

February 2026

# Treasure House News



## President's Message

I hope all your New Year's resolutions are going well, and if not, you always have another chance for making yours at the Lunar New Year! I have always joked about how the Chinese are smart to have the Lunar New Year come after the Western New Year so we can start fresh twice!

This year, as you had read in the previous THN, is the year of the fire horse, so intense transformation is being called for which will require bold actions to make significant progress. That fits into our long-anticipated exhibition that is opening in February. I am confident to say that each of you is ready to tour this exhibition with all the work we have done in the past 2 months. For all the touring docents who shied away from the Chi exhibition, welcome back! And for those who had toured and are now returning after a long break, we need all your support again! My goal is to reach 100% touring, so let's take this challenge on and together we can make it happen!

The museum is also having their annual Chinese New Year celebration on February 15. What a great way to kick off the start of the year of the horse and to share this festivity with the Asian community. I look forward to seeing you there!

Yvonne

## IMPORTANT DATES

**February 3, 2026 at 10am**  
Docent Council Board Meeting  
(Board members only)

**February 10, 2026 at 10am**  
Docent Council meeting  
Lecture by: Dr. Amy Holmes-  
Tagchungdorpa  
Topic: An overview of Himalayan  
Buddhism/materiality

**February 15, 2026  
from 11am to 5pm**  
Lunar New Year Festival  
Opening of "Mythical Creatures"  
Exhibition

# Gallery Showcase

## Daruma

By Annette Drey

Traveling through Japan, it's hard to miss the ubiquitous Daruma doll. Found in shops everywhere and crafted in a variety of sizes and materials, these round figures may at first seem like a Japanese counterpart to Russian nesting dolls, or even simple children's toys. Traditionally made of papier-mâché, Daruma dolls are now also produced in wood, ceramic, glass, and other materials. Several examples, including a striking contemporary glass interpretation, are featured in the Gallery 1 "restaurant" of our Mythical Creatures exhibition. But what is the story behind these intriguing objects?

The Daruma doll is one of Japan's most recognizable and meaningful folk objects—simple in form, bold in expression, and rich in symbolism. At first glance, it appears as a rounded red figure with a stern face and blank white eyes. Beneath this minimalist design lies a powerful message about perseverance, resilience, and the pursuit of goals.

Daruma dolls are modeled after Bodhidharma, the Indian monk credited with founding Zen Buddhism in China in the 5th or 6th century. According to legend, Bodhidharma meditated in a cave for nine years with such intensity that his arms and legs withered away, giving rise to the doll's limbless, rounded shape. Over time, Japanese artisans softened his austere image, transforming it into a folk talisman. By the Edo period (1603–1868), Daruma dolls had become popular symbols of good fortune and steadfast determination.

One of the Daruma's defining features is its weighted base, which allows it to right itself when tipped over, a physical embodiment of the proverb *nanakorobi yaoki*, "fall seven times, get up eight." The doll's vivid red color, associated with protection and good health, originally echoed the robes worn by Buddhist monks and was also believed to ward off evil and illness. Daruma dolls have strong animal connections through their symbolic facial features representing longevity: crane eyebrows, turtle mustache, and a pine/ bamboo beard. Its gold accents bring hope for wealth and good fortune.

Perhaps most importantly, Daruma dolls also serve as tools for goal-setting. Some dolls include characters on the front indicating specific wishes. When a goal is set—whether for academic success, business prosperity, or personal growth—one eye is filled in. The second eye is painted only after the goal is achieved, marking both accomplishment and gratitude. In this way, the Daruma becomes a silent yet constant reminder of intention and effort.

Still widely used in temples, homes, and businesses today, the Daruma doll endures as a humble but powerful symbol. Its message is timeless: setbacks are inevitable, but with perseverance we rise again.



*Bodhidharma doll,  
Japanese goal-setting tool,  
One eye at a time.  
kkm*

# Gallery Showcase

## HAMSA (Hong): The Celestial Bird

By Annette Drey

On display in Gallery #8 of our current exhibition, Mythical Creatures, is a sculpture of a bird formerly featured in our Southeast Asia Gallery. We now have the chance to revisit it and learn more about this mythical creature.

