



# ASIAN ART MUSEUM

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## SHANGHAI

February 12 – September 5, 2010

*“When the Expo opens in 2010, it will be taking place in a country in which over half of its people are newly urbanized. . . . It will also take place in a city that is a shining example of China’s engagement with the world. For a century and a half Shanghai has sat at the center of crisscrossing currents between the country and the city, the Chinese hinterland and the world beyond the sea.”* —Wen-hsin Yeh, University of California, Berkeley

San Francisco, CA, February 10, 2010: From

February 12 through September 5, 2010, the Asian Art Museum presents *Shanghai*, the first exhibition of its kind to explore the visual culture of one of the world’s most intriguing cities. Spanning the time period from Shanghai’s origins as a modest regional center to the dynamic, cosmopolitan, global powerhouse of today, the exhibition reflects upon

the history of the city over the past 160 years, using art as its mirror. Drawn mainly from the collections of the Shanghai Museum, the Shanghai History Museum, the Shanghai Art Museum, the Lu Xun Memorial Hall, and the Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Centre, the more than 130 artworks include trade oil paintings, Shanghai deco furniture and rugs, movie clips, revolutionary posters, and video and contemporary art installations. *Shanghai* is co-organized by the Shanghai Museum and the Asian Art Museum, with assistance from the Shanghai International Culture Association. The exhibition serves as the cornerstone of the Shanghai Celebration, a year-long festival hosted by San Francisco Bay Area cultural institutions honoring the region’s long-standing relationship with Shanghai. For more information on the *Shanghai* exhibition, please visit [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org). For more information on the Shanghai Celebration, please visit [www.shanghaicelebration.com](http://www.shanghaicelebration.com).



*A Prosperous City That Never Sleeps*, 1930s. By Yuan Xiutang (dates unknown). Poster. Collection of the Shanghai History Museum.

“The 2010 World Expo that opens in May is Shanghai’s coming-out party, the official debut as the city reclaims its position as a global powerhouse,” says Jay Xu, museum director. “The Asian Art Museum’s *Shanghai* exhibition was timed to coincide with this prominent international

event. Only through understanding its tumultuous history, can one truly understand the progressive and stylish Shanghai of today.”

“No one can deny the dynamism of Shanghai. It is a blend of old and new, East and West, cutting-edge technology and traditional values,” says Michael Knight, senior curator of Chinese art. “A case-study in globalization, Shanghai derives its unique character from its welcoming of international influences and adaptation of them to complement local values and flavor. The *Shanghai* exhibition examines the effects of globalization using visual art as its lens.”

### **Shanghai Exhibition Overview**

The *Shanghai* exhibition is divided into four broad sections providing an overview of the major cultural and historical developments in Shanghai: “Beginnings” (1850–1911), “High Times” (1912–1949), “Revolution” (1920–1976), and “Shanghai Today” (1980–present). “Beginnings” traces Shanghai’s rise from a modest regional center to a city of international prominence after its designation as a “Treaty Port” by Britain and China in the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing. “China Trade” oil paintings, Shanghai school paintings, and a series of lithographs present the city as the international economic hub that it became in a short time. “High Times” represents a dynamic era in Shanghai’s history, which many people consider a historic commercial and cultural height. Ink and oil paintings, posters, one-piece dresses called *qipao*, film clips, and Shanghai Deco furniture together capture the launching of a public romance with the city that continues today.

“Revolution” highlights a collection of propaganda posters and woodcuts that document the changing landscape of Shanghai during the Communist reaction against the excesses of the “High Times” period. Other artworks in this section include woodblock prints from the 1930s and 1940s— among the earliest works to express the social criticism that would later lead to the revolution — and ink and oil paintings. “Shanghai Today” presents the visual culture that is emerging as the city reclaims its role as a leading center of global trade and finance. Prints, paintings, and video and installation art demonstrate the assurance with which Shanghai artists have reentered the global art scene with the removal of many of the restrictions of the “Revolution” period.

Because of its scope and scale, the museum has reconfigured its gallery spaces to accommodate the exhibition. Visitors will be directed through South Court to the exhibition’s beginning at the entrance to the Hamon Arcade. In the arcade, visitors will encounter the first work of art, *Shadow in the Water*, a white porcelain sculpture created between 2002 and 2008 by the Shanghai installation artist Liu Jianhua. The sculpture is a repeating row of landmark skyscrapers found in cities across China, suggesting a sameness in the landscape of China’s

metropolises. Shanghai's Oriental Pearl Tower (one of the tallest towers in the world), Jinmao Tower, and Bank of China Tower are among the buildings depicted.

