



News Release

Asia Society and MFAH Present Landmark Exhibition Introducing New Scholarship on Vietnamese History, Culture and Trade

Twenty Years in the Making, Exhibition is First-Ever to Bring Rare Objects from Vietnamese Museums to the United States

Arts of Ancient Viet Nam: From River Plain to Open Sea

On view at Asia Society Museum, New York, February 2–May 2, 2010
following premiere at MFAH in Houston, September 13, 2009–January 3, 2010

New York, NY – Asia Society, New York and Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH) present an unprecedented exhibition of ancient art from Viet Nam—the first U.S. exhibition to address the historical, geographic and cultural contexts of pre-colonial Vietnamese art in depth.

Arts of Ancient Viet Nam: From River Plain to Open Sea introduces new scholarship on the history of Vietnamese art, with approximately 110 objects dating from the first millennium BCE through the 17th century on rare loan from ten leading Vietnamese museums. The exhibition represents the first time these works have been exhibited in the United States and, for many of the objects, the first time they have traveled outside of Viet Nam.

Throughout its long history, Viet Nam served as a central hub for trade routes that connected the regions of Asia and the west with travelers and merchants traversing its long open plains. Trade vessels from as far as India and Rome found safe haven in its harbors. Objects in the exhibition illustrate the rich and complex patterns of trade and cultural exchange in southern, central and northern Viet Nam, and the varied influences of Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Japan, China, Rome and even northern Europe.

Highlights of the exhibition include ritual bronzes, terracotta burial wares, fine gold jewelry, large-scale Hindu and Buddhist sculptures and ornaments made of jade, lapis lazuli, crystal and carnelian.

The exhibition is co-organized by Asia Society, New York and the MFAH. Independent scholar Dr. Nancy Tingley is curator of the exhibition. Dr. Adriana Proser, Asia Society's John H. Foster



Male Figure. Champa period, 9th century. Dong Duong site, Quang Nam Province. Stone. Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture, 3.5

Curator of Traditional Asian Art, is in-house curator. MFAH curator of Asian art, Christine Starkman is in-house curator for the show in Houston.

When Dr. Tingley first traveled to Viet Nam in the 1980s with the intention of organizing an exhibition, the United States and Viet Nam had yet to normalize relations following the War. Realizing the exhibition was impossible at that time, Tingley kept at her research. As U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation grew and the relationship was strengthened, opportunities emerged for collaboration on the project. Over twenty years later, the exhibition is finally a reality. Works are on loan from ten leading Vietnamese museums including the National Museum of Vietnamese History in Ha Noi and the Museum of Vietnamese History in Ho Chi Minh City. The exhibition guides the viewer through critical periods in the region's history, beginning with ancient burial items from the fifth century BCE, continuing with intricate jewelry and religious statues of the first millennium and culminating with the fine ceramics of the seventeenth century.

"Asia Society gratefully acknowledges Viet Nam's Ministry of Culture and our colleagues in Vietnamese museums for their collaboration on this important project," said Asia Society Museum Director Melissa Chiu. "Having worked with Vietnamese officials, museums and Dr. Tingley for years, it is extremely gratifying to see the exhibition come to fruition, and to be working with our colleagues at MFAH on the exhibition's presentation."

"Most audiences are familiar with Vietnamese history of the twentieth century but, for many, this exhibition provides the first opportunity to explore the richness of Vietnamese art in its deserved depth," said MFAH director Dr. Peter C. Marzio. "We are extremely pleased to work with our colleagues in Viet Nam and at Asia Society to share these great treasures with U.S. audiences for the first time."

"The works in this exhibition are of truly global significance, and evidence a shared history that predates colonialism by several thousand years," said Dr. Tingley. "Unfortunately, modern scholarship and archaeological research were interrupted and delayed by the tumultuous decades of the twentieth century. After working for over two decades to bring this exhibition to fruition, we are very excited to bring these works to American audiences."

Exhibition Organization



Bell. Dong Son period, 5th century BCE–2nd century AD. Ninh Binh Province, Bronze. National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, L5b 1844

The exhibition is divided into four roughly chronological sections, which explore the art of the period's most prominent civilizations:

Early Cultures: Dong Son and Sa Huynh (1st millennium BCE–2nd century CE) will explore Viet Nam's first "Golden Age," which was dominated by two now legendary civilizations, the Sa Huynh in central and south Viet Nam and their contemporaries in the north, the Dong Son. Particular highlights of this section are the burial wares of the Sa Huynh people, who entombed their dead in large upright jars, the bodies positioned in crouched postures with precious offerings, weapons and smaller pottery vessels enclosed. This rare practice was not shared by the Dong Son culture in the north, which is better known for its ornamental bronze drums. Other highlights from

this exhibition section include iron axes, jewelry, beads of semiprecious stones, glass and gold.

