



SOCIETY FOR ASIAN ART PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2023-2024

This fiscal year has brought us a substantial increase in our assets with more than \$900,000 being received from a large bequest of \$874,000 as well as member donations of over \$30,000. Our Investment Committee led by Sandra Pan has been busy investing the money and coupled with the excellent stock market gains, we can increase our support of the Asian Art Museum and SAA programs in the coming years.

Membership is still a concern and using the Outreach Task Force report prepared in 2022 our Membership Committee headed by Julia Molander has been working with our Publicity chair Candace Kahn to come up with ideas to reach new members. Due to our expanded use of remote Zoom programs, we are able to reach beyond the Bay Area and have recently established an Out of Region Membership category.

As you read the Committee Reports that follow, I hope that all of you will continue to support and attend the various programs, travel and social events. Without you, our membership, board and committee members, there would not be a Society. Our Annual Book Sale chaired by Ehler Spliedt was again four days this April with the money added to our yearly donation of \$18,000 going to support the C. Laan Chun Library of the Asian Art Museum. As this fiscal year draws to an end, I want to thank all of the Board members for their work and especially those that will be leaving the Board after serving the maximum six years. Thanks to Susan Lai, our Office Manager, who keeps all this working smoothly, the staff and curators at the Museum and all of you for your continued support.

Best regards,

Marsha Vargas Handley
President

COMMITTEE REPORTS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Arts of Asia

The Arts of Asia lecture series consists of two series per year, each consisting of 14 speakers giving lectures filled with images on topics related to Asian themes. Each series is designed and organized by the Arts of Asia committee and an Instructor of Record, usually a member of the Asian Art Museum's curatorial staff or a faculty member from UC Berkeley.

The Fall 2023 series was titled Views from the Other Side and focused on the veritable explosion of material and information exchanges between distant nations that started in the 15th century. The series began with our own Forrest McGill speaking on an understanding of art and globalization, titled "A Curious Affair." The series continued with lectures on the Timurid-Mongol influence on the Mughal Empire in India; Crowned Gods and the Art of Power in Early Southeast Asia; Japanese Inspirations in Bengal; Sinophile Painters and Patrons in 18th Century Japan; Ottoman Art Between Europe and Asia; and Ritual Objects made in China for China's Muslims, to name a few of the lectures.

This Spring 2024, the topic was Echoes of the Past, Visions of the Future. Three of our speakers were Asian artists who addressed the influence of their traditional background on their current, contemporary art; Michael Frachetti and Sarah Wenner were archaeologists who spoke about their work literally uncovering amazing ancient civilizations; Heghnar Watenpaugh spoke about the significance of the ancient archeological site, Ani, to Armenia today; and our own Museum Director, Jay Xu will speak on the Lost Kingdoms of Ancient China. The schedule of lectures for the current series is available on the Society for Asian Art website as are the schedules of speakers and topics from past series, in the Arts of Asia archive section

Susan Lai, office manager for the SAA does invaluable organizational and communications work and since we started broadcasting the lectures via Zoom during the pandemic, the Audio-Visual crew has also been invaluable. Our AV crew consists of John O'Shea, AV Manager, and AV Techs Parish Braca, Jonathan Covey, Ted Desmarais, and Michael Meserau, who also edits all videos. John O'Shea and Michael Mesereau are also responsible for musical selections before the lecture and during the break. John Kouletsis is responsible for the beautiful announcement slides before and after the lectures and during the break.

The Arts of Asia Committee consists of co-chairs **Larry Mock** and **Edith Benay**, **Peggy Mathers**, whose voice can be heard most weeks during the Q&A period following the lecture, **John Kouletsis**, **Daniel Raybin** and **Charita Thakkar**.

