, and from there shipped to West Asia, India and Africa.

LATER CHINESE CERAMICS:

NONYA AND BENCHARONG WARES

The last group of export ceramics on the Gallery's wall presents examples of Chinese ceramics made to order for different communities within Southeast Asia from the 1800s. One group comprises Nonya ware made for Straits Settlements communities in Penang, Malacca and Singapore in the 1800s where a distinct culture, known by the Malay word *peranakan*, had evolved. Richly decorated enamel wares for use on auspicious occasions were termed Nonya ware, Nonya being the term used for Straits-born women. Blue and white ware, rough and practical, was called 'Kitchen Qing' since it was made for everyday use in the kitchen. This type of ware has gained popularity amongst visitors

to Southeast Asia, and has become a popular collectors' item.

Another distinctive category of Chinese export ceramics is that of Thai Bencharong wares. The Thais developed a taste for Chinese porcelains made in shapes suited to their way of eating and living, and decorated with Thai motifs and in Thai taste. The richly decorated wares are called Bencharong ('five coloured') and while the body is porcelain it is not sure exactly where the ceramics were decorated, although it probably was workshops in Jingdezhen. The Gallery has an excellent collection of Bencharong ware through the generosity of the late Freddy Storch who loved it, and wanted others to share his passion.

Indeed it should be said that most of the Gallery's ceramic wall is gifts, donations from individuals who collected their pieces on travels to Asia and like so many others, became enraptured with the exciting stories of trade, shipwrecks, wealth and belief systems. The ceramic wall contains a wealth of absorbing facts and details that make it worthy of close study.

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A LANTERN ON THE DOMAIN

Jackie Menzies

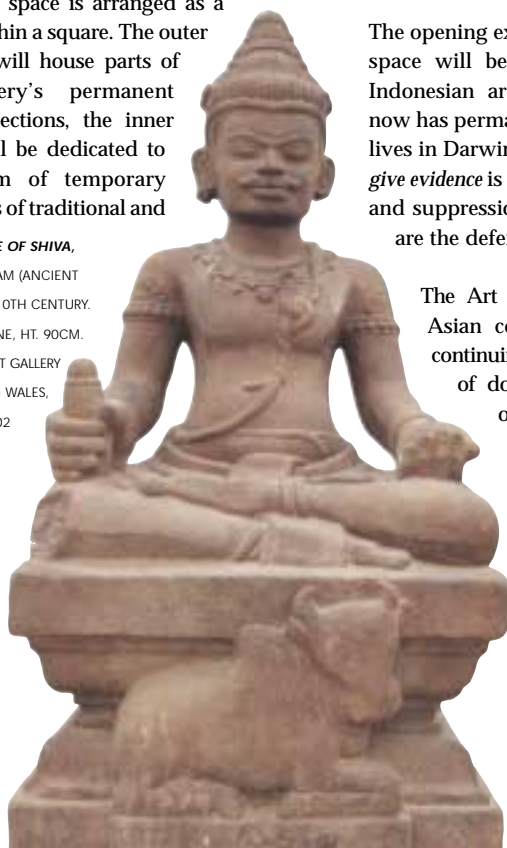
EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE NEW ASIAN GALLERY, ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, ARCHITECT RICHARD JOHNSON, 2003. ALL PHOTOS: JENNI CARTER



In late October 2003, the Art Gallery of New South Wales will re-open its refurbished Asian Gallery in addition to a totally new gallery for Asian art designed by Richard Johnson of Johnson Pilton Walker. For the new Gallery, Johnson worked on the idea of a lantern, something consistent with a number of Asian cultures. The new Gallery floats above the current Asian gallery, a pearly white glass cube held together with stainless steel lotus pins, and cantilevered above and slightly to the side of the current gallery.

