



SOCIETY FOR ASIAN ART PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2025-2026

When I began my term as President in July of 2025, I told you that I was looking forward to the many programs and events that the Society for Asian Art (SAA) was planning for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. My expectations were fully met during this past year. The SAA once again presented two world-class lecture series on the Arts of Asia, featuring scholarly presentations on a single overarching theme developed by the Arts of Asia Committee. For the fall, the theme was *It's Magic; Art and the Power of Transformation*, delving into the mystical qualities of art across cultures and time. For the spring, Arts of Asia invited the participants to 14 lectures on the theme of *Asia Reimagined: Mapping Cultures Beyond Borders*, showing the varied and numerous ways that cross-border creative exchange among artists and artisans can influence the makers.

SAA Travel also had a banner year, offering small-group trips meticulously planned to explore Asian art and artifacts, some in unexpected locations. In July 2025, the SAA traveled to mesmerizing Mongolia, learning about Mongol art and participated in the annual falconry festival. September offered a less distant trip to Los Angeles, visiting the LACMA exhibition of *Buddhist Art across Asia*, the Getty's collection of Chinese porcelain, the Hammer Museum's Japanese woodblock prints, and the Broad's collection of influential Asian contemporary artists. In January 2026, the SAA journeyed to Thailand to explore Bangkok's incomparable golden temples, the National Art Museum, a new contemporary art museum, and Jim Thompson's House Museum; a trip to the ancient capitals of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai; and several days in Chiang Mai, the hub of Lanna craft and textile culture. Wrapping up the year, SAA members will fly to Hawaii in June to enjoy art and culture in Honolulu.

Our Study Groups, Literature and Culture, and Member Events Committees all had a busy year as well, with very interesting presentations. For the fall, we had both a member event and a study group focusing on the new opera *The Monkey King*. Other member events included a lecture on Ruth Asawa; a Chinatown tour with David Lei; a visit to a Buddhist Temple for the Obon festival; and a lecture on Zoroaster, as well as the Holiday Party at Guillermina Asian Arts and Antiques in Point Richmond, and the Spring Dinner at Saffron Kitchen in Oakland. The Society's customary four-day Book Sale in early April, was a huge success, with proceeds exceeding all prior years, all of which are donated to the Asian Art Museum's library.

We are so grateful to our members for their support and engagement in the SAA's activities. We encourage all of you, including non-Board members, to join one or more committees of the SAA. And please feel free to send any thoughts you might have on further events to me at jamolander@sbcglobal.net. We are proud of you and the SAA for everything that we have done together to support the Asian Art Museum (AAM) since the SAA was founded in 1958.

Regards,

Julia Molander
President



COMMITTEE REPORTS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Arts of Asia

The Arts of Asia program offers two lecture series each year, featuring talks on Asian art and culture, organized by the Arts of Asia Committee and the Instructor of Record. The Fall 2025 series, *It's Magic: Art and the Power of Transformation* enrolled 131 subscribers. The Spring 2026 series, *Asia Reimagined: Mapping Cultures Beyond Borders*, enrolled 113 subscribers.

The Arts of Asia Committee is co-chaired by **Larry Mock** and **Edith Benay**, with committee members **Peggy Mathers** (speaker introductions, Q&A, and speaker luncheons), **Laura Allen**, **Jim Brown**, **Daniel Raybin** and **Lydia Zane**.

SAA Office Manager **Susan Lai** manages essential logistics and communications, and shares lecture videos with registered attendees upon request. The Audio-Visual team — AV Manager **John O'Shea**, AV Coordinator **Ted Desmarais**, and AV technicians **Jonathan Covey** (primary Zoom host), **Travis LaMetterey** (video editor), and **Jared Akiyama**, **Lucas Chu**, **Jerry Herrera**, and **LB Johnson** — supports both in-person and Zoom broadcasting; **John O'Shea** also selects the pre-lecture and break music.

The Fall 2026 Arts of Asia lecture series, *Unknown Makers, Lasting Beauty: Rethinking Fine Art Across Asia*, is now open for registration.

Literature and Culture of Asia

The Literature and Culture of Asia Committee presented a one-day course in Fall 2025 entitled *Journey to the West: The Monkey King*, an exploration of the 16th century Chinese novel. This program coincided with San Francisco Opera's production of *The Monkey King*, based on the same novel. The lecturer, Dr. Ling Hon Lam, explored the history and allegorical features of the novel. The program drew 52 registrants.

In Spring 2026, the committee presented a three-meeting series entitled *The Floating World Fiction of Ihara Saikaku*, early Tokugawa Japan's greatest writer of fiction. Dr. David Gundry, the speaker, gave presentations on the historical and cultural contexts of Saikaku's stories and novels, and detailed examinations of three representative works. We had 18 registrants.