Literature and Culture of Asia

The Literature and Culture of Asia Committee presented a five-meeting series in Fall 2023 entitled the 'Old Testament as Literature'. This program was originally developed before the pandemic. The lecturer, Dr. Ronald Hendel, explored the literary features and resonances of the various genres of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: History, Myth, Prophecy, Love Poetry, and Wisdom. The meetings were held in the



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nearby Community Room of Opera Plaza due to scheduling conflicts with events hosted by the Asian Art Museum. In Spring 2024, the committee presented a three-meeting series entitled 'Aspects of Ottoman Culture.' Dr. Douglas Brookes, the speaker, led discussions on: History and Language; Life in the Ottoman Palace; and Music and Architecture. The course was held in the Koret Education Center, with an audio-visual specialist in attendance.

The committee is chaired by **Gloria Garaventa**, with committee members **Daniel Raybin, Pamela Royse, Irene Schaefer, and Russell Wadbrook**.

Study Group

The Study Group Committee aims to organize day or half-day events and workshops that delve deeply into various topics of interest to our members.

In January 2024, Study Groups kicked off the year with a lecture by Dr. Robert Goldman and Dr. Sally Goldman on Vedic beliefs and the magnitude of Hindu gods. Despite the weather and a rally in Civic Center, it was well attended and received strong positive feedback afterward. On April 13th, we hosted a show and tell event by Annie Dorsey to explore the history and spiritual significance of prayer beads in Asian cultures. She also shared insights about early religious history and practices around prayer beads using some of her prayer beads collection.

The Study Group Committee is chaired by **Debbie Wong Ottman**, with members **Tom Ihrig, Daniel Raybin, and Pamela Royse**.

EVENTS FOR MEMBERS

Member Events

The Member Events Committee is chaired by **Nazneen Spliedt** with members **Margaret Booker, Lynne Brewer, Jim Brown, Kalpana Desai, Annie Dorsey, Anne Adams Kahn, Phyllis Kempner, Julia Molander, Debbie Wong Ottman, Ehler Spliedt, Graeme Vanderstoel, and Sylvia Wong**.

During the past year, we continued with a few in-person talks at the Asian Art Museum as well as visits to temples, art galleries, other local museums, collectors' homes, walking tours of famous San Francisco landmarks, such as Chinatown and Japantown, while continuing to hold many lectures on Zoom.

The Member Events Committee also organized a Spring Dinner, a Holiday Party and the reception for the Annual Meeting. The Committee continued its program of talks by authors. Most in-person programs attracted a smaller than usual audience and the Zoom audience has also fallen in numbers.

Between July 2023 and June 2024, the Committee organized 15+ presentations in person and/or on Zoom, covering a broad range of topics from ancient to contemporary art, culture, history and talks by authors. Our speakers/scholars were from the Bay area as well as from around the country and overseas including curators, SAA Advisors, and other experts in various fields.

Upper Category Member Events

The Upper Category Member Events Committee provides programs for SAA members at the Contributor, Donor and Sponsor membership levels. The committee co-chairs are **Anne Adams Kahn and Trista Berkovitz** with members **Sheila Dowell, Nancy Jacobs, Candace Zander Kahn, Phyllis Kempner, Ehler Spliedt, and Charita Thakkar**.

The fall season began with a talk in September by the artist Rupy Tut at the Institute of Contemporary Art in San Francisco's Dogpatch neighborhood, where several of her works were being shown. A no-host lunch with Rupy was held afterwards at a restaurant near the Institute. Next up was the annual Sponsor level program, which this year featured SAA president Marsha Handley Vargas discussing Asian water droppers in her San Francisco apartment.

Winter programs included a "Society Conversation" which took place at Nazneen and Ehler Spliedt's home in South San Francisco with former AAM curator Qamar Adamjee explaining her past and current provenance research. The annual Sponsor/Donor program took place at Anne and Tim Kahn's home in the East Bay in January and featured Bay Area collector Steve Koppich who talked about the history of Japanese inro and how he began collecting.

Final programs for this fiscal year were two additional "Society Conversations" – one in February with University of Oregon associate professor Akiko Walley discussing Katsura Villa at the home of Lynne Brewer in the East Bay and the other in March with Cincinnati Museum of Art curatorial research fellow Sarah Wenner discussing Nabatean site promotion at Candace Kahn's apartment in San Francisco.

