EDITORIAL

WE HAVE CHOSEN for the enjoyment of our many thousands of readers around the world the gorgeous cover of this November–December 2008 issue, which features Bhutan, Buddhist art, and very special Asian museums. The cover figure is a splendid seated Buddha Akshobhya, 18th century, in parcel gilt silver alloy (reproduced near size, height 23 cm). On view at the time of publication, it is a major example of the exhibition titled “The Dragons’ Gift: The Sacred Art of Bhutan” held at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York through January 5th, 2009. Organised by the Honolulu Academy of Arts in Hawaii in cooperation with the Royal Government of Bhutan’s Department of Culture and the country’s Central Monastic Authority, the exhibition was presented in Honolulu earlier this year, before travelling to New York for its autumn North American premiere.

I am delighted that John Johnston, Assistant Curator at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, accepted my invitation to contribute the cover article “Buddhist Art of Bhutan” with its wonderful illustrations of rare sculptures and thangkas to illustrate Bhutan’s highly sophisticated Buddhist culture. He says, “Buddhist practice and ceremonies in Bhutan require a great number of images and ritual items, thus creating the causes and conditions for an outstanding tradition of Buddhist art”.

Not seen elsewhere in his article is a detail from a thangka illustrating scenes of the previous lives of the Buddha from the exhibition. It shows how the Lord Buddha, in the form of a turtle, felt compassion for a group of merchants whose boat had capsized, and saved their lives by ferrying them to shore.1 The complete set of such 18th–19th century scenes (or Jataka Tales) is normally kept in the Phajoding Gonpa monastery in Bhutan’s capital city of Thimphu.

As an interesting point of contrast, the issue includes the article “The Lost Buddhas: Stylistic and Iconographic Innovations in Sixth Century Qingzhou Buddhist Sculptures” by Dr Liu Yang, Curator of Chinese Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. These stone Buddhist images, unearthed in 1996, are considered one of the most significant archaeological finds of the 20th century in China. The article contains twenty-one sculptures that were found buried in a pit on the site of the long-destroyed Longxing (“Dragon Rise”) Temple in Qingzhou, Shandong province in eastern China. Mostly created during a period straddling the Northern Wei to the Northern Qi dynasties (early to late 6th century) with a small number of works from Tang and Song period, an exhibition is on display at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney (29/8/08–11/11/08) and will tour the Asian Civilization Museum in Singapore (5/1/09–8/4/09).

Arts of Asia contributor Barry Broman writes on his hometown “Seattle’s Asian Art Museum” which is housed in an elegant Art Modern building designed by local architect Carl Gould. This was the original home of the Seattle Art Museum established by the museum’s founder and main benefactor, Dr Richard E. Fuller. Seattle’s Asian Art Museum, located in Volunteer Park on Capitol Hill overlooking a reservoir and Puget Sound, is where Barry interviewed curators and photographed the Asian art collection.

It is always a pleasure to receive positive letters from readers complimenting us and Hajni Elias on her well-written articles for Arts of Asia. For the November–December 2008 edition Hajni Elias, international researcher and archivist for Sotheby’s Chinese Works of Art departments worldwide, writes on “The Barlow Collection at The University of Sussex, UK”. The collection, assembled by Sir Alan Barlow (1881–1968), contains over four hundred ceramic, two silver, seventeen bronze and fifteen jade pieces. Hajni says the collection “is remarkable for its outstanding spread and depth in certain areas and is also a fine example of the extraordinary spirit and enthusiasm of a collector with a passion for Chinese art”. Oriental Ceramics Society members will find this article particularly relevant as Sir Alan joined the Society in 1933 and ten years later became its President, a position he held for eighteen years between 1943 and 1961.

Dale Carolyn Gluckman, an independent curator and consultant for Asian textiles and dress, fashion and fibre art, writes on an exhibition consisting of forty stunning kimono by Ichikazu Kubota and lent by the Ichikazu Kubota Art Museum in Kawaguchi outside of Tokyo. It is co-organised by the San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA), the Timken Art Museum (San Diego), the Canton Museum of Art (Canton, Ohio) and the Kubota Art Museum. The exhibition will be at the SDMA and Timken (1/11/08–4/1/09) and at the Canton Museum (3/2/09–26/4/09). Guest curator Dale Carolyn Gluckman says, “Kubota was a remarkable man and a driven artist. He was inspired by a piece of tsuniga-hana he saw at the Tokyo National Museum at the age of 20 and in the course of trying to recreate it, he developed his own unique version that combined stitch resist (shibori), ink painting (he trained as a painter as well as a dyer), gold leaf and embroidery. No one has really understood what he did and that his art was a result of his unique and skilful blending of tradition and innovation. This is what my essay explores.”

