ROM

Friends of East Asia

Newsletter of the Bishop White Committee

Fall 2025

Message from the Co-Chairs

Deanna Horton and Mary Boyd

On May 12, 2025 the BWC hosted “The Big Chill”, an event to celebrate the “Korea-Canada Cultural Exchange Year” and to showcase ROM’s Korean collection. The focus of “The Big Chill” was the complex correlation between climate change and aesthetics during Korea’s Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). This was the third in the BWC’s annual Distinguished Speaker Series, following the 2024 program “Fragile Cargo” and the 2023 program “Silver Linings”.

The Consul General of Korea Mr. Youngjae Kim was a special guest for the evening. Dr. Sooa Im McCormick, Korean Foundation Curator of Korean Art at the Cleveland Museum, was the keynote speaker. Dr. Soren Brothers, Allan and Helaine Shiff Curator of Climate Change at ROM, discussed global ecological transformation during the Little Ice Age and Dr. Vicki Sung-yeon Kwon, ROM Associate Curator of Korean Art and Culture, spoke on artistic production in Korea during this period, using examples from ROM’s collection. ROM has one of the largest and most significant collections of Korean art and artifacts in North America. It encompasses over 1,600 objects from prehistoric artifacts to contemporary art.

Figure 1: VIP reception prior to the speakers' presentation © ROM.

The Bishop White Committee joined with ROM Governors to co-host a VIP reception for members of the Korean business and academic community prior to the speakers' presentations. We are grateful to Grace Lee, the Government of Korea, and to curator Vicki Kwon for their support.

Figure 2: Dr. Sooa Im McCormick © ROM.

Figure 3: Dr. Soren Brothers © ROM.

We would like to thank all the BWC volunteers who helped organize and host this successful event. We look forward to our Distinguished Speaker Series program continuing in 2026, which will focus on Japanese art and culture in conjunction with ROM-curated exhibition, Shokkan. It is set to open in April, 2026. Stay tuned for more details!

In This Issue

Welcome to the fall 2025 edition of Friends of East Asia. The report on the Bishop White Committee latest from our Co-Chairs Mary Boyd and Deanna Horton opens this issue. Then we have an informative list of contributors to our Curator's Corner section. Japan curator Akiko Takesue has written a sneak review for her upcoming exhibition, the first

on Japanese art at ROM in a decade; “Shokkan: Japanese Art through the Sense of Touch”. Our former H. H. Mu Far Eastern Library Librarian Jack Howard contributes to our curiosity as he reflects on the concept of touch in Japanese culture. We also have Mr. Yusuke Akai, a professional potter and owner of Akai Ceramic Studio explains what is zara-zara, a tactile vocabulary. We hear from the Rebanks summer 2025 intern, Joshua Dudley writing on the work of Okada Marie, a Japanese contemporary printmaker. Her work will be on display at the Osler Gate starting in October. This issue is a nice mix of the present and the past where the Doris Dohrenwend Intern, Jialu Zheng describes a collection of photographs from the George Crofts Collection taken of Buddhist caves. This year saw the passing of former Head of the Far Eastern Department, James Hsu. He is fondly remembered in 3 tribute pieces by Jack Howard, Sara Irwin and Jane Liu. We have two great contributions from BWC members: Julia Bentley on cultural diplomacy in Taiwan, and Lynne DiStefano recounting her experience in Japan climbing Mount Fuji. We also want to acknowledge new acquisitions of the Art of Won Lee, the bronze sculptures, donated by the Won Lee family and a statue of Kannon made possible by Philip Cheong and Deanna Horton. So enjoy this issue; full of information pertaining to Japan, Taiwan, George Crofts, and James Hsu who we want to remember.

Jane Liu and James Thompson, Co-Editors

Curator’s Corner

“Shokkan: Japanese Art through the Sense of Touch” exhibition

Akiko Takesue, Bishop White Committee Associate Curator of Japanese Art & Culture

On April 4, 2026, ROM will open the first exhibition featuring Japanese art in ten years, “Shokkan: Japanese Art through the Sense of Touch” on the third floor Centre Block. This exhibition explores shokkan 触感, or the sense of touch, as a critical component in the creation, appreciation, and circulation of Japanese art. It is based on my original, pioneering research that broadly covers this topic.

The exhibition includes about 80 objects, mainly from ROM collection, of a wide-ranging category from kimono to armour, paintings, tea utensils, ceramics, and lacquerwares, spanning from the ancient time to today. In order to demonstrate the continuity in tactility in Japanese art, historical works and contemporary pieces will be displayed side-by-side—for example, an 18th century kimono and an Issey Miyake dress, or a 17th century screen painting and a contemporary screen work.

Figure 4: Woman's outer robe (uchikake) with pine, bamboo and plum design. Silk, shibori tie-dying, embroidery. Edo period, early 18th century. 949.49 Gift of Louise Hawley Stone © ROM.

Figure 5: Issey Miyake, Dress & Trousers, polyester, linen Heisei era, 1990. 990.62.1.1-2. A Textile Endowment Fund and Director's Retirement Fund co-purchase in acknowledgement of Mary C. Holford, retired costume curator © ROM.

Shokkan is a complex sense: it does not only refer to the haptic physical sensation directly felt by the fingertips, but also the psychological impression of the touch, composed of inputs from vision or hearing, as well as memories or words. This means that, even with the same physical sensation, the shokkan is personal and unique. This complex sensory understanding of touch is deeply rooted in Japanese art, where tactility plays an integral role.

In creation, a maker's hands are not simply considered tools; rather, hands mediate the relation between an object and a maker's mind or spirit, called kokoro in Japanese. Handmade objects are thus not simply "made by hands," but embody multi-layered tactility, including the direct handling by the maker, the maker's imagination of the user's hands, and the eventual user's touch that engages with the maker's kokoro.

