

# ASIAN ART

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## BHUTANESE ARTIST WINS RUBIN MUSEUM ART PRIZE

The Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art announced in September that the Bhutanese visual artist Pem Lham is the winner of the 2026 Rubin Museum Himalayan Art Prize, a \$30,000 unrestricted cash prize and the largest international award in support of contemporary art related to Himalayan regions.

Pem Lham said, 'As artists, there are moments when we wonder if our stories are reaching anyone, but this prize is a reminder that our voices matter and that there are always people connecting with the work we create. I hope this recognition inspires my fellow artists to continue creating, while supporting my own research, experimentation, and future projects.'

As a painter and mixed-media artist, she explores themes of folklore, gender, identity, memory, and the evolving relationship between inherited narratives and contemporary experiences. Her work balances tenderness, humour, satire, and introspection, and often deconstructs familiar cultural symbols, inviting a dialogue between past and present. At

the heart of her practice is the long-term exploration of 'Molay,' a spirit girl from Bhutanese mask dance traditions, whom she reimagines as a contemporary figure. Through her reinterpretation, she examines ideas of womanhood, power, and belonging.

'This recognition is an important step in flattening the landscape of a global contemporary art world that has historically underrecognised South Asian women artists,' Michelle Bennett Simorella, Rubin Museum director of global projects and collections, explained. 'This prize widens the lens from which we view contemporary art, and it creates the opportunity for an artist to expand upon their work or take new risks. Pem Lham's career is just beginning, and I look forward to seeing what she does next.'

For more than 16 years, Pem Lham has been actively engaged with VAST (Voluntary Artists Studio) Bhutan, a non-profit organization with the primary aim of providing opportunities for Bhutanese youth to develop their artistic talents. She holds a Bachelor of



Pem Lham in her art studio in Thimphu, Bhutan, courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art. Photo: Yeshe Zangpo

Fine Arts in visual arts from Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan, and her work has been exhibited across Bhutan, Nepal, India, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Taiwan. Recent exhibitions include her debut solo exhibition *Molay Moley* (2025) presented by VAST

Bhutan, as well as the group exhibitions *She* (2026) at Pristine Contemporary Gallery, Delhi; *Bhutan Festival* (2025) at Leuk Castle, Valais, Switzerland; and *Healing with Happiness* (2022-23), which travelled from Brussels to Paris before being exhibited at Bhutan's Paro International Airport. In 2021, she

won the White Canvas Art Competition, an international contest to support emerging Asian artists, and in 2024 won the Best Production Designer Award at the Bhutan National Film Awards for *I, The Song*.

'Pem Lham is quite versatile in her work, demonstrating skill, whimsy, emotional depth, and a willingness to experiment and explore new forms of expression,' explained Elena Pakhoutova, Rubin Museum senior curator. 'Her work is extremely relatable and emotionally resonant within Bhutan as well as the global contemporary world. Pem Lham's clear talent has great potential to fully blossom. The grant might really propel her to explore and create more, and gain exposure beyond Bhutan.'

In addition to the annual Rubin Art Prize, the Rubin provides direct support to artists and scholars through an annual grant programme and art commissions. The Rubin's global model also includes travelling exhibitions such as Gateway to Himalayan Art, which opens at the USC Pacific Asia Museum in October.

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, TASHKENT

The Centre for Contemporary Arts Tashkent (CCA Tashkent), a flagship initiative of the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF), is now open to the public. Led by ACDF Chairperson Gayane Umerova, the centre is the first institution of its kind in Central Asia, providing a permanent home for contemporary art, research, and public engagement in Uzbekistan while positioning the country within global contemporary art discourse.

Originally built in 1912 as a diesel station and depot for Tashkent's first tramway line, the centre occupies one of the city's most significant industrial heritage buildings. Designed by Wilhelm Heinzlmann, the architect behind landmarks including the Palace of Grand Duke Romanov and the Treasury Chamber, the site remained part of Tashkent's electricity network for more than a century before being entrusted to ACDF in 2019 as part of its long-term cultural development strategy. Under the direction of ACDF Chairperson Gayane Umerova, the building has been transformed by acclaimed French architects Studio KO into a permanent home for contemporary art, carrying its industrial heritage forward while creating a new cultural landmark for Tashkent.

