

January 2025

Treasure House News



President's Message

Dear Docents,

Welcome to the beginning of a New Year! We closed out 2024 with a very nice Holiday Party at the Blinn House, put together by our Events Committee. A big thank you to them for all their planning and work to make this a success.

Hopefully by now docents are familiar enough with the Cai Guo Qiang exhibit that you can begin to relax and enjoy it yourself. The exhibit will be continuing until June. We will be featuring various works in the exhibition in the THN **Gallery Spotlight** and Cai's book is reviewed in the **Library Corner**. Also, have you been checking out the **Touring Blogs'** section of our own **Docent Blog** on line? You may find information/helpful hints there by other docents to add to your own tours. Please remember to add your own entries there as well. Others will find this useful.

In January we are touring an assortment of different grade levels, so there is something for everyone. Be sure to read Fran's **Touring Tips** for Middle School Students. There are still quite a few spots that need filling; so, remember to sign up. Lonnie will be as grateful as she is to December's **Touring Heros**. This month we celebrate two big Asian holidays. Japanese New Year matches our New Year celebrations on January 1. Chinese New Year is on January 29th when we enter the Year of the Snake. So, if you need a reason to celebrate....

Annette

IMPORTANT DATES

January 7 at 10 am

Docent Council Board Meeting
(Board members only)

January 14 at 10am

Docent Council Meeting
and Lecture

February 1

Lunar New Year celebration
at USC-PAM

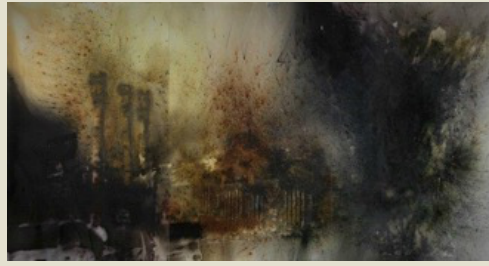
March 1

Exhibition Tour@PAM
Cai Guo-Qiang: A Material Odyssey).
RSVP beginning 1/21

*Cover Image
Acclaimed "nihonga,"
Glimmering azure rooftops,
Higashiyama.*

Gallery Spotlight Palmyra

By Annette Drey



Palmyra (the Roman name; Tadmor to the Syrians) was a thriving city of the ancient world, whose impressive UNESCO-listed ruins are located in Syria. References to Palmyra appear in the Bible, as well as in other historical writings; some dating as far back as the 2nd millennium BCE. However, it was from the 1st century BCE that affluent caravan owners stopped there along the old Silk Road, contributing to its wealth. It was under Roman rule, however, that Palmyra experienced its peak. As the Roman Empire expanded in the 1st and 2nd centuries BCE, Palmyra became one of its provinces. Most of the extensive ruins of Palmyra today – that were not destroyed during the Syrian Civil War – date back to its time under Roman rule, particularly the 2nd and 3rd centuries.



Ancient Palmyra suffered irreparable harm when ISIS overran the city in 2015. The destruction of Palmyra's magnificent monuments provoked an international outcry. The Syrian government

retook the area in March 2016; and, the ancient site—which has survived multiple wars and strife—remains a key historical and cultural treasure. Palmyra was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980.

Palmyra is also the title of a work by Cai Guo Qiang, hanging in our final gallery. It is a large piece made up of three panels that are 7' 10 1/2" x 14' 9 1/8" in total. Cai chose Palmyra as the subject of one of his paintings in 2017 as a gesture of empathy for the destruction that had befallen it in its most recent misfortune as a victim of the Syrian Civil War. He was working during a residency at the Prado in Spain at the time he created the work. As a precursor to this work, Cai experimented using gunpowder to reimagine Goya's 'The Third of May', the subject matter of which was the indiscriminate killing of civilians by the French occupiers. With Syria systematically being occupied and destroyed by the ISIS fighters, it is easy to draw parallels between the choice of this work and the situation in Syria. Further, one can see Cai's use of gunpowder explosions to create his Palmyra painting as an interesting marriage of materials and historical reality.

Docent Spotlight

By Richard Ewell



Chuck Woo is a Southern California native from Artesia, growing up as a 'farm boy' on his family's chicken ranch that produced eggs for the local egg distribution center in Commerce. He became a 'city boy' when the family moved to Monterey Park at the beginning of his senior year at Alhambra High School. He graduated from Cal State Los Angeles with a BS in Microbiology and was employed as a Laboratory Scientist at Kaiser Hospital, retiring after 38 years of service. In 2018 he became a docent and has since developed a strong interest in discovering a variety of our museum's 'hidden gems or treasures' along with their history.

His wife, Shirley, along with their son and daughter, plus the four grandkids enjoy family-time, traveling to various vacation locations. Last month they returned from visiting the Dazu Rock Carvings in Chongqing, China. This extensive World Heritage Site, with its statues, history, carvings, and stories they consider one of the best they've ever visited. They also enjoy traveling to different cities, visiting museums (especially Asian arts), Chinatowns and Chinese restaurants along the way. Their favorite activities include running, researching genealogy, and participating in their grandkids' activities.

