

LAUNCH OF THE WOON GALLERY OF ASIAN BRINGING ASIAN AND BUDDHIST ART TO THE WEST

On 9 July 2018, the Northumbria University celebrated the opening of the Woon Gallery of Asian Art and the Woon Foundation Painting and Sculpture Prize 2018 at the Sandyford Building, Northumbria University City Campus. The Woon Gallery of Asian Art is part of the newly refurbished space of the University Gallery which showcases one of the most important collections of Buddhist and Asian art in the United Kingdom. It also includes contemporary pieces by the likes of Pablo Picasso, Damien Hirst and Andy Warhol, all of which, a generous contribution by the Woon Brothers Foundation.

Supporting Education, Research and Public Exhibition

The Woon Gallery of Asian Art houses a unique collection of 47 items from the Woon Foundation's Collection to support research and public exhibition in the Northeast of England, comprising 43 artefacts and 4 contemporary western paintings selected for display in the adjacent gallery of Northumbria for modern artworks. Other than being home to a rare and unique Asian and contemporary art collection, the Woon Gallery of Asian Art also serves to provide an interesting and

invigorating way of providing a liberal and broad-based education, extending the aim of the Woon Brothers Foundation.



(Above) Interview feature
The Woon Gallery of Asian Art
by Northumbria University, on Vimeo



(Above) Mr Woon Wee Teng at the opening of the Woon Gallery of Asian Art.
Photo credit: Northumbria University, Newcastle

One of the aims of the Foundation is to use Asian art to foster better understanding, build warmer relationships and strengthen friendships between the East and West. Mr Woon explained, "Art has no barriers, borders or boundaries. It is in fact the universal language or natural expression of the human mind, heart and soul. It is through art we can all heal, harmonise, bond and unite. The artworks emanating from a different ethnic, religious or cultural background can be just as beautiful and astounding as one's own. The opening of a gallery of Asian art on campus will bring to Northumbria new energy, exciting activities and further academic pursuits."

"艺术是无境界的。它是一种通用语言、一个能表达人类思想和性灵世界的自然方式。"

Enhancing Wider Religious and Cultural Understanding

The 47 items (from an initial 172 items offered by the Woon Foundation for loan), have been selected for its contribution to the understanding, application of craft and making and also the relationship of Buddhist Art to culture and religious belief, practice and devotion – particularly the representation of the divine through physical form and materiality.



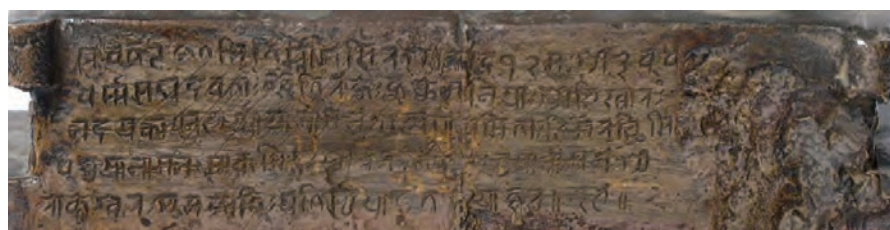
(Above) Woon Gallery of Asian Art Exhibition Catalogue
No. 14 - A gold and crystal stupa, Gandhara, circa 2nd/3rd century. Height: 14.5cm



(Above) Woon Gallery of Asian Art Exhibition Catalogue
Preface - A Qingbai Guanyin,
China, Southern Song Dynasty
(AD 1127-1279)
Height: 38cm.
Collection of the
Woon Brothers Foundation

Dr. Heather Robson, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor, Knowledge Exchange and Engagement (Faculty Arts Design and Social Sciences) also shared, "In selecting items from the Woon Foundation Collection, we have specifically chosen depictions of the Buddha from different cultures and periods in order to bring a fresh perspective on the interpretation of Asian and Buddhist Art. The collection will be used as an education and research resource and will support the City's Cultural Strategy."

More Than a Curated Collection of Artefacts

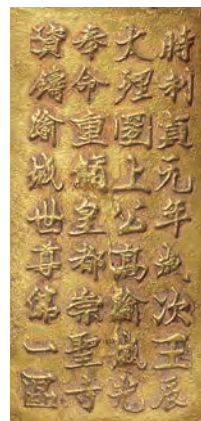


(Above) Woon Gallery of Asian Art Exhibition Catalogue
No. 21 – A gilt bronze Buddhist triad with inscriptions on the reverse, Nepal, circa 17th / 18th century, Height: 18cm



Through the entire collection of artefacts, one has a glimpse of not just the amazing artistry of craft, but also seems to be brought on a Buddhist journey along with the hearts and minds of the artists through time and space. Though the entire collection is presented in artefacts categorised based on geographical places – from the Indian Subcontinent, Gandhara, Tibet, Nepal and Himalayan Region,

(Left) No. 27 – Thangka of Vajravarahi, Tibet, circa 14th century, Height: 81cm, Width: 61cm



(Left)
No. 88 – A gold Buddha seated in dhyanasana pose with right hand raised in kapitthaka mudra and left hand lowered in combined varada and vitarka mudra and cast with an epigraph on the back in Chinese characters, Yunnan, China, Dali Kingdom, dated to 1st year of Li Zhen Reign of Emperor Duan Zhixing (corresponding to AD 1172) Height: 19cm, Weight: 1.29kg
Illustrated on the front cover and pages 260-262 of "The Hidden Treasures of Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms" by WT Woon.

Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, Yunnan and to China – the essence of the entire collection transcends beyond the land boundaries, just like the wonderful Buddha Dharma.

From the gold and crystal stupa, to the gilt bronze Bodhisattva statues, hand-painted thangkas, wood-carved Buddha and many more precious pieces, it seems that there is one consistent theme weaving the different narratives behind each artefact. So regardless of whether we are looking at the compassionate Guanyin Bodhisattva, the awe-inspiring Padmasambhava, or the serene Buddha faces, statues, mudras and inscriptions, the experience is like a supreme and pure spiritual devotion manifesting in a physical world for the human eye to experience – a bridge between the supramundane transcendence and our worldly mundane reality.

Another Milestone in Buddhist Art, Research and Education

The opening of the Woon Gallery of Asian Art is definitely another milestone for the Woon Brothers Foundation. First set up in 2007 by the four Woon brothers, Tek Seng, Wee Phong, Wee Hao and Wee Teng, the Foundation aims to promote art education and collection, and to also help the needy. In 2014, the Woon Brothers Foundation gifted a rare 800-year-old reliquary (with finely inscribed series of Buddhist figures including the Acuoye Guanyin on the surface) from China's ancient Dali Kingdom to the Yunnan Provincial Museum. Aside from these, the Foundation has generously donated to other museums elsewhere, and also continues to make contributions through projects and awards.