The centre opens with Hikmah, the inaugural exhibition curated by Chief Curator Dr Sara Raza, which runs until 31 January 2027. Across the centre's restored industrial spaces, Hikmah brings together newly commissioned works and recent installations by ten contemporary Uzbek and international artists that explore the concept of *hikmah* (wisdom) and respond to the architecture of the building and the wider cultural histories of Uzbekistan: Ali Cherri, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Kimsooja, Tarik Kiswanson, Muhannad Shono, Nari Ward, Shokhrukh

Continued on page 2

### Inside

- 2 Profile: the artist Sheila Makhijani
- 6 Asian and Islamic art at this year's Venice Biennale
- 8 Garuda in Bali, an exploration of the mythical bird in Asia, in San Francisco
- 10 The work of the celebrated lacquer artist Shibata Zeshin
- 12 Korea – 2,000 years of Korean creativity, in London
- 14 Art from Gandhara, present-day Pakistan
- 16 Asian Art in London gallery shows
- 18 Exhibitions in the UK: Artists Soma Surovi Jannat, Meiro Koizumi, and Hokusai; Constantinople to Istanbul
- 19 Chinese enamels and a Mughal songbook, in Cambridge; Balraj Khanna in Birmingham
- 20 Amar Kanwar and Kawada Kikuh, and a Korean artists' group show, in London
- 20 Gallery shows, in London
- 21 London auction previews
- 23 Islamic Arts Diary

### Next issue

November 2026

Focus on Japanese and Korean art



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# ASIAN ART IN LONDON 2026

## IN GALLERIES

Asian Art in London (AAL), the 29th edition, runs from 27 October to 6 November. This year AAL has reorganised and has gone to The Lavery (formerly known as Cromwell Place) in South Kensington to group most of the dealer participants together, complementing the shows in the permanent gallery spaces and temporary shows around the central London.

• For an up-to-date list of participants, visit [asianartinlondon.com](http://asianartinlondon.com)

Late evening viewings have always been part of the event with opening nights for evening viewing of Asian art in St James's (Sunday, 1 November), and in Mayfair (Monday, 2 November). Check the guide to see which galleries are participating.

• The Asian Art in London launch party is at The Lavery, 4 Cromwell Place on 29 October, between 18.30-20.30



Tree of Life, screen print and hand embroidery on linen, 81 x 56 cm, Anrad Gallery



Ritual sake bottle, heishi, Muromachi period, 15th/16th century, red and black lacquer, negoro ware, 24 x 32.5 cm, Simon Pilling

## AT THE LAVERY

South Kensington, 29 October to 3 November

Anrad Gallery, AstaGuru UK, Hanga Ten, Rob Dean Art, Runjeet Singh Gallery, Simon Pilling, Slaats Fine Art

Japanese art is represented this year with **Hanga Ten's** exhibition, *Contemporary Japanese Prints and Paintings – Now and Then*, featuring workings from the 1960s to the present day. The show highlights work from Clifton Karhu, Daniel Kelly, Katsunori Hamanishi, Toko Shinoda, Joel Stewart, and Nana Shiomi, among others.

**Simon Pilling's** selection of Japanese objects includes ancient and contemporary lacquerware from Japan. Much of lacquer's allure lies in its mystery – shadows complete the objects, imparting a rich, dense presence that will be diminished, if not destroyed, by the harsh glare of contemporary lighting. The appreciation of Japanese lacquer, *urushi*, resonates with many of



Thief (2026) by Daniel Kelly, woodcut and chine collé on Echizen paper, Hanga Ten



Carved lacquer hibiscus tray by Tamakaji Zokoku (1806-1869), Edo period, 19th century, carved lacquer, choshitsu, 27.3 (diam.) x 2.5 (height) cm, accompanied by a signed and sealed tomobako, Simon Pilling

Japan's traditional aesthetic concepts – *Ikki*, *Wabi*, *Sabi* and *Yo-no-bi*. This collection of objects invites viewers to reflect on these values and their increasingly universal importance to our lives today: memories of past events and lives, important moments in everyday rituals.

The pieces span 600 years – from 15th-century to contemporary work, from anonymous craftsmen to Living National Treasures recognised by the Japanese government for their essential role in continuing Japan's unique artistic history.

**Slaats Fine Art's** exhibition is entitled *Ancient Echoes, New Perspectives II*, featuring Chinese works of art, encompassing ceramics, jade, bronzes, cloisonné enamels and lacquerware. These historic works are complemented by a considered group of contemporary paintings and artworks by emerging Asian artists, creating a dialogue between tradition and contemporary practice.

