



**BUDDHA AND SHIVA, LOTUS AND DRAGON:
Masterworks from the Mr. and Mrs. John D.
Rockefeller 3rd Collection at Asia Society**

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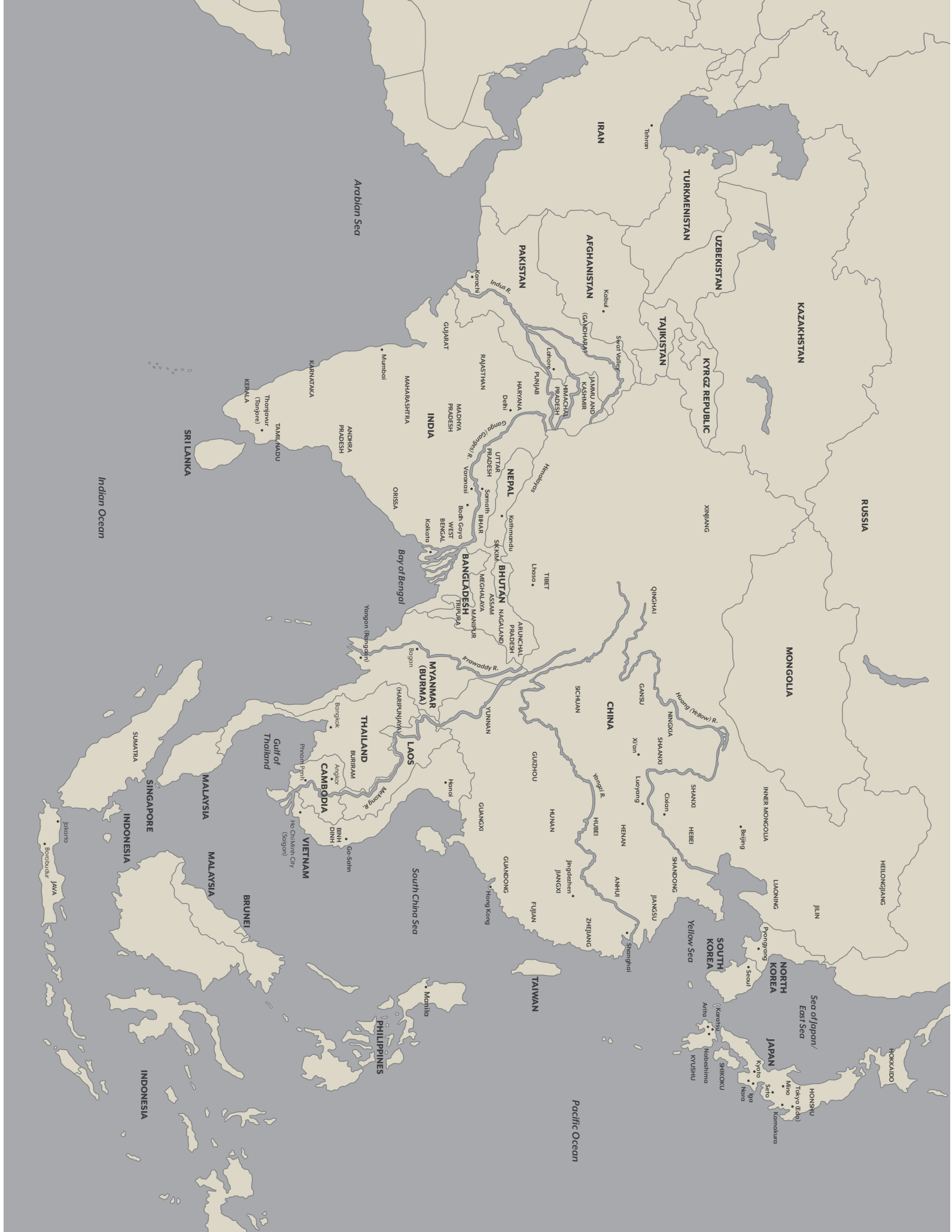
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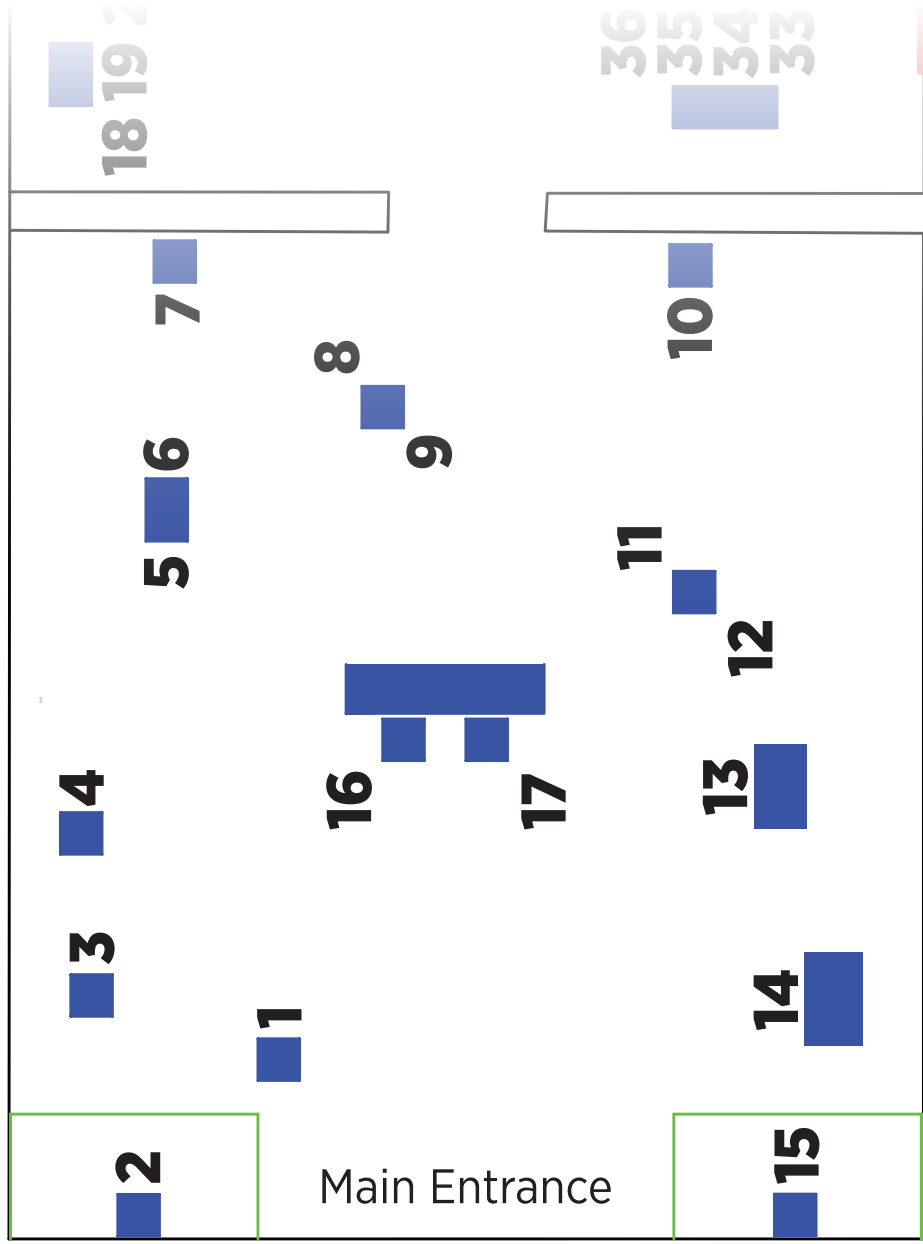
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EXHIBITION LAYOUT DETAIL 1-17