Figure 6: Nonomura Ninsei; Rounded square tea bowl with flowing glaze, stoneware, Edo period, late 17th century. 944.16.24 Donated in memory of of the late Sir William Van Horne © ROM.

Touch is always double-sided: when you touch something, you are simultaneously being touched by it. The double-sidedness of touch can be found in many Japanese works of art that also serve as utilitarian objects. This means, they are meant to be handled as part of a user's everyday life, even paintings.

Figure 7: Views of Kyoto and its Environs (Rakuchū rakugai zu), pair of six-fold screens; ink, colour, gold leaf on paper. Edo period, 1640-1660. 970.75.1-.2. Gift of Mrs. Percyval Tudor-Hart © ROM.

Figure 8: Kokei, Netsuke of two puppies; carved wood, Edo period, 18th century. 909.21.78 © ROM.

Experiencing the texture of objects via touching them is thus an essential part of appreciating Japanese art. The patina of a netsuke from long-time use, for example, is a crucial factor in appreciating it. The aesthetic value of a tea bowl, too, is determined by how it fits in one's palm: its shape, weight, and the texture of its glaze. The importance of texture has led the techniques used to decorate the surfaces of objects to become highly developed, such as maki-e lacquer and shibori tie-dyeing.

The sense of touch also seems to have played an important role in the global circulation of Japanese objects from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries, when small things that can be held in hands were enthusiastically collected among Western collectors. For example, Sir William C. Van Horne (1843-1915) in Montreal collected over 1,200 Japanese ceramic objects, and maintained a close, tactile relation with them. The popularity of Japanese art in the West at that time might have been an antithesis to the elevation of the vision as the highest sense of all, as opposed to the touch that was degraded as "uncivilized" in the 19th century.

Thinking about touch is also highly relevant to today's social conditions. The global experience of the COVID-19 pandemic made us suddenly conscious of touch. While virtual communication may make us feel connected even during the pandemic, our sense of "skin perception" knows something is missing, according to Masashi Nakatani. Unlike other senses, it is impossible for us to "shut down" our sense of touch. In times like today, it is meaningful to foreground this easy-to-forget sense of tactility as an alternative way to engage with art.

Touch in Japanese Culture: A personal reflection

Jack Howard, Retired Librarian of the former H. H. Mu Far Eastern Library

In 2026, a unique exhibition on touch in Japanese art will be on display at ROM.

Figure 9: Chawan tea bowl, the Yamagami Soju collection, 19th Century Edo-Meiji period. 991.252.3 © ROM.

When I started thinking about what is touch, in the context of Japanese art, my mind went straight to a teacup in ROM's Yamagami collection of Japanese tea ceremony utensils. This cup is a rose-coloured chawan (cup for drinking matcha tea) with what looks like a belly button; indeed, it has a nickname oheso お臍 "belly button". I have never held it because it was in a glass case in a section in ROM's Japan gallery devoted to the tea ceremony. Yet just looking at it I had a sensation of what it feels like when touched because I have felt other chawan with a similar texture.

In the Cha-no-yu tea ceremony the moment of taking tea is a truly aesthetic experience—touch is an essential part of it. Chawan are made of clay that has been kneaded into a purified medium. All the work involving the making of a chawan involves touch. Kneading the clay, forming the ball from the clay, shaping it by hand or on a wheel into a bowl—all involve touch.

Touch is also a critical element in the creation and appreciation of Japanese textiles. To feel the sensation of a kimono as it touches your skin: when your hand is placed on your lap, feeling a texture of the kimono with an awareness of the feel of the cloth against the skin. The weave and source material—be it silk or cotton or linen—each have a certain touch-characteristic. Although every society has the basics for creating things, what I am considering here is how the Japanese instil their objects with an element of creativity giving even the most mundane object an attribute of beauty, "the Japanese added touch" one could say.

In Japanese, the word for touch is shokkan 触感. It translates as the feel, like the feel of silk or of tatami. The word's meaning also includes shokkaku 触覚 signifying the actual

sense of touch. Having walked on tatami mats in Japan I can remember how they felt. Each occasion I visit Japan and walk on tatami mats, a flood of memories come to me of the times I have walked on them or smelt their ineffable fragrance—something akin to what Marcel Proust describes in his “Remembrance of Things Past”.

One can look at an object, but to really appreciate it one is drawn to a subtle touch that puts into play a whole, new sensibility. Craftsmanship comes alive when touched. Perhaps, though, one can also think of a visual touch where a person does not actually touch an object, but rather looks closely at it, taking in all its details. In Japanese museums, visitors often carry a small close-focus monocular to be able to see the details of an object more clearly. Perhaps this is a more mature form of touch, based on experiences of touching similar objects. I would like to think so.

Zara-Zara（ざらざら）

Yusuke Akai, Professional potter and the owner of Akai Ceramic Studio

Have you ever paid attention to the feeling of holding a vessel in your hands?
In Japan, rice bowls are held while eating, and matcha bowls are gently cupped in the hands when drinking tea. Many people even feel that the warmth of the bowl, the texture of the clay, and the sensation of the rim against the lips can change the very taste of tea. Here, let us introduce a Kiseto matcha bowl by Kato Kozo 加藤幸造 (1935-2023) and he was designated a Living National Treasure of Japan in 2010. The foot ring is deliberately finished with a rough surface, leaving the marks of a dull wooden spatula so that the tactile quality of the clay can be enjoyed. When using the bowl, one can sense the earthy texture with the palm, the smooth surface of the glaze with the fingers resting along the side, and the rim’s feel at the lips, all while savoring tea.

Figure 10: The foot ring of Kato Kozo’s Kiseto matcha bowl © Yusuke Akai.