Arts of Asia readers will surely be impressed with the excellent range of articles for this November–December 2008 magazine. Travellers to Thailand may also like to hear of the interesting exhibition being presented by the Bank of Thailand and Asian Cultural Center of Vermont (ACVC). “Bhutanese Textiles: Weaving from the Heart” will be held at Bank of Thailand Museum in Chiang Mai from November 10th, 2008 through February 10th, 2009. Jay and Rungrupa Bonmer, our longtime subscribers from America, gathered rare and brilliant weaving and ornaments for the exhibition. Jay informs us that this will be the first time that Bhutanese textiles will be exhibited in a museum setting in Thailand and also a first for the Bank of Thailand to have a joint project with an outside source. This joint cooperation of parties involves Bhutan, Thailand and USA.
The exhibition will be displaying fifty-five art photographs of Bhutanese by American photojournalist Torie Olson, such as the archer, while focusing on the “national dress” of Bhutan. Included are rare antique tunics (kushung), with supplementary geometric patterns and used only today in Bhutanese ceremonial occasions. Only recently has this culturally rich nation begun to open to the outside world and has the outside world begun to understand the intricacies of its exquisite weavings. Invitations to the exhibition opening will be sent to government officials from all countries involved: Bhutan, Thailand and USA. The coronation of his Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in Bhutan takes place starting November 6th, 2008.

Mr K.Y. Ng, Vice-Chairman of the Hong Kong Art Craft Merchants Association, Ltd. came to my office on July 30th, 2008 with Ms Liu Dehuan and Ms Ni Shuying, mainland representatives for The Chinese Collectors Convention taking place in Shanghai 2008. They requested to interview me for the convention’s publication. Ms Liu Dehuan’s first question was “Would you mind sharing with us some ideas of interesting stories about your art collection? The main things I want to know are the philosophy of your collection and the original idea for starting Arts of Asia magazine?” This resulted in a most interesting exchange of question and answer ideas which will be appearing in several pages of the convention’s catalogue in both Chinese and English.

I hope to be able to attend the convention, although this is difficult in timing, since it coincides with the printing of this number when I should be easily available in Hong Kong as we may receive last minute changes from contributors and advertisers which need my help. However, I look forward to the interview’s appearance and wish the collectors convention success. Importantly for two days, October 8th-9th, 2008, it is hosted by the Shanghai Municipal People’s Government and organised by the Shanghai Cultural Development Foundation. The event will have been mainly, if not only, conducted in mandarin as is customary in mainland China on all official occasions.

Time passes by far too quickly these days for your publisher and editor also, who notes she missed earlier bringing attention to E & J Frankel’s September 18th to October 18th latest two-part exhibition and sale entitled “Steppes: Forward and Back”. Neatly covered in their 90-page catalogue are both “Foremost Contemporary Artists of Mongolia” and “17th and 18th Century Buddhist Bronzes, Thankas and Sakhas”. Edith and Joel gratefully acknowledge in a long list all the people who have made the exhibition and colour catalogue possible, and together introduce Mongolian contemporary art in a three-page introduction which includes their pictures of Mongolian horses, camels, dogs and a Gher de-mountable habitation. I would like to add to the congratulations of their son, Dr James D. Frankel, on his move to Honolulu where he will be a professor by now in the Religion Department at the University of Hawaii. My own memories of the Frankels go back to when James was a young boy. This is the fourth Mongolian exhibition E & J Frankel has held.

Another interesting catalogue, amongst the many we regularly receive, is “Animistic Art of Island Asia” from our friend Thomas Murray and his company of Asiatica-Ethnographica. Tom (or more formally Thomas) dedicates his hardback 110-page production, which includes the gifted photographs by Don Tuttle, to his uncle Captain Fenton Kilkenney, known in his later years as Captain Mike Fenton. Evidently a remarkable intrepid man, Captain Fenton like Tom, has many stories to tell of the South China Coast and the South Seas, the Philippines and Indonesia, as well as in addition of South America and the African Congo.
Asian Art in London (AAL) is now in its eleventh year. Presented from October 30th to November 8th, 2008 it has ventured into a new area of media promotion by making a video of its participants’ presentations. Sight as yet unseen at the time of writing my Editorial, A & J Speelman’s spotlight is on works of art from the Song (960–1279) to the Qianlong period (1736–1795), including bronze and cloisonné wares, furniture and particularly jades. Well represented are lacquer wares and porcelains. In addition, works of art include mark and period Qianlong glass vessels and finely carved pieces in ivory, bamboo, boxwood and horn. A fully illustrated catalogue is available on application.

