

Society for Asian Art Newsletter



May - June 2026

No. 3

Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries



Left: Installation view of *Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries* at Japan Society Gallery, New York, 2025. Photo by Waso Daniilenko. © ARS, New York, 2026 and Chiharu Shiota.
Right: Chiharu Shiota. Photograph by Sunhi Mang, 2024.

The first solo museum exhibition in the Bay Area by Chiharu Shiota (b. 1972), the Osaka-born, Berlin-based artist best known for large-scale installations that fill spaces with densely woven webs of colored fibers, is on view through Jul. 20. Featuring works from throughout her career and including installation, sculpture, video, drawing, and stage design, the exhibition offers a timely meditation on belonging, impermanence, and living with “in-betweenness.” In the monumental installation *Diary*, Shiota explores themes of nationality, identity, and memory through her distinctive visual language, reflecting on her own experiences of her “two home countries.” Strands of red yarn stretch across the 88-foot length of the Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Pavilion, creating a spectacular structure that surrounds audiences as they pass through and accompany the artist on a journey that is both deeply personal and universally relatable.

Society for Asian Art Annual Meeting and Reception

When: **Thursday, May 28, 2026**

Time: **2:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.**

Place: **Samsung Hall, Asian Art Museum**

Fee: **Free for all current Society members**

All Society members are invited to attend the Annual Meeting and Reception. Email invitations will be sent to all members in good standing by April 28. **Please kindly follow the instructions in the invitation to RSVP.**

After a short formal meeting to elect new members of the Board of Directors, and a report from the President Julia Molander on the activities of the Society during the past year, Associate Curator of Southeast Asian Art Dr. Natasha Reichle will give a talk on the special exhibition, *Vishnu's Cosmic Ocean*, which will open on Oct. 23. This once-in-a-lifetime exhibition features a colossal statue of the Hindu god Vishnu reclining on a serpent-shaped pedestal, the last chance that this masterpiece will be out of Cambodia.

The Society for Asian Art is an independent nonprofit organization that provides programs on Asian art and culture and supports the Asian Art Museum.





IN THIS ISSUE

Saturday, Apr. 25, 2026

Study Group - Textiles of Southwest China and Southeast Asia with Chris Buckley & Serena Lee

Saturday, May 9, 2026

Member Event - Gazing East, Gazing West: The Last Empress in Qipao with Sally Yu Leung

Thursday, May 28, 2026

Member Event - Annual Meeting & Reception

Saturday, Jun. 20, 2026

Member Event - Sonoma Botanical Garden Tour

Saturday, Jul. 18, 2026

Study Group - The History and Development of Mongolian Calligraphy with Tuya Bliss

Fridays, Aug. 21 - Nov. 20, 2026

Fall 2026 Arts of Asia - Unknown Makers, Lasting Beauty: Rethinking Fine Art Across Asia

Sundays, Oct. 11 & 18, 2026

Fall 2026 Literature Course - The Ramayana in Literature and the Arts with Forrest McGill



UPCOMING EVENTS (Subject to Change)

Oct. 11 - 16, 2026 Asian Art in Boston and Beyond

Registration will be announced via email the first week of May.

Jan. 22 - Feb. 5, 2027 Saudi Arabian Odyssey from the Desert to the Sea

Registration will be announced via email the end of May/beginning of June.



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members, who joined the Society in February and March. 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!

Joanne Ablan
Jeffrey Doherty
Nancy Dunlap
Janet Goehring

Angela Neal Grove
Kristin Johnson
Martha Kropf
Sanjyot Mehendale

Carmel Tenenbaum
Judith Webster
Susan Wilf
Adeline Wu



SOCIAL MEDIA

Starting Jul. 1st, the Social Media Committee will merge with the Membership Committee. Grace Kim Kostal will lead the new joint committee, which will continue to work on growing the Society's social media presence to attract new members and to get more people to attend our programs.