Figure 11: The tactile quality of Kato Kozo’s Kiseto matcha bowl © Yusuke Akai.

Why are Japanese people so sensitive to touch?

One reason for this lies in chopstick culture. Chopsticks are tools that delicately convey the softness or firmness of food, nurturing a refined sense of touch. Daily life surrounded by natural materials such as paper, wood, and cloth has also cultivated this sensitivity. Another factor is the seasonal choice of tableware. In summer, cool glass is favored, while in winter, thicker vessels that convey warmth are appreciated. Touch, in this way, is closely tied to Japan's seasonal sensibilities. Over time, Japanese sensitivity to tactile qualities has been shaped by food culture, daily life, language, and the rhythm of the seasons. This perspective comes from a book written about 40 years ago, "How to Choose and Buy Tableware" by Yoshio Akioka.

The richness of Japanese tactile vocabulary

The Japanese language contains a wealth of words for describing tactile sensations—such as ざらざら zara-zara (rough), つるつる tsuru-tsuru (slick), and すべすべ sube-sube (smooth). At first glance, these words all describe "surface qualities," yet each carries a distinct nuance.

- Zara-zara refers to a gritty, uneven texture, like sand or earth, often evoking a sense of rusticity.
- Tsuru-tsuru suggests a glossy smoothness, like ice or glass, so slick that one's hand might slip—often linked with coolness or hardness.
- Sube-sube describes a finely polished, pleasant smoothness, like human skin or the surface of porcelain, conveying comfort and softness.

Rather than reducing textures to a single word such as "rough" or "smooth," Japanese expressions distinguish the quality of those sensations. They allow people to share subtle feelings such as "What kind of softness?" or "What kind of roughness?"
This linguistic richness reflects a culture that values and refines tactile awareness in everyday life. Of course, this is not unique to Japan. In Canada, too, people often test the "mouth feel" of a mug before buying it, or they remark: "I want this bowl because it feels so nice in my hands." The appreciation of touch is, in fact, a universal human experience that transcends cultures.

Figure 12: Fuwa-moko (fluffy and cozy), © magazine Can Cam キャンキャン.

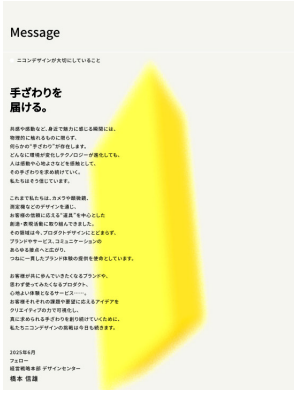


Figure 13: Tezawari (hand feel) Nikon Commercials © Nikon.

Even today, advertisements in Japan still use the word 手ざわり tezawari (“hand feel”), and fashion magazines frequently feature tactile expressions such as ふわもこ fuwa-moko (“fluffy and cozy”), instantly communicating a texture even to younger readers.

James Chin-Hsiung Hsu 1941-2025

Sara Irwin, retired East Asia specialist

Figure 14: James Hsu examining the Tiger bone in storage © ROM.

James came to ROM in 1968 to study and publish the James M. Menzies, oracle bone collection. In 1960 ROM acquired the Menzies collection. This gift was based on the provision that the museum would establish a fund to bring a scholar to study and publish the collection. The original plan was to engage the renowned scholar Dr. Ch’u Wan-li from the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. For health reasons it became impossible for Dr. Ch’u to travel, so he recommended his top student for the position: Hsu Chin-Hsiung – known at ROM as James Hsu.

Before arriving in Toronto, James had completed his MA at National Taiwan University and had spent a year perfecting the art of making rubbings from the oracle bones in the collection of the National Centre Library in Taipei. Oracle bone rubbing is a complex and skilled operation, and a detailed process which in those days involved heating beeswax and setting the bone in the wax to give it both stability and support. Next, applying soaked special rubbing paper to the surface, then gently tapping the surface. The paper was pushed into the engraved characters or hollows in the bone, which were typically either the shoulder blade of an ox, or the top part of the shell of a tortoise**.** Chinese ink was evenly applied and the paper peeled off before it had completely dried. The result was a black and white impression of the engraved characters or chiselled hollows.

James needed an assistant for this work, so the late Patty Proctor who had studied at the U of T and spent a year in Hong Kong studying language was hired and worked with James for about 18 months preparing the bones for rubbing. James and Patty worked in what was called the big study room, a hot airless space in the middle of the centre block on the third floor of the 1932 wing. Years later they wondered why they hadn't caused a fire using a hot plate and aluminum pot to heat the wax. The hot plate was attached to an extension cord plugged into the only electrical outlet in the space that also provided power for two or three desk lamps. Patty became a member of the Far Eastern Curatorial staff in the 1970s and an expert on Chinese ceramics. The first volume of the Menzies oracle bone collections was published in 1972, the second in 1977. In 1979, James published the collections of Bishop White, George Crofts and other collections of oracle bones in ROM's Chinese collections.

In 1974, James received his PHD from the University of Toronto and was cross appointed to the Department of East Asian Studies, where he taught a popular course "The Written Word in Ancient China". In 1982, James published "Ancient Chinese Society" with Professor Alfred Ward which became the textbook for his course. In 1996, "The Written Word in Ancient China" an expanded and updated version in English was published. These are only the tip of the iceberg of James's prodigious literary output of books, articles and contributions to academic journals. Dr. Hsu was a highly respected scholar, his knowledge of Ancient Chinese culture, history and folklore was limitless. James was an invaluable resource to the department and museum as a whole.

In 1979, James became Department Head for a considerable number of years. He performed this task with unfailing good humour and patience. In 1996, James decided to retire from ROM and returned to Taiwan, where he enjoyed a second career teaching, researching, writing and training oracle bone scholars.