Inside, the space is arranged as a square within a square. The outer corridors will house parts of the Gallery's permanent Asian collections, the inner square will be dedicated to a program of temporary exhibitions of traditional and

SEATED FIGURE OF SHIVA,
CENTRAL VIETNAM (ANCIENT
CHAMPA), 9TH-10TH CENTURY.
BUFF SANDSTONE, HT. 90CM.
COLLECTION ART GALLERY
OF NEW SOUTH WALES.
PURCHASED 2002



contemporary Asian art. The outer galleries will be arranged thematically: two will be dedicated to art related to the faiths of Asia, a third to the remarkable story of intra-regional trade from as early as the 9th century; and the fourth to the art of Southeast Asia. In the third of these galleries, a 13 metre long case will be filled with Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese ceramics that were exported from their respective countries to other Asian countries and to the West. Opposite the case, a staircase will link the upstairs Gallery to the existing downstairs one.

The opening exhibition in the upstairs central space will be a sculptural installation by Indonesian artist Dadang Christanto, who now has permanent Australian residency and lives in Darwin. Dadang's moving work *They give evidence* is a potent indictment of violence and suppression, a cry for the innocent who are the defenceless victims of conflict.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales' Asian collections are pan-Asian, and continuing to expand under the impetus of donations as well as acquisition opportunities that constantly take the collections in new directions. Accordingly, some displays will be arranged to cover pan-Asian themes, while more focused displays will be culture-specific. The pan-Asian display of 'Faiths of Asia' in the new Gallery will present the art of Hinduism

and Buddhism, limited by the current nature of the collections. One section will cover the art of South and Southeast Asia, including such relatively new acquisitions as the extraordinary bronze *Hevajra mandala* illustrated in the June 2003 issue of *TAASA Review* in the obituary for Goldie Sternberg.

While the Gallery still aspires to acquire good Indian sculptures of the Hindu god Shiva, it recently acquired a fine Vietnamese example of the subject created by an artist of Champa, a Hinduised kingdom that ruled what is now central Vietnam from around the 500s until destroyed by the Vietnamese in 1471. This serene figure of softly rounded forms depicts the powerful god seated cross-legged on a stepped pedestal with his bull Nandi kneeling before him. In line with the Southeast Asian Hindu tradition of the *devaraja*, or 'god king', the sculpture may be a posthumous portrait of an actual king. Stylistically the sculpture demonstrates affinities with Cambodian equivalents, and is a persuasive testament to cultural cross-fertilisation in Southeast Asia.

Pride of place on the trade wall, the third gallery in the new space, will be the fantastic ceramic dragon pouring vessel made from a two-piece mould with the parts luted together along a vertical seam, its dragon details realised with spirited brushwork. This ewer was part of the important so-called Hoi An Hoard of over 150 000 ceramics, the cargo of a sunken ship found near the historic port of Hoi An near Da Nang in Vietnam and

brought to public attention through controlled excavations carried out from 1997 to 1999. Interestingly, a similar dragon vessel was documented (in a 1979 Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong catalogue) as having been excavated with a fine gold chain around its neck from a grave on the southern coast of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi in 1972.

As the Gallery prepares for its forthcoming opening, it has been inundated with generous offers of gifts to different parts of the collection. Most recent contributions to the trade ceramics wall include some 9th century Changsha ware bowls, one given by John Yu and George Soutter, another by Steven Zador. These were welcome, since such wares are the opening chapter for the absorbing tales of trade and exchange throughout Southeast Asia, a story revolving around ceramics, textiles and spices. Gifts of Indonesian textiles from John Yu and George Soutter, and of Indonesian, Cambodian and Lao textiles from Nomadic Rug Traders, mean that the Gallery will be able to have a permanent display of some of these important traditions in the fourth of the new Galleries.

