

January 2026

Treasure House News



President's Message

As we enter 2026, I hope you find moments of peace, joy, and gentle reflection. This time of year reminds us how far we've come and how much strength we carry within us. Even small steps forward matter, and every effort you've made deserves recognition. Thank you to those who showed up for our "Conversations About" and the "Brown Bag Sessions". New perspective and touring skills were forged in the many engaging activities and group discussions. I am looking forward to some dynamic school tours in the coming months!

We wrapped up year 2025 with great joy and laughter during our holiday feast with contributions by our USC PAM docents! May the rest of the month be filled with warmth, kindness, and renewed hope for the year ahead. Take time to rest, to laugh, and to cherish the people and moments that matter most.

Wishing you a Happy New Year.

Yvonne

IMPORTANT DATES

Dec 20, 2025-Jan 4, 2026

Special Limited Time Preview. Docents may preview the exhibition in progress during regular museum hours

January 6, 2026 at 10am

Docent Council Board Meeting
(Board members only)

January 13, 2026 at 10am

Docent Council meeting
Lecture by Dr. Fabio Rambelli
"Development and Evolution of Yokai Culture in Japan."

January 17, 2026 at 6:00 pm

Event: Night Parade: Yokai Unleashed
A look at USC PAM's exhibition,
Mythical Creatures: The Stories We Carry. Free for Members

Exhibition Tours@PAM: Mythical Creatures: The Stories We Carry

Sat, Feb 21, 11:00 AM at USC PAM

Gallery Showcase

The Myth of the Garuda

By Annette Drey

The Garuda is one of Asia's most enduring and wide-ranging mythical beings, celebrated across Hindu, Buddhist, and Southeast Asian traditions. Often portrayed as a majestic, eagle-like creature with the golden body of a man and the wings and talons of a great bird, the Garuda symbolizes courage, sovereignty, and the triumph of wisdom over ignorance. There are many variations in the story of the Garuda.

In Hindu mythology, Garuda is best known as the mount (vahana) of Vishnu, the Preserver deity. His story begins with a feud between two sisters—Kadru and Vinata, Garuda's mother—whose rivalry ends with Vinata enslaved by the serpentine Nagas, the sons of Kadru. To free her, Garuda promised the Nagas he'd bring them the Amrita (nectar of immortality). Garuda flew to heaven, overcame celestial guards and challenges, retrieved the pot of Amrita, and showed immense strength and selflessness by not drinking it himself. On his return, he encountered Vishnu, who was so impressed by Garuda's integrity and power that he granted him immortality independent of the Amrita and chose him as his divine mount. In turn, Garuda pledged eternal service to Vishnu.

Buddhist traditions also adopted the Garuda, depicting him as a powerful but disciplined being capable of immense transformation. In Nepal and Tibet, he appears in tantric iconography as a symbol of spiritual liberation, able to devour poisonous snakes and metaphorically dispel inner obstacles.

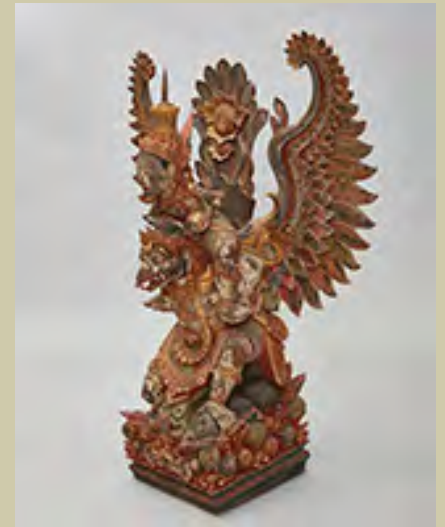
Across Southeast Asia, the Garuda takes on broader cultural meanings. In Indonesia and Thailand, he becomes a national emblem, representing strength, protection, and righteous rule. Khmer and Javanese temples depict the Garuda in dynamic stone carvings, his wings spread wide.

Though his forms vary—from fierce warrior to benevolent protector—the Garuda consistently embodies the aspiration to rise above adversity. Whether carved in temple walls, painted in manuscripts, or invoked in ritual, the Garuda remains a vivid reminder of humankind's enduring fascination with beings who bridge earth and sky.

Myth of Garuda,

Half human and half eagle,

Loyal Vishnu mount.