Society for Asian Art

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Edited by Janet Constantinou
and Susan Lai

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Unknown Makers, Lasting Beauty: Rethinking Fine Art Across Asia



Left: Bottle with fish design, approx. 1450–1550. Korea. Stoneware with painted decoration over white slip (buncheong ware). *Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection, B65P63.* Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.
Right: Temple hanging with Buddhist scenes (pidan), 1920–1950. Cambodia. Silk, ikat technique. *Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. David Buchanan, 2007.11.* Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

When: Fridays Aug. 21 to Nov. 20, 2026 (Subject to Change)

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

Place: Samsung Hall, Asian Art Museum & Zoom Webinars

Please see schedule 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 Aug. 14, 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

Of the thousands of objects in the museum’s collection, most were created by unknown makers. Many works are unsigned, and others have lost attribution over time. For generations, such pieces were categorized as “craft” or “decorative art,” often excluded from the status granted to “fine art.”

In the early twentieth century, Japanese thinker Sōetsu Yanagi challenged this hierarchy, drawing attention to the quiet beauty of functional, everyday objects. His ideas encourage us to consider anonymous makers with the same care and seriousness we reserve for named artists, and to recognize that insight and artistry are not limited to signed masterpieces.

This lecture series looks across Asia at both celebrated works and once-overlooked objects, exploring how ideas of art, value, and “fine art” have evolved — and how unknown makers created works of enduring beauty and significance.

The schedule of speakers and topics will be published on the [program webpage](#) as soon as it is finalized.

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



Gazing East, Gazing West: The Last Empress in Qipao with Sally Yu Leung

When: **Saturday, May 9, 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**

This talk explores Empress Wanrong's life and image through the contrasting perspectives of East and West. The qipao, her iconic dress, functions as both an emblem of elegance and the lens through which identity, culture, and perception are refracted.

Key figures in her story—the Last Emperor Puyi, her eunuch Sun Yaoting, and her English teacher Isabel Ingram, as well as Puyi's tutor Reginald Johnston—illuminate the intersections of private court life and the wider world. Eastern portrayals highlight grace, tradition, and historical continuity, while Western eyes often emphasize intrigue, spectacle, and exotic allure.

Sally Yu Leung is an author, researcher, and independent curator. She has organized 23 major exhibitions at museums, primarily in the United States and China, and lectured internationally on a variety of topics, including the customs and folklore behind Chinese New Year, the evolution of the qipao, and the hidden meanings in Chinese children's clothing and accessories. She has been a docent, cultural ambassador, and a former Commissioner of the Asian Art Museum as well as a board member or trustee of several other museums. Sally has also been inducted into the Chinese Ministry of Culture's Hall of Fame for contributions to the protection and preservation of Chinese cultural heritage.



Photo courtesy of the Sun Yat-sen University Museum.



Sally Leung

Sonoma Botanical Garden Tour

When: **Saturday, Jun. 20, 2026**

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

Place: **12841 Sonoma Highway, Glen Ellen**

Fee: **\$20 per person Society members; \$25 per person non-members includes garden admission**

Put on your favorite walking shoes to join fellow SAA members in exploring Sonoma Botanical Garden in Sonoma.

Our guide for this exclusive SAA tour will be Michael Wenzel, Chief Curator of Living Collections, who will focus on the garden's famous Asian botanicals. Bring a hat, water bottle and plenty of sunscreen in addition to wearing sturdy shoes that can navigate gravel paths and descents to pond areas.

You might want to pack a post-tour lunch as well since the garden complex features numerous attractive picnic areas!



Upper Pond With Water Lilies
Photo courtesy of Sonoma Botanical Garden.



Garden Bridge
Photo courtesy of Sonoma Botanical Garden.



Textiles of Southwest China and Southeast Asia with Chris Buckley & Serena Lee

When: **Saturday, Apr. 25, 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 Apr. 17, 2026.**

Southwest China and Southeast Asia is one of the world's most diverse regions, with peoples from four major language families. The weaving traditions of this region are equally diverse and colorful and subsequently spread to other parts of Asia. Textile experts Chris Buckley and Serena Lee will introduce the region through field photographs and slide examples of textiles. They will discuss the variety of techniques, styles, and looms. The talk is aimed at anyone with a general interest in the craft traditions of Asia as well as textile collectors.

