

Society for Asian Art Newsletter



January - February 2026

No. 1

President's Message



Bowl with eight horses, 1662-1722. China. Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Reign of the Kangxi emperor (1662-1722). Porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze multicolor decoration. Asian Art Museum, The Avery Brundage Collection, B60P1728. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

Welcome to 2026! The Society for Asian Art has a great year ahead of it. The spring session of Arts of Asia will begin on February 6, 2026. The program is called "Asia Reimagined: Mapping Cultures Beyond Borders." and it promises to capture your imagination. We have four travel events planned for this year, Thailand in January, Honolulu in June, London in October, and Boston in November. On January 31, the Study Group will host Dr. Mitra Ara for an in depth look of the prophet and philosopher, Zoroaster. Join us at our Annual Spring Dinner on March 17 to celebrate the Lunar New Year, the year of the Fire Horse, which begins on February 17. The Annual Book Sale at the Museum will take place from April 2 to 5. The spring Literature Course on 17th century Japanese writer Ihara Saikaku will take place on three consecutive Sundays in April. There will be many more events and programs throughout the year, so go to our website at societyforasianart.org for more information and to sign up. Thank you so much for your support and participation.

As a final note, the recent passing of Alexander "Sandy" Calhoun at 100 years old reminds us of how much the SAA has been a foundation of the Asian Art Museum. Sandy joined the SAA in 1958, when its mission was to persuade Avery Brundage to bring his amazing Asian art treasures to San Francisco. Those early efforts were the successful beginning of the wonderful Asian Art Museum that we enjoy today.

Julia Molander
President

Society for Asian Art Board Nominations

The Nominating Committee is looking for candidates to serve on the Society's Board of Directors for 2026 - 2028. The SAA Board is a working board with all board members expected to serve on at least one committee. The committees plan and manage various programs each year. The committees that plan events are: Arts of Asia, Member Events, Upper Category Member Events, Literature & Culture, Study Groups and Travel. We are also looking for volunteers with expertise to serve on Finance, Investment, Social Media as well as Membership Committees.

If you would like to be considered or wish to recommend a potential candidate, please contact the Nominating Committee Chair, Jim Brown, by emailing jimmarinabay@gmail.com by March 1, 2026.



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Fridays, Feb. 6 - May 15, 2026

Spring 2026 Arts of Asia - Asia Reimagined: Mapping Cultures Beyond Borders

Saturday, Feb. 21, 2026

Member Event - Nagas? with Forrest McGill

Sundays, Apr. 12, 19 & 26, 2026

Spring 2026 Literature Course - The "Floating World" Fiction of Ihara Saikaku with David Gundry



UPCOMING EVENTS (Subject to Change)

March 17, 2026

Annual Spring Dinner

April 2 - 5, 2026

Annual Book Sale

June 22 - 27, 2026 Asian Art & Culture in Honolulu

Registration will open the 2nd week of February and will be announced via email.



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members, who joined the Society in October and November. We are thrilled that you have decided to join us, and hope you find our programs and events interesting and engaging. Please don't hesitate to ask questions and give us feedback. Welcome!

Annie Burton
Barbara De Salvo

Michael Kevin Ferris
Dana Kawano



SOCIAL MEDIA

As of Jan. 1, 2026, the Social Media Committee will be co-chaired by SAA Board members Candace Zander Kahn (candacezks@gmail.com) and Grace Kim Kostal (gracekostal@ucberkeley.edu). All photos and other submissions for Instagram and Facebook should be emailed to both Co-Chairs.

Society for Asian Art

Newsletter

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Members' Newsletter
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and Susan Lai

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(415) 581-3701
saa@societyforasianart.org

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ARTS OF ASIA SPRING 2026 LECTURE SERIES

Asia Reimagined: Mapping Cultures Beyond Borders



Left: Incense burner with Arabic inscription, approx. 1700–1800. China. Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Bronze with gold inlay. *Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Avery Brundage Collection, B62B32. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.*

Right: Dish with wave-and-rock motif, approx. 1575–1600. Turkey. Ottoman period (1281–1924). Stonepaste; polychrome painted under transparent glaze. *Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of the Menke family in memory of their parents and grandparents Betty and John Menke, 2015.26. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.*

When: Fridays Feb. 6 to May 15, 2026 (No lecture on Mar. 6, 2026.)