The first historical and cultural subsection of the exhibition – “Beginnings” – is introduced upon entering the Osher Gallery. “Beginnings” introduces Shanghai as it was transformed from a modest regional center to an internationally prominent locale after its designation as a Treaty Port in 1842. In 1854, the Shanghai International Settlement – combining the British and American foreign concessions – was established, with its own system of self-governance that was effectively independent from China. In this special environment, which continued until 1943, Shanghai rapidly became a center for artistic production, with Chinese artists creating works for foreign, as well as domestic, consumption.

“China Trade” paintings are among the artworks on view in this section. This genre of paintings and drawings served the purpose of documenting the environs of Western traders and functioned as visual mementos of their time in Shanghai. These works were created by Chinese artists for the new market of Western patrons. The world portrayed in these paintings is dominated by Western-style buildings and images of Western lifestyles.

The handscroll entitled *Illustrations of the Antique Collection of Kezhai* by Lu Hui (1851-1920) and Hu Qinhan (act. late 19th century) is an example of the types of artworks created by and for the Chinese elite in Shanghai during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The artwork depicts the famous scholar and collector Wu Dacheng (whose poetic name was Kezhai) surrounded by his collection of ancient Chinese bronzes. Shanghai was home to a large number of wealthy, well-educated Chinese – including many artists – who fled to the city during the internal strife that besieged most of China during this time period. Such works show Shanghai artists struggling to find a balance between looking back to long-standing artistic traditions and embracing new directions influenced by Western styles.

The intermingling of Chinese and Western cultures in the city figures prominently in a set of large drawings that served as models for lithographs. Many of the drawings depict interiors with women in fashionable Chinese garb (and with bound feet) in a variety of pursuits, many influenced by the West, from playing pool to using sewing machines. Outside their windows are power lines, electric and gas lamps, and other signs of the Western-influenced modernization.

Covering the period from around the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912 to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, “High Times” occupies the remainder of Osher Gallery and continues into Hambrecht Gallery. The boundary between “Beginnings” and “High Times” is marked by a bronze tablet originally erected at the boundary of the American Settlement in Shanghai.

“High Times” begins with a series of paintings and calligraphies in traditional Chinese mediums and formats. “Bird and flower blossoms,” a hanging scroll by Xie Zhiliu (1910-1997) is an example of the bright colors and delicate brushwork that mark works by artists of the Shanghai school of painting. Artists associated with the Shanghai school broke from the traditional mode of landscape painting and created expressive and dramatic works that responded directly to the demands of their patrons.

Shanghai’s complex and often ambiguous social structure at the time is evident in a painting that appears to be a straightforward portrait of two men in a traditional Chinese garden. The painting, “Huang Jinrong and Du Yuesheng” by Yu Ming (1884–1935), depicts two legendary bosses of the infamous Green Gang. The Green Gang controlled the criminal activities in Shanghai in the early twentieth century.

The next part of “High Times” presents the arts that bombarded the residents of Shanghai on a daily basis: fashion, film, posters, and other graphic arts. Faces of beautiful Chinese women appeared often in visual products exhibiting Shanghai modernity in the 1920s and 1930s. Two of the many examples on view in the exhibition are posters entitled *Moonlight over Huangpu River* and *A Prosperous City That Never Sleeps*, both by Yuan Xiutang (dates unknown). Each of these posters presents a woman, clothed and coiffed in the latest styles, lounging before a backdrop of the city’s skyline. Such a composition exemplifies a successful marketing strategy that linked 1) Shanghai with 2) modernity with 3) the Chinese woman. This triangular association was so prevalent in the city’s visual culture at this time that it compelled the following claim by writer Cao Juren (1900–1972): “*Haipai* (Shanghai-style) is like a modern girl.”

Also included in this area are five *qipao*, a version of traditional Chinese women’s dress that was updated in Shanghai after the 1900s to be slender and form-fitting. This style was popularized by Shanghai socialites as well as glamorous courtesans. During the 1920s and 1930s Shanghai had one of the leading and most innovative film industries in the world, and film clips from that era, shown on a flat-screen monitor in this part of the exhibition, provide a sense of this genre and a context for the other items on view.