Chris Buckley is an expert in Asian textiles who lived in China and Hong Kong for twenty years and now lives in the Bay Area. He is the author of several books, including *Roots of Asian Weaving* (Oxbow Books, 2015). His particular interest is how culture in general, and crafts in particular, are transmitted from generation to generation. Serena Lee is a textile artist, founder of [Textile Odyssey Tours](#), and leader of the Ethnic Textiles Study Group of the [Textile Arts Council](#), a support group of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. She has presented her research internationally and nationwide at numerous conferences. Her particular interest is in the role clan dress and textiles play in maintaining ancestral identity, social structure, and history of these communities that remain a mystery to outsiders.

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.



Maonan bedcover. Photo courtesy of Chris Buckley.



Young Miao (Hmong) woman in Guizhou Province, China, with a young child wearing a protective silver crown. Photo courtesy of Chris Buckley.

The History and Development of Mongolian Calligraphy with Tuya Bliss

When: **Saturday, Jul. 18, 2026**
 Time: **10:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (One hour lunch break)**
 Place: **Koret Education Center, Asian Art Museum**
 Fee: **\$35 per person Society members; \$40 per person non-members after museum admission. Advance registration must be received by SAA by Jul. 10, 2026.**

This rare presentation of Mongolian art explores the rich evolution of Mongolian writing and calligraphic traditions, beginning with the Old Uyghur script from the time of Genghis Khan and its development to the classical Mongolian vertical script, to the creation of the Soyombo script by the Mongolian artist and scholar Zanabazar, to the introduction of the Cyrillic system in the early mid-20th century, and the subsequent revival of Mongolia's historical calligraphy styles in modern times. This study group highlights how each script reflects Mongolia's cultural identity, religious influences, and historical transitions. Even during periods of foreign influence, the vertical script served as a cultural anchor, preserving Mongolian identity today.

The talk will be followed by a hands-on workshop learning and creating an original Mongolian calligraphic work, including writing your name.

Enkhtuya (Tuya) Bliss is the founder and director of the Mongolian Arts and Education Center (MAEC), an organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the living heritage of Mongolia through community-based arts education. Under her leadership, MAEC has become a cultural hub offering accessible programs in Mongolian language, classical Mongolian vertical script calligraphy, and Morin Khuur (horse-head fiddle) music, serving both youth and adults across the Bay Area.

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.



'Mongol Bichig' (Mongolian Script) in Mongolian calligraphy by B. Altantuya calligrapher. Photo courtesy of the Mongolian Arts and Education Center.



Tuya Bliss. Photo courtesy of the Mongolian Arts and Education Center.



FALL 2026 LITERATURE COURSE

The Ramayana in Literature and the Arts with Forrest McGill

When: **Sundays, Oct. 11 & 18, 2026**

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

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

Fee: **\$75 per person Society members; \$100 per person non-members for the course after museum admission**

Advance registration must be received by SAA by Oct. 4, 2026.

A lustful proposition accompanied by a gruesome threat. A violent, humiliating rejection. A retaliatory—and lascivious—kidnapping. A long search for the one kidnapped. A war of recovery. Slaughter. Victory. Glorification of the heroes. “Happily ever after”—or not.

Such an encapsulation bears something like the relation to the great seven-volume epic Ramayana as the AI-generated teaser “Mad prince seeks revenge, ghosts haunt, uncle dies, mother marries, tragedy” does to another profound tale.

This two-session series also can hardly do justice to the epic of Rama, but aims to provide entry points into its vast complexity. The sessions isolate and focus on five key turning points. At each, if the characters had chosen different courses of action, everything subsequent would have changed. The characters’ choices are motivated by some combination of love, lust, jealousy, revenge, pride, strategy, and above all the sense of duty—that is, adherence to righteousness (dharma).