A Memory of Dr. James Hsu

Jane Liu, BWC Executive

After he retired and returned to Taiwan, Dr. James Hsu kept a dedicated routine and visited Toronto every summer. That is how I came to meet him at ROM. One time Chen asked me to go down to the staff entrance to escort a special guest; it turned out to be James, who in his humbleness, was not recognized by the security guard. We had to phone Chen in order to have permission. James would typically stay at Chen's office on average for about an hour. Once I overheard them chatting about video games, which had been a hobby of James in his spare time. James always travelled with two iPads, since he needed two accounts to be able to download games of different versions. To James, video games were not only a game to play for fun, but for him games actually improved strategic thinking and decision-making skills. James told me that he played on a daily basis, both early morning and after dinner. That is what I remember of Dr. James Hsu. He was a dedicated scholar in many ways, and with many talents.

James Hsu, my memories

Jack Howard, Retired Bishop White Committee Library librarian

I was new to the department in 1977. At the time, the Far Eastern Department was in the Heritage Wing (as it is called now), the original ROM building which opened to the public in 1914. Our offices were around the reading room of the Far Eastern Library, which was in the Heritage Wing Annex 3rd floor. Some curators, like the department head, had their own offices, but a good number of us had offices around the library or in a room that was constructed in the galleries for exhibits planning for The Chinese Exhibition in 1974. The exhibition preparation room is where I ended up, along with head librarian Betty Kingston.

One of the things that struck me when I first joined the department was sound of pounding practically all day long. Who was doing the pounding? It was Dr. James Hsu who had been hired expressly to work on ROM's collection of Chinese Shang dynasty oracle bones. He spent his days cataloguing these oracle bones which included doing rubbings of all the oracle bones scripts. It was a long and laborious task for him, I am sure. He used a handmade brush of horsehair to do the rubbing using sumi ink as the transfer medium. He organized all the little slips of rubbings on washi paper, eventually assembling them into a series of books. That was my first introduction to James.

Over the years. I got to know James better because he would attend the staff meetings and other social gatherings. He often talked about his travels in China and Taiwan where

he met with other oracle bone specialists. His expertise was recognized, and he rose quite high in the ranks of oracle bone specialists. He became prominent in that field for the quality of his work and his interpretation of the oracles incised into the bones and turtle-shells. Eventually James became the head of the department, although he was not that knowledgeable in management. Somehow, we all stumbled through his time as head. I was on the carpet once for overspending the library budget. It was something I did often, though, because there was never enough money for all the books the curators wanted. In a way I was following in a tradition of Bishop White who always overspent, knowing that the money would come from somewhere.

Despite being reprimanded once, I found working with James to be a valuable experience. I was a librarian, and I felt my primary job was to serve the research needs of the curators. James was always suggesting books to obtain. I would like to think that Betty Kingston and I facilitated his research, helping him become a leading oracle bone expert. For that, I'm pleased and proud to have such a renowned scholar come out of our ranks at Royal Ontario Museum.

Spotlight on Okada Marie: A Second Generation Japanese Woman Printmaker

Joshua Dudley, Rebanks Summer 2025 Intern for Japanese Arts & Culture

Figure 15: The return of Seasons-summer, 2024.43.121.15 Etching 2015, Marie Okada © ROM.

For the past several months, the print rotation at Osler Gate has featured works covering the past century of Japanese printmaking. In this innovative era, the idea that printmaking could be used as a tool for self-expression soon encouraged the exploration of new techniques and artistic philosophies. Thus arose the first generation of women printmakers such as Iwami Reika (1927-2020) and Shinoda Toko (1913-2021), whose works are now on display at the Osler Gate. While the current rotation comes to a close this October, the next iteration will see more works not just by this first generation, but also second-generation women printmakers like Okada Marie (b. 1956).

Okada Marie is a print artist primarily concerned with etchings, but also drawings, oil paintings, and mixed media. Born in Yokohama in 1956, she graduated with a bachelor's

degree from the department of painting at Musashino Art University (Tokyo) in 1979, eventually migrating to etching. As an artist, Okada's goal is stated on her personal website to be an attempt at creating works which communicate directly with the viewer that "instill tranquility and provoke an inner smile". As such, Okada's works use shapes and landscapes found in her daily life as inspiration to create atmospheric designs. In tune with her creative goal, she constantly refines the titles of her works, which she views as a gateway to the world presented in each print, allowing for a smooth transition of the viewer's mind to a colourful euphony on paper.

It would not be befitting to move onto discussion of the final product before highlighting a unique innovation Okada invented herself and applies to each print — a method she calls ippan tashoku ōtotsuban-zuri 一版多色凹凸版刷り (literally "Single plate, multi-coloured relief and intaglio printing"), where she uses a single copperplate to print multiple colours at once. In this method, points of emphasis in the design are etched in acid onto a copperplate, with ink packed into the negative grooves. Then, the ink on the surface is wiped clean (often leaving a cloudy shadow of the previous colour), and a roller is used to apply new ink of a different colour onto the positive portions of the plate. This layers the colours and results in popping line-work and shapes in the foreground, and cloudy and atmospheric backgrounds composed of colour from both inking stages.

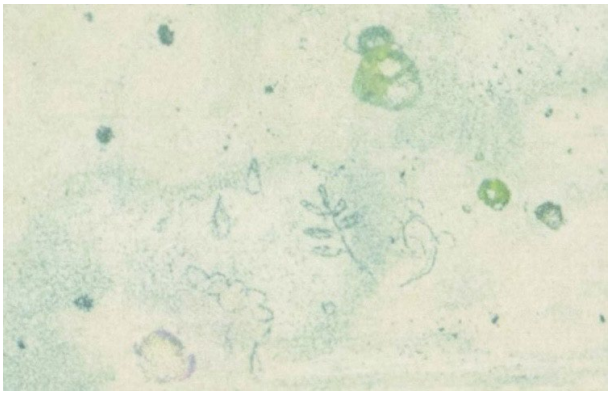


Figure 16: Etching 2024.43.121.15 detail 1 Foliage, raindrops and clouds © ROM.