Osher Gallery concludes with a series of oil paintings done in modern Western styles. Very few such works have survived the turmoil of the mid- and late-twentieth century in Shanghai. The eight examples on view are from a private collection in Shanghai. *The Bund* by Liu Haisu is an example of a strong work by one of China’s most famous artists influenced by Western artistic sensibilities. This painting is a view of Shanghai’s Garden Bridge and its environs. Its twisting, dynamic forms and vibrant colors reveal the artistic influence of Van Gogh, one of Liu’s favorite artists.

“High Times” continues across North Court in Hambrecht Gallery. Shanghai Deco furniture and carpets are displayed, as well as photographs of the deco interiors and exteriors of famous Shanghai buildings of the 1920s and 1930s. A pair of armchairs is remarkable in that the original fabric has survived largely intact. The bold swirling fabric in tangerine and fuchsia complements the curving lines on the hardwood and burl frames. Other art deco furniture presented include a six-piece bedroom suite, a dining room table with four chairs, and a cabinet, among others.

A change in wall color marks the transition between “High Times” and “Revolution.” Shanghai was a leader in many of the social and political movements that swept China in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The first image that greets the visitor upon entering the new section is a 1968 portrait of Mao Zedong by oil painter Yu Yunjie (1917–1992).

The next grouping of works looks backward to the 1930s and 1940s at early expressions of the reformist socialist impulses that eventually led to the revolution. The woodcut print artists of the time asserted that the medium could best serve “the people” as it was reproducible, affordable, and mobile. They increasingly pursued socialist agendas in their prints, tackling societal ills. A good example is a 1935 woodcut print entitled *Roar, China!* by Li Hua (1907–1994). The slogan “Roar, China!” had become an international rallying cry for the emancipation of all oppressed people. The phrase was representative of the anti-Imperialist mood gripping many countries in the 1920s and 1930s, and it highlighted China as *the* focus of this global mobilizing effort. The exhibition also includes a 1946 cartoon of *Sanmao*, the longest running comic strip in China, which like the woodcut prints was aimed to align visual art with populist concerns.

In print, perhaps the most ubiquitous products of the government’s visual enterprise were the large-format, colorful propaganda posters. The posters in the exhibition depict celebrations in Shanghai of the new Communist regime. Many of the posters on display were published by the Shanghai People’s Fine Art Publishing House, a state-owned enterprise. In these and in the others on view, famous landmarks of the Bund and Nanjing Road appeared often as sites of new revolutions and campaigns against all that the city had once symbolized.

The last area of Hambrecht Gallery is dedicated to Shen Fan’s 2007 installation *Landscape-Commemorating Huang Binhong-Scroll*, an homage to one of China’s great artists of the twentieth century. This installation piece with computer-operated neon lights and music introduces the contemporary section “Shanghai Today.” Like most of the works in this section, it was created in the past few years, while a number of works in this section were actually created for the exhibition.

After exiting Hambrecht Gallery, the exhibition continues in Lee Gallery, which features contemporary photographs, textiles, ink paintings and calligraphy on paper, acrylic paintings, and oil paintings. For the first time North Court will be given over to art, where two large new works by the leading Shanghai installation artists Zhang Jianjun (b. 1955) and Liu Jianhua (b. 1962) will be on view.

Zhang Jianjun's work *Vestiges of a Process: Shanghai Garden* is situated closest to Lee Gallery on the east side of North Court. It is an installation composed of two silicone rubber Taihu rocks, manufactured from molds of real Taihu rocks which in traditional garden culture are prized for providing to city dwellers a symbolic access to nature. The rocks are accompanied by a silicone rubber vase. Together they are arrayed atop a pavement of gray antique bricks, salvaged from the demolition of Shanghai houses constructed between 1923 and 1926. Visitors can walk around the rocks, reflecting on time and process.

Liu Jianhua's *Can You Tell Me?* occupies the west end of North Court in the Vinson Nook. The installation is a series of stainless steel books suspended from a vertical wall. Each book presents two questions about Shanghai's future, one on each page, that are translated into five languages, Chinese, English, French, German, and Japanese. Always changing, propelled by its role as an economic powerhouse, the city suggests endless possibilities, some of which Liu asks visitors to contemplate.

