

December 2024

Treasure House News



President's Message By Melissa Patton

Dear Docents,

I am filling in for Annette while she is on a travel adventure to Ethiopia.

In these divisive times, I want us to remember the mission statement of the USC Pacific Asia Museum: "The Museum's mission is to further intercultural understanding through the arts of Asia and the Pacific Islands", and to promote that "understanding in the service of elevating our shared sense of humanity." It is through our important role as Docents that we accomplish those goals with every tour we lead.

During these months of thanks and giving, I want to acknowledge our bravery, ingenuity, and generous sharing of ideas in developing engaging tours of "A Material Odyssey". I also want to thank our wonderful Education staff – Valentina and Lonnie – for providing us with much support and encouragement in creating those tours.

Please take advantage of the exhibition tours led by Dr. Rachel Rivenc. Her insights into the mind and work of Cai Guo-Qiang are illuminating, and she is a fantastic speaker. The next one is Saturday, December 7; reservations can be made through the museum's website.

Do not forget our Happy Holiday Party on Tuesday, December 10, 11:30 am at the Blinn House. And remember to bring an already priced treasure for the fundraising sale. I hope to see everyone there.

Melissa

IMPORTANT DATES

December 10, 2024
at 10:00 a.m.

Docent Council Meeting

December 10
at 11:30 am

USC PAM Docent Holiday Party

Ode to Cai Guo-Qiang*

In the realm of art where vision and sky unite,
A master stands, his canvas vast and bright—
Cai Guo-Qiang, with gunpowder as his light,
Crafts scenes that turn the darkness into sight.

With a touch, a spark, a controlled explosion,
He paints the sky, in motion, a bold notion.
A fleeting moment, where fire meets ambition,
Creating beauty from a tradition's transition.

More than an artist, a philosopher of flame,
He questions war, peace, and humanity's aim.
Through his work, a dialogue, an open door,
Inviting us to think, to dream, to explore.

Oh, Cai Guo-Qiang, you capture the night's soul,
With fireworks that sketch, that dance, that scroll.
Each burst, a word; each pattern, a story told,
A tapestry of light, in the heavens boldly scrolled.

You are the bridge between the earth and sky,
Where ephemeral beauty and human hopes fly.
A shared silence, as the crowd gazes on,
In that moment, our differences gone.

Your art, a testament to power and grace,
A reminder of our place in time and space.
A narrative woven with gunpowder's trace,
Marking the sky, humanity's shared embrace.

So here's to you, artist of the ephemeral light,
Who crafts from darkness, scenes so bright.
In the world of art, you carve your mark—
Cai Guo-Qiang, with fire, you ignite the spark.

**Created by Grammarly AI and submitted by
Fran. De La Rosa*

Edited excerpts from the book “GUNPOWDER: Alchemy, Bombards, And Pyrotechnics (Section 1)

by Jack Kelly submitted by Holly Holbart

(According to legend)..In the mountains of Western China there were ogres. The best way to frighten them off was a loud noise. When moist young bamboo twigs are heated the expanding air and steam inside creates pressure that bursts the twig with a loud snap. These early noisemakers were used from prehistoric times. On New Years, the crack of exploding bamboo drove away evil spirits and cleared the way for the coming year.

A branch of Taoism that incorporated sorcery, superstition and esoteric knowledge became established as Chinese alchemy. Alchemy contributed three critical elements in the discovery of “fire drug”: purification, observation and experiment. Purity was a sacred quality; even a small amount of contamination could derail a reaction. Alchemists took note of quirks. Having carefully observed, they experimented. While not scientific in the modern sense, their systemic trial and error enabled them to grope into the unknown.

Their principal aim was to create an elixir of immortality. Taoist alchemists conducted a centuries-long search into paradoxical materials – gold, the element that never tarnished; mercury, the liquid metal; sulfur, the stone that burned. A book dating from around 850 AD, “Classified Essentials of the Mysterious Tao of the True Origins of Things” warned, “Some have heated together sulfur, realgar (arsenic sulfide) and saltpeter with dried honey, smoke and flames result, so that their hands and faces have been burnt, and even the whole house where they were working burned down.” Alchemists had stumbled across what saltpeter could do when mixed with sulfur and a source of carbon.

Saltpeter (nitrate) is the waste product of bacteria that break down organic matter. In nitrate, three oxygen atoms are fastened to one of nitrogen. Nitrate is among the most soluble of all salts. It dissolves in rainwater, soaks into the earth and is wicked upward by evaporation. All other materials solidify first, leaving the nitrates to concentrate at the surface. Southern China’s hot climate, accompanied by alternating wet and dry seasons, promoted both rapid decay and speedy evaporation. The salt was readily available as a white crust on certain soils. Alchemists had studied its qualities for centuries.