Indonesia, Bali
19th Century
wood; pigment; gold leaf
2020.6.24A-D



Garuda Lamp
Indonesia; Java
18th to 19th Century
1991.47.87

Featured Article

Mythical Creatures: The Stories We Carry

By Melissa Patton

Mythical Creatures: The Stories We Carry, the Pacific Asia Museum's new exhibition, is curated by artist Dave Kim. The exhibition is informed by his family's experience of immigrating from Korea to the U.S., but it tells the larger story of Pan-Asian immigration. Like his wonderful mural, *A Momentous Moment in Time of Passage and Landing*, which graces the museum's northern exterior wall, **Mythical Creatures** highlights the trials and triumphs inherent in the journey to, and integration into, a new home. Through artworks and immersive environments, the exhibition illuminates the internal "luggage" we all carry with us—the familial and sensory memories, and the stories and traditions that connect us to our diverse cultures.



More than 100 works of art from the PAM permanent collection are included in the exhibition. Some are seldom-seen pieces, such as the delicate *Night Parade of One Hundred Demons* scroll and the gorgeous gilt Japanese screen, *Three Cranes and Bamboo*. Among the more familiar pieces are the intricate wooden sculpture from Bali, *Wisnu Riding Garuda*; a vibrant Korean dragon painting; the silver *Lamp in the Form of a Garuda* from Java (used to illuminate shadow puppet plays); and selections from our exquisite collection of netsuke.

There are also stunning contemporary works, such as *Kites: A Poem by an Immigrant*, a series of ancestral portraits in the form of traditional Chinese kites, and *The Night Crossing*, sculptural interpretations of yokai. The first gallery greets visitors with a wall of family photographs contributed by community members, and the final gallery presents modern and traditional visions of a triumphant phoenix in a variety of media.



These mythical creatures represent the stories, traditions, beliefs, and memories that we carry with us when we can bring very little else on our journeys through life. The exhibition examines what sustains us through transitions and what allows us to preserve our heritage and culture, no matter where our journey ends.

Soft Opening, December 20; Formal Opening in February

*Mythical creatures,
Pan-Asian immigration,
Stories we carry.*

Docent Spotlight

By Richard Ewell



Paige LaCombe grew up in South Pasadena as the eldest of five children in a family that believed deeply in education, public service, and curiosity about the world.

Her parents were passionate travelers, and she learned that understanding other cultures generates empathy. Watching her mother serve on the school board taught her that women's voices matter.

Teaching became both Paige's profession and calling. She earned a degree in Human Development and a teaching credential from Pacific Oaks College and spent 23 years teaching with LAUSD. She worked in South Central L.A. alongside immigrant families, Dreamers, and Black youth. Her love of culture and human connection led her to international volunteer work. Through roles with the United Nations and Servas International, she built friendships across borders and witnessed how personal exchange can soften fear and build peace. Today, she organizes for the UN Commission on the Status of Women, with a focus on elevating women's voices from countries where speaking freely comes at great personal risk.

Recently retired from teaching, she is a volunteer at the L.A. Zoo and serves on its Conservation Committee. After losing their home in the Altadena fires, she and her family are now in the process of rebuilding—an experience that has deepened her appreciation for community, impermanence, and renewal. They continue to travel, learn, and seek beauty in art, history, and architecture. She is honored to work as a docent with PAM, where art becomes a bridge connecting cultures, generations, and stories across Asia and the world.

Docents On the Go

By Bruce Cristol

Annual Holiday Party



On December 9, 2025 the USC PAM Docent Council presented its annual holiday Party. Attendees included all Board members, Active and Associate docents as well as Sustaining docents. In addition, Lonnie, the School Programs and Education Coordinator and other staff members were also in attendance. The theme was PHOENIX RISING.

What caught one's attention was the camaraderie, in addition to the array of food choices, some homemade. Moreover, many lovely items were brought to the party by council members for viewing/sale. After thank you gifts to Al (custodian) and Eric (guard), the Council netted almost \$600 from the sale. The event culminated in an entertaining raffle, which involved all attendees.



Touring Topics

By Fran De La Rosa

"When's Lunch?"

Do you ever walk into an unfamiliar place and immediately look around for a restroom or check out the locations of exits? Do you have a preferred seat on public transportation, such as one near an exit or the driver? These actions are everyday, human behaviors developed to ensure survival. They are basic human needs.