1

Pakistan, Gandhara area

Head of the Buddha

Kushan period (late 1st – 3rd century), late 2nd – 3rd century

Phyllite

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.2

The Gandharan region (northwest of present-day Pakistan), where this head was made, was a geographical crossroads where early influences of the Western classical world met with Indian imagery and local practices. The Gandharan style radiated to Central Asia, the oasis towns of the Tarim Basin, and into China. From there it spread to Korea and Japan.

2

China, Hebei Province

Pair of Bodhisattvas in the Pensive Pose

Northern Qi period, dated 570

Marble

Asia Society, New York: Estate of Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller, 1992.4

Bodhisattvas seated on high stools in mirror-image poses like these were most likely inspired by descriptions in Buddhist texts, translated by Indian monks in the Chinese court. Although their exact identification is uncertain, scholars agree the stele represents bodhisattvas in a paradise, possibly the Tushita Pure Land of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future. The ultimate prototype for the physique of the figures can be found in the art of Gupta-period India (about 320 – 577). It is possible this style entered China through a Central Asian intermediary.

3

India, probably Bihar

Buddha

Late 6th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.8

The Buddha raises his right hand in the gesture of reassurance (**abhaya mudra**). The style of his nearly transparent monk's robe emphasizes the perfection of his physical form and follows conventions established in Sarnath (east central India) in the last quarter of the 5th century. The Buddha's webbed fingers, snail-shell curls, and the bump on top of his head are among the 32 **lakshanas** (auspicious marks) described in Buddhist literature that signify the Buddha's advanced spiritual enlightenment.