In South Asian mythology, the **Hamsa** is far more than an ordinary wild goose or swan. It is a symbolic creature that glides effortlessly between worlds: earth and sky, water and air, the material and the spiritual. Revered in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, the Hamsa represents wisdom, purity, and the soul's ability to discern truth from illusion.

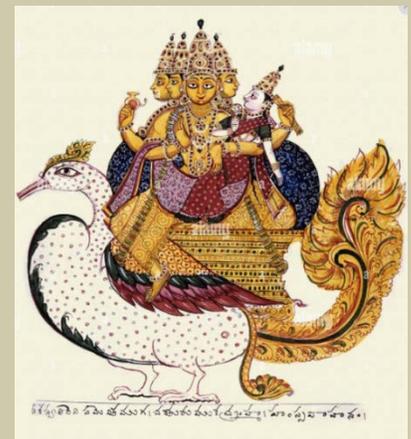
In Hindu mythology, the Hamsa is most closely associated with Brahma, the creator of the universe, who uses the bird as his divine mount (*vahana*). This pairing emphasizes that creation should be guided by intelligence and balance rather than force. The Hamsa is also linked to Saraswati, goddess of learning, music, and the arts. Often shown seated beside her, the bird reinforces the idea that wisdom should be clear, discerning, and refined, suggesting that true knowledge requires both insight and grace. In Buddhist and Jain stories, the Hamsa appears as a noble and wise creature, sometimes acting as a teacher or guide.

One of the Hamsa's most enduring myths is its legendary ability to separate milk from water. In mythology, this serves as a poetic metaphor for *viveka*, or discernment: the ability to tell truth from appearance and the essential from the superficial. Because of this, the Hamsa is a favorite emblem of sages, monks, and seekers striving to rise above illusion and attachment. The bird's ability to live comfortably on land, water, and in the air gives it another layer of mythic meaning; the Hamsa can pass freely between realms, making it a symbol of the soul's journey through cycles of birth, death and rebirth.

Across traditions, the message is much the same: wisdom doesn't rush or shout—it stays calm, steady, and elevated. In its myths, the Hamsa reminds us that real understanding comes from clarity, patience, and moving thoughtfully through the world.



Hamsa (hong), the celestial bird  
Thailand  
Circa 1875-1925  
Bronze; gilt; mirror  
1995.95.1



Brahma and Saraswati on  
hamsa vahana

*Brahma's Divine Mount  
Favored emblem of wise men,  
Wise celestial bird.  
kkm*

# Featured Article

## God of Longevity

By Bruce Cristal

**Shouxing (壽星)**, originally a personification of the South Pole Star, acquired divine qualities in the late Western Han dynasty (206 BC–9 AD). It was not until the Tang dynasty that he was personalized as the God of Longevity in folk mythology and subsequently popularized in poetry and memorials. Shouxing is revered as an immortal figure, one of the Fu Lu Shou trio. Immortals (Xian) are a broader category of beings who achieve eternal life through Taoist practices. Shouxing represents longevity and its blessings and often appears as a benevolent guide or symbol, but he is not a ruling deity like some other Immortals.

Shouxing is one of the most recognizable figures in traditional Chinese art and textiles. As the Chinese God of Longevity, he is depicted as a wise old man with a high forehead and long beard, holding a peach or staff, or both, and often accompanied by a deer. Everything in the composition reinforces wishes for long life, prosperity, and auspicious fortune.

Knowledge of Chinese homonyms is also crucial to understanding this hanging. In the Chinese language, words may share the same characters and pronunciations but have different meanings, or they may share the same pronunciations while using different characters with different meanings.

Below is a detailed reading of the figure, symbols, and color, including homonyms:

The **peach** held in his hand represents immortality. It is associated with Xi Wangmu, Queen Mother of the West, and symbolizes eternal life, renewal, and divine nourishment. Peaches are often given as a symbolic birthday present to elders.

The **deer** shown at his side is sacred to Shouxing. In Chinese, “deer” (鹿, lù) sounds like “emolument” or “official salary”, symbolizing long life, wealth, and career success.

The **bat** (蝠, fú) represents good fortune. The word for bat (蝠, fú) sounds exactly like “blessing” (福). A single bat means happiness, while five bats represent the Five Blessings: longevity; health; wealth, virtue and peaceful death.

The **circular medallions** on his robe contain the “shou” (壽) character for longevity. Repeating patterns reinforce the wish for long life.