Travel

The Travel Committee is chaired by **Marsha Vargas Handley**, with members **Neaera Baer, Margaret Booker, Lynne Brewer, Kalpana Desai, Sheila Dowell, Kalena Gregory, Mary Hunt, Anne Adams Kahn, Bianca Larson, Greg Potts, Sharon Roe, and Gail Uilkema**.



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SAA Travel's first trip of the fiscal year was to Washington, DC/Baltimore from October 2-7, quickly followed by a Morocco trip from October 13-27, 2023. To start off 2024, a trip to South India from January 17 to February 3, 2024 to visit a number of UNESCO World Heritage sites was very successful. We will complete this fiscal year with a trip to Paris led by the popular scholar, Julian Brown, from April 21-28, and a trip to Chicago from May 12-17. The coming fiscal year has a Scandinavian trip from August 9-19 followed by a trip to Seattle from September 24-27, Sri Lanka in February 2025, and Mongolia from July 2-18, 2025. Watch the Newsletter for Save the Date announcements of upcoming trips.

PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Library/Book Sale

The Library Committee is chaired by **Kirk Gibson**, assisted by **Ehler Spliedt**. The SAA continued its support of the AAM library with a monthly donation of \$1,500, for a total of \$18,000 for the year. This money helps buy new books and subscriptions to a wide variety of periodicals.

The committee, assisted by a wonderful group of volunteers, organized the Annual Book Sale which took place in the Loggia of the Museum on April 4 – 7, 2024. It was the second 4-day Book Sale and included a First Free Sunday at the Museum. This year's sale netted over \$12,000. The entire proceeds were donated to the AAM library as part of the SAA annual donations to the Museum

Newsletter

The Newsletter Committee edits and publishes the bi-monthly SAA Newsletter, which informs members of ongoing SAA activities and ways to register for them. The latest issue can be found on the SAA website. The Newsletter is now only offered digitally.

The Newsletter Committee was chaired by **Janet Constantinou** and joined by co-editor **Susan Lai**.

Social Media

The Social Media Committee concluded its year by partnering with the Membership Committee with the mutual goal of spreading the word about SAA. The Membership Committee will focus on increasing membership through print media, while the Social Media Committee is renewing its efforts to grow the organization's footprint by enhancing its Facebook and Instagram pages with new content. We are planning to provide new content in the form of "Reels" (short videos) and "Stories" (videos that appear on a site for only one day.)

We have many wonderful travel experiences planned for the next fiscal year. Therefore, we are asking those of you who like to take short videos to share them with the SAA. Trip participants give their permission to be photographed when they sign up for an SAA trip. Therefore, you don't have to worry about getting their permission to film them. Please send video clips in addition to any photos you want to submit to candacezks@gmail.com. Please also let us know how you would like to be credited for your videos and photos. Videos and photos of our local excursions are also welcome.

The committee is chaired by **Candace Zander Kahn**, with member **Anne Katz**.

DEVELOPMENT AND OUTREACH

Advisors

The Advisors Committee maintains relationships with the SAA Advisory Board. There are a total of 21 Advisors and 2 Advisors emeriti. A few of the members recently retired from active teaching but stayed on as professors emeriti at their universities and will continue on the SAA's Advisory Board. Forrest McGill was invited to join this board upon his retirement from the Asian Art Museum. The committee always welcomes recommendations, particularly scholars from fields not already represented.

The committee arranged an annual luncheon in the Museum's Peterson Room for the Advisory Board hosted by the SAA Board of Directors. SAA Board members always look forward to this opportunity to meet our Advisors in person and interact with them.

The committee is chaired by **Nazneen Spliedt**, with members **Jeanne Dorward**, **Kirk Gibson**, and **Pamela Royse**.