4

Indonesia, Central Java

Head of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

9th century

Volcanic stone

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.86

This head likely came from one of the large Buddhist temple-mountain complexes in central Java. A headdress with carved ornaments, including five large decorative plaques on the diadem above the forehead, and the figure of a small, seated Buddha at the front center of the tall coiffure, are still discernable. This small Buddha in the diadem is an attribute of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

5

Western Tibet

Bodhisattva

Late 10th - early 11th century

Brass with inlays of copper and silver

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.45

The proximity of Kashmir and northwestern Tibet, and the movement of monks and artists between the two lands, led to the transmission of both faith traditions and artistic styles. In 988, the king of western Tibet, Yeshe O, gave royal support for the creation of local workshops—which likely employed artists from Kashmir—to produce images for temples. The articulation of this figure’s torso, the exaggerated waistline, the shape of the face, and the strong facial features closely parallel the art of Kashmir from this period.

6

Nepal

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

Early Malla period (1200 - 1382), late 13th - early 14th century

Gilded copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.51

This sculpture depicts a form of Avalokiteshvara that was extremely popular in Nepal. Nepal linked northern and eastern India with other Himalayan lands, such as Tibet, and the art produced there reflects artistic interchange. Traces of the Gupta style prevalent in India during the 4th through 6th centuries is apparent in the shape of the torso and the long legs revealed through the clinging clothing. However, the idealized facial features—the broad face, full cheeks, and wide-set eyes—are typically Nepalese.

7

Myanmar

Buddha Shakyamuni with Kneeling Worshippers

14th-15th century

Gilt copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.91a-c

The Buddha Shakyamuni attained enlightenment after a lengthy meditation in which he battled Mara, the god of death and desire. The earth-touching gesture (**bhumisparshamudra**), seen here, refers to the moment when, challenged by Mara regarding his right to achieve enlightenment, the Buddha reached his right hand down to call the earth to bear witness. In response, the earth, represented here by a female figure on the base, wrung the waters from her hair and swept away Mara and his armies. Two of the Buddha's most important disciples, Mogallana and Shariputra, face the Buddha. Their presence symbolizes the importance of using both skill and knowledge in the search for enlightenment.

8

Sri Lanka

Bodhisattva

7th - 8th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.41

This sculpture presents a distinctly Sri Lankan version of the ascetic bodhisattvas found in art beyond the Indian mainland from the 7th through 9th centuries, reflecting the movement of new expressions of Buddhism originating in the subcontinent, and transferred via traders and pilgrims along the maritime trade routes.

9

Sri Lanka

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

8th - 9th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.81

The voluptuous form and S-shaped curve of this Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, are comparable to features found in Buddhist sculptures created in peninsular Thailand in the 8th to 9th century. The formal similarity suggests widespread cultural interactions and shared traditions between Southeast Asian cultures.

10

Thailand

Buddha

Mon style (c. 6th - 8th century), c. 8th century

Limestone

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.76

With its high cheekbones, full, wide lips, and broad nose with flared nostrils, this head of the Buddha reflects the influence of the Mon (Dvaravati) people who lived in central Thailand from roughly the sixth to the eleventh century. It also retains much of the iconography for depicting the Buddha developed in India, such as the bump atop the head signifying expanded wisdom (**ushnisha**) and right-turning, snail-shell curls, which miraculously appeared when Prince Siddhartha Gautama cut off his long hair.

11

Japan, Nara Prefecture, Horyuji

Kneeling Woman

Nara period, early 8th century

Clay with traces of slip and pigment

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.200

During the 8th century, Japan was part of an international trading network that linked East Asian nations to one another, and through China, to India, Iran, and beyond. Japanese painting, sculpture, and architecture of the period followed Chinese prototypes very closely. Originally part of a larger group of small clay figures at the early and important Buddhist temple complex of Horyuji, the attire of this kneeling figure is identical in style to garments seen in Chinese sculptures of women dating from the late 7th to early 8th centuries.

12

Japan

Male Attendant Figure

Kamakura period, early 14th century

Gilded copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.203

The introduction of Buddhism to Japan via Korea in the 6th century C.E. had a profound effect on Japanese history, art, and culture. This small sculpture shows a young man with his hair looped, a braid over each ear, wearing trousers under a heavy outer robe. Similar features are found on attendant figures (**dōji**) that make up part of Japanese Buddhist temple tableaux. Both arms are bent at the elbow, suggesting that he was originally carrying something, though the current hands and the box are 20th-century replacements.

