EDITORIAL

IN MY PREVIOUS issue London was the focus, and I was back again in this great city for our July–August 2009 special Japanese edition. From April 19th to 26th I was staying at Brown’s Hotel on Albermarle Street in Mayfair. On Tuesday April 21st I was off to the British Museum’s Sir Joseph Hotung Centre for Ceramic Studies to preview the opening of the Sir Percival David Collection from 6:45 pm to 8:30 pm. The ceremony was opened by British Museum Director Neil MacGregor and Royal Patron of the British Museum HRH The Duke of Gloucester.

I was delighted to join my friends in complimenting the museum curators for organising the special event and the attractive presentation of the collection. At the gallery’s entrance we were overwhelmed by the display cases filled with wonderful ceramics in a wide range of colours. It was clear of the museum to highlight the rarest ceramics by grouping them not only at the entrance, but also in the centre of the exhibition hall. The spacious gallery is widely regarded as a befitting resting place for the Sir Percival David Collection. From the crowd’s reaction, they enormously enjoyed the preview and gave high praise for the quality of the objects. The British Museum’s invitation states:

“The Sir Percival David Collection is internationally renowned for its beauty and scholarly importance. Featuring almost 1700 ceramics that range in date from the 3rd to the 20th century AD, many are of imperial quality and a high proportion are rare because they are inscribed and dated. The entire collection is placed on permanent display in a specially designed gallery in the new Sir Joseph Hotung Centre for Ceramic Studies.”

I encourage Arts of Asia readers to visit London to view the British Museum’s new gallery where our May–June 2009 magazine has been selling very well. I am proud that our issue on the world-renowned Sir Percival David Collection of Chinese art has been so positively received by international academics and experts, curators, collectors and Asian art scholars.

On April 28th, 2009 the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) unveiled its new gallery for Buddhist sculptures, designed by Adriana Ferlauto. Arts of Asia readers can learn more about the gallery in this issue by reading the ten-page article by Beth McKillop (Director of Collections and Keeper of the Asian Department at the V&A) and Suhashini Sinha (Assistant Curator in the South and South East Asian Section of the Asian Art Department at the V&A). A generous donation from the Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation to the V&A has enabled the transformation of its sunlit galleries 17–20, west of the John Madejski Garden. This is where the V&A’s unrivalled holdings of Asian Buddhist sculpture are presented in a sympathetic, accessible and elegant setting.

The V&A’s collections of sculpture from Asia are among its greatest treasures. This suite of four rooms explores the images of the Buddha Sakyamuni, together with associated images of bodhisattvas, guardians and monks. The displays also explore the spread of Buddhism from India throughout Asia. The visitor is encouraged to learn about the iconography and conventions of Asian images and to compare outstanding sculpture in diverse styles. These new installations complement the museum’s European Sculpture Galleries and create exciting opportunities in the V&A for enjoying and understanding Asian sculpture.

The cover and nineteen-page lead article for the July–August 2009 special Japanese issue feature “Lords of the Samurai”, an exhibition at the Lee, Hambrecht, Osher Galleries in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, from June 12th to September 20th, 2009. The samurai culture and code of conduct, bushido, have long captivated the imaginations and aspirations of young and old in the Western world. More than just fierce warriors, Japanese samurai of the highest rank were also visionaries who strove to master artistic, cultural and spiritual pursuits.

“Lords of the Samurai” takes an intimate look at the daimon, or provincial lords of the warrior class in feudal Japan. The Hosokawa clan, powerful military nobles with a 600 years old lineage, embodied this duality of fierce warrior and refined gentleman. The exhibition of more than 160 works from the Hosokawa family collection is housed in the
Eisei-Bunko Museum in Tokyo, the Kumamoto Castle and the Kumamoto Municipal Museum in Kyushu. Objects on view include suits of armour, armaments (swords and guns), formal attire, calligraphy, paintings, lacquer and tea wares, masks and musical instruments. The Asian Art Museum is the exclusive United States venue for this exhibition.

The samurai subject has international appeal. This was demonstrated at an exhibition in Milan, Italy at the Royal Palace in Piazza Duomo, the most important location for art exhibitions in the city. Held until June 2nd, under the patronage of the President of the Italian Republic, the show featured eighty-five works of art, mainly from the collection of Luigi Keolliker, an important collector of art in Italy who has created quite recently one of the largest private collections of samurai art outside of Japan. Some works in the exhibition were also from the Civic Oriental Collection of the Castello Sforzesco.

Curated by Giuseppe Piva, an Italian dealer specialising in Japanese art and antiques, and Fondazione Antonio Mazotta, the show contained a good selection of samurai items, particularly full armours, largely from the Edo period, and kawari kabuto (unusual helmets). Other accessories such as mountings for swords, armour decorations and masks, complete the collection. The catalogue in Italian contains a history of Japanese armour and other introductions about the samurai world and the armour’s construction.

From the samurai exhibition I have selected the following three examples. On the left is a second half of the Edo period, 19th century, full armour with riveted vertical plates. Its fan-shaped heraldic insignia decorating each individual part of the gear is the variant used by the Akita clan. Top right from the Tokugawa clan is a 19th century open-style quiver which kept arrows fully in view, bundled together and with the tips inserted in the special protective dividers of the lower section. Below them is a traditional and refined Edo period sword with lacquer decorated mounting. When worn with armour the cutting edge of the blade was turned downwards. Though the first pieces date from the Muromachi period, production of this kind of mounting remained virtually unchanged through to the end of the Edo period.

I close this Editorial with mention of the “Taiwan Today” feature by Bradley James Gardner who grew up in Hong Kong and Singapore. With assistance from the National Museum of History in Taipei he has written a comprehensive view of “master painter and national icon” Zhang Daqian (1899–1983), through his paintings, calligraphy and memorabilia. Gardner continues with a second article on restoration in Taiwan of Chinese painting and calligraphy. In 1986 we were invited to visit the residence that the National Palace Museum provided Zhang Daqian, where there was a workroom for the mounting of paintings as the artist understood the importance of this part of his work.

Information appears in my Editorial of our November–December 1986 issue “Chinese Painting in the Imperial Age—The National Palace Museum and its Collections”. Prepared under the guidance of the director and curators at the National Palace Museum, Taipei, this back issue (one of my favourites) is still available in limited quantities.

Chinese artist Zhang Daqian’s last residence, near the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Tuyet Nguyet in 1986 with the lifelike wax model of the artist at work painting

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