



Fayez Sarofim Grand Hall

Building Bridges of Global Understanding:
The Asia Society Texas Center



Faye Sarofim Grand Hall

In 1956, John D. Rockefeller III saw the need to encourage greater knowledge of Asian culture and heritage in the United States. The result was the creation of the Asia Society in that same year. Today, the Asia Society “is the leading educational organization dedicated to promoting mutual understanding and strengthening partnerships among peoples, leaders and institutions of Asia and the United States in a global context,” according to the Asia Society website. The society also addresses Asian American issues, the effects of globalization, and modern cultural concerns, like the status of Asian women, the environment, and growing urbanization. Its mission is to provide insight, generate ideas, and promote collaboration to address current challenges and create a shared future across the fields of the arts, business, culture, education, and policy.

Only two cities in the United States possess buildings that house their branch of the Asia Society. One is New York City and the other is Houston. Located in the Museum District of Houston, the Asia Society Texas Center opened its doors in 2012. Designed by renowned Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi, the impressive 40,000-square-foot facility is a perfect example of meticulous attention to detail. One of its most intriguing features is the thought-provoking use of contrasting materials ranging from Jurassic Period limestone to stainless steel. The airy structure features a flexible classroom and conference space, an art gallery, a theater, and a café.

Houston is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the country. As such, its Asian American population is one of the most rapidly growing populations in the United States. With the promotion of Asian culture and concerns always at the forefront, the Asia Society Texas Center offers inspiring programming featuring innovative artists and knowledgeable speakers from Asia and around the world. Its exhibits, films, performances, and lectures bring greater understanding of the local and global Asian community to the city of Houston.

In keeping with its mandate to forge and strengthen bonds of mutual understanding between Asian and American cultures, the Asia Society Texas Center offers a number of educational and outreach programs. All of these programs are made possible through generous funding from patrons, foundations, and philanthropic institutions.

For families, AsiaFest, an annual free event, celebrates Asian Pacific American Heritage Month through Asian fusion cuisine, movement and fitness demonstrations, community performances, creative activities, and visual art displays; the Night Market, a festive evening of food and crafts provided by local vendors, also features a sneak peak at the fall exhibition; Family Days are held throughout the year and provide participants of all ages with the opportunity to learn more about Asian culture through demonstrations, exhibits, performances, storytelling, and activities; Creation Stations provide free monthly art activities promoting Asia’s rich and varied cultures.

For students, there are free school tours, which are facilitated by education department staff and volunteers. These interactive tours provide students with the opportunity to learn about Asian art, culture, and traditions and are open to public, private, charter, alternative, and home schools. For educators, the Asia Society Texas Center provides workshops combined with a performing or visual arts experience designed to provide educators with a greater understanding of all aspects of Asian life, including economic, governmental, and cultural. The center also provides educators with a number of resources that can be used for lesson planning and in the classroom.

For adults, the Adult Education Program provides affordable instruction on a variety of Asian topics and is designed to increase the knowledge of the adult community regarding Asian arts, culture, history, politics, and customs. Guided architectural tours of the center provide adults with the opportunity to experience the fine details of Yoshio Taniguchi's first free-standing structure in the United States. As well, docent-led art tours of the Asia Society Texas Center's exhibitions provide visitors with the opportunity to experience the art on a more intimate level, learn more about Asian historical periods and style, and listen to stories associated with the works of art. In addition, Asia Society offers Chinese language classes, as well as wellness classes, through weekly Yoga and Tai Chi offerings.

The Asia Society Texas Center also participates in a number of community events hosted by organizations throughout Houston with the ongoing goal of raising public awareness of the center and joining others in celebrating the richness of Asia's cultures. Past outreach participation has included City of Houston Citizenship Week Kickoff, Gulf Coast International Dragon Boat Regatta, India Film Fest, and the Korean Festival, as well as many other events.



ExploreAsia Summer Camp



ExploreAsia Summer Camp



Water Garden Terrace

Modern Twist: Contemporary Japanese Bamboo Art

Continuing its tradition of presenting exhibits that immerse the public in some aspect of Asian culture, the Asia Society Texas Center opened "Modern Twist: Contemporary Japanese Bamboo Art" in January of this year. It will run until July 30. This intriguing look at bamboo, a material that is characterized by its strength, flexibility, and ability to bend rather than break, explores the innovative shape bamboo art has taken since the mid-twentieth century. The exhibit employs rare wall-hung installations and sculptures, which haven't been viewed previously in Texas, to bring the intriguing art form alive.



Tanioka Shigeo-2002-Asuka

Bamboo is found in abundance, but it's also a challenging medium. Mastering it requires decades of learning how to harvest, split, and plate the substance. There are less than 100 professional bamboo artists creating their art in Japan today. Seventeen of them are represented in "Modern Twist." Their innovative sculptures and installations exemplify the highest level of mastery of the tool.

