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Review – Bat Cave: Treasures of the Day and Creatures of the Night

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The ancient Chinese wanted blessings, lots of them and right now, writes assistant curator Andrew Fung. A modest, gourd-shaped vase is the epitome of this statement. The vase is covered with hundreds of red bats flying in all directions, clashing and overlapping with one another. It's a frenzied, almost delirious invocation for blessings. "Please, give me all the good stuff," it cries.

The last room, or corridor, is a breath of fresh air. It contains a large mural by contemporary artist Sun Jun depicting the flying mammals swishing around golden clouds. In contrast to the tiny delicate handicraft in the main exhibition rooms, these bats are massive and painted with energetic, dry brushwork. It's a shame the space doesn't quite do the work justice because it's so narrow one can't even step back to view the painting in full. The animation film produced by the same artist is a fascinating take on a folklore concerning Chinese explorers.

Bat Cave is a rather straightforward showcase of elegant and delightful craftsmanship, with the contemporary mural seeming like an afterthought in an attempt to bring some new meaning to the eponymous animal. Asia Society tries to broaden the appeal, though, by presenting a series of educational programs for kids, including an ecological night walk to learn about bats and a "pao" bat-themed, duh, button workshop. Apart from that, it's all about blessings, fortune, longevity and everything nice. *Eunice Tsang*

Bat Cave: Treasures of the Day and Creatures of the Night Asia Society, until Jan 3, 2014

Visit asiasociety.org for more information.

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