For our Fall 2026 course, Dr. Forrest McGill will offer a two-lecture series entitled *The Ramayana in Literature and the Arts*.

The committee is co-chaired by **Irene Schaefer** and **Russell Wadbrook**, with committee members **Daniel Raybin**, **John Richardson**, **Pamela Royse** and **Lydia Zane**.

Study Group

The Study Group Committee continues its mission to organize lectures and workshops that offer in-depth exploration of diverse topics, bridging scholarly insight with accessible learning experiences. On November 22, 2025, Dr. Robert Mintz presented "Modern and Contemporary Japanese Art Movements", offering a comprehensive overview of key artistic developments and their broader cultural context. On January 31, 2026, Dr. Mitra Ara led "Zoroaster: The Most Influential Philosopher and Prophet in History", a thought-provoking program examining the enduring legacy of Zoroastrianism. On April 25, 2026, Chris Buckley and Serena Lee will offer a course on "Textiles of Southwest China and Southeast Asia" introducing participants to one of the most diverse textile traditions in the world, highlighting techniques, materials, and cultural contexts across the region.

The Study Group Committee extends its sincere gratitude to **Debbie Wong Ottman**, who stepped down as Chair in February of 2026 after 5 years of dedicated leadership and contributions to the program's growth and success. The Study Group Committee is currently chaired by **Kalim Winata**, with members **Jim Brown**, **Wendy Chiang**, **Mary Howell**, **Tom Ihrig**, **Lewis Lam**, and **Lydia Zane**.



EVENTS FOR MEMBERS

Member Events

The Member Events Committee is chaired by **Nazneen Spliedt** and co-chaired by **Mary Howell**. Members of the committee are **Lynne Brewer, Wendy Chiang, Kalpana Desai, Annie Dorsey, Anne Adams Kahn, Debbie Wong Ottman, Evelyn Raimundo, Ehler Spliedt, Sylvia Wong, and Lydia Zane**.

During the past year the committee organized six programs – both in-person talks at the museum or Zoom presentations, as well as five offsite events, including a visit to a Buddhist temple, curated tours of artists' exhibitions at Bay Area museums and galleries, and tours of places of interest showcasing Asian art and culture. The events covered a broad range of topics from ancient to contemporary art, history, culture, and religion. The speakers were from the Bay Area and included museum curators, Society Advisors, a Dramaturg Emeritus, a Buddhist priest, and Society members with unique expertise. Most activities were well received and the audience numbers are increasing.

In addition, the Committee organized a Holiday Party in December at Guillermina Asian Arts and Antiques in Point Richmond, a Spring Dinner in March at Saffron Kitchen in Oakland, and arranged for the catering at the Annual Meeting at the museum in May.

Upper Category Member Events

The Upper Category Member Events Committee is temporarily on hiatus until new co-chairs to lead the committee are in place. If you are interested in volunteering for this committee, please contact SAA President Julia Molander at jamolander@sbcglobal.net.

Travel

The Travel Committee is chaired by **Marsha Vargas Handley**, with members **Lynne Brewer, Sheila Dowell, Elizabeth Green-Sah, Kalena Gregory, Mark Gross, Mary Hunt, Bianca Larson, Sharon Roe, Judy Sleeth, Gail Uilkema, and Keith Weed**.

SAA Travel's first trip of the fiscal year was to Mongolia from July 2 to July 18, 2025, followed by a trip to Los Angeles from September 15 to September 20, 2025. To start off 2026, a very successful trip to Thailand from January 12 to January 22, with Julian Brown as the scholar and Dana Conley as the tour leader, visited Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, and Chiangmai. We will complete this fiscal year with a trip to Honolulu from June 22 to June 27.

The coming fiscal year has a trip planned October 11 to October 16 to Boston, followed by a trip to London for Asia Week from October 29 to November 7, with Julian Brown as the scholar. We have planned a trip to Saudi Arabia from January 22 to February 5, 2027 but we are waiting until late May to determine whether it is still viable due to the war with Iran. A trip to New York City for Asia Week in March 2027 will end the coming fiscal year.

Watch the Newsletter for Save the Date announcements and when the trips will be offered for registration.



PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Library/Book Sale

The Library Committee is chaired by **Ehler Spliedt** and assisted by **Kirk Gibson**. The SAA continued its support of the Asian Art Museum's 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 2 – 5, 2026. It was a 4-day book sale and included a First Free Sunday at the museum, as well as two major events open to the public. This year's sale netted over \$15,000. The entire proceeds were donated to the AAM library as part of the Society's annual donation 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 is chaired by **Janet Constantinou** and joined by co-editor **Susan Lai**.