Asian Highlights

PRAYER FLAGS



Prayer flags, a common sight in the Himalayan region, are significant cultural and religious symbols believed to promote peace, compassion, strength, and wisdom. For many Himalayans, prayer flags are a vital part of their spiritual life. The origins of prayer flags trace back to ancient Tibet, where they were initially part of the indigenous Bön tradition. As Buddhism spread into Tibet around the 7th century, prayer flags were seamlessly integrated into Buddhist practices.

When in the Himalayas, you'll typically find them strung horizontally across mountain passes, between trees, on high poles, rooftops or other high places. It is believed that when the wind blows the flags, it spreads the blessings, goodwill, and compassion embodied in the images and writings across the land. This act of spreading positive energy helps to purify the environment and bring harmony to all living beings.

Prayer flags come in five specific colors, each representing an element: **Blue**-sky and space; **White**-air and wind; **Red**-fire; **Green**-water; **Yellow**-earth. They are always arranged in a specific order, reflecting their connection and the harmony they bring. The flags are also traditionally woodblock-printed with images and texts.



Lungta, or wind horse flags, are perhaps the most well-known type of prayer flags. The name *lungta* (*lung* = wind; *ta* = horse) comes from a mythical Tibetan creature from pre-Buddhist times combining the speed of the wind and the strength of the horse to carry prayers from earth to the heavens. It often carries three jewels on its back, which symbolize the Buddha, the Dharma (Buddhist teachings), and the Sangha (Buddhist community). There are usually images of four sacred animals in the corners of the flags, each with its own specialized meaning:

Dragon - strength and protection; **Garuda** - wisdom and the ability to see all things clearly; **Tiger** - confidence and strength; **Snow Lion** - fearlessness and joy.

Over time, the prints on the flags fade and the prayers become part of the universe, symbolizing the fleetingness of life and the continual renewal of spiritual energy. As the old flags wear out, new ones are hung to continue the cycle of prayers and blessings. Since the flags are consecrated and believed to be sacred, it is taboo to treat them with disrespect or desecrate them by stepping on them, throwing them in the rubbish, or using them for mundane purposes.

In the diverse cultures of the Himalayas, prayer flags play a significant role as a symbol of cultural identity and in fostering cultural unity. Despite the varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the region, the practice of hanging prayer flags is embraced by Buddhists, Hindus, and even non-religious people in the area.

The influence of prayer flags has extended far beyond the Himalayas, resonating with people around the world. The global adoption of prayer flags reflects a broader cultural exchange. As people travel and learn about different traditions, they bring back practices like hanging prayer flags, which enrich their own cultural landscapes with these meaningful symbols.

Bhutan prayer flags

*Peace, compassion, strength, wisdom,
Path to happiness*

Touring Topics

Fran De La Rosa

Do you remember a field trip from your early childhood? What do you recall? I remember the field trip to Mission San Juan Capistrano. Why? I saw cows roaming the hills alongside the highway on the long journey! A friend remembers a trip to Helm's Bakery. Why? Each student received a mini loaf of bread after the tour. Those events happened over sixty years ago! What makes them stand out? The experience is the memory, not the questioning by the docent/guide (if there even was one).

Be assured that questioning students will not make them remember your tour. Asking "open-ended" or "closed" questions will make little difference in what your visitors carry away. This is not to say the questions posed are not important. They certainly are. Their importance lies in how they further the visitors' experience.

In education today, students are continually questioned. They are prodded and encouraged to share their thoughts or feelings. They are harangued to "explain their thinking" to peers. Is it any wonder that when they go on a field trip, they are reluctant to answer questions from someone they don't know?

Good questioning opens the door to various outcomes, many predicated on the rapport established with the group. Middle and high school students are often leery of opening up to their peers, much less to a docent they have never met. Often, younger students have difficulty putting thoughts together and will answer off-topic or incomprehensibly.

So, what to do? One solution is to begin an observation with your musings: 'I'm noticing ...' or "As I look at this, I'm wondering ...," followed by "What are you wondering?" Not giving too much information about the object encourages a visitor to ponder and think. Wondering is a way to prompt students to ask questions independently (isn't wondering an indirect way of asking a question?).

Allowing visitors to ask their own questions is an excellent way to enhance the tour experience. Older students prefer to ask questions and seek answers independently rather than have questions asked to which they must find answers. Students may be broken into pairs or small groups to explore a gallery on their own and bring back questions for discussion to the group or to share what they have discovered.

Creatively asked questions can enhance a tour for all involved. Any questions?

Study Group Activity

Study Group 1:

November 2024: A lively discussion was held as we discussed Tajikistan, the smallest of the Central Asian countries that once were part of the Soviet Union. The impoverished country mainly retains the original culture of the nomadic peoples prior to Soviet rule.