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow, proposed what he termed a "Hierarchy of Needs" to explain the basic needs required by humans to reach their full potential. He divided his list into five sets, all of which are interrelated. His theory has been depicted as a pyramid, which conceptualizes his work. Since its inception, this theory has been applied across many fields (education, business, social work, healthcare), and, for our purposes, in museums. Every visitor to the museum must have basic needs met before they can begin to enjoy, learn, or regulate their behavior. The five divisions are:

- Physiological Needs - "I'm thirsty."
- Safety - "Is this a safe place for me?"
- Belongingness and Love - "Will I fit in?"
- Esteem Needs - "Am I good enough to learn here?"
- Self-Actualization - "Will I become the best person I can be?"

What does this mean for Docent Educators? We are primarily concerned with the first two or three needs, which should be considered when planning tours, particularly when school-aged students are involved. The first few minutes of the tour are critical. This is the time when you, as the host, make your visitor feel comfortable and, more importantly, ensure they believe they are in a safe place and that their needs will be met. Often, student apprehension begins before they arrive at the museum, and the Docent Educator's welcome can alleviate some of their anxiety. When visitors feel comfortable, they are more receptive to listening and learning. While our time with groups is short, the impact can be long-lasting.

When greeting visitors, conduct a brief assessment of their current mood. Questions such as "Where did you come from?" or "How was the bus ride?" may provide insight into how they are feeling. You can explain that the security guard is responsible for protecting the museum, its artifacts, and visitors (an introduction to the guard is often effective). This makes them feel safe and know they are protected. Learning visitors' names and calling them by name signals that you acknowledge them and value their contributions. Young visitors may ask where the restrooms or drinking fountains are located; assure them that they are available and accessible.

Every visitor, group, and tour is different, but one thing is clear: everyone has basic needs that must be met before they can experience what life has to offer.



Library Corner

By Lisa Koizumi

Since the Garuda is the national emblem of Indonesia and the Garuda lamp (see "Gallery Showcase") is used in their popular shadow puppet plays (wayang purwa), the following books have been chosen for this month's Library Corner.

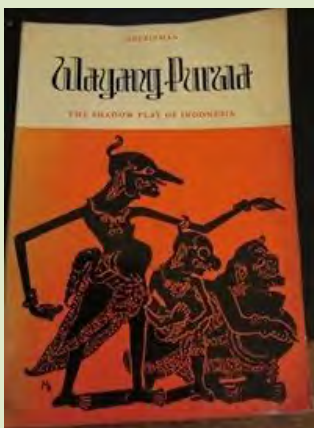


Myths and Legends of Indonesia

by Jan Knappert
Call Number: 398K

This book is an engaging introduction to Indonesia's wide range of myths and stories, influenced by Hindu-Buddhist epics, Islamic traditions, and indigenous beliefs. Drawing from Java, Bali, Sumatra, and other regions, it features gods, spirits,

heroic princes, and magical beings tied closely to nature and the unseen world. These oral tales pass on moral lessons and social values, showing Indonesia as a vibrant cultural crossroads where ancient epics blend with local folklore.



WAYANG PURWA: The Shadow Play of Indonesia

by Moebirman
Call number: 791.598 M

This book looks at the world of Javanese shadow puppetry, where storytelling, ritual, and philosophy come together. Based on Hindu epics, wayang purwa

reshapes these tales with local values, symbols, and humor. It highlights the dalang, or puppet master, who acts as storyteller, spiritual guide, and performer, using music, light, and shadow to share deeper meanings. More than entertainment, wayang purwa is shown as a living tradition that teaches balance, harmony, and insight.

Docent Heroes

Thank you to all Docent Educators who attended the "Conversations" and "Chats" sessions in Weeks 3 and/or 4!



Annette Drey
Richard Ewell
Jeanne Heilman
Jin Sook Jung
Eiko Kubota
Paige LaCombe
Nancy Lan
Rose Lee
Yvonne Lee
Diana McCrohan
Karen Margolis
Randy Quinton
Linda Risch
Jon Sides
Susan Sides
Candace Siegle
Ralph Thlick
Lorenzo Vargas
Chuck Woo
Melissa Patton
Fran De La Rosa

Around Town

By Maureen Nyhan

The THN welcomes your input! Please send any local or online activities you think USC PAM Docents might be interested in! The deadline is the 20th of the month prior to publication. The earlier the better! You may send them directly to Maureen: moho1234@gmail.com

USC Pacific Asia Museum

Event: Night Parade: Yokai Unleashed

Explore the spiritual and historical legacies of yokai with experts in Japanese folklore, art history, and pop culture.