The exhibit also examines the growing awareness of bamboo as an art form. "In the last century, the creativity and talent of bamboo basket makers has elevated their status from artisans working primarily anonymously to sought-after artists. The exhibition celebrates these artists who have helped to redefine a traditional craft as a modern genre, inventing unexpected new forms and pushing the medium to ground-breaking levels of conceptual, technical, and artistic ingenuity," according to Asia Society Texas Center.



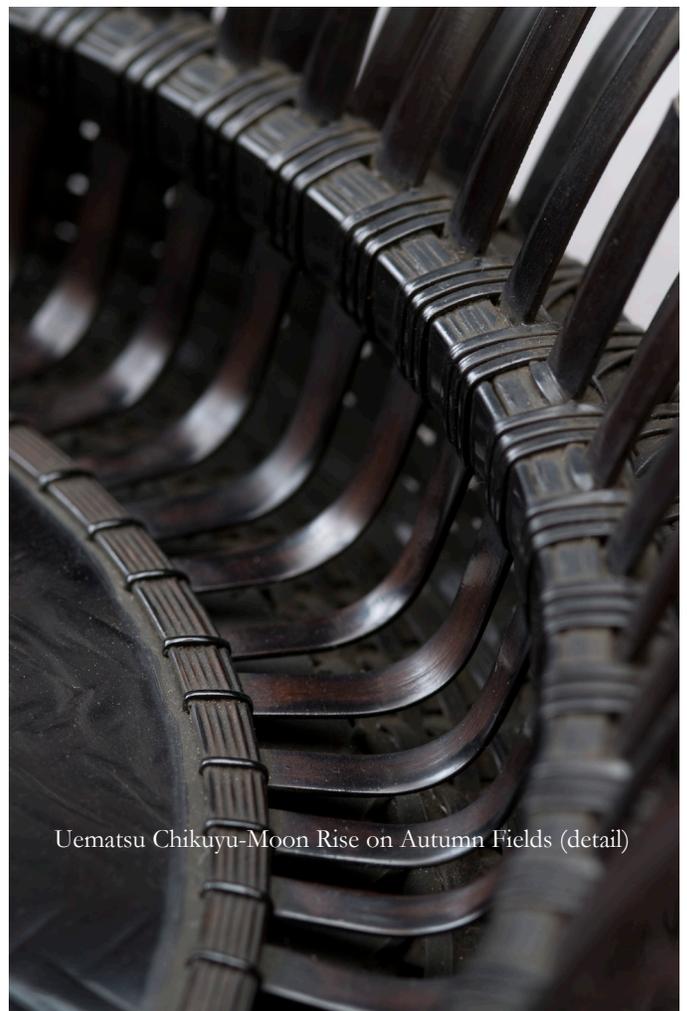
Mimura Chikuho-Hope



Uematsu Chikuyu-Moon Rise on Autumn Fields



Tanabe Shochiku III-Warrior (detail)



Uematsu Chikuyu-Moon Rise on Autumn Fields (detail)



Bonna Kol, *President of the Asia Society Texas Center*

CKW Luxe had the pleasure recently of speaking with Bonna Kol, President of the Asia Society Texas Center, about the center's importance as a Houston cultural center, how it integrates itself into the community of Houston, and what its plans are for the future.

CKW Luxe: What do you see as the role of the Asia Society Texas Center in Houston and how do you make it accessible to everyone?

Bonna Kol: Asia Society Texas Center works to strengthen our great city by offering programs that celebrate diversity. Each year, we offer over 100 innovative and relevant programs to promote mutual understanding between the East and West and to deepen our community's knowledge about both regions. For accessibility, Asia Society does not require an admission fee to access our building nor is there a fee to visit the exhibition in the Faye Sarofim Grand Hall.

CKW: What were the principles behind creating the center and how did you go about making them a reality?

BK: Sharing the vision of John D. Rockefeller III, who recognized the need to educate Americans about Asia, a small group of Houstonians began planting the seeds for an Asia Society in Houston. This forward-thinking group, which included former first lady Barbara Bush, Charles C. Foster, Roger Wallace, and Roy M. Huffington, recognized the need for a premier educational and cultural institution in Houston. It would be many years later, in April 2012, with the support of this group and many other individuals such as Nancy C. Allen, that Asia Society Texas Center would open its doors to the public.

CKW: The architecture of the center is astounding. Can you tell us about the building's architectural importance?

BK: The building, an architectural masterpiece, was designed by Japanese-born Harvard-educated Yoshio Taniguchi. The 40,000-square-foot two-story structure combines contemporary international design with an understated elegance and serenity associated with Asia. For his first free-standing building in the United States, Taniguchi combined graceful design with stunningly beautiful stone, wood, and glass to give the building its distinctive character. Many will remember Taniguchi for his expansion and renovation of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

CKW: The center's current exhibit, "Modern Twist," is a fascinating exploration into the versatility of bamboo as a material as well as a tool for creating art. Can you tell our readers what experiencing it will add to Houstonians' knowledge of Asian culture?