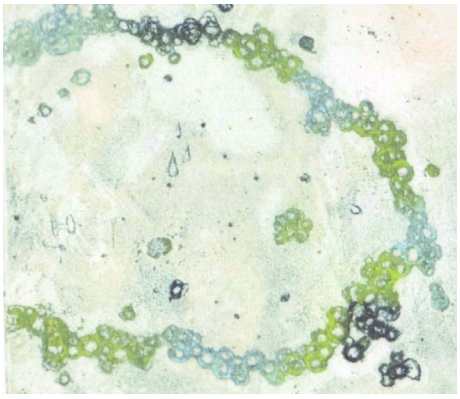


Figure 17: Etching 2024.43.121.15 detail 2 Raindrops and other shapes © ROM.

ROM currently holds one of Okada's smaller prints (this one being 17.5 x 23.3 cm) titled "Meguru – natsu" (The Return of Seasons - summer). This print was in fact commissioned by the foremost Japanese printmaking magazine *Hanga Geijutsu (Print Art)* for the Summer 2015 issue. It released alongside four other prints by Okada, each named after a season that are available for purchase from their website. A quick glance shows a myriad of seemingly random elements brought together that fittingly swirl around in the mind at the mention of "summer", from lines scratchily etched evoking tree bark, to the pale, verdant background recalling both vegetation and hazy, cloud-filled

skies. A personal favourite feature of mine are the tiny shapes and doodles reminiscent (to me!) of little microbes, which, upon closer inspection, are actually trees, stars, foliage, and clouds. These perfectly encompass the spontaneous images that come to mind at the thought of the summer season and aptly create a soft atmosphere which one envisions might be seen in the artwork hanging on the walls of hotels, hospitals, and living spaces — locations which are indeed decorated with Okada's art.

"The Return of Seasons - summer" will be on display on the main floor of the Museum from October 2025 to March 2026 at Osler Gate.

Yungang in Focus: Early Photographs of Buddhist Caves from the George Crofts Collection

Jialu Zheng, the Doris Dohrenwend Intern, 2025

George Crofts (1871–1925), the Anglo-Irish fur merchant based in Tianjin, China, who devoted himself to the trade of antiquities, emerged as a formative figure in the early years of ROM. From 1918 until his death in 1925, he forged a close partnership with Charles T. Currelly (1876–1957), the museum's first director. Currelly brought the vision of what the institution might become, and Crofts supplied the drive for acquisition. Together, they raised the museum's Chinese collections from modest beginnings to a standard that secured them international renown.

This summer, under the guidance of Dr. Wen-chien Cheng, I catalogued two sets of un-accessioned photographs of the Yungang caves from the George Crofts collection. The first set comprises 112 images documenting both the exterior and interior of major caves, while the second set consists of 13 images, including one that captures a panoramic view of the site. Comprising 45 major caves, more than 1,000 niches, and over 51,000 images, Yungang is equaled by few Buddhist architectural sites in China in scale and ambition, and Crofts himself was drawn to its grandeur. In 1921, he acquired a series of photographs of the site in China and sent them to Currelly. In a letter to Currelly dated September 1st of that year, Crofts remarked with enthusiasm that Currelly would not rest content until he had seen the caves for himself.

Figure 18: Yungang panoramic view © ROM.

Carved into the sandstone cliffs west of Datong in northern Shanxi province, the Buddhist caves of Yungang unfold as a sweeping tapestry in stone, where colossal Buddhas preside over a profusion of niches and images. This visual program articulated the ambition and authority of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–535 CE). To understand the vision embodied at Yungang, one must situate it within the turbulent world of the Six Dynasties (c. 220–589 CE), a period when nomadic groups built short-lived regimes in north China. Among them, the Tuoba rose to power as the Northern Wei and adopted Buddhism—foreign in origin yet mirroring their own outsider status—as a framework of belief and governance. Under their patronage, the Yungang caves came into being.

Figure 19: Yungang cave 20 © ROM.

Figure 20: Yungang cave 39 © ROM.

With support from scholars at the Yungang Research Institute in Shanxi, China, we were able to identify nearly every photograph of the Yungang caves in the George Crofts collection, down to the specific caves, walls, and niches. Comparative analysis with other images of the caves produced in the early twentieth century suggests that the photographs were likely taken by Yamamoto Sanshichirō 山本贊七郎 (1855–1943) and his eldest son, Yamamoto Akira 山本明. Sanshichirō, who first operated a photography studio in Tokyo, relocated to Beijing at the turn of the century. His Yamamoto Photo Studio near Dong'anmen became the first Japanese-run commercial studio in the city. Additionally, there was a "Yamamoto Photographic Studio" that opened in Tianjin around the same time, where Crofts was also active. However, the relationship between this Tianjin studio and Yamamoto Sanshichirō remains unclear".

Japanese architectural historian Itō Chūta 伊東忠太 (1867–1954) rediscovered the Yungang caves in 1902 and soon published two pioneering articles that brought the site to global attention. In the decades that followed, scholars such as Mizuno Seiichi 水野清

一 (1905–1971) and Nagahiro Toshio 長廣敏雄 (1905–1990) conducted archaeological excavations that laid the foundations of modern Yungang studies. In 1916, Sanshichirō retired to Japan, entrusting the studio business to his son, Akira. At a time of growing international scholarly engagement with China, Akira seized the opportunity. That year, he travelled to Yungang to undertake a systematic photographic survey, returning four times in subsequent years. His photographs, among the earliest visual records of the caves, capture the site before the extensive deterioration and loss that have since altered its appearance. As historical witnesses, these records remain invaluable for the study of one of China's greatest Buddhist monuments.