Membership

Our membership continues to decrease. Current membership as of February 2024 is 416, down from 434 in February 2023. This represents a 4.1% decrease on top of last year's 8.5% loss. The decrease in membership is due to two main factors: (1) lack of new members and (2) loss of our continuing members due to health and mortality issues.

The Museum docent training that brought new members to our ranks has been on hiatus; we hope for a restart of that program and a further collaboration with the new docents. In the meantime, the Membership Committee has undertaken a number of initiatives based on the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Outreach Committee on Membership.



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We have added a new category of membership for Out of Region participants in our programs who reside more than 100 miles from the Museum. Out of Region members are not required to be members of the Museum. We hope that this will capture the Asian art aficionados who watch our programs on line. If we attract more members, we may expand this effort.

We have undertaken an advertising initiative. We will place announcements in our bimonthly newsletters urging members to award friends and family with gift certificates to the SAA. We will also place an announcement in the website to urge readers to join the SAA.

We are also working with the Social Media Committee to create advertising that appeals to a younger demographic. We have retained a graphic designer on an hourly basis to assist us in designing this program.

Last but not least, we are working with the Director of Membership for the Museum, Danielle Hobart, to collaborate in membership efforts that can enhance the efforts of the SAA and the Museum. Our first step in this direction was to contribute financially to the presentation in the Museum of the new documentary film on the life of artist Chang Dai-Chien. The program was well-received, and the SAA was highlighted as a contributor.

The Membership Committee is chaired by **Julia Molander**, with members **Edith Benay**, and **Pamela George**.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Bylaws and Operating Procedures

The committee periodically updates the SAA Operating Procedures, Bylaws and Policies to keep them current and accurate. During this fiscal year, the Bylaws and Operating Procedures were updated to reflect a change in requirements for SAA membership. Out-of-Region members (those who live more than 100 miles from the Asian Art Museum) can now participate in online presentations of SAA programs without having to be members of the Asian Art Museum.

The committee is chaired by Secretary **Anne Katz**, with members **Trista Berkovitz** and **Margaret Edwards**.

Finance

The Finance Committee under the leadership of Treasurer **Jim Brown**, Assistant Treasurer **Daniel Raybin** and Investment Committee Chairperson **Sandra Pan**, and aided by a strong economic environment as reflected by current financial indices, is pleased to report a 45% increase in the Society's total equity vs the previous 2022/23 fiscal year. Based on the February 2024 financials, the society's net worth is \$3,802,221.

A major factor contributing to this strong performance was a bequest last December by former Society member Frances Y. Austin, in the amount of \$874,000. These funds are being judiciously reinvested, biweekly over a six-month period, in accordance with an agreed upon dollar cost averaging plan.

Since the beginning of this fiscal year last July, the committee has held monthly meetings. Treasurer **Ed Baer** retired at the end of 2023 with Assistant Treasurer **Jim Brown** moving into the Treasurer's position. At the January Board meeting, the SAA Board elected **Daniel Raybin** as Assistant Treasurer. **Sandra Pan** and **Nazneen Spliedt** are two other Board members who also serve on the Finance Committee. Non-Board members include **Ed Baer** and **Melonie Brophy**.

At the February Board meeting **Julia Molander** was asked if she would serve on the Finance Committee, primarily to advise on insurance matters, replacing **Melonie Brophy**, who will be leaving at the end of June.

Investment

The Investment Committee, headed by Chairperson **Sandra Pan**, holds quarterly meetings to review the status of SAA investments which continue to be quite positive. Other members of the committee include SAA Treasurer **Jim Brown**, Assistant Treasurer **Daniel Raybin**, **Ed Baer**, **Trista Berkovitz**, **Gary Chou** and **Howard Moreland**.

With market conditions continuing to remain positive, the single biggest challenge facing us this year was the implementation of J.P. Morgan's acquisition of First Republic. With the closure of the Palo Alto First Republic office, and the disbanding of the banking team who are currently responsible for the SAA account, we anticipate change with respect to how our account is currently serviced. However, this change could be positive. At this point it's too early to tell.