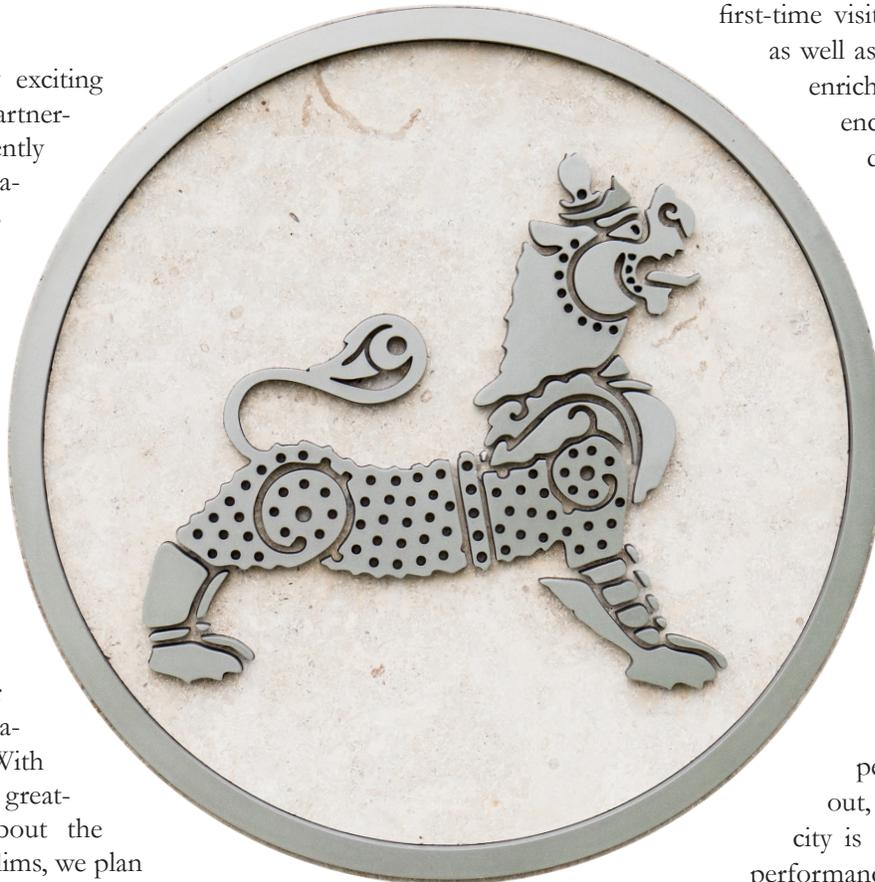
BK: Bamboo is characterized by strength, flexibility, and lightness. "Modern Twist" explores the innovative shape bamboo art has taken in Japan since the mid-twentieth century. With rare wall-hung installations and sculptures never before seen in Texas, the exhibition both engages and educates audiences about a vibrant cultural art form. If you haven't seen "Modern Twist," I encourage everyone to stop by Asia Society to view the exhibition. It's on view until July 30, 2017.

CKW: Our readers would also be interested to know what plans the Asia Society Texas Center has for the future.

BK: We have many exciting programs and partnerships ahead. We recently launched our signature series, Women's Leadership Series, which has welcomed such influential women as the Founder and CEO of Tupelo Capital Management, Lulu C. Wang; Linking the World CEO, Mina Chang; and the 18th U.S. Secretary of Transportation and former U.S. Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao. With the goal of fostering greater understanding about the diversity among Muslims, we plan to launch another signature series.

Also, Asia Society has recently partnered with our museum neighbor, the Holocaust Museum, to offer a unique opportunity to students. We've developed a curriculum based on the concept of the Universe of Obligation, which highlights the common threads of human identity, agency, suffering, and compassion. The exhibitions in each of the museums serve as the centerpiece to explore issues of both the past and present. This project specifically focuses on increasing literacy and effective communication of global issues among fourth- and seventh-grade students. Asia Society also offers school tours to all grade levels and to community groups. As if that isn't enough, we're also in discussion about the creation of an interactive educational

space that will be dedicated to educating visitors about our mission. This space will be targeted to first-time visitors and school groups as well as cover information that enriches the visitor's experience and furthers their understanding of the East. Asia Society recently served as a stop on the U.S. tour of the Japanese puppetry performance "Shank's Mare." Created by Tom Lee and Japanese master puppeteer Koryu Nishikawa V, "Shank's Mare" is the story of two wandering travelers whose paths intersect in time and space. Both performances were sold out, which tells us that the city is hungry for more good performance arts programs.



Asia Society's Logo

Forging bonds between cultures is important. It leads to understanding, awareness, acceptance, tolerance, and a desire to become involved. It also leads to experiences and knowledge that enrich our lives. It's hard to say where we would be as individuals and as a culture if we didn't allow the bounties of other cultures to enhance our own. The Asia Society Texas Center creates the opportunity for Houstonians and other visitors to walk through its doors and allow themselves to be immersed in Asian culture through the architecture surrounding them; displays of exquisite works of art; performances, lectures, and films; and interactive programs and events.



Asia Society's exterior



Designed by renowned Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi