

Society for Asian Art Newsletter



July - August 2026

No. 4

President's Message

Welcome to the 68th year of the Society for Asian Art (SAA). Our fiscal year starts on July 1st and ends on June 30th. We have so many exciting events planned for our 2026-2027 season, including the Arts of Asia fall and spring sessions, travel opportunities, special member events, study groups, literature classes, the book sale in April and our get-togethers for a holiday party, spring dinner and our Annual Meeting next May.

Speaking of the Annual Meeting, I was glad to see so many of you attending our 2026 meeting. The speakers were wonderful, and we were pleased to initiate the first ever SAA Volunteer of the Year Award. This year's recipient was the indefatigable Nazneen Spliedt, who has volunteered for three decades to bring our best events to fruition. We couldn't have done it without you, Nazneen.



Julia Molander

At the Annual Meeting we honored five Directors who are stepping down from the Board: Anne Katz, Candace Zander Kahn, Debbie Wong Ottman, Irene Schaefer, and Charita Thakkar. We were also pleased to introduce at the Board meeting our four newest Directors: Jeff Doherty, Jennifer Faulkner-Ongerth, Sanjyot Mehendale and Carmel Tenenbaum. Standing for re-election for another two-year term are Neaera Baer, Sheila Dowell, and Mark Gross.

As I mentioned at the Annual Meeting, the SAA is fairly unique in allowing and even encouraging all its members to join committees for our programming and events. Our committees include the Arts of Asia, Literature and Culture, Member Events, Study Groups, Upper Category Events, Travel, Membership, Social Media and the Book Sale. We also could use special expertise in investments and bylaws/operating procedures. If you are interested, please contact me at jamolander1@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
Julia Molander
President

Ha Chong-Hyun: Retrospective Sept. 25, 2026 – Jan. 25, 2027

Don't miss this unprecedented look at the creative evolution of one of Korea's most influential contemporary artists in his first museum exhibition in North America!



Left: *Conjunction 25-19, 2025*, by Ha Chong-Hyun (b. 1935). Oil on hemp cloth. Photo by Chunho An.

Middle: *Naissance-B, 1967*, by Ha Chong-Hyun (b. 1935). Oil and collage on canvas. Ha Chong-Hyun Art Center. Photo by Sangtae Kim.

Right: Ha Chong-Hyun in his studio. Photo by Chunho An (2).

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





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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



UPCOMING EVENTS (Subject to Change)

Jan. 22 - Feb. 5, 2027

Saudi Arabian Odyssey from the Desert to the Sea

Registration will be announced via email the end of June.

May 12 - 23, 2027

Himalayan Heritage: Journey to Nepal and Bhutan

Registration will be announced via email in September.



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

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

Johann Boedecker & Michelle Tran
Yvonne Dorsey
Barbara Foo
Lawrence Lee
Sharon Lee-Nakayama

Karen Leong
Amanda Minami & Aime Chao
Eowyn Pak
Pamela Pasti
Johnie Wong



SOCIAL MEDIA

To submit photos or videos of SAA programs for use in our Social Media channels, please email them to Social Media Committee Chair, Grace Kim Kostal, at gracekostal@berkeley.edu.

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and Susan Lai

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Board of Directors 2026-2027

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*ex officio



ARTS OF ASIA FALL 2026 LECTURE SERIES

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 (buncheon 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 Sept. 11 to Dec. 11, 2026 (No lecture on Oct. 23 & Nov. 27.)

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 Sept. 4, 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.

Please visit our [website](#) for the most up-to-date information about this lecture series..

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



ARTS OF ASIA FALL 2026 LECTURE SERIES

Speakers & Topics (Subject to Change)

Sept. 11, 2026

Lost Masters and Named Craftspersons: Artisans during the Han Dynasty

Anthony Barbieri, Professor and Interim Associate Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, University of California, Santa Barbara

Sept. 18, 2026

The Impact of Jingdezhen Chinese Porcelain on China

Ellen Huang, Adjunct Associate Professor, Humanities and Sciences, ArtCenter

Sept. 25, 2026

Japanese Bamboo Artworks and Bashōfu Textiles

Yuki Morishima, Associate Curator of Japanese Art, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

Oct. 2, 2026

Kogei and Sodeisha Japanese Ceramics after Mingei

Bradley Bailey, Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Curator of Asian Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Oct. 9, 2026

Mingei in Japan and Post-War United States

Meghen Jones, Professor of Art History, Alfred University

Oct. 16, 2026

Differences between Material Culture and Traditional Art History

Morgan Pitelka, Bernard L. Herman Distinguished Professor, Department of History, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Oct. 23, 2026 - No Lecture

Oct. 30, 2026

The Art of Wood in Korea

Yoon-Jee Choi, Assistant Curator of Korean Art, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

Nov. 6, 2026

The History and Impact of the 1000 Year Old 20 Foot Long Cast Bronze West Mebon Vishnu

Vasudha Narayanan, Distinguished Professor, Department of Religion, University of Florida

Nov. 13, 2026

The Arts of the Ainu People of Japan

Akiko Walley, Maude I. Kerns Associate Professor of Japanese Art, University of Oregon

Nov. 20, 2026

Fabrication and Forgery of the Art of Islamic Ceramics

Margaret Graves, Adrienne Minassian Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture in honor of Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, Brown University

Nov. 27, 2026 - No Lecture

Dec. 4, 2026

Contemporary Art of Cambodia

Boreth Ly, Associate Professor, Southeast Asian Art and Visual Culture, University of California, Santa Cruz

Dec. 11, 2026

The Art and History of Cloth in Mughal India

Sylvia Houghteling, Associate Professor of History of Art, Bryn Mawr College



MEMBER EVENTS

StudioDong Visit: Curator Jeff Durham in Conversation with Artist Nick Dong

When: **Saturday, Jul. 11, 2026**

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

Place: **StudioDong, 8 Grass Valley Ct., Oakland**

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

Join the SAA for a private visit to the studio of artist Nick Dong, and hear curator Jeff Durham speak on *Engineering Awakening: Exploring the Intersections of Art, Technology, and Buddhism in conversation with the artist.*

In 2023, Nick initiated a project titled *Auspicious 88*, and vowed to complete 88 works by 2028. With a strong background in Tibetan Buddhism, Nick leverages iconography as a starting point and integrates in his artworks painting, metalsmithing, and new media art, and incorporates the effects of light, sound, space and metaphysics to "fabricate" a transcendental experience. His 2024 exhibit at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, *Nick Dong: 11 to 88*, featured 11 of these works. Pieces now at his studio and on exhibit in Taiwan will be shipped to Berlin mid-July for an upcoming exhibition. We are invited to see and hear about what's in his studio before it's shipped out. Besides exhibiting internationally and at the Asian Art Museum, in 2012, Dong was one of 40 artists born since 1972 chosen to appear in *40 under 40: Craft Futures* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C.

Nick Dong is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice centers on spiritual inquiry and personal transformation. He draws inspiration from both ancient philosophies and contemporary design, and creates immersive installations that invite introspection and emotional resonance. Nick currently lives and works in Oakland, CA, and Taipei, Taiwan.

Jeff Durham is known to SAA members as a highly respected lecturer and scholar, and former Associate Curator of Himalayan Art at the Asian Art Museum. Previously, Jeff was a professor of comparative religion, specializing in Buddhist and Tibetan art, iconography and philosophy.

New Chinese Museums with Jay Xu

When: **Saturday, Sept. 5, 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**

China's museum scene has exploded in the past 10 years with an astonishing number of new museums being built in addition to the widespread expansion and remodeling of existing museums. Join Jay Xu, the very popular former director of the Asian Art Museum, as he explains what's driving all this museum activity and describes some of the most fascinating of the new and remodeled museums – many of which have been designed by the world's most exciting and innovative architects. Jay will also focus on key art objects showcased in these museums and will discuss Chinese museum projects being planned or currently in production.

Jay Xu was the Director of the Asian Art Museum from 2008 to 2025. He received his PhD from Princeton University in early Chinese art and archaeology. He has held curatorial positions at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Seattle Art Museum and has had hands-on experience at the Shanghai Art Museum. He is the first Asian American to be elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.



Auspicious 88 - Lotus of Living and Dying. Graphite drawing on high density foam with epoxy, mirror, LEDs, acrylic mirror, aluminum, kinetic and audio components with micro computer. Photo courtesy of Nick Dong.



Left: Nick Dong. Photo courtesy of Nick Dong.
Right: Jeff Durham. Photo courtesy of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.



Sanxingdui Museum. STW932, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:New_Sandingdui_Museum_02.jpg.



Shanghai Museum East. Alexey Yakovlev, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shanghai_Museum_East.jpg



Jay Xu. Photo courtesy of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.



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.

Due to the set up requirements, this study group is limited to a maximum of 36 participants. So, please sign up now!

Materials to produce calligraphy during the workshop are included in the registration fees.



'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.

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.

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

The course syllabus with specific reading assignments will be posted on the program webpage in August.



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, 2023.7lab. 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: 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 June and will be announced via email.



Left: Baudhanath Stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal. Photo courtesy of Signature Escapades.

Right: Buddha Dordenma, Thimphu, Bhutan. Photo courtesy of Jojo's Adventures.

Save the Date May 12 - 23, 2027 Himalayan Heritage: Journey to Nepal and Bhutan

Join the SAA for an unforgettable trip to the "Roof of the World." Mantled with the high Himalayas to the north, Nepal is a land of scenic splendor, age-old temples, diverse cultures, exotic wildlife and some of the friendliest people on the planet. We'll start in Kathmandu where we will be immersed in Buddhist culture, religion and art. We also visit Chitwan National Park where we'll see many of the Nepali fauna in their natural habitat. What would a trip to Nepal be without going to Lumbini, birthplace of the Buddha. A short plane ride will take us to "The Land of the Thunder Dragon" - Bhutan where we will be joined by art historian, Ariana Maki, whose research focuses on the material and visual cultures that constitute South Asia and its borderlands, with particular expertise in Bhutan and the broader Himalayan region. She is a two-time Fulbright scholar to Bhutan. Ariana will introduce us to the arts and textiles of Bhutan and we'll visit museums, craftspeople engaging in their arts, and workshops. Buddhism is as important in Bhutan as it is in Nepal, so we will also see one of the largest seated Buddha statues in the world as well as either the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery or Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest and most sacred temples (your choice). We will stay in 4 or 5 star hotels, which are walkable to sites. These two countries are not to be missed!

This trip will open for registration in September and will be announced via email.