The downstairs galleries will be devoted to the art of East Asia - China and Japan - with a small display of Korean ceramics. In regard to the Chinese collection, a major and very special recent gift was a collection of 60 pairs of Chinese couplets, given by James Hayes, a former TAASA Committee member. The couplets, collected by James during the years he lived in Hong Kong, form an important assembly of calligraphies by officials of varying degrees of importance in the hierarchy of Chinese bureaucracy. One is written by Zuo Zongtang, an eminent figure of 19th-century China, a military leader and

statesman, and a renowned calligrapher even during his own time. A native of Xiangyin, Hunan province, he studied geography and military strategy in his youth, with his talent being recognised by Zeng Guofan, one of the most important generals in modern history, and Emperor Xianfeng (r.1851-1861). He served the Qing regime for some 30 years, suppressing various rebellions including the Taiping uprising.

The Gallery's Curator of Chinese Art, Dr Liu Yang, has translated the couplet as follows:

Written for fourth brother Zicheng as he requested
A merciful nature is the source of longevity;
The wise mind resembles the complexity of a pearl shell's twists.

According to Liu, although Zuo Zongtang's best-known calligraphy is *xiaozhuan* or lesser seal-script, a style developed during the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), his skill in *xingshu* (running script), is excellent too, as demonstrated in this couplet. The derivation of his style from *xiaozhuan* is observable. As one can see, here the smooth and regular manner of the lesser seal-script has been melted into the elegance of the running script style. The characters contained in the seal, *Qing Gong taibao* refer to an honourable title, 'The guardian of heir apparent', that was bestowed to him by the imperial house after Zuo Zongtang recaptured the city of Hangzhou from the Taiping rebels in 1864.

The collection of traditional Japanese art has been enriched with the Gallery's acquisition of its first Noh robe. Noh performance, perfected during the Muromachi period, was an integral part of samurai culture. Being exclusive to the samurai class, its costumes were made with

the best available cloths and techniques. Of the different types of robes required for different roles within the repertoire of Noh plays, the most gorgeous and resplendent costumes are the *karaori* robes, which are the centrepiece of a performance. The term *karaori* (literally 'Chinese weaving') refers to the intricately woven figured brocades which produce a stiff and heavy garment. The bulk and stately style of the robe, derived from the formal garment of the Heian court of the 10th century, is well suited to the considered pace of a Noh performance. The design of a *karaori* is based on the contrast between a ground pattern (*jimon*), usually geometrical, and a surface pattern (*uwamon*), often floral. The elegant design on this robe depicts the flowers of the four seasons on sectioned red-and-white background.

Finally, in a stunning and vigorous display of the enduring Japanese sense for artful design, the screens by Suzuki Shonen are a testament to the maxim 'less is more'. To add to this extraordinary sweep of trees, expressed only with rich dark ink, would be superfluous and detrimental. Shonen, a significant Kyoto painter and an influential teacher, was known for his uninhibited, powerful brushstrokes, which are certainly visible in this pair of screens. The screens embody the confidence, optimism, and sense of experimentation that marked the painting of the Meiji period (1868-1912) when Japanese painters felt empowered to draw on Western art, in addition to any past style they favoured, to create vital new expressions of enduring themes from their beloved nature.

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PINE TREES BY SUZUKI SHONEN (1849-1918), JAPAN. PAIR OF SIX-FOLD SCREENS, INK ON GILDED PAPER, 153 X 364CM EACH. COLLECTION ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, PURCHASED 2000

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

3

SUGGESTED ARTISTS FOR STUDY FROM THE AGNSW PERMANENT COLLECTION

| | |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| Japan | Printmaking |
| | Masami Teraoka |
| | Munakata Shiko |
| | Taninaka Yasunori |
| | Photography |
| | Yanagi Miwa |
| | Morimura Yasumasa |
| | Sugimoto Hiroshi (Japan/USA) |
| | Kon Michiko |
| | Ceramics |
| | Araki Takako |
| | Sculpture |
| | Akio Makigawa |
| Yoshihiro Suda | |
| China | Painting |
| | Zhang Xiaogang |
| | Guan Wei |
| | Lui Xiao Xian |
| | He Jianguo |
| Drawing | Su Xinping |
| | Fang Lijun |
| Korea | Nam June Paik |
| Thailand | Montien Boonma |
| Indonesia | Dadang Christanto |
| India | Anish Kapoor |