The five key turning points are Prince Rama’s being sent into exile as a result of machinations within the royal family, the demon king Ravana’s abduction of Rama’s wife Sita to possess her and to punish Rama for harming Ravana’s kinfolk, Rama’s allying with one rival for the kingship of the monkeys in return for help in finding Sita, Rama’s killing Ravana in battle, and Sita’s having to undergo a trial by fire when her faithfulness to Rama is questioned.

While the focus of the sessions will be on the canonical Ramayana of Valmiki, other versions, from various parts of Southeast Asia as well as South Asia, will be considered. Additional emphasis will be on representations of the key turning points in the visual and performing arts.

Participants in the sessions will be encouraged to discuss and debate the ethical and emotional dilemmas the primary characters face.

Forrest McGill is the Asian Art Museum’s Emeritus Senior Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art. For more than 20 years, 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.

The course syllabus will be posted on the program webpage.

Reading materials will be shared with registered attendees.



Rama and Lakshmana carried by Hanuman, detail of a pair of doors with scenes of the lives of Krishna and Rama, and other deities, 1960-1980. India, Odisha state. Paint on wood. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of Dr. Joanna Williams, 2023.71ab. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.



Forrest McGill

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



Left: Hwarot (bridal robe), Korea, 1700s or 1800s. Silk, paper, and cotton. Gift of Yamanaka and Company, 1927. #20190.F. Peabody Essex Museum. Photo courtesy of the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation and the Peabody Essex Museum.
 Center: Dish with phoenixes and peonies, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, China. Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, 1662-1722. Porcelain with transparent glaze and overglaze polychrome enamels. Gift of Sarah B. Jewell, the Conger Collection, 1991. E76737. Photo courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum.
 Right: Fall foliage, Boston, October 2024. Photo courtesy of Susan Lai.

Save the Date
Oct. 11 - 16, 2026
Asian Art in Boston and Beyond

Join the Society for Asian Art on a tour to Boston, Cambridge and Salem to enjoy an astounding line-up of art collections and also glimpse the gorgeous fall foliage. We will have in-depth, curator-led tours at both the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) in Salem to discover renowned collections from China, Japan, Korea, South Asia and the Islamic world – including the opportunity at PEM to see a major retrospective exhibition about Isamu Noguchi and to marvel at the Yin Yu Tang House, an 18th-century Chinese house re-erected inside the museum. We will also see archaic Chinese jades and other important Asian art at Harvard’s Sackler Museum, as well as a tour into Egypt’s past at the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East. Rounding out our Boston sojourn will be guided tours at art lovers’ favorites, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art. We will stay at the four-star Fairmont Copley Plaza, located in Back Bay and within walking distance to restaurants, shopping and local attractions.

This trip will open for registration the first week in May and will be announced via email.



Left: Elephant Rock AlUla. Right: Barbara Porter. Photos courtesy of Barbara Porter.

Save the Date
Jan. 22 - Feb. 5, 2027
Saudi Arabian Odyssey: From the Desert to the Sea

Take the road less traveled and join the SAA for a fascinating journey through the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a country untouched by tourism until relatively recently. The trip combines history, culture, archaeology, architectural wonders, and natural beauty. Led by distinguished Middle East archaeologist and art historian, Dr. Barbara Porter, we will explore a variety of venues, including UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as the Nabatean ruins of Hegra (Mada’in Salih) and historically strategic sites along the incense trade route, such as AlUla. We will also visit the holy city of Madinah, the JAX district of contemporary art in Riyadh, and significant castles and forts. Throughout the trip, we will be inspired by Saudi Arabia’s stunning geographical diversity, including sandstone cliffs, dramatic rock formations, an ancient natural canyon, historic oases, and the crystal clear waters of the Red Sea. The trip will begin in the capital city of Riyadh in the historical heartland of Najd, and conclude in the port city and commercial hub of Jeddah, along the shores of the Red Sea, the historic gateway to Mecca.

This trip will open for registration the end of May/beginning of June and will be announced via email.