

# SEATTLE ASIAN ART MUSEUM



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# PRESS RELEASE

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## **SAM'S ASIAN ART MUSEUM TO REOPEN FEBRUARY 8 WITH FREE WEEKEND-LONG COMMUNITY CELEBRATION**

Renovated and expanded space enables SAM to reimagine its installation of the permanent collection, showcase contemporary Asian art, and put conservation on public view

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SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) announced today that the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park will reopen to the public on Saturday, February 8, 2020, following a 24-month-long renovation and expansion. The museum's historic 1933 building closed to the public on February 27, 2017 to address critical needs of infrastructure, accessibility, and program space. Now enhanced with a design by the Seattle-based firm LMN Architects (2016 AIA National Firm Award) with landscape architect Walker Macy, the building reopens as a modern museum within an historic icon.

A free community celebration will welcome visitors to the museum on February 8 and 9, 2020. It will feature two 12-hour days (9 am-9 pm) of programs reflecting the 12 themes of the reimagined collection galleries, *Boundless: Stories of Asian Art*. Free tickets will be available to reserve in early December.

"This is a pivotal moment for SAM and for the city of Seattle," says Amada Cruz, the newly appointed Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO of SAM. "With the completion of this project, we unveil new spaces to connect the museum's extraordinary collection of Asian art to our lives and experiences. I'm grateful to the city of Seattle, the staff and supporters of SAM, and especially to my predecessor, Kimerly Rorschach, for seeing this monumental project through."

### THE BUILDING PROJECT

The Asian Art Museum's historic Art Deco building was SAM's original home and has not been substantially restored or renovated since its construction in 1933. The renovation and expansion project has modernized and preserved the historic building, expanded exhibition and education space, and established a better connection to the surrounding Volunteer Park.



### Highlights include:

- A new glass-enclosed park lobby on the east side of the building, creating a visual connection to Volunteer Park
- Two new portals in the Fuller Garden Court opening onto the park lobby
- A new gallery, education studio, conservation center, and community meeting room
- The restoration of Olmstedian pathways in the park near the museum
- Restoration of three fountains (two exterior, one interior)
- Cleaning and preservation of the original sandstone façade
- Cleaning of the façade's Art Deco metalwork and reglazing of the glass

The project was funded by a mixture of public and private funds, with a final budget of approximately \$56M. Of this funding, \$21M comes from the City of Seattle, which owns the building. Additional government support includes \$1.5M from the State of Washington and \$1.4M from King County. The remaining funds were raised through private support. The project team included general contractor and construction manager BNBuilders, Inc., and construction and project management services from OAC Services, Inc.

### THE ARTISTIC PROGRAM

One of only a few art museums in North America dedicated exclusively to Asian art, the Asian Art Museum maintains an important collection of art from China, Korea, Japan, India, Himalayas, and Southeast Asia. The museum offers a wide range of collection installations as well as special exhibitions and can now expand its program with the addition of a new 2,650-square-foot gallery.

With expanded and improved space has come the opportunity to bring to light new stories of the Asian art collection amid changing definitions of what makes up Asia in the 21st century. Ping Foong, Foster Foundation Curator of Chinese Art; Xiaojin Wu, Curator of Japanese and Korean Art; and Darielle Mason, consulting curator of South Asian Art, collaborated on a dramatic reimagining of the collection in the inaugural installation *Boundless: Stories of Asian Art*.

Organized thematically, rather than by region or time period, *Boundless* embraces the complexity of Asian art by bringing together works that tell stories about worship and celebration, visual arts and literature, clothing and identity, and more. The presentation of 12 themes makes use of the building's structure of two wings divided by a central courtyard, with art related to material life in the north galleries and to spiritual life in the south galleries.

SAM will inaugurate the special exhibition galleries on the east side of the building with *Be/longing: Contemporary Asian Art*, featuring 12 artists from across Asia—including Azerbaijan, Iran, India, Thailand, China, Korea, and Japan—who have worked or are working outside Asia. Featuring works from SAM's holdings and private collections, the exhibition explores the artists' experiences as both insiders and outsiders and their simultaneously Asian and global perspectives.