Time: 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Pacific Time

Place: Samsung Hall, Asian Art Museum & Zoom Webinars

Please see schedule on the next page for any exceptions.

Fee: \$200 per person Society members; \$250 per person non-members for the series.

Advance registration must be received by SAA by Jan. 30, 2026.

We only accept drop-ins for individual lectures in Samsung Hall on a space available basis.

Drop-in fee is \$20 per person per lecture.

All in-person fees are after Museum admission.

Instructor of Record: Natasha Reichle

In an age when cultural identities are increasingly fluid, Asia Reimagined invites you to explore how artists, ideas, and aesthetics have long transcended national boundaries and how the artistic soul, be it nomad or explorer, has responded with curiosity and vision. This 14-lecture series examines the ways that creative exchange has influenced both the makers and the patrons of Asian art. Join us this spring, along with Instructor of Record Natasha Reichle, AAM curator of Southeast Asian art, as we cross physical and metaphysical borders to discover new definitions of art.

Whether you're a devoted museum member or a curious newcomer, this series offers a compelling lens into the vibrant complexity of Asia as it has been imagined, reimagined, and continually reshaped

The Arts of Asia committee welcomes comments about our lecture series. Please email comments to info@societyforasianart.org.

Please visit our website for the most up-to-date information about this lecture series.



ARTS OF ASIA SPRING 2026 LECTURE SERIES

Speakers & Topics (Subject to Change)

Feb. 6, 2026 - Koret Education Center

Rhythms of the West Asian Diaspora: Contemporary Art in Motion

Naz Cuguoglu, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art & Programs, Asian Art Museum

Feb. 13, 2026

Cultural Rediscoveries and Hybrid Forms: Modern and Contemporary Tibetan Artists

Rosaline Kyo, Assistant Professor, History of Art/Visual Culture, University of California, Santa Cruz

Feb. 20, 2026

California Collectives: Retracing a History of Asian American Artistic Coalitions in the Exclusion Era

ShiPu Wang, The Coats Family Chair in the Arts and Professor of Art History, University of California, Merced

Feb. 27, 2026

Egyptians and Persians: The Art and Archaeology of a Colonial Encounter (ca. 526-333 BCE)

Henry Preater Colburn, Visiting Assistant Professor of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology, Bryn Mawr College

Mar. 13, 2026

Tibetan Murals as You've Never Seen Them

Jeff Durham, Former Associate Curator of Himalayan Art, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

Mar. 20, 2026

A Brief History of Japanese-Style Gardens in North America: The View from San Francisco

Kendall Brown, Professor of Asian Art History, California State University Long Beach

Mar. 27, 2026

Photography and Art/Photography as Art in Japan

Karen M. Fraser, Professor & Program Director, Art History & Museum Studies, University of San Francisco

Apr. 3, 2026

Magic in Thai Buddhism

Justin McDaniel, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Endowed Professor of Humanities, Department of Religious Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Apr. 10, 2026

Southeast Asian Textiles

Sandra Sardjono, Independent Researcher and President, Tracing Patterns Foundation

Apr. 17, 2026

Calligraphy in East Asian Cinema

Markus Nornes, Professor of Asian Cinema, University of Michigan

Apr. 24, 2026

The Transcultural Evolution of Islamic Architecture

Nasser Rabbat, Aga Khan Professor and Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

May 1, 2026

Dutch Maritime Excursions to Asia

Tonio Andrade, Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies, Department of History, Emory University

May 8, 2026

Hindu Religions Across South and Southeast Asia

Elizabeth A. Cecil, Timothy Gannon Associate Professor of Religion, Florida State University

May 15, 2026

Central Asian Influences on Ancient Chinese Bronzes

Liu Yang, Chair of Asian Art and Curator of Chinese Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art