Two years ago Anthony Carter (email: info@anthonycarter.net) moved from his gallery in Jermyn Street to a stylish apartment in St. James’s where he works discretely with museums and serious collectors offering only the best pieces. Despite the move to private premises, Anthony Carter wishes to continue to support AAL in its eleventh year and so will look forward to welcoming collectors to view privately, pieces which he has assembled over recent months. His well-known passion for superior examples of lacquer and jade is evident in the objects he has for sale. Many of his pieces are from private collections and have not been on the market for decades. This year he will have imperial Chinese lacquers of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Bonhams, the auction house, note that they find international demand for Chinese art is still extremely strong at the moment. In particular for fine ceramics of the Ming and Qing dynasties (14th to early 20th centuries), jade carvings in white and pale green tones, cloisonné enamel vases and other large vessels. In support of AAL, they are offering selective Chinese and Southeast Asian art auctions on Thursday, November 6th, 2008 (see website: www.bonhams.com/asiann).

Eskenazi Ltd, one of the world’s leading dealers in Chinese art, contribute Chinese ceramics and stone sculpture to this year’s AAL at their 10 Clifford Street, London W1 gallery. From the Northern Qi period (550–577) comes a richly ornamented glazed earthenware jar with moulded appliqués, including four mask-like faces. Among other highly desirable earthenware are an equestrian figure and a blue and white amber glazed vessel, both from the Tang dynasty (618–907). While among the stone sculpture represented are a Sui period (581–618) Buddha, formerly in the C.T. Loo collection, and two sandstone panels, of male and female orchestras carved in high relief playing flutes, zithers, lutes and recorders, dating from Tang to Five Dynasties (9th–10th century). An illustrated catalogue (price £20) accompanies the exhibition, with the range of exhibits being £10,000 to over £100,000.

Roger Keverne (2nd Floor, 16 Clifford Street, London W1) is well known as an author on jade and, among the varied selection for his Winter Exhibition in support of AAL, he is showing a naturalistic white model of a crab. Dating to the 17th–18th centuries, it was formerly in the renowned collection of E.T. Chow. A spinach-green jade brushpot with figures in a landscape and a meiping form vase with the eight Buddhist emblems are amongst the one hundred Chinese works of art. Also included are superb lacquers, soapstone figures, bronzes dating from the late Shang dynasty (circa 11th century BC) to the 19th century, a charming silver box and cover of the Tang dynasty from the Cunliffe collection and a large Vietnamese solid gold mid-19th century basin. A fully illustrated catalogue will be available in October.
Exhibiting for the third year as part of AAL, Simon Pil- ling, East Asian Art and Interiors, presents as his central me-
dia Japanese lacquer. Sumptuous examples are a Japanese ornamental box by Okada Yuji (born 1948), and a Japanese sake cup by Wakamiya Takashi (born 1964), who has un-
dertaken a workshop in the gallery during AAL. The latter’s work is held in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Mu-
seum, London and the Lacquer Museum, Munster.

Coinciding with AAL, S. Marchant & Son, a London leading
and most venerable dealer in Asian art, are having an ex-
hibition of “Ming Porcelain for the Japanese Markets, ko-
sometsuke and ko-akai”. Appropriate to mention here is a blue
and white plate painted in the centre with two standing digni-
farities and a warrior looking at a boy holding a broom and
pointing to an army in the distance behind a mountain, all in
a winter landscape. Very little is known in the Western world
about the group of wares. In order to extend their appeal
and show collectors their fascination and rarity, S. Marchant & Son’s exhibition of more than sixty items is
accompanied by a hardback full-colour catalogue with a fore-
word written by the scholar Julia B. Curtis.

Back in Hong Kong, Grace Wu Bruce, the Chinese furni-
ture specialist, will be having an exhibition in October to
November of Ming furniture at 701 Universal Trade Centre,
3 Arbuthnot Road. In the gallery will be seen all the main
chair types—yoke back armchairs, horseshoe armchairs and
meizhu rose chairs. Every piece in the exhibition has been
chosen with care for fine craftsmanship and excellent mate-
rial. A fully illustrated catalogue is available and prices range

from HK$180,000 to HK$5.5 million. Included are exquisite
and rare Ming tables, a travelling book cabinet, daybed, can-
opy bed and twelve-leaf folding screen of various precious
woods. Illustrated above is Grace Wu Bruce’s set of four
17th century Chinese yoke back armchairs of jichimu wood
with dalishi marble panels. Surviving sets of four chairs dat-
able to this period are very rare.