The project has also added a new scholarly resource to the museum with the Asian Paintings Conservation Center, led by Nicholas Dorman, SAM's Chief Conservator. The first museum center of its kind in the western United States, the center is devoted to the conservation, mounting, and study of Asian paintings, serving SAM's collection as well as institutional and private collections in the region. A \$3.5M challenge grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation established and endowed the center. SAM is currently raising \$2.5M in matching funds needed for its opening. To underscore the importance of conservation for the understanding and appreciation of Asian art, the center is constructed so that museum visitors will be able to observe some of its work through a viewing window, along with displays featuring conservation projects and processes.

### EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The renovated and expanded museum features an innovative community learning gallery, which brings art from the collection into a space with interactive activities for all ages. Art-making and reflection stations invite community voices and creativity into the galleries. In addition, the expansion allows for a new dedicated space for SAM's extensive education and art-making activities serving K-12 students throughout the region. A new community meeting room is available to community partners of SAM via reservation.

The museum will also feature interpretive technology integrated throughout the galleries and educational spaces. Interactive experiences, smartphone-enabled multimedia tours, and in-gallery video content all offer ways for visitors to learn about the art on view and the ideas the works embody.

The project advances the work of SAM's Education and Public Engagement department, which serves the community across the museum's three locations with public programs; programs for youth, teens, and families; and programs for schools and educators. At the Asian Art Museum, the Gardner Center for Asian Art and Ideas presents performances, films, and lectures with artists and scholars. Programs for youth and families include Free First Saturdays and the annual SAM Camp. SAM reaches more than 35,000 youth every year with tours and programs for K-12 students and the Creative Advantage program, a partnership with the Office of Arts & Culture to make quality arts education accessible to every student in the Seattle Public Schools. In addition, a series of free programs managed by the Office of Arts & Culture will be presented in and around the museum through the City of Seattle's 1% for Art program. The Asian Art Museum also houses the McCaw Foundation Library.

**Photo credit:** Tim Griffith.

### **ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM**

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum in 1994 and will reopen on February 8, 2020 following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.



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# Architect's Statement

## **Seattle Asian Art Museum**

*Seattle, Washington*

*2008-2020*

Harmonizing with the 1933 Bebb and Gould designed Art Deco building, the renovation and expansion of the Seattle Asian Art Museum is concurrently composed to integrate into the Olmsted designed landscape of Volunteer Park. The design represents the seamless integration of the building's spectacular site with the museum's mission for the 21st century: to showcase Asian art in conjunction with contemporary educational and conservation spaces.

A set of steps lead to the Art Deco lobby entrance on the west side of the building. Once inside, the Entry Lobby connects to the Fuller Garden Court and unfolds into the new Park Lobby. All three spaces create a new circulation spine joining the building with the park, and the park with the building. The renovation and addition reaffirms the original character of the Fuller Garden Court as the central hub of the museum which not only provides access to the gallery spaces, but also establishes a sense of expectation that is reinforced by the two new portals that open to the Park Lobby. The new lobby is the vertical connector to the program spaces and is composed mostly of glass, giving the impression that the space is floating in the landscape.

The circulation interconnects each volume, ultimately connecting everything to the park and the original elements. The Entrance Level encompasses all lobbies, existing gallery spaces, and an all-new 2,648 sq. ft. gallery which adds significant additional space for the museum. The Ground Level and Basement Level have a similar building program composed of ancillary spaces, art storage, meeting spaces, and offices. The Ground Level also contains a library, conservation studio, 201-seat auditorium, and a community education space.

The renovation provided daylighting to the octagonal galleries using light boxes built into the ceiling that emulate natural daylight while providing the museum with a modern lighting system. This artificial lighting allows the museum to set the stage for new art, better preserve their collection, and provide newfound flexibility for future displays.

The building components and the interior spaces have been renovated and organized to maximize program space and functionality as well as take advantage of their own tectonic identity. In addition to the façade restoration work, major upgrades were completed to the walls, floors, and ceiling elements in the existing galleries to modernize the space to be structurally sound and meet code requirements.

The Seattle Asian Art Museum honors and preserves the architectural legacy of the historic building and integrity of the park while providing space for deeper explorations of the diverse, artistic, and cultural traditions of Asia. The new addition of a dedicated community education space provides visitors enjoyment and access to public programming and community events. The new expanded and renovated gallery space enables the museum to showcase more of its permanent collection and attract special exhibitions offering broader perspectives on Asia's traditions and contemporary issues. Reflecting a complex organization of requirements, the museum integrates nature, architecture, history, and art in a poetic and intimate scale.