Asian Highlights

Japanese New Year

By Karen Komai Margolis



In Japan, the New Year, “Oshogatsu” is celebrated from January 1-3, after the Emperor Meiji accepted the Gregorian calendar in 1873 in place of the lunar calendar. The lunar calendar’s new year begins on January 29, 2025. In preparation for the coming year, the people clean their homes, and throw out old remnants of the previous year for a fresh start. Homes are decorated with pine, bamboo, and plum tree branches, a straw wreath, stacked “kagami mochi” topped with a mandarin orange, and the zodiac animal representing the year, all displayed for visiting family and friends.

The year of the wood snake (2025) is destined to be a time of growth, creativity, introspection, strengthening relationships, and making long-term goals. The snake’s ability to shed its skin is symbolic of change. One must relinquish that which is no longer useful, in order to let in whatever one needs for growth. Wood, as the element that falls in years ending in four or five, brings an added layer of growth, resilience, and forward-looking energy. The additional four elements that accompany other years are fire, earth, metal, and water.



Japanese postcards, “nengajo,” are sent to family and friends. Special foods are prepared prior to New Year’s Day, so that no work will be necessary during the holiday, freeing everyone of stress as the new year ushers in health, success and prosperity. The popular music show: “kohaku uta gassen” airs on New Year’s eve. “Oshogatsu” begins with sunrise observance. The first dish consumed for good luck is “ozoni,” a soup containing “mochi” (pounded rice cakes). The main meal, “osechi,” containing ingredients which date back to the Heian Period (794-1185), packed in a layered lacquer box, may include buckwheat noodles, sweet

rolled omelette, candied chestnuts, black soybeans, anchovies, sweet potatoes, red bean paste, herring roe, daikon & carrot salad, pickled vegetables, burdock with sesame sauce, simmered chicken, boiled vegetables, various seafood, and fresh homemade mochi.

Traditionally, many dress in elaborate winter “kimono” to attend the local shrine with their families. They write a wish or goal upon an “ema,” a small wooden tablet tied on a string. To purchase an “omikujii” (fortune) at the shrine with hopes for good luck is an ancient custom. Visitors ring the bell, say a prayer, and anticipating a fruitful year to come, return home to entertain New Year’s guests.





Docents On the Go

By Eiko

Holiday Party

December 10, 2024

The docent holiday party, hosted by the Events Committee led by Evelyn Xu, was held on December 10th at the Blinn House, home of Pasadena Heritage. Approximately 40 docents, plus Valentina and Lonnie, enjoyed the heartwarming party with food catered by Panda Express. People also enjoyed the fundraising sale which yielded \$350. Carmen Choy kindly donated a ticket to the Langham Huntington Afternoon Tea and a plate full of cookies. Nancy Lan won the Afternoon Tea ticket; and, Richard Ewell won the plate of cookies. It was a fabulous way to finish the year.



Activities Around Town

By Maureen

Descanso Gardens

Rock Garden Raking

January 3, 2025

9:00 am - 10:00 am

Included with admission or membership

Join us on Fridays in January as Jenny Flores, a gardener at Descanso Gardens, demonstrates rock garden raking in the Japanese Garden. Each demonstration will be followed by a Q&A.

No registration required, free with admission.



Camellia Walking Tour

January 4, 2025 @ 9:00 am - 10:00 am

Included with admission or membership.

Join Camellia Horticulturalist Arian Noorzai on a walking tour to learn about Descanso's camellia collections and an introduction to rare and exotic camellias.

Meets at Center Circle. No advance registration required, free with admission.

Online Activities

Documentary and conversation with Chuang Che, one of the key members of the Chinese painting modernization movement of the 1960s and forward. The two films describe his familial and lifelong relationship with the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. (Subtitled)



Touring Topics

By Fran De La Rosa

Engaging Middle School Students

“Middle school students are a hoot!” “Middle school students are so difficult to deal with.” When working with middle school students (MSS), these are two common impressions from teachers and/or docents. Bottom line: they are very complicated. In general, MSS are energetic or lethargic, curious or apathetic, or just plain difficult to read, which makes touring with them all the more challenging (and fun!). So, how do we make our tours successful for MSS?

Rather than lecture-based learning, MSS may prefer an inquiry approach. They enjoy interacting with each other, as well as instructors/docents, in information-seeking activities.

- Give them a task. In a gallery, give pairs of MSS a broad task to complete and bring back to the group. For example, in the Crossroads Gallery, distribute cards with broad topics (people, religion, shelter), and send students to discover an object(s) that fits that topic. Ask them to gather some information to bring back to the group and share.

MSS like to feel they have control over what and how they learn.

- Ask them what they want from the visit or what they need from you to make it worthwhile. They may or may not have come to the museum with a specific learning agenda.

These students want to make connections to their own lives.

- Ask the probing question, “What does the Silk Road have to do with me?” or “How does artificial intelligence (as in Cai Guo-Qiang’s work) affect me?”