Catch an exclusive early look at USC PAM's upcoming exhibition, *Mythical Creatures: The Stories We Carry*.

Date and Time: Saturday, January 17, 2026 | 6:00 pm

Free for Member [Info and Registration Here](#)

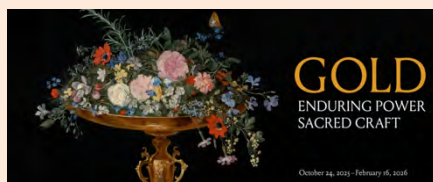


Upcoming Exhibition: Mythical Creatures: The Stories We Carry

Our newest exhibition created by Korean American artist and muralist Dave Young Kim. This immersive experience invites visitors to explore the immigrant

journey through the visual language of myth; the exhibit will officially open on February 14, 2026 but please take the opportunity to enjoy a preview:

Special Limited Time Preview Dec. 20, 2025–Jan. 4, 2026



Norton Simon Museum

Lecture: Serene and Resplendent: Asian Gold at the Norton Simon Museum

Gilt, pressed, painted or cast, gold has expressed power, prosperity, purity and transcendence throughout the history of Asian art. Stein delves into the Asian works on view in the exhibition *Gold: Enduring Power, Sacred Craft* and discovers more gold in the Museum's South and Southeast Asian collections.

DATE & Time: Saturday, January 10, 2026 | 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

SPEAKER: Emma Natalya Stein, Associate Curator of Southeast Asian and South Asian Art, National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian
Free with Admission

[Info and Registration](#)

Japan Foundation

The Beauty of Japanese Sculpture: Heian Period



DATE & TIME:

January 07, 2026 |
7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
Free with museum admission.

[Registration Here](#)

Workshop: Write your wish on an Ema!

DATE: January 17, 2026

TIME: 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM (In person, free)

[Information and Registration](#)

Japan House (3 Hours Free Parking)

Continuing Exhibition: Cuisine and food related exhibits and experiences: [The Art of Food Replicas](#)



Bowers Museum:

Global Threads

India's Textile Revolution

December 13, 2025 –
April 5, 2026



Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

Documentary Movie Night – Free

Date & Time: January 7, 2026 |

7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

[Info and Registration](#)

JACCC Aratani Theatre Downtown LA

Nihon Buyo

Sunday January 18, 2026

1:30–5:30 p.m.

[Info and Registration](#)



Docent Musings

By Karen Komai Margolis

Year of the Fire Horse

The Asian zodiac is familiar to many. Twelve animals are associated with a given year. The five following elements that are associated with each of the animal years are less known. 1) Metal: strength, determination, courage, ambition (Monkey, Rooster). 2) Water: wisdom, intuition, flow, adaptability (Rat, Pig). 3) Wood: growth, flexibility, vitality, compassion (Tiger, Rabbit). 4) Fire: passion, energy, leadership, assertiveness (Snake, Horse). 5) Earth: stability, practicality, nurturing, reliability (Ox, Dragon, Goat, Dog). Each year is affected by both the animal sign, and by the element accompanying the sign.

In Japan, in celebration of sixty years (“kanreki”), the guest of honor, considered to be a newborn, wears a red beret, a red “chanchanko” vest, and receives a special cushion. 2026 is the year of the fire horse, beginning February 17, 2026 - February 5, 2027. According to Japanese superstition, a woman born in the year of the fire horse’s strong temperament, shortens her husband’s life. In the Edo period (1603–1868), fire horse birth rates declined. Yaoya Oshichi was born in 1666, the year of the fire horse. Burned at the stake in 1681-83, before her 18th birthday; some say before she was 16. In both the Meiji and the Showa eras, birthrates declined in the fire horse year. In 1966, the Japanese birthrate declined by 25%!

My Kyoto aunt was born in 1906, a fire horse year.

To avoid problems, her parents claimed that she was born in 1907. She married my relative, who died from typhoid on a return sea trip with his family, leaving pre-school age children upon his demise. Superstition? Perhaps!

*Year of the fire horse,
Female children marriage curse,
Early spousal death.*