Fu Nan in the Mekong River Delta (1st–5th century CE) examines the great first-millennium civilization known as Fu Nan, which comprised several major cities connected by an advanced network of canals across southern Viet Nam and into Cambodia. The exhibition will focus on the walled city of Oc Eo, one of the civilization’s wealthiest, located at the crossroads of trade routes linking the Roman, Indian and Chinese empires. The city was a main center of manufacture, notable for its superior-quality gold jewelry inset with semi-precious and precious stones. The jewelry of Oc Eo is presented alongside imported goods from Rome, India and China from the same period.



Lotus. Fu Nan period, 7th–8th century. Go Xoai site, Duc Hoa district, Long An Province. Long An Museum, BT87-M1-V-2

Champa Ports of Call (5th–15th century) explores the art of the seafaring Cham people, whose central coastal kingdoms became the locus of power in the sixth century CE. The exhibition features Cham ceramics, metalwork and sculpture, which demonstrate artistic and cultural exchange between coastal Viet Nam, Indonesia, the Philippine kingdom of Butuan and other regions of Southeast Asia and India.



Ewer. Late 15th century. Chu Dau kiln, Cu Lao Cham shipwreck. Stoneware. Viet Nam History Museum, Ho Chi Minh City, BTLS 16997

Trade and Exchange in Hoi An (16th–18th century) explores the city of Hoi An, which served as one of Southeast Asia’s primary international ports for two centuries. Located in central Viet Nam about 18 miles from modern Da Nang, Hoi An was the center of the ceramic trade between China, Japan and Europe. The exhibition will present ceramic wares produced in northern and central Viet Nam, and will explore the influence of Japanese, Chinese, Dutch and Portuguese traders who settled in Hoi An during the period. A group of objects recovered from a fifteenth-century shipwreck are displayed in this section of the exhibition

Public Programs

Asia Society will organize a series of public programs looking at Vietnamese arts, culture and contemporary society, including a curator’s lecture with Nancy Tingley, “Viet Nam: Ports of Call,” on February 2 at 7:00 pm.

Programming will also examine the complicated history and current relationship between the United States and Viet Nam,

which is being marked during 2010 on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the normalization of relations between the two countries and the 35th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. For details visit www.AsiaSociety.org

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a 356-page, fully-illustrated color catalogue, co-published by the Asia Society Museum and MFAH and distributed by Yale University Press. The book features original essays by Dr. Nancy Tingley and a distinguished group of international scholars, including: Dr. Nguyen Dinh Chien, chief curator at the National Museum of Vietnamese History; independent scholar Kerry Nguyen-Long; Dr. Pierre-Yves Manguin, of the

École Française d'Extrême-Orient; and Dr. Andreas Reinecke, from the Kommission für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Archäologie des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Bonn.

Asia Society Museum

Asia Society Museum organizes groundbreaking exhibitions of both traditional and contemporary art, as well as exhibitions showcasing masterpieces from its permanent collection, the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection. Universally described as “gemlike” the permanent collection contains objects from cultures ranging from Pakistan to Japan and Java, from 1000 BCE to the nineteenth century, with strengths in Chinese ceramics of the Song and Ming periods, Chola-period Indian bronzes and Southeast Asian sculptures. Through exhibitions and related public programs, Asia Society provides a forum for the issues and viewpoints reflected in both traditional and contemporary Asian art.

Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Asia Society is a nonprofit nonpartisan educational institution with offices in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, and Washington, D.C. Through planned new buildings in Hong Kong and Houston, slated to open in 2011 and 2012, respectively, the Society will dramatically expand its exhibition and public programming spaces and reach.

Asia Society is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. General admission is \$10, seniors \$7, students \$5 and free for members and persons under 16. Free admission Friday evenings, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. The Museum is closed on Fridays after 6:00 p.m. from Independence Day to Labor Day. For more information, visit www.AsiaSociety.org.

About the MFAH

Founded in 1900, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston is the largest art museum in America south of Chicago, west of Washington, D.C., and east of Los Angeles. The encyclopedic collection of the MFAH numbers more than 57,000 works and embraces the art of antiquity to the present. Featured are the finest artistic examples of the major civilizations of Europe, Asia, North and South America, and Africa. Italian Renaissance paintings, French Impressionist works, photographs, American and European decorative arts, African and Pre-Columbian gold, American art, the Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art, and the European and American paintings and sculpture from post-1945 are particularly strong holdings. Recent additions to the collections include Rembrandt van Rijn's *Portrait of a Young Woman* (1633), the Heiting Collection of Photography, the Helen Williams Drutt Collection of contemporary jewelry, a major suite of Gerhard Richter paintings, an array of important works by Jasper Johns, a rare, second-century Hellenistic bronze *Head of Poseidon /Antigonos Doson*, and major canvases by 19th-century painters Gustave Courbet and J.M.W. Turner. For more information, visit www.mfah.org.

Media Contacts:

Asia Society Museum, New York
Elaine Merguerian
212-327-9271 or pr@asiasoc.org

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston:
Mary Haus, Dana Mattice,
Megan Whitenton
713-639-7554 or MWhitenton@mfah.org