The **crooked wooden staff** suggests extreme old age and wisdom, like an ancient tree shaped by time. **The dragon** atop the staff symbolizes immortality and cosmic life force, indicating that his longevity is divinely sanctioned.

The **embroidered borders** suggest rank, dignity, and celebration.

The **Red color** of his robe is not decorative; it is symbolic and intentional. Red represents life force and vitality, joy and celebration, and protection against evil. It is frequently used for birthdays, weddings, New Year and longevity celebrations. In art, red makes the wish active and powerful.

This is not a portrait but a visual blessing, conveying, “May you live long, remain healthy, enjoy prosperity, and be surrounded by blessings and joy.” Such pieces were often hung in homes during milestone birthdays (60th, 70th, 80th) and given as gifts to elders.



*Longevity god,  
High forehead, bearded, old man,  
Peach, deer, bat, and staff.  
kkm*

# Docent Spotlight

By Richard Ewell



## Carmen Choy-Surdam

Carmen was born in Lima, Peru, and grew up immersed in three cultures, shaped by family traditions and a deep appreciation for art. At her Chinese grandparents' home, meals were shared around a table, fragrant with herbs, fish and vegetables. At her Italian grandmother's, the family gathered for Cinzano before minestrone with fresh basil. These early experiences taught her that culture is something lived—passed down through everyday moments.

Her father, born in Peru to parents from China, painted bamboo with delicate brush strokes, instilling in her a reverence for artistic practice. Creativity ran throughout the family: her sister studied art, and later, Carmen's own children would pursue music and visual arts. Although she earned a degree in psychology and built a successful career in hospitality, art and cultural exploration remained her true passion.

Four years after her father's passing, Carmen joined USC PAM as a docent, drawn by a desire to better understand her Chinese heritage and reconnect with the artistic traditions he once practiced. What began as a personal search for cultural connection soon became a commitment to education and service. It brings her joy witnessing young students light up with curiosity, their questions unfolding into moments of discovery. Carmen believes that honoring our ancestors is not only about preserving the past, but about inspiring the future—through music, dance, food, travel, and every form of artistic expression. For Carmen, learning is lifelong, culture is a bridge, and teaching is a way of honoring the past while enriching the present.

# Docents On the Go

By Annette Drey

## Touring training



A strong turnout of docents met on January 20 to share ideas for touring the upcoming exhibit, *Mythical Creatures*. After an hour of discussion, the group moved into the galleries, where smaller groups formed to focus on specific works on display and individual galleries where they exchanged ideas about how to present them on tours. These discussions continued at the January 27th meeting.

# Touring Topics

By Fran De La Rosa

## “Take a Note”

A popular and frequently recommended touring strategy is to give visitors a notebook, field guide, or journal to use during tours. Some Docents prefer a simple clipboard with writing or drawing paper attached. Regardless of the material used, the result is the same: writing (taking notes) enhances any tour. Recent studies have shown that, even in the digital world, handwriting is a valuable asset for learning.

Writing and drawing, throughout a tour, can serve multiple purposes. Visitors can record information to revisit later and be reminded of the experience. Some may want to sketch a favorite artwork or note an artist's name for later reference. Lastly, the notebook can be used to record responses to Docent questioning, record one's own questions, and note wonderings. Or, in rare cases, the notebooks can just be carried from place to place.

The benefits of using notebooks are many. First and foremost, keeping notebooks close deters wandering hands and focuses attention on the task. Behavior issues lessen. Shy students can participate without fear, reducing anxiety and building confidence. Young students can feel empowered and more willing to jot notes and share with partners or the group as they are not put on the spot to immediately respond to a question. The following are some interesting ways to use the notebook with visitors.

**Whip-Around.** Write down all the things noticed about the artwork in 3-5 minutes. Then go around the group and have each person name something from their list. If something on your list is mentioned, cross it off. Discuss the experience.

**Jump into the Artwork.** Imagine that you are inside the artwork and, speaking softly, give sensory prompts: hear, see, smell, feel (not touch). Give students time to explore the environment and record notes. Share with the group.