13

Kashmir or northern Pakistan

Crowned Buddha Shakyamuni

Dated by inscription 714

Brass with inlays of copper, silver, and zinc

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.44

Kashmir was an important crossroads between northern Indian and parts of Central Asia, China, and Tibet. The complex and unique iconography in this work, which is not yet fully understood, likely reflects these cultural interactions. Seated upon a lotus that rises from water inhabited by **nagas** (serpent deities), the Buddha holds his hands in the gesture of preaching. His elaborate costume and crown indicate that the sculpture depicts the consecration of Shakyamuni as king of the Tushita Pure Land, the abode of all buddhas before their final rebirth on earth. The Sanskrit inscription on the base lists the donors as Sankarasena, a government official, and Princess Devshira.

14

Cambodia

Crowned Buddha Seated in Meditation and Sheltered by Muchilinda

Angkor period, Angkor Wat style, possibly 12th century

Copper alloy with recent covering of black and gold lacquer and gold leaf

Asia Society, New York: The Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.68a-c

The serpent played a key role in the mythical origin of the Khmer kings, Buddhist rulers who emphasized their identification with the historical Buddha. The 17-headed serpent king Muchilinda is shown here shielding the seated Buddha Shakyamuni from a fierce storm, an incident that took place during the Buddha's sixth week of meditation after his enlightenment. This image may have been understood as both an image of the Buddha and a portrait of a Khmer ruler. The black lacquer and gold-leaf surface are later additions to the original bronze.

15

India, Bihar or Bengal

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in the form of Khasarpana Lokeshvara

Pala period (c. 8th – 12th century), late 11th – early 12th century

Schist

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.40

Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, takes on a wide variety of forms in order to assist the faithful and spread compassion in the world. One of the most important is that of the **Khasarpana**, or “Sky-Gliding” form, which shows a youthful deity with an elaborate coiffure featuring an image of the Amitabha Buddha on the headdress. Here, Avalokiteshvara demonstrates his care for all living beings by feeding a hungry ghost (below his right hand) with drops of nectar that flow from his fingers.

16

India, Bihar

Crowned Buddha Shakyamuni

Pala period (c. 8th – 12th century), 11th century

Schist

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.36

Wearing a crown and jewelry, the Buddha Shakyamuni is surrounded by four smaller Buddha images, each representing a significant scene from his life: his first sermon, the monkey offering him honey, his descent from heaven, and the taming of a mad elephant. The importance of crowns in the representations of Shakyamuni and other Buddhas has been linked to the development of Vajrayana (Esoteric) Buddhism, which is characterized by an expanded pantheon of deities and the practice of certain mental and physical exercises. The well-defined waist and the long, thin facial features exemplify the Pala style in the 11th century.

India, Tamil Nadu

Shiva Nataraja (Shiva as Lord of the Dance)

Chola period (880 - 1279), about 970

Copper alloy

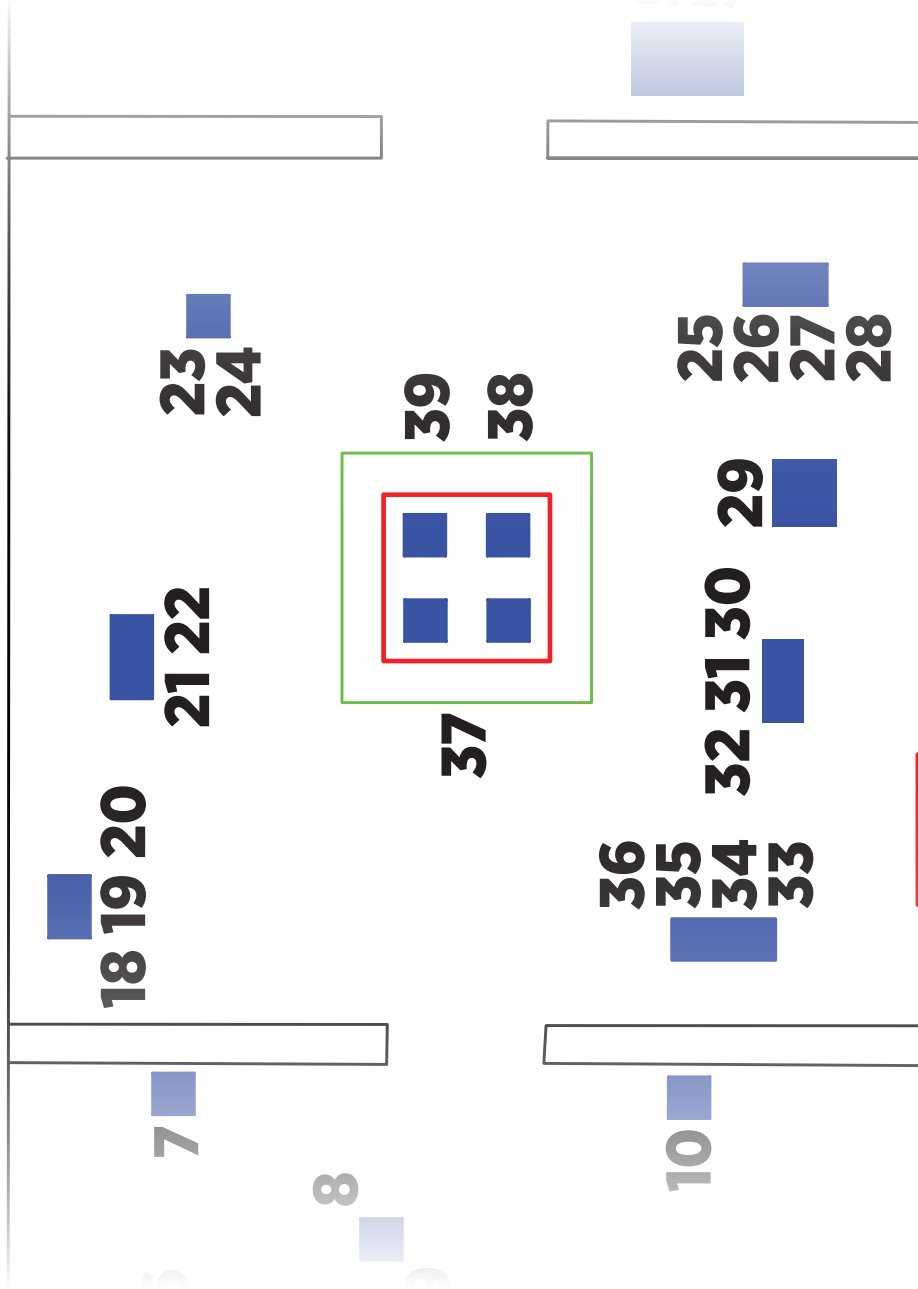
Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.20