MEMBER EVENTS

Nagas? with Forrest McGill



The Gods and demons churn the ocean of milk, approx. 1800. Mysuru (Mysore), Karnataka state, India. Opaque watercolors on paper. *Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B87D13. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.*



Forrest McGill

When: **Saturday, February 21, 2026**

Time: **10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

Place: **Koret Education Center, Asian Art Museum**

Fee: **\$15 per person Society members; \$20 per person non-members after museum admission**

Nagas are semi-divine serpent beings and turn up often in the mythology and the arts of South and Southeast Asia. Are we sure what they look like, though, especially since shapeshifting is in their nature? Can they be distinguished from other serpent-like creatures? And, most fundamentally, what do they do and what can they signify?

Join Forrest McGill, the Asian Art Museum's very popular Emeritus Senior Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art, who will answer all these questions (and more!) about these mysterious creatures who figure so prominently in South and Southeast Asian art.

Forrest McGill was the Senior Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art at the Asian Art Museum for more than twenty years. During that time, he organized major exhibitions such as "The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe" and "Beyond Bollywood: 2,000 Years of Dance in the Arts of South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Himalayan Region". He has edited and co-edited numerous exhibition related catalogs in addition to giving lectures and writing articles about Asian art.

Donations for Book Sale

We now accept books throughout the year for our annual Book Sale. So if you move, downsize or are tired of all the books collecting dust in your home, please donate them to our Book Sale. We are accepting books with Asian subjects only, be it art, culture, novels, history, travel, cooking, exhibition catalogs or others.

Due to space constraints, we are unable to accept book donations at the SAA office. You can drop off books on Fridays when the Arts of Asia lectures are in session. If you have a lot of books, we are happy to pick them up from your home within the Bay Area. Please contact the SAA office at 415-581-3701 or info@societyforasianart.org



STUDY GROUPS

Zoroaster: The Most Influential Philosopher and Prophet in History with Mitra Ara

When: **Saturday, January 31, 2026**
Time: **10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (One hour lunch break)**
Place: **Koret Education Center, Asian Art Museum**
Fee: **\$30 per person Society members; \$35 per person non-members after museum admission**
Advance registration must be received by SAA by Jan. 23, 2026.

This study group examines Zoroaster, an Indo-Iranian prophet whose philosophical teachings significantly influenced the development of Zoroastrianism, a tradition that began in the mid-second millennium BCE. The analysis presents Zoroaster as a prominent prophet who has shaped later Abrahamic religions and Western philosophy, positioning him as an early supporter of revealed religion. Zoroaster's core beliefs, including dualistic cosmology, eschatology, and the ongoing battle between good and evil, continue to impact modern ethical, moral, and philosophical discussions. The lecture highlights Zoroaster's substantial historical influence and the continuing importance of his ideas in debates about ethics, free will, and human purpose.

Dr. Mitra Ara is a cultural historian and professor at San Francisco State University, where she teaches classes in multiple departments. She earned her B.A. in Religious Studies, her M.A. in South and Southeast Asian Studies with a focus on Sanskrit and Avestan religious traditions, and her Ph.D. in Asian Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. She has written several books, numerous articles, and has spoken at conferences and colloquia.

This study group consists of a morning session and an afternoon session. **Please note that lunch is not included in the registration fee.** Attendees can purchase lunch in the museum café, and are welcome to bring food into the Koret Education Center.



Miho couch central panel.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a7/Miho_couch_central_panel.jpg
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TRAVEL

Save the Date

June 22 - 27, 2026

Asian Art & Culture in Honolulu



Tsherin Sherpa. *Spirits (Metamorphosis)*, 2019-2020. Gold leaf, acrylic, and ink on canvas. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. (L.2025-27-01)