**Contour Drawing.** Draw a subject in the artwork, focusing on the outer edges first, and add details as you wish.

**Thought Bubbles.** Imagine and note what the character is thinking or saying.

**Collaborative Story.** Begin with one sentence and pass the notebook to the next person, who adds a second sentence. Continue around the group; share the final story.

**Close Looking.** Look closely for 30 seconds; write down 5 things you see. Now look again for 30 seconds; write 5 new things you see. Share your favorite.

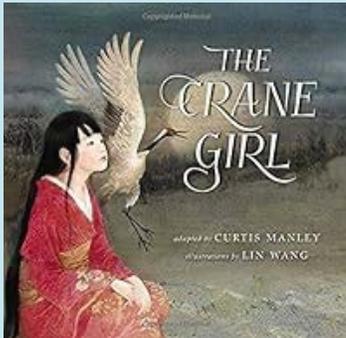
The possibilities of using notebooks are endless and will enhance any tour. One recommendation: using clipboards can be awkward if not prepared. Precut and staple blank paper to the size of the clipboard. Ask students to put their name on the top sheet. Finally, assure the students that their notebooks are personal and that they can choose to share if they'd like.



# Library Corner

By Lisa Koizumi

This book has been selected as a touring aid, and its pictures and text have been copied and made available in a folder in the docent library



## **The Crane Girl: Based on Japanese folktales**

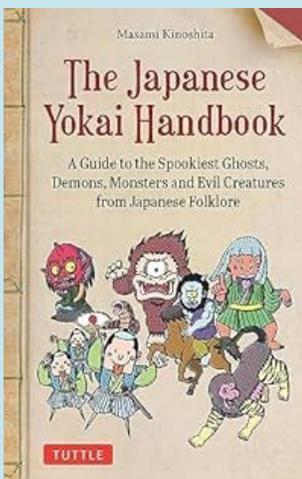
by Curtis Manley

Call number: 398.2

*The Crane Girl* by Curtis Manley is a lyrical picture-book retelling of a Japanese folktale. A mysterious girl aids

a poor family by weaving exquisite cloth, asking only for privacy. When curiosity prevails, her true identity as a crane is revealed. The story tenderly explores kindness, sacrifice, gratitude, and the consequences of broken trust.

The following book is also new to our library and was purchased specifically for the current Exhibition which has a gallery featuring yokai.



## **The Japanese Yokai Handbook: A Guide to the Spookiest Ghosts, Demons, Monsters and Evil Creatures from Japanese Folklore**

by Masami Kinoshita

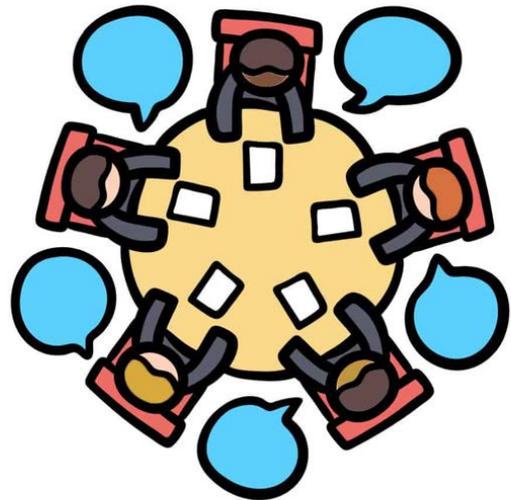
Call number: 398.20952

The *Yōkai Handbook* is an accessible guide to Japan's supernatural beings. Blending

folklore, history, and cultural context, it explains the origins, behaviors, and symbolism of spirits, monsters, and shape-shifters. The book shows how yōkai reflect human fears and humor, tracing their evolution from ancient legends to modern manga, anime, and popular culture.

## Docent Heroes

Thank you to all Docent Educators for continuing the learning journey!



- Annette Drey
- Richard Ewell
- Daniel Grosz
- Jeanne Heilman
- Jane Hirschowitz
- Nancy Lan
- Rose Lee
- Yvonne Lee
- John O'Malley
- Randy Quinton
- Linda Risch
- Jon Sides
- Susan Sides
- Candace Siegle
- Ana Soulrivier
- Bob Swan
- Ralph Thlick
- Lorenzo Vargas
- Kathy Wales
- 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](mailto:moho1234@gmail.com)

## USC Pacific Asia Museum

### Lunar New Year

Our annual Lunar New Year festival will be back to celebrate the Year of the Horse! The day will feature exciting FREE performances and activities for the whole family.