Surrounded by a fiery aureole and wrapped in serpents, the Hindu god Shiva performs the dance of bliss with such energy that it forces his matted hair outward. Entangled in his locks is the river goddess Ganga (Ganges). In his upper hands, Shiva holds a drum, symbolizing the rhythm of creation, and fire, the destructive force of the universe. His open right palm indicates protection, and his left hand points to his raised foot, signifying refuge and deliverance. Mushalagan, the dwarf demon of ignorance and illusion, lies below, vanquished.

This form of Shiva, known as Shiva Nataraja (Shiva as Lord of the Dance), is closely associated with the Chola rulers of South India, for whom it may have served as an emblem for kingly aspirations.

EXHIBITION LAYOUT DETAIL

18-39



Side Entrance

India, Tamil Nadu

Ganesha

Chola period (880 -1279), 11th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.26

The elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati, Ganesha is worshiped as the god of good fortune and the remover of obstacles. He holds a mace in his back right hand and a lasso in his back left, symbolizing his position as a god of war and his ability to ensnare a devotee. He also holds a broken tusk in his front right hand; his front left contains a sweet picked up with his trunk.

Like other Chola bronzes, this figure was intended for a procession. The hollow base has four lugs, through which sticks could be placed to help convey the sculpture, and two prongs, from which garlands of flowers could be draped.

19

India, Bihar or Bengal

Uma-Maheshvara (Shiva with his Consort)

Pala period, late 10th – 11th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Gift from The Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund, 1994.2

Pala-period artists made both Hindu and Buddhist sculpture. While the iconography differed according to the faith represented, the artistic style remained consistent. The influential Pala style is apparent here in the angular facial features of the figures of this small bronze and in the articulation of well-proportioned bodies.

Shiva embraces his consort Uma-Parvati; their children, Ganesha and Karttikeya, are seated nearby. Parvati holds a mirror, reflecting their marital bliss. The presence of female donor figures at the base of this and other Pala-period sculptures of this theme, suggests the subject resonated with women.

20

India, Tamil Nadu

Parvati

Chola period (880 – 1279), 11th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.21

Parvati, known as Uma in South India, where this sculpture was commissioned by the Chola rulers, is the consort of the god Shiva. This image of Uma stands in the **tribhanga**, or triple-bend posture, which emphasizes the sensual contours of her slim waist and full breasts and hips. Her gracefully raised hand once held a lotus or blue lily blossom, which is now missing.

21

India, Tamil Nadu

Saint Mannikkavachaka

Chola period (880 - 1279), 12th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.27

One of the 63 principal saints who serve the god Shiva, Mannikkavachaka is dressed in a loincloth with a sacred thread running over his left shoulder. His right hand is raised in a gesture of teaching, and his left holds a manuscript inscribed with the phrase **om nama shivaya** (praise be to Shiva). Beginning in the 11th century, Chola temples dedicated to Shiva commonly had a full set of bronze images of the 63 principal saints. These South Indian temples frequently possessed multiple images of one deity or poet-saint, indicating both the temple's wealth and the popularity of a given figure. An image of this saint was often placed before one of Shiva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance).