I am seen above in our photograph taken on July 25th
with three family members of the Mok dynasty. In
the centre of the three is Dr Mok Hing Yiu, son of Mok Kong
Sang (1882–1958), the third and last comprador from the
Mok family to serve Butterfield and Swire. Dr Mok Hing Yiu
has five children and they are named alphabetically after A,
B, C, D and E! Christopher Mok, seen on the far right of the
picture, being the third child. His brother Edwin Mok seen
on the far left of the picture is the fifth and youngest. Edwin
and his wife Rina are the owners of the Edrina Collection
(named appropriately as a combination of their first names)
of Ming and Qing imperial costumes, on display as part of the
exhibition “Timeless Legacy: The Mok Family Collections”.
This is being held at the Art Museum, Institute of Chinese Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong
from July 26th to November 2008.

Timeless indeed, this exhibition presents the Mok family
collections of three generations which includes paintings,
calligraphy, objects for the scholar’s studio, ceramics and
jades. These are further supplemented by ancestral furniture
and portraits. The Edrina Collection of Ming and Qing im-
perial costumes, includes formal court robes (chuofu), semi-
formal court robes (jifu), daily and casual robes (changfu and
bianfu), as well as some rank badges (buzi). My good friend Judith Rutherford from Australia, a specialist on Chinese textiles from the Ming and Qing dynasties, lectures on "Chinese Textiles: Symbols of Rank, Status and Artistic Merit" on September 27th at the Chinese University of Hong Kong followed by a gallery tour of the collection. Judith’s first article for Arts of Asia, “Chinese Textiles and Dress Accessories” appeared in the May–June 1993 issue.

It is appropriate to mention here that I have just received the 88-page catalogue of the exhibition “Picture Paradise: Asia-Pacific Photography 1840s–1940s”. This will be held at the National Gallery of Australia until November 9th, 2008. According to the fold-in leaf of the front cover, the exhibition chronicles the transmission and adoption of new developments in photography from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. It is the first survey, it says, of the early photography from the region covering India and Sri Lanka, Southeast and East Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, to the west coast of North America. The exhibition is drawn from the National Gallery of Australia’s outstanding collection of photographs and other Australian and international sources. Many of these images have never been published before. The catalogue includes over eighty photographs and album views of people and places.

This reminds me that Dennis George Crow, a leading specialist in historic China and Asian photography, has asked me to look at his new website which is now up and running (www.dennisgeorgecrow.com). I find it attractive and shows a wide range of his photographs from China, Japan, South and Southeast Asia. At the time of writing my Editorial, Dennis was holding an exhibition in his Hong Kong gallery (10/F Parekh House, 63 Wyndham Street, Central) from his new acquisitions of 19th and early 20th century photographs of Hong Kong and China. There were over 350 images on display, including more than twelve large multi-part panoramic views of Hong Kong and Macau. His other specialities include colonial and tribal Africa, early nautical photography, classic nudes and rare vintage travel photography.

In my last Editorial I introduced our readers to Andy Hei, Founder and Director of the Hong Kong International Arts and Antiques Fair (HKIAAF), which was scheduled to be held ahead on October 4th–7th at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. Following Andy’s personal invitation, Robin, who took the photographs for Arts of Asia, and I attended the fair preview press conference held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel on September 10th. Andy Hei is seen holding a cloisonné enamel sword owned by his exhibitor, Milton Man Kin of M&C Gallery in Hong Kong, who told me he had acquired it from a European collector over a year ago. According to the Chinese and English information provided with the press release it is “the only known Imperial Ming sword available on the market and is valued at over HK$20 million”.

Among several of the other confirmed local exhibitors at the press conference were Henry Au-yeung and Charles Wong. Henry Au-yeung is the Director and Chief Curator of Grotto Fine Art Ltd which he founded in Hong Kong in 2001. The gallery exclusively represents local Chinese artists with a particular interest in the newest and most avant-garde artworks. These include paintings, sculptures, prints, photographs, mixed-media and conceptual installations. A specialist in 20th century Chinese art history, Henry writes, curates and gives lectures regularly in these fields. Charles Wong of Ever Arts Gallery is a leading Chinese furniture expert. He is photographed standing behind his Qing dynasty (1644–1911) bamboo root carving with its scene of immortals crossing the sea on a raft. Ever Art galleries, specialising in antique Chinese furniture, scholar’s objects and accessories, are located in Hong Kong’s famous Hollywood Road antiques district and on Union Street in San Francisco. The Hong Kong gallery was established in the 1980s when fine quality classical Chinese furniture became available to the international marketplace.

Arts of Asia aims to please and provides stimulating, informative and beautifully presented articles supported with attractive advertisements from important international art galleries and auction houses. With the holiday season approaching, a subscription to our magazine is a very thoughtful gift for your friends and family who are also passionate about enriching their knowledge of Asian art, antiques and culture. It is a fine way to keep up to date on Asian art news and trends. Please visit our website www.artsofasianet.com for more information. I truly value your wonderful support in the coming 2009 year.