The last section of "Shanghai Today" is presented in what is normally used as the Education Resource Room. (The Resource Room is temporarily moved to Tateuchi Gallery, in the southwest corner of the second floor.) This space features contemporary video art, one of the mediums in which Shanghai artists are taking a worldwide lead. Three of the five videos are by Yang Fudong (b. 1971): *City Light* (2000); *Liu Lan* (2003); and *Honey* (2003). A celebrated photographer, videographer, and film maker, Yang frequently explores the feelings of longing and displacement. His works often focus on the lives of young urbanites who despite possessing admirable qualities such as education or beauty, may not be well-adjusted to the environment in which they live.

#### **Exhibition Organization and Support**

*Shanghai* was co-organized by the Shanghai Museum and the Asian Art Museum, with assistance from the Shanghai International Culture Association. The lead curator was Michael Knight, assisted by Dany Chan. Britta Erickson selected the works for the contemporary section. Presentation at the Asian Art Museum is made possible by Carmen M. Christensen, Fred Levin and Nancy Livingston, the Shenson Foundation, the Koret Foundation, the Bernard Osher Foundation, AT&T, the MetLife Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, United Airlines, Credit Suisse, and China Guardian Auctions Co., Ltd. Media sponsors are ABC7, KQED Public Broadcasting, Titan, SF magazine, KTSF 26, Sing Tao Daily, World Journal, Where magazine and Sina.com.

**Publication**

*Shanghai* is documented with a lavishly illustrated catalogue, *Shanghai: Art of the City*. The catalogue, published by the Asian Art Museum, was edited by Michael Knight, Senior Curator of Chinese Art and Deputy Director of Strategic Programs and Partnerships at the Asian Art Museum and Dany Chan, Curatorial Assistant of Chinese Art at the Asian Art Museum. The fully illustrated oversized catalogue is available at the Asian Art Museum store (\$37.50 softcover, \$49.00 hardcover). 415-581-3600 or [shop@asianart.org](mailto:shop@asianart.org) (catalogue price subject to change).

**Press Preview**

A media preview for *Shanghai* will be held on Wednesday, February 10, 2010. Doors open at 10:00 a.m., remarks begin at 10:15 a.m. Please RSVP by Friday, February 5, to [pr@asianart.org](mailto:pr@asianart.org) or call (415) 581-3713.

**About the Shanghai Celebration**

The Asian Art Museum's presentation of *Shanghai* is the cornerstone of the Shanghai Celebration, a San Francisco Bay Area-wide collaboration of cultural institutions honoring the region's long-standing relationship with Shanghai. The Celebration includes exhibitions, performances, film series, lectures, special events, and more presented by dozens of Bay Area organizations. The Celebration will be observed throughout 2010, the year Shanghai hosts the World Expo (May 1 through October 31). For more information on the Shanghai Celebration, please visit [shanghaicelebration.com](http://shanghaicelebration.com)

**About the Asian Art Museum**

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture is a public institution whose mission is to lead a diverse global audience in discovering the unique material, aesthetic, and intellectual achievements of Asian art and culture. Holding more than 17,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history, the Asian Art Museum is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. Once located in Golden Gate Park, the museum now resides at its new, expanded facility at Civic Center Plaza. An architectural gem featuring a dynamic blend of beaux arts and modern design elements, the museum's new home is the result of a dramatic transformation of San Francisco's former main public library building by renowned architect Gae Aulenti (who famously reenvisioned an abandoned railway station as Paris's Musée d'Orsay) into a showcase for the Asian Art Museum's celebrated collection and exhibitions.

- **Information:** (415) 581-3500 or [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org).
- **Location:** 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.
- **Hours:** The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, with extended hours until 9:00 pm every Thursday.
- **Admission:** \$12 for adults, \$8 for seniors, \$7 for youth 13–17, and free for children under 12. Thursday evenings after 5 pm admission is just \$5 for all visitors except those under 12 and members, who are always free. **Target First Free Sundays:** The museum offers free admission to all on the **first Sunday** of every month, courtesy of Target. In addition to regular museum admission fees, entry into *Shanghai* requires a \$5 surcharge.
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.