**Rob Dean** is showing a selection of Indian paintings including an illustration from the *Devi*



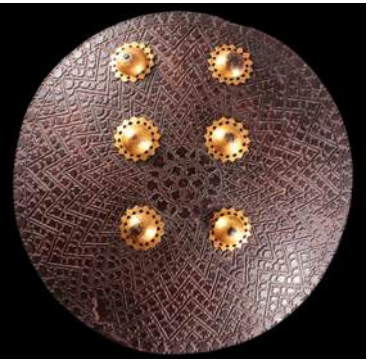
An illustration from a Markandeya Purana series, The Devi attacks Sumbha's Demon army, Kangra, India, opaque pigment on paper heightened with gold, 1820-1840, Rob Dean

*Mahatmya*, itself an episode from the *Markandeya Purana*, where the might of the Devi and her *sakti* force is brought to bear on Sumbha's demon army. Theologically the Devi Mahatmya and the slightly later *Devi Bhagavata Purana* present the Goddess as the supreme source of all divine power. These goddess traditions were closely influenced by tantric rituals and ideologies which were evidently popular in the courts of Guler, Kangra and Mandi, where the subject is frequently depicted through paintings. Other works include a 19th-century illustration for a *Shiva Purana* series depicting the sage Shuka reciting stories from the Shiva Purana, from Kangra, and a Company School study of a male Emerald Dove, North India, watercolour on paper from around 1800.

**Runjeet Singh Gallery's** exhibition is entitled *2,000 Years of Art from the Indian Subcontinent: From Ancient Traditions to Contemporary Practice*, and traces 2,000 years of South Asian art through a curated collection of antique, modern, and contemporary artworks and objects. Singh has expanded his expertise in antiques to include modern and contemporary art, and this exhibition explores continuities in craftsmanship, imagery, and cultural tradition, while forming dialogues



An archaic silver and gold inlaid bronze vessel, fanghu, Qing dynasty, 18th century, Mark Slaats Fine Art



Carved leather shield, Bidar, Deccan, 17th/18th century, diam. 56 cm, Runjeet Singh Gallery

between artworks across centuries and geographies. Highlights include a 17th-18th-century carved leather *dbal* (shield) from Bidar in the Deccan. The radiating star pattern is associated with two Bidriware objects in international museum collections. It is mounted with six gilt-iron bosses. A highlight of the contemporary works on offer is *Sector 10 (II)* by Coventry-based painter, Suminder Virk, whose distinctive application of fine lines of oil paint draws on traditional *mehndi* or henna techniques while reflecting the Brutalist architecture of her home city of Chandigarh.

Indian contemporary art is represented by **AstaGuru**, who are presenting *Shifting Ground*, works by Tom Vattakuzhy, marking the first London solo exhibition of this Indian artist. Tom Vattakuzhy is a contemporary Indian painter whose work is distinguished by its evocative treatment of light, memory, and the quiet drama of everyday life. Rooted in observation yet deeply psychological in tone, his paintings often depict solitary figures, animals, and domestic interiors, rendered with a cinematic stillness that invites contemplation. Carefully composed, his scenes suspend figures and objects in moments of pause and introspection, blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination through references drawn from everyday experience, art, literature, and cinema. Vattakuzhy hails from Kerala on



Sector 10 (II) (2026) by Suminder Virk (b 1969), acrylic on canvas, 80 x 80 cm, Runjeet Singh Gallery

India's southwestern coast, a region whose history has been shaped by centuries of trade and political transformation. Central to the global spice trade, Kerala drew Arab, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British powers to the Malabar



Bird and Egg (2026) by Tom Vattakuzhy, oil on canvas, 182.8 x 76.2 cm, AstaGuru



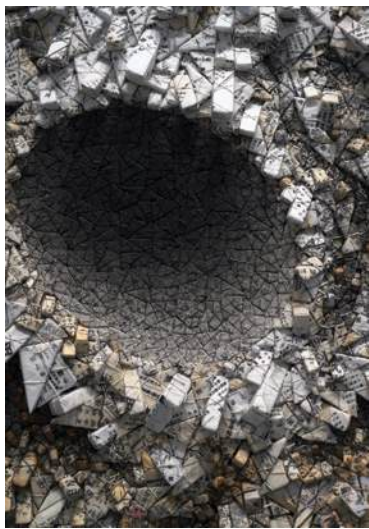
Candle and Cats (2026) by Tom Vattakuzhy, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 60.96 cm, AstaGuru