They want to interact with each other and have “fun.”

- Learning and fun are not mutually exclusive; learning should be fun! Allow some time for MSS to explore the gallery on their own or with a partner. Then, bring the group together to share questions, wonderings, etc. Their questions serve as a springboard for lively discussions that meet your goals for the tour.

MSS want to feel comfortable with the environment, the docent, and the material.

- Remember that MSS want to be seen as young adults rather than children. They don’t want to be lectured to or talked down to. They relish having their thoughts and ideas recognized as valuable.

These thoughts are the tip of an enormous iceberg when touring with MSS. They are a unique age group, in between children and young adults, who are a “hoot” and are “difficult.” But, once you experience their uniqueness, you will look forward to the next middle school tour!

December Touring Heroes

A big thank you to the docents who toured during December 2024:

Fran De La Rosa
Jane Hirschkowitz
Eiko Kubota
Nancy Lan
Yvonne Lee
John O’Malley
Melissa Patton
Candice Siegle
Ana Soullriver
Kathy Wales
Chuck Woo
Evelyn Xu

Study Group Activity

Study Group 2

By Maureen Nyhan

We only met during the early part of December; and, our meetings consisted of non-formal discussions about: touring, USC PAM history, and planning ideas for the upcoming year.

January Haiku

By Karen Margolis

*Ancient Palmyra,
UNESCO heritage site,
Gunpowder peril.*

*Dragon bids farewell,
As Snake brings transformation,
Changes lie ahead.*

*Japanese New Year
Most important holiday
Time to eat “mochi”!*

Library Corner

By Rose Lee

Cai Guo-Qiang: Odyssey and Homecoming



This book, “Cai Guo-Qiang: Odyssey and Homecoming,” is available in the Docent Library.

The book is available for docents to browse, enjoy and use for your tours. The book cannot be borrowed, but can be read in the docent office. The book will be displayed in the glass cabinet in our library.

BOOK REVIEW:

“Cai Guo-Qiang: Odyssey and Homecoming” is a beautifully presented hardcover book that delves deep into the artistic world of the renowned Chinese contemporary artist, Cai Guo-Qiang. Through a visually stunning collection of artworks and insightful commentary, this book offers readers a captivating journey through Cai’s creative odyssey.

The book showcases Cai’s signature style of using gunpowder as a medium for his explosive and breath-taking art installations. From large-scale public exhibitions to intimate galleries, each artwork featured in the book tells a story of cultural heritage, personal identity, and global connections.

What sets this book apart is its meticulous attention to detail in documenting Cai’s creative process, inspirations, and aspirations. The narrative not only explores Cai’s iconic works, but also provides a glimpse into the artist’s emotional and intellectual journey, making it a truly immersive reading experience.

With its high-quality production, stunning visuals, and thought-provoking content, “Cai Guo-Qiang: Odyssey and Homecoming” is a must-have for art enthusiasts, collectors, and anyone interested in the intersection of culture, tradition, and contemporary art. This book is a testament to Cai Guo-Qiang’s extraordinary talent and a celebration of his exceptional contribution to the art world.

(Hardcover, 372 pages, published August 10, 2021)

Edited excerpts from the book “GUNPOWDER: Alchemy, Bombards And Pyrotechnics (Section 2)”

By Jack Kelly submitted by Holly Hobart

Fire needs fuel, oxygen and heat. It needs an initiator – a tiny bit burning, a spark. The heat of the spark rips apart molecules of fuel. Carbon and hydrocarbon atoms combine with oxygen. The results are exothermic – they give off heat to ignite more fuel. Artificial fire requires an oxidizer, a chemical that releases oxygen when heated. When exposed to heat of 335 C, saltpeter breaks down, letting loose its many oxygen atoms. The key mechanism of artificial fire is this release of virgin oxygen, which becomes available to burn any surrounding fuel. “Fire drug” mixed saltpeter with fuel for a fast burn. The proportions were worked out through long trial and error. Three quarters saltpeter by weight in the total mixture would eventually emerge as the ideal proportion – early “fire drug” recipes containing lesser percentages burned vigorously but did not explode.

All that was needed to complete the formula was the proper fuel. The eventual fuel found charcoal and sulfur. Alchemists had long known of sulfur’s fiery potential. The second fuel was charcoal. Charcoal is a complex of pure carbon laced with volatile hydrocarbons and organic remnants. These chemicals, along with charcoal’s lattice-like structure, play a subtle but crucial role in the action of gunpowder.

Saltpeter, sulfur and charcoal rely on a unique and intricate teamwork to bring about the magic associated with “fire drug”. Sulfur reacts first to the addition of heat from a spark or flame. It ignites at a relatively low temperature, 261 C. Its burning generates additional heat that ignites the charcoal and shatters the saltpeter, releasing its store of oxygen. This pure oxygen hurries the ignition of more fuel. Charcoal burns at a higher temperature than sulfur, emitting abundant thermal energy to accelerate the reaction further.