From the Committee

From Arhats to Oysters: Cultural Diplomacy in Taiwan - With a passing nod to Dr. George Leslie Mackay

Julia G. Bentley, BWC Executive

In spring 2025, I spent three months in Taiwan and took the opportunity to visit museums across Taiwan, three of which I touch on here. They highlight respectively Buddhist sculpture, cultural diplomacy about Chinese heritage conservation and the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of shellfish.

A major highlight was a visit to the Museum of World Religions in Puli, facilitated by Professor Lee Chian-wei. I had met him in September 2024 when he was invited by the Bishop White Committee to assess the collection of artefacts acquired by Dr. Mackay in Taiwan from 1871 to 1901.

When I visited Taichung in March 2025, Professor Lee invited me to visit the Chung Tai World Religions Museum of Buddhist Sculpture in Puli, an hour's drive from Taichung. The museum was established by the Chung Tai Chan (Zen) Monastery, which serves as the monastic headquarters of one of the four major Buddhist sects in Taiwan. The monastery was opened in 2001, by 2009 it had established the Chung Tai World Museum. Then in 2016, the Wood Sculpture Gallery was added. The museum boasts an astounding collection of historic Buddhist sculptures from across Asia, primarily from China, but also representative examples from South Asia, Central Asia and East Asia. The galleries are arranged geographically and chronologically and the sculptures are displayed in state-of-the-art exhibits, generously spaced and expertly lit. Informative panels situate their cultural and artistic context, with emphasis on the most significant periods in Indian and Chinese artistic traditions.

One of Professor Lee's former graduate students, Ms. Gu Ting-shao, is a librarian at the museum and provided us with a personalized expert tour, followed by lunch at the monastery's elegant vegetarian restaurant. Prof. Lee pointed out that many of the other tables were occupied by families hosting a gathering involving a monk who was a family member. After lunch we were given a guided tour of the adjacent Wood Sculpture Gallery by its director, Buddhist Master Jian Pai. The collections in the two museums were funded by Buddhist devotees, who are clearly very generous donors. These treasures were presumably acquired in significant part from international auctions in recent decades. The selection and curating of these rare and historic statues, steles, stupas, calligraphy, paintings and stone inscription rubbings demonstrated both professional expertise and aesthetic refinement.

What I found most memorable was the gallery of Gandharan sculpture from the 1st to the 3rd century, with exceptional early stone and bronze carvings of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and arhats from what is now Afghanistan. Accompanied by well-researched bilingual explanatory panels, the sculptures were arranged to demonstrate stylistic evolution, combining Indian and Hellenic elements, and later influencing Buddhist art along the Silk Road, in China and across Asia. Visiting the Chung Tai Museums will be rewarding for anyone interested in Chinese sculpture and Buddhist art. The museum website gives a sense of the treasures on offer. The museum does not allow photographs inside the museum, apart from this magnificent monumental Buddha in the lobby.

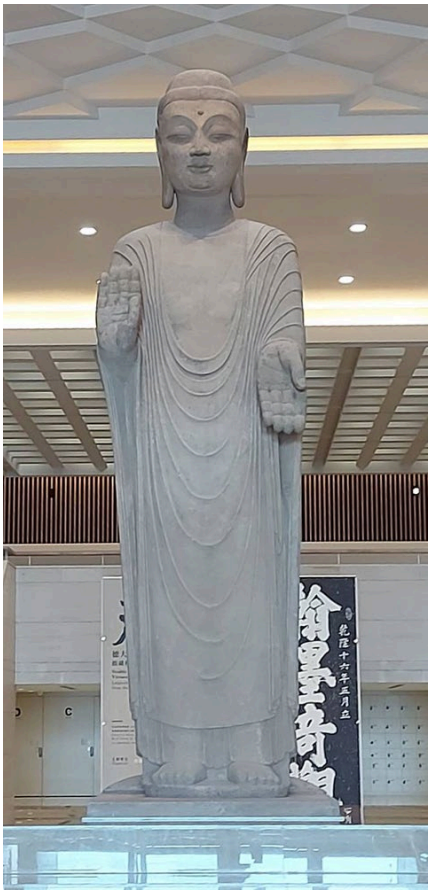


Figure 21: Chung Tai World Museum © Lee Chian-wei.

A second museum, this one in Taipei, prompted reflections on the significance of cultural diplomacy. The National Museum of History features an exhibit on "Chinese cultural chests", which toured the world from 1969 to 1986. Cultural diplomacy became increasingly important to Taiwan (the Republic of China) after it "withdrew" from the United Nations in 1971, as a way of projecting soft power, contrasting conservation of

Chinese heritage in Taiwan with the Cultural Revolution then underway in the People's Republic of China. Reproductions of classical Chinese art treasures–such as bronzes, porcelain, paintings and calligraphy–were packed in trunks to exhibit in countries around the world, along with some original artefacts. Canada was one of the chosen destinations. The museum's website reveals a wealth of information about this initiative: "Unpacking Culture: Chinese Cultural Chests in the National Museum of History".

Figure 22: An-ping Oyster Shell Kiln Museum © An-ping Oyster Shell Kiln Museum.