Coast over centuries, reshaping the region's economy, architecture, and social fabric. In the early 20th century, Kerala's deeply entrenched caste system and anti-colonial struggles gave rise to strong reformist and communist movements, culminating in the election of the world's first democratically elected communist government in 1957. These historical and political currents quietly permeate Vattakuzhy's work, entering not as scenery but as atmosphere: farmers, migrants, fractured households, moral tremors, and silences charged with quiet weight. Kerala appears less as a backdrop and more as a lived social and psychological condition shaped by layered histories of labour, caste, and displacement. This tension between the intimate and the larger social landscape is central to Vattakuzhy's practice.

## IN THE GALLERIES AND BY APPOINTMENT

**Alice Williamson** is exhibiting for the first time as a new gallery in a space at **Daniel Crouch Rare Books**, Bury Street, St James, from 29 October to 4 November. It is a return to the event for Alice herself, who took part for many years with Priestley & Ferraro and served as a board member. The exhibition focuses on early Chinese and Korean ceramics and works of art and will feature a group of Song ceramics from important private collections. There will be two handling sessions during the exhibition. More information on [asianartinlondon.com](http://asianartinlondon.com) for information and booking details.

**Sundaram Tagore Gallery** are showing in their Pall Mall gallery, from 9 October to 5 December, works by Korean artist Chun Kwang Young. Chun Kwang Young



From the series Aggregation 26 (2026) by Chun Kwang Young, mixed media with Korean mulberry paper, Sundaram Tagore



Moulded qingbai flower-shaped cosmetic box and cover, Southern Song dynasty, diam. 10.1 cm, the box is covered with a clear blue glaze with characteristic pools of a darker tone and would have been used to hold cosmetics, Alice Williamson Asian Art

(b 1944, South Korea), who is internationally recognised for his *Aggregations*, an ongoing series of sculptural reliefs composed of thousands of individually wrapped triangular forms made from traditional Korean mulberry paper, or *hanji*, often sourced from antique books. Each unit, carefully folded, dyed, and assembled, embodies fragments of memory, history, and human experience. At once organic and architectural, Chun's intricate structures evoke landscapes that appear both ancient and otherworldly. The exhibition's opening reception coincides with Hangul Day, a Korean national holiday that celebrates the creation of the Korean alphabet called Hangul—a simple, scientific writing system that helped improve literacy and shaped Korean identity.

In Mayfair, **Eskenazi Ltd** is holding launch for *1935 The International Exhibition of Chinese Art*. **Francesca Galloway** is open by appointment in Holland Park. This



Sancai and blue glazed 'peacock feather' pattern jar, Tang dynasty, height 16 cm, with bright sancai glaze, this 'peacock feather' pattern jar is of 'wannian guan' (ten-thousand-year jar) shape, one of the most appealing and characteristic Tang dynasty profiles, Alice Williamson Asian Art

year's show is entitled *Observed & Imagined, Indian Painting 17th-19th Century*, alongside a new catalogue illustrating this group of paintings. Highlights from the show include a painting from Raghogarh depicting a young, standing yogini (*khadesvari*). Her practice requires her to remain upright, even when asleep, and her only support is a swing (*jhula*). Her legs and feet are shown swollen from having stood for so long, indicating that the novice is in the early days of her practice. This appears to be the only physical meditation practice (*tapas*) that women are ever shown doing in Indian painting. In Prince Sulaiman Jah in Procession, an adolescent prince astride a lavishly caparisoned prancing white steed. Basking in the colourful pageantry of the event and the golden light of

sunset is Sulaiman Jah (18 October 1792-28 June 1862), the seventh son of Nizam 'Ali Khan (r 1762-1803), ruler of the powerful Asaf Jahi dynasty based in Hyderabad. The painting is attributed to Venkatchellam, the master artist at the Hyderabad court.



Prince Sulaiman Jah in Procession, Deccan, Hyderabad, attributed to Venkatchellam, circa 1804, Opaque pigments and gold on paper, folio 29.5 x 41 cm; painting 27.3 x 39 cm, Francesca Galloway



Standing Yogini (khadesvari), Central India, Raghogarh, circa 1690-1700, opaque pigments on paper, 25.2 x 18.2 cm (including border), Francesca Galloway



## Asian Art in London

29 October – 10 November 2026

[asianartinlondon.com](http://asianartinlondon.com)

Image: Rob Dean Art