AGNSW RESOURCES

- Menzies Jackie (ed). *The Asian collections*, 2003
- Menzies Jackie (ed). *Buddha: radiant awakening*, 2001
- *Adventures in Asia: education kit for the Asian galleries*, 2nd edn, 2003

Articles

- Menzies, Jackie. 'The Nanhai Trade', *TAASA Review: The Journal of The Asian Arts Society of Australia*, vol 13, no 1, Dec 2004 (explains export ceramics in the AGNSW collection)
- Menzies, Jackie. 'A lantern on the Domain' *TAASA Review: The Journal of The Asian Arts Society of Australia*, vol 12, no 3, Sept 2003 (describes the new Asian Gallery at the AGNSW)

Lectures

Case Studies: Asia and the Contemporary World lecture series, AGNSW, August 2004:

- Huangfu, Binghui. 'Exhibiting contemporary Asian art: a curator's perspective', 8 August 2004
- Judd, Craig. 'The Biennale of Sydney and the contemporary Asian artist', 18 August 2004
- McKeon, Penny. 'AGNSW an arena for practice: the Asian collections', 25 August 2004

Prints and Drawings Study Room

The study room provides public access to the Gallery's collection of works on paper including prints, drawings, photographs and watercolours. School groups can visit with teacher-lecturers or with teachers under supervision of the Study Room assistant. Bookings essential tel: 9225 1758 web: www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/study_room

Website

Art Gallery of New South Wales
<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au>

- Suggested case studies for Stage 6 Visual Arts and photography
- Information on permanent and temporary exhibitions
- Public programs
- Education programs
- Activity sheets K-6 and 7-12
- Visual arts, photography, Chinese language, Japanese language
- Professional development
- 2005/2006 exhibition program
- Collections
- Information on specific artists and artworks from the permanent collection
- Temporary exhibitions
- Press releases and programs on past and present temporary exhibitions

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Carlos, Isabel (ed). *On reason and emotion*, Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, 2004,
Previous Biennale of Sydney catalogues and education kits

Websites

Asia-Australia Arts Centre

<http://www.4a.com.au>

Information on public programs, past, present and future exhibitions and links to relevant sites

The Asian Arts Society of Australia

www.taasa.org.au

Event listing and index to TAASA Review: The Journal of The Asian Arts Society of Australia

Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art

<http://www.qag.qld.gov.au>

Information on artists and programs from past APT exhibitions. APT 2006 is scheduled to coincide with the opening of the new Queensland Gallery of Modern Art

Contemporary Asian Art – Queensland Art Gallery

Contemporary Asian Art. The Queensland Art Gallery plays a unique role in Australia and internationally by collecting and exhibiting contemporary Asian art

www.qag.qld.gov.au/collection/contemporary_asian_art

Universes in Universes- Search International Art Events

<http://www.universes-inuniverse.de/english.htm>

A non-commercial information system on the visual arts of Africa, Latin America, Asia within the context of international art processes

Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial – Japan

Information on particular artists and artworks, regions, history and environments

<http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/index.html>

Shanghai Biennale – China

<http://www.shanghaibiennale.com/2004/>

Information on curators, past biennales and news releases

Gwangju Biennale - South Korea

<http://www.gwangju-biennale.org/>

Information on curators, themes, past biennales and a report on the significant relationships between artwork and audience

Taipei Biennial – Taiwan

<http://www.taipeibiennial.org/>

Information on programs, curators artists and links to associated websites

Pacific Bridge Contemporary Southeast Asian Art

<http://www.asianartnow.com/index.html>

Asian Art Now is the online gallery and artist exchange program located in Oatland, California, founded to make the contemporary art of Southeast Asia accessible to an American audience.

Includes artists and exhibition outlines and news reviews.

Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

<http://faam.city.fukuoka.jp/eng/home.html>

Through permanent and temporary exhibitions this gallery collects and exhibits modern and contemporary Asian art. Collection, exhibition and event information and related links.