Afghanistan; Pakistan will be the subjects of future meetings.

Karen Margolis

Study Group 2:

Discussion of the Shoya House tour at the Huntington; presentation on Ancient Chinese water sources by Holly; presentation on the 'Masters of Mercy' series of Buddhist paintings by Kano Kazunobu by Maureen; discussion of 'Dragonfly and Butterfly' movie event; discussion of the oral history record of Pacific Asia Museum; presentation on the history of the Halo in art by Maureen.

Bunny's book recommendation: Elephant Company by Vicki C Crooke



Docents On the Go

Activities Around Town

By Maureen

Movie Screening in Hollywood

November 10, 2024

Evelyn Xu kindly invited docents to the movie premier of the "Swallowtail & Dragonfly" at the TCL Chinese Theatres in Hollywood. The movie is about the dramatic and wonderful life of Evelyn's grandmother, Zhou Lianxia, born Zhou Ziyi, which detail was provided on last month's THN. Evelyn is the executive producer of the movie, and casted as Zhou's beautiful mother. We also enjoyed the immersive experience of movie's exhibition curated by Meher McArthur. Congratulation to Evelyn and her family for wonderful premier!

Zhou "Ziyi" Lianxia,
Shanghai's artist/poetess,
Lovely "swallowtail".



One Arroyo Trail Project Ribbon Cutting

December 7, 2024

The City of Pasadena, in partnership with the One Arroyo Foundation, invites the community to a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the completion of the Arroyo Seco trail improvements. The event will take place on Saturday, December 7th, 2024, at 11:00 AM at the Lower Arroyo Park parking area and marks a major milestone in revitalizing this cherished Pasadena resource.

The ceremony will feature remarks from Pasadena Mayor Victor M. Gordo and other community leaders. Attendees can enjoy optional activities, including a guided walk of the new trail improvements or a one-mile trail run led by the Pasadena Pacers

[More Information and Reservations](#)

Shoseian Teahouse, Glendale

Sunday, December 15, 2024 -- 10:00 AM 2:00 PM

Join us to celebrate the holidays with a demonstration of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony! Guests will view a formal ceremony and be served an authentic bowl of matcha tea and a Japanese sweet.

Reservations are required. There will be three seatings with limited tickets: 10:00am, 11:30am and 1:00pm.

[Purchase tickets here.](#)

Online Activities

The Dunhuang Foundations 6-Part Fall Series 'Curating the Silk Roads' is being posted on YouTube: [Click Here](#)

Free Online Presentation: **JapanCraft 21 to host "10 Japanese Urushi Lacquer Masters"** on Thursday, Dec. 5 at 5PM, PST

One hour, Live on Zoom, presented by Japancraft21, Steve Beimel

[Register Here](#)



Library Corner

First Books

For anyone discovering new spiritually oriented ways of looking at the world, new ways of being in the world, the "First Book" (or Books) play a vital role in providing a direction or path. Such was it for me when, because of "life situations" (too dull and pedestrian to list here), I began a search for a spiritual path. Below find a personal catalogue of my "First Books" that led me to Buddhism, specifically Zen Buddhism. This is just my list; there are an infinite number of paths to be found and followed. Well, here we go.

The Buddha and His Teachings,

ed. Bercholz and Kohn, Shambhala Publications

Originally titled Entering the Stream this is a rich anthology of writings covering the history of Buddhism, the life of the Buddha, and representative writings from a wide variety of teachers covering all the major schools of Buddhism.

Radiant Mind,

ed. Smith, Tricycle Books/Riverhead

Another wide-ranging introduction to Buddhism, again with representative writings from Buddhist teachers from all the major schools.

The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen,

Shambhala Publications

A necessity for the student of Buddhism, providing definitions of Buddhist terms from Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese and Japanese. I found this book to be a wonderful teaching tool just leafing and browsing, moving from one term to another.

What The Buddha Taught,

Walpola Rahula, Grove Press

A review of the Buddha's basic teachings, derived from early Pali scriptures; focusses on the Four Noble Truths, with a Theravadan perspective,

Zen Mind, Beginners Mind, S

hunryu Suzuki Roshi, Shambhala Publications

A classic, gentle introduction to Zen; emphasizes the importance of "Beginners Mind" for both the novice and the veteran practitioner.

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying,

Soygal Rinpoche, HarperCollins Publications

A detailed but eminently readable introduction to the traditions and teachings of Tibetan Buddhism.

As Buddhism has flowered in the West, the number of materials available for the student and practitioner has expanded exponentially. There are many ways of "entering the stream"; each searcher will find their own way. This listing is just a tiny part of my own introduction to the Dharma.

Bob Swan

Other Reminders

*Holiday party,
Docents delight together,
Result: happiness.*