In Tainan, the An-Ping Oyster Shell Kiln Museum sheds light on a curious topic. During the Ming dynasty there was a shortage of building material such as bricks and limestone, and local fishermen made their living primarily from oyster cultivation, producing a large volume of discarded oyster shells. Local builders developed an innovative construction material: quicklime made from oyster shell ash, which was then combined with glutinous rice and sugar syrup to make mortar. The remaining walls of Fort Zeelandia, built by the Dutch when they occupied Tainan from 1624 to 1662, attest to the mortar's durability. The museum was recently renovated, highlighting Ecology (oyster biology and farming, oysters as environmental indicators of ocean health and pollution), and Innovation (sea-wool textiles, lime plaster coatings and household objects such as "Y strap footwear", i.e., flip flops). An original kiln (last fired in 2003 but no longer used for environmental reasons) demonstrates the process used for incinerating oyster shells, producing lime and various applications of oyster lime, from traditional mortar to clay sculptures and brick production. The volunteer on duty was a retired professor of biology who proudly showed me photos of oyster cultivation on display which he had taken. For everything

you always wanted to know about the life cycle of the oyster and the infinite applications of oyster shells, this is the place to go.

I conclude with a note in homage to Dr. Mackay that demonstrates yet another dimension of cultural diplomacy in Taiwan. I was sent a link to the menu for a Mackay Banquet that was devised with great care by a historian at Tamkang University and the chef at a local hotel in Tamsui. They clearly had a good time creating this menu and the bilingual description of each dish honouring George Mackay's three decades in Taiwan as a missionary, teacher and dentist. For example, "Stars around the Moon–Adored by people" is a Japanese–style seafood salad platter. The menu explains that "sashimi represents George Leslie Mackay, who is the leader fish. Scallop, crab sticks, fresh oysters and salmon roe (representing Ahua, Chuang Tien-neng, Yeh Shun, and Ko Cui, respectively) are all students of Mackay. When Mackay went around Taiwan preaching the gospel, a group of students often followed him."

Fujisan - The Big Climb; 2012 August 28-September 6

Lynne D. DiStefano, BWC Executive

Early in the summer of 2012, I received an invitation from the International Committee on Historic Sites and Monuments (ICOMOS) to do the Technical Evaluation of Fujisan, which was being considered by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) for possible inscription as a World Heritage Site (WHS). I recall thinking that anything to do with evaluating Japan's heritage was an enviable experience – and then I realized I had just been asked to evaluate one of the country's most iconic sites. I was humbled, but excited.

Preparation

Once I accepted the invitation, I received a thick dossier to review. I started to prepare myself for the rigors of a close to 3,800 meter climb to the top of Fujisan. My husband and Swiss friends were quick to point out that Switzerland, where I had been for the summer, offered perfect training opportunities, including Zermatt. And so, week after week, I trained with hiking sticks and custom-made hiking boots. And week after week, I studied the dossier, discovering the complexity of the site. There is more than one way to ascend Mt. Fuji, there are four trails. And there is not just one shrine, there are at least nine shrines.

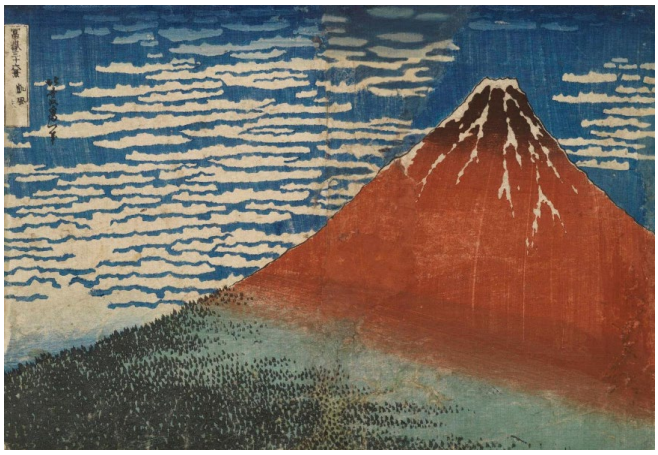


Figure 23: The Red Fuji, woodblock print on paper, Katsushika Hokusai, Edo period c. 1830-32. 926.18.565 © ROM.

As I digested the dossier, it became even clearer that Fujisan is a multi-dimensional, vast landscape recorded by pilgrims and depicted by artists. It is a spiritual place for some, for others, a place of recreation. For the Japanese, it is a prominent place in the landscape and a place to climb once (or so I was led to believe).

By the end of August, with my "homework" and physical training completed, I felt ready for the mission. But then I received a rather unusual request from Japan. What was my blood type? I replied and then tucked the request in the far reaches of my mind.

The Schedule, including The Big Climb

The mission started Tuesday, August 28th. I flew from Hong Kong, where I was working at The University of Hong Kong, and was met at the Haneda Tokyo International Airport. From that moment, almost every waking hour was in the company of staff from the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the Ministry of the Environment, and/ or the Forest Agency – or meeting with individuals from Shizuoka Province (39 individuals) or Yamanashi Province (55 individuals). (These two provinces share responsibility for managing Fujisan.)

The schedule (excerpt below) given to me upon arrival, captures the mission in detail. Notable climbing days are Days 2 and 3 (Yoshida Trail – ascending and descending Fujisan from the 5th Station – The Big Climb), Day 6 (Fujinomiya Trail – ascending and descending Fujisan between the 5th and 6th Stations) and Day 7 (Subashiri Trail – only a visit to the 5th Station). In addition to the evaluation of three trails, places associated with Fujisan were evaluated: lakes, springs and waterfalls; lodging houses and shrines; and lava tree molds and a pine tree grove.