22

India, Tamil Nadu

Saint Sambandar

Chola period (880 - 1279), 12th century

Copper alloy

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.24

According to Hindu tradition, when the three-year-old Sambandar became hungry during a temple visit with his father, he was fed milk by a sculpture of Parvati. Immediately becoming a devotee, Sambandar spent the rest of his life praising Shiva and Parvati through poetry and song.

23

China, reportedly found in Shandong Province

Gui (Ritual Food Vessel)

Eastern Zhou period (771 – 256 B.C.E.), c. 6th century B.C.E.

Bronze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.103a, b

Wavelike patterns cover the body, base, and lid of this **gui**, a bronze form that first emerged as one of several styles of ritual food vessels during the Shang period (c. 1500–1046 B.C.E.). During the following Zhou period, bronzes like this were items of wealth and power. The dramatic crest at the top of the bowl-shaped lid—which, when the lid is removed and set down, becomes a stand—and the regal dragon handles are excellent examples of the sculptural and decorative qualities of many Eastern Zhou-period bronze vessels. During the Shang dynasty, Chinese bronzes began featuring cunning animal motifs that meld and merge. The tigers with curled tails clinging and biting into the curve in the handles are a continuation of this convention.

24

North China

Stem Cup

Tang period (618 – 906), c. late 7th – early 8th century

Silver with microscopic traces of gilding

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.118

The flourishing mercantile and cultural exchange between China, Central Asia, and Sasanian-period Iran during the 7th through 10th centuries led to an increase in the number of beautifully shaped and elaborately decorated objects made of gold and silver. These rare, valuable goods were used by affluent elites, in diplomatic exchanges, and as donations to Buddhist temples. Made by hammering a single sheet of silver into a vessel with eight lotus-petal-shaped panels decorated with an intricate design of flowers and birds, this cup reveals the influence of West and Central Asia in both its method of manufacture and its decoration.

Ogata Kenzan

Japanese (Kyoto Prefecture) 1663 – 1743

Bowl with Reticulated Rim

Edo period (1615 – 1868), early 18th century

Kyoto ware: Stoneware with pierced design and painted with slips, underglaze and overglaze enamels, and gold

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.252

Ogata Kenzan, mentored by Nonomura Ninsei, whose **Tea-Leaf Jar** is on view nearby, was one of the most successful artist-potters of the Edo period. Kenzan's tea wares—including trays, dishes, and bowls—are known for their bold decorative designs and strong silhouettes. A sprawling scene of golden wild geese circling among white mists, green bamboo, and black riverbanks envelops the exterior and interior surface of this perforated, deep bowl. The elaborate and colorful decoration reflects Kenzan's own flair. The bowl has the potter's signature on the base, signaling an important shift in the practice of ceramic art in Japan. Ninsei and Kenzan were among the first Japanese potters to sign their works, indicating the expectation that ceramic artists should be as highly regarded as the pieces they produced.

Japan, Saga and Nagasaki Prefectures

Two Mukōzuke Dishes

Momoyama (1573 - 1615) to Edo (1615 - 1868) periods, late 16th - early 17th century

Stoneware painted with underglaze iron brown (Karatsu ware)

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.229.1-2

Mukōzuke is the Japanese term for the tall, narrow dishes used for serving eel and certain other side dishes during the **kaiseki** meal that sometimes precedes a formal Japanese tea ceremony. These two **mukōzuke** dishes—probably part of an original set of five—are of Karatsu ware, a high-fired ceramic made near the city of Karatsu on the southern island of Kyushu. Known for their refined stoneware bodies and thin gray glaze, Karatsu wares are often painted with iron-brown pigment (**e-garatsu**). One of the dishes is decorated with reed like bamboo, the other with a design of flowing water plantain. Each has a fishnet pattern at the top and the back.

Japan, Saga Prefecture

Dish

Edo period (1615 - 1868), 17th century

Arita ware; Nabeshima porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue with iron brown and green glazes

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.248

“Nabeshima ware” refers to the porcelains made at kilns operated directly by the Nabeshima clan, the rulers of the Saga domain. Both decorative and functional, the production of this refined porcelain was extremely limited and intended solely for the clan’s own use or as gifts to the shogun, feudal lords, and the nobility. Nabeshima ware is characterized by precise, arresting, and uniquely Japanese designs, often featuring motifs found in nature and in Japanese textiles and frequently presented in asymmetrical compositions. Here, the combination of cherry trees and curtains may refer to outdoor viewing spaces for cherry blossom viewing parties, popular in spring.