Social Media

The initiation and growth of the Social Media Committee over the past six years puts it in a position of synergy with the Membership Committee. Thus, the 2026-2027 fiscal year will see the combining of the Social Media Committee and the Membership Committee under the leadership of **Grace Kim Kostal**, as the current Social Media chair terms out of the SAA Board of Directors at the end of the current fiscal year. The joint committee will enable Social Media activity to assist the Society in attracting new members in addition to making current members and viewers of our Instagram page aware of recent and future programs and activities as part of the new, combined committee.

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



DEVELOPMENT AND OUTREACH

Advisors

The Advisors Committee keeps in contact with SAA Advisors and maintains the list of the Advisory Board. This year we have a total of 23 Advisors and 1 Advisor Emeritus. Jay Xu was invited to join the Advisory Board on his retirement from the Asian Art Museum and he has graciously accepted. The committee always welcomes recommendations, particularly for scholars from fields not already represented.

The committee arranged an annual lunch for the Advisors, hosted by the SAA Board in the museum's Peterson Room. The Advisors and all board members always look forward to this opportunity to meet in person and interact with each other. At this annual get-together those Advisors attending usually give a brief presentation on their major achievements during the past year on topics which may be of interest to our members.

The committee is chaired by **Nazneen Spliedt**, with members **Jeanne Dorward, Anne Adams Kahn, Larry Mock, Pamela Royse** and **Russell Wadbrook**.

Membership

The Membership Committee continues to try various initiatives to expand membership. We've suggested changes to our website, including adding a new discounted Student membership category to the existing discounted Senior and Out-of-Region membership categories, and the option to gift memberships. We've included outreach about SAA in membership confirmation emails that members of the Asian Art Museum receive. We also encourage new membership at our events, such as the annual Book Sale. We had flyers with QR codes directing folks to sign up for an SAA membership.

We also have placed requests in our bi-monthly Newsletter that Members encourage their friends and family members to join the SAA so that they can learn and travel together.

The Asian Art Museum has approved posting SAA signage on premise, and we've designed such signage. We need to get this signage up around the museum that would encourage museum-goers to also join the SAA with a QR code.

This year, we're hoping to hold an in-person membership and fundraising drive. We're also hoping that the additional Board Directors will contribute to events such as this one, with a focus on Upper Category events and events that will drive membership and/or donations.

Social media remains a large driver of exposure and new membership. We've invested in a social media contractor and have posted regularly throughout the year. We have 1,174 followers. From Jan 14 - April 13, we had 57K views, reached 18.6K accounts, had 578 people view our profile, and 33 people tap the links in our bio that direct folks to our website. In March 15-April 13, our views were at 34K, with 1.6K interactions and 59 new followers. This demonstrates that our social media success is only growing.

The Membership Committee is chaired by **Julia Molander**, with members **Janet Constantinou, Grace Kim Kostal**, and **Stephen Smith**.



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 have been reviewed and revised and are in the process of being ratified by the full SAA Board.

The committee is chaired by **Anne Katz**, with member **Julia Molander**.

Finance

The Finance Committee is chaired by Treasurer **Daniel Raybin** with members **Ed Baer**, **Trista Berkovitz**, **Jim Brown**, SAA President **Julia Molander**, Investment Committee Chair **Sandra Pan**, **Ehler Spleidt**, and **Nazneen Spleidt**.

The Finance Committee meets quarterly to review the monthly financial data in comparison with the budget and also reviews the annual budget. Every year, the Treasurer submits the budget for the next fiscal year.

The income for the Society comes from membership dues, contributions, registration fees from educational programs including the Arts of Asia Lecture Series, Literature Courses, Member Events, and Study Groups, and contributions from Travel. This is supplemented by substantial investment income (interest, dividends and realized capital gains). There are also expenses for the educational programs and member events. Our overhead includes administrative expenses including insurance, accounting costs, website expenses, and the salary of the Office Manager. The income for SAA is roughly the same as the expenses.

Investment

The Investment Committee, led by Chairperson **Sandra Pan**, meets quarterly to review the status of SAA investments. Committee members include Treasurer **Daniel Raybin**, **Trista Berkovitz**, and **Howard Moreland**. SAA President **Julia Molander** also participates in discussions.

The portfolio has undergone a successful transition to JPM Wealth Management. The portfolio continues to be well managed with the General Portfolio maintaining a 60/40 allocation, while the Stout Account—designed for long-term growth and more closely resembling an endowment—now targets a 65/35 allocation. The portfolios maintain a good risk-return profile.

Both portfolios have performed well, reaching one of the highest combined values in our investment history while effectively supporting the Society's donation and operating needs.