**DATE & Time:** Sunday, February 15, 2026 11:00 am to 5:00 pm

**Free for All** - [Register Here](#)

### Upcoming Exhibition: Mythical Creatures: The Stories We Carry

Join us for a guided tour of 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.

**DATE & Time:** Saturday, February 21, 2026 11:00 am

**Free for Members** [Information and Registration](#)

*In case you missed it...* **Online and Download:** Check out the three very enjoyable and informative **Touring Aids** Paige compiled and recently distributed by Eiko in your email: <https://pamdocent.com/services/touring-aids/>



## Japan Foundation

### The Beauty of Japanese Sculpture: Kamakura Period

The Buddhist icons produced during Japan's Kamakura period demonstrate a refinement of the technical innovations from the preceding period.

**DATE & Time:** Wednesday February 4, 2026

7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

**No Cost** [Info and Registration](#)

## Japan House

### Sounds of Japan | Experience the Essence of Japanese Instruments

**DATE & Time:** Mon February 2, 2026 | 2:00 – 3:30 pm

**Location:** JAPAN HOUSE Salon, Level 5

**Fee:** No Cost - Walk-in program

## Norton Simon Museum

### Lecture: Art and Arbitrage: Gold across the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages

During the European Middle Ages, silver was more abundant for the northern shores of the Mediterranean, whereas coastal North Africa enjoyed easier access to gold via trans-Saharan trade. In this lecture, Guérin reveals how this valuable metal influenced both historical events and artistic production.

**DATE & Time:** Saturday, February 7, 2026

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

**SPEAKER:** Sarah M. Guérin, Associate Professor of Medieval Art, History of Art Department, University of Pennsylvania. Free with Admission – [More Information](#)

## Bowers Museum

### Global Threads: India's Textile Revolution

Through April 5, 2026

## Pasadena Heritage

### Women's Work: The Art and Craft of Weaving in Rural Morocco

Across Morocco's tribal regions, distinct weaving styles reflect local histories, outside influences, and the aesthetics of the Amaizgh, indigenous weavers. As stewards of cultural knowledge, these artisans hold a respected place within their communities.

**DATE & Time:** Thursday, February 12, 2026 | 6:00 – 7:00 pm

**Location:** 160 N Oakland Ave, Pasadena, 91101

**Fee:** \$16 - \$20 [More Information and Registration](#)

## Los Angeles Korean Cultural Center

### Lights of Korea: JinJu Silk Laterns

This exhibition offers a contemporary interpretation of Jinju silk lanterns; a heritage rooted in the historic center of Korean sericulture. Layered in a circular embrace, these lanterns evoke the warmth and generosity associated with the maternal figure in Korean tradition. Through the soft translucence and fluid curves of silk, we invite you to experience the emotional resonance of light, color, and space.

**DATE & Times:** January 15 - February 28, 2026 | Mon - Fri 9 AM - 5 PM, Sat 9 AM - 1 PM

**Location:** 5505 Wilshire Blvd, LA, CA 90036)

**No Cost**



## Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

No upcoming live events but you can view past events on their YouTube channel here: [CHSS YouTube](#)

# Docent Musings

By John O'Malley

## I Am the Unknown Horse

It is midnight in the China gallery. Silent and dark. In a corner, I stand ready. My ears alert. My eyes wide open. On the wall, a panel gives me no name. Only saying that I am made of earthenware, hardened clay that is more than two thousand years old.

This moment of peace reminds me of that time long, long ago when I first stood next to my Han master in his tomb. He called me Flying Lightning. We were destined to ride to the sky—above the clouds, to heaven. I cannot remember if we reached the stars or saw the sun. I know only that my master is not with me. I am not in his tomb.

During the light of day, I see and hear others walk past me or stop and stare. Some, especially children, sit close to me and draw pictures of me. That makes me smile on the inside. A uniformed guard coughs in the background. Then, with a click, the light goes off.

With no soul around, I wish, every once in a while, to move like lightning and, yes, to fly. Oh, if only my master were here, I would not be waiting forever in this lightless gallery.



*Unknown Han tomb horse,  
Cherished but sadly dismayed,  
Beloved equine.  
kkm*