Join the SAA on this fabulous trip. We will have curator-led tours of two special exhibitions at the Honolulu Museum of Art, *Divine Disruption: The Art of Tsherin Sherpa*, and *Toshiko Takaazu: Worlds Within*, as well as the permanent collections, including the Pan-Asian galleries and Japanese woodblock prints. A rare treat will be a visit to the Shangri La Museum on a day when it is closed to the public, allowing us time to appreciate this home of Doris Duke (1912–1993) with some 4,500 objects and cultural resources that she collected from Spain, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Central Asia, India, and Southeast Asia. Rounding out our trip will be a visit to Iolani Palace, the official residence of Hawaii's monarchy; a walking tour of the historic district with SAA member Bob Oaks; a private tour of both permanent and off-view ethnological collections at the Bishop Museum, which showcases the natural and cultural history of Hawai'i and the Pacific, followed by lunch with the museum's historian, who will share insights into Hawaiian food; and visits to artist studios. We will stay at the four-star Prince Waikiki, which sits on the quieter side of Waikiki, just steps away from shopping, dining, and beautiful beaches. An email announcement with trip details and registration instructions will be sent the 2nd week of February to all SAA members and newsletter subscribers. The trip is limited to 20 SAA members and will be filled on a first-come first-serve basis.



SPRING 2026 LITERATURE COURSE

The “Floating World Fiction” of Ihara Saikaku with David Gundry

When: **Sundays, April 12, April 19 & April 26, 2026**

Time: **10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

Place: **Koret Education Center, Asian Art Museum**

Fee: **\$100 per person Society members; \$125 per person non-members for the course after museum admission**

Advance registration must be received by SAA by Mar. 27, 2026.

This course will introduce three key works by Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693), widely acclaimed as early-Tokugawa Japan’s greatest writer of fiction. The first lecture will outline the historical and cultural context of Saikaku’s stories and novels: the status-group system imposed by the Tokugawa regime; the rapid growth of cities in 17th-century Japan, the expansion of a literate bourgeoisie and the concomitant emergence of a publishing industry; the licensed prostitution quarter as cultural hub; the Buddhism-derived aesthetics of evanescence; age-structured male homosexuality and normative male bisexuality; consumerism and sumptuary laws. In our first session we will also examine Saikaku’s first published work of fiction, *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* (The Life of an Amorous Man, 1682), a sophisticated parody of and homage to the aristocratic courtly romances *Tales of Ise* (900s) and *The Tale of Genji* (early 1000s) whose hypersexual bourgeois protagonist devotes his life to the pursuit of erotic adventure with female and male prostitutes and some “amateurs” as well. The second lecture will focus on Saikaku’s *Kōshoku gonin onna* (Five Women Who Loved Love, 1686), whose bourgeois heroines arrogate to themselves the male prerogative of sexual pursuit, with, in four out of the five stories, disastrous results. The third and final meeting will focus on Ihara Saikaku’s collection of samurai vendetta tales *Budō denraiki* (Exemplary Tales of the Way of the Warrior, 1687), which portray, variously, samurai bravery, cowardice, heroism and abuse of power. Reflective of the fact that in Tokugawa Japan age-structured male homosexuality was considered an erotic specialty of the samurai, this collection includes stories in which samurai youths avenge the deaths of their male lovers.

David J. Gundry is Associate Professor of Japanese and Undergraduate Faculty Advisor for Japanese at the University of California, Davis, where he teaches classes on Japanese literature from the early period to the present. He earned his Ph.D. from Stanford University. He has written several books and contributed numerous articles and book chapters. Tuttle Publishing just released Ihara Saikaku’s *This Scheming World: Classic Tales of Desire, Deception and Greed in Old Japan*, which was revised and with a new introduction by Prof. Gundry. He is currently working on an article regarding depictions of sexuality in Ihara Saikaku’s fiction, as well as translations of Saikaku’s *Budō denraiki* (Exemplary Tales of the Way of the Warrior, 1687) and *Honchō nijū fukō* (Twenty Cases of Filial Impiety in Japan, 1686). His research interests are medieval and early-modern Japanese literature, comparative history of the novel, and Edo period popular culture.

Reading materials will be shared with registered attendees.



Illustration from Ihara Saikaku’s
The Life of an Amorous Man



David J. Gundry