Day 2		August 30 (Thu)	
		9:00	Leaving Hotel Mt. Fuji (check-out)
9:10	~	9:40	Lake Yamanakako
10:20	~	10:30	Maneuver field neighborhood
10:40	~	11:20	Pre-climbing meeting (Yamanashi Institute of Environmental Sciences)
11:55	~	13:25	Lunch (at a restaurant Komitake at the 5th station on the Fuji Subaru Line)
13:25	~		Start ascending Fujisan
17:10	~	23:00	Dinner and rest at Toyokan Inn (at the 8th station)
23:00	~		《Ascending》
Day 3		August 31 (Fri)	
	~	4:00	《Ascending》
4:00	~		Break (explanation about Kusushi-jinja Shrine and mountaintop worship sites)
4:55	~	5:15	"Goraiko" (sunrise)
5:15	~	6:35	"Ohachimeguri" (trekking around the crater)
	~	7:00	Breakfast
7:00	~	11:00	《Descending》
		11:00	Arriving at Fuji Subaru Line (5th station)
		12:00	Check-in at Fuji View Hotel
12:15	~	12:45	Meeting
13:00	~	14:00	Lunch (at Fuji View Hotel)
			Break
18:45	~	19:45	Dinner (at Fuji View Hotel)

Figure 24: The schedule – Day 2 and Day 3 © Lynne D. DiStefano.

The Big Climb/ The Big Reveal

To mark the formal end of the mission, a dinner was hosted by the governors of the two provinces "sharing" Fujisan. I recall seating next to one of them – and in the course of our exchanges, he mentioned that he and the other governor had been concerned about my ability to complete the mission. Afterall, I was of a certain age when few people would even consider climbing the mountain much less actually climb it. It was for this reason that I was asked to provide my blood type – and it for this reason that a helicopter was on standby for my evacuation from the mountain!

The irony is that there was no need to be concerned about me. However, two members of the mission did suffer from the vagarity of the climb. One young man (in his thirties) needed oxygen and one older man (in his fifties) had a problem with his Achilles tendon. Thanks to my experienced guide, a man close to my age, I had no problems during the climb – and no aftereffects. The secret? Stopping every 10 to 15 minutes during the climb – and fulsome stretching at the end. Was it a tough climb? There were sections where I took extra deep breaths and followed my guide's instructions to the letter: "Put your foot here!" "Grab the rock there." And then – rather suddenly – we were at the top and in time for a magnificent sunrise. I have a slightly blurry photograph of my guide and me standing – and with me looking rather the worse for wear – by a simple torii marking the summit, the end of the climb.

Figure 25: Mount Fuji and the Pine Grove at Miho, woodblock print on paper, Ogata Gekko, Meiji period c. 1905. 2016.80.366 © ROM.

During the carefully controlled mission, there was little fanfare. No photographers accompanied the mission, although there were two times when we were alerted to the presence of the media. The mission organizers wanted to downplay the evaluation. In fact, on the last day of the mission, after lunch in a local restaurant with a small group of civil servants, I was simply escorted into the kitchen and from there to the restaurant's back door. Outside, a car was waiting to take me to the airport. No fanfare at all.

Now, years later, I reflect on the people I met and travelled with for ten days – and the opportunity I had for personal exchanges. I remember one civil servant talking in detail about his work and family life. I have not forgotten him and that he kept in touch with me for years after the mission.

New Acquisitions:

The Art of Won Lee – An exploration of expressionism and materiality through public art
Published on ROM website April 08, 2025.
Vicki Kwon, Associate Curator of Korean Art and Culture

Won Lee (1946-2021) was a celebrated Korean Canadian artist. Lee is known for his large-scale sculptures seen in public parks. In honour of her late husband, Lee's wife, Mrs. Hyon Chu Lee, recently donated $100,000 to refresh ROM Gallery of Korea and contributed three Won Lee sculptures to the collection. Here are two sculptures:

Figure 26: Meditators #2, 2006. Two large human figures 250cm tall meditating together in different poses © ROM.

Figure 27: Herd #1, 2011. A group of pigs running up and down stairs in two rows © ROM.

And we also we have other exciting gifts from members to ROM:

Figure 28: statue of Kannon, wood, Heian period 12th century, 2024.60.1 © ROM.

Figure 29: Dr. Akiko Takesue and Don Campbell, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs as Ambassador to Japan © ROM.

This small statue of Kannon, the Boddhisattva of compassion, dates back to 12th century Japan (Heian period). It is now part of the ROM collection thanks to donations by two BWC members - Deanna Horton (Co-Chair), Philip Cheong (Vice-Chair) along with six former Canadian Ambassadors to Japan and one Japanophile lawyer.

According to Akiko, This Shō Kannon is holding a lotus flower (now lost) in the left hand, and the right hand is in vadara mudra (gift-giving gesture). These small statues of Shō Kannon were made for private spaces rather than for temples, when Buddhism prevailed among the nobles of the Heian period (794-1192). Kōfuku-ji temple in Nara prefecture once owned a thousand standing statues of small-sized Shō Kannon, donated by the Fujiwara family to the temple in the 12th century. These statues were created by many different carvers in various styles, but all share the similar size of around 40 cm in height, in the frontal pose, standing on a base. There is a possibility that ROM's statue could be one of the thousand, the only one of its kind in Canada, but there are similar examples at the Metropolitan Museum, the Brooklyn Museum and the Harvard Art Museum.

Please consider joining our Committee!

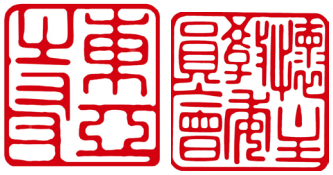
Visit our website: Bishop White Committee: Friends of East Asia

Friends of East Asia
100 Queen's Park, Toronto ON M5S 2C6

Contact FTC: bwc@rom.on.ca
Become a ROM member

Alternative accessible formats are available upon request.

Bishop White Committee is organized by ROM's Department of Museum Volunteers to provide support for the Museum. ROM is an agency of the Government of Ontario.



ROM