The technical prowess of Nabeshima porcelain is evident in the combination of underglaze blue with iron-brown and green glazes, which melt at different temperatures, therefore requiring separate firings.

Japan, Gifu Prefecture

Square Serving Dish with Bail Handle

Momoyama period (1568 – 1615), late 16th century

Mino ware, Oribe-type stoneware painted with iron brown on slip under glaze and a partial overlay of copper green glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.226

Mino wares were made for serving food in association with **chanoyu**, the Japanese tea ceremony. The ritualized preparation and consumption of tea sometimes involve a **kaiseki** meal, which is served before a more formal tea ceremony. This serving dish, with its bail-shaped handle and lively asymmetrical decoration, was probably created for serving grilled fish. It is representative of the Oribe type of ceramics popular in early 17th-century Japan, named for a famous tea master, Furuta Oribe (1544–1615). Oribe aesthetics include distorted shapes and quirky decorative patterns that may take inspiration from contemporary textile designs. The combination of geometric and nature-inspired motifs and the strategically splashed, bright green copper glaze epitomize the individualism of Oribe ceramics, particularly one-of-a-kind pieces like this.

Nonomura Ninsei

Japanese (Kyoto Prefecture) c. 1574 - 1660/66

Tea-Leaf Jar

Edo period (1615 - 1868), mid-17th century

Kyoto ware: Stoneware painted with overglaze enamels and silver

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.251

With a design of elegantly painted mynah birds with silver and gold embellishments, this jar is an artistic tour de force by one of the few 17th-century potters whose name is recognized today, Nonomura Ninsei. Closely associated with a renowned tea master, Kawamori Sowa (1585-1656), Ninsei created ceramics for Sowa's tea ceremonies and cultural gatherings. His sophisticated ceramics perfectly expressed the kind of **kirei** (refined beauty) Sowa strove to include in his tea ceremonies. Despite its utilitarian form, with four lugs on its shoulders for securing a lid, this tea-leaf jar was more likely intended for aesthetic appreciation rather than actual use. The sweeping vision of the overall composition, along with the vivid realism of the birds—who stand, fly, and squabble—exemplifies Ninsei's affinity to the art of screen painting.

Japan, Saga Prefecture

Two Standing Female Figures

Edo period (1615 - 1868), c. 1670 - 1690

Arita ware; Kakiemon style porcelain painted with overglaze enamels, one figure also with traces of gold

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.239 and 1979.240

Porcelain sculptures of elegantly coiffed and attired courtesans, called **bijin** (beautiful women), were among the wares manufactured at the Arita kilns on the southern island of Kyushu. These sculptures found many admirers in Europe, where they remain treasured objects in public and private collections. The black eyes and eyebrows, red lips, and white facial complexion of these figures has been carefully rendered. Their hair, in the **gosho-mage** (palace chignon) style, is held with an ornamental pin in the Edo-period fashion that most likely originated at court. One woman wears an outer kimono with the design of large chrysanthemum blossoms floating atop a winding stream, while the other wears one decorated with delicate wisteria sprays. Both of their inner kimonos are decorated with a Chinese arabesque motif (**karakusa**) but with the red/white coloring in reverse.

Japan, Saga Prefecture

Bowl

Edo period (1615 - 1868), c. 1670 - 90

Arita ware, Kakiemon style; Porcelain painted with overglaze enamels, with traces of gold, and 18th-century gilded bronze mounts

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.237

The city of Arita on the southern island of Kyushu became the world's largest and most important center for porcelain production in the 17th century. At this time, European customers for porcelain turned from China, which was experiencing civil upheaval, to Japan. Japanese porcelains continued to dominate the European market until the mid-18th century, when Europeans resumed major porcelain trade with China. This bowl is indicative of the porcelains so highly prized and sought after by Europeans during this period. It was formerly in the collection of Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (reigned 1694-1733), an avid collector of Asian porcelain and the founder of the Meissen Manufactory, the first European porcelain producer. Other objects from Augustus' collection can be seen in the Lovett Gallery. The custom-made gilt-bronze mounts, probably manufactured in Germany, attest to how highly porcelains were regarded in Europe.

Japan, Saga Prefecture

Drum-Shaped Pillow

Edo period (1615 - 1868), late 18th - early 19th century

Arita ware; Imari style porcelain painted with overglaze enamels and gold
Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection,
1979.233

The development of porcelain production in Japan is linked to the contributions of technically advanced Korean potters who came to Japan in the late 16th century. It was at this time that Arita established itself as the most important center for porcelain production in the world, supplying ceramics for both domestic consumption and export. This drum-shaped pillow is decorated in overglaze enamels with a restrained pattern of white cherry blossoms against the bold red color typical of the so-called Imari style. Red chrysanthemums with gold highlights border the dominant cherry blossom pattern. Both flowers have long been popular decorative motifs in Japan. Neck pillows like this one were made for fashionable women to protect their elaborate coiffed hair as they slept.

Korea, South Jeolla province

Foliate Bowls and Saucers

Goryeo period (918 – 1392), early 12th century

Stoneware with glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.193.1-4

The highly refined, green-glazed stoneware created by potters during the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392) was the first Korean ceramic to become internationally renowned for its extraordinary craftsmanship. This rare pair, part of a larger set, may have been used as containers for delicacies during dinners or banquets at the court. The graceful and crisply articulated floral shape of these bowls, which recalls the form of a lotus or chrysanthemum, and the stunning color of the glaze indicate that these pieces were luxury goods. The translucency and density of the glaze and the intentional, subtle crackles over the surface add to the pieces' allure and make them among the most important surviving green-glazed Korean ceramics of the period.

Korea

Storage Jar

Joseon period (1392 – 1910), c. mid-18th century

Porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.196

Blue-and-white porcelain was first introduced to Korea from China in the 15th century. At that time, it was exceedingly rare in Korea, and its consumption was legally restricted to the royal court. By the mid-18th century, blue-and-white porcelain had reached consumers well beyond imperial patrons. The symbols of longevity that adorn this large jar—the pine tree, crane, **lingzhi** (longevity-inducing fungus), and moon—were tremendously popular at all levels of Joseon society. However, this combination on a porcelain, underglaze-cobalt-blue storage jar is rare; no other examples are known. The slightly irregular shape and the freely executed decoration, adapted from folk painting, indicate that it may have been intended for the wealthy literati rather than for the imperial court.

Thailand

Jar

14th century

Stoneware with incised and applied design under glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.95

The shape of this glazed jar, with a wide mouth, slender neck, and broad shoulders tapering to a smaller foot, as well as the two bands of incised vertical zigzag marks, suggest it may have been produced in northern to central Thailand, where related ceramics have been found. This jar has a form that was sometimes used for funerary urns, and it was filled with many metal and terracotta votive tablets when it was unearthed. Funerary urns of similar shape were produced at kilns controlled by the Khmer empire of Cambodia; it is possible that this jar reflects the influence of a Khmer prototype or, at the very least, is evidence of the interrelationship of contemporaneous ethnic groups in mainland Southeast Asia that exchanged goods and ideas.

Vietnam

Storage Jar

Possibly Champa (192 - 1471), 15th - 16th century

Go-sanh ware: stoneware with incised design under glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.96

This storage jar with a boldly incised design of flowers and foliage was most likely intended as a functional rather than purely decorative object; the lugs just below the neck helped anchor some type of cover. Jars such as this contained foodstuffs and other wares that merchants often transported and traded across the South China Sea to other parts of Southeast Asia.

The potters at the Go-sanh kilns produced wares with distinctive butterscotch-colored glazes and incised decoration for centuries during and after the rule of the kingdom of Champa (192-1471). The strategic location of Champa along the Vietnamese coast made it an important port on the trade routes that linked mainland Southeast Asia with Indonesia, China, and other parts of the world from at least the 8th century.

Cambodia

Male and Female Figures

Angkor period (802 - 1431), late 12th - early 13th century

Sandstone

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.72.1, 2

The faces of this male and female pair, with their downcast eyes, raised brow bones, and slight smiles, date them to the era of either Jayavarman VII (reigned 1181 - c. 1218) or his immediate successor. Jayavarman VII was an influential Buddhist Khmer king who erected the Bayon Temple Mountain in Cambodia as an act of merit. Neither figure displays attributes that would identify them as specific deities or royal personages; the Cambodian custom of paralleling gods and rulers makes it difficult to distinguish one from the other (or a combination of the two). Nevertheless, the heavy earrings, elaborate belts, and the crown on the male suggest they are figures of power.

38

Cambodia

Shiva

Angkor period (802 – 1431), 11th century

Sandstone

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.64

Angkor was the capital city of the great Khmer empire that ruled large parts of mainland Southeast Asia from the 9th to the early 15th century. The Angkor rulers, some of whom were Buddhist and others of whom were Hindu, were regarded as earthly manifestations of major deities, such as a Buddhist bodhisattva or the Hindu gods Shiva or Vishnu.

This four-armed sculpture is now identified as Shiva, due to the “third eye” in the middle of his forehead. Close examination has revealed that this was added later, likely at the same time that a small figure at the center of the headdress, representing either a **stupa** or a seated Buddha, was severely abraded in attempt at erasure. Scholars now believe that the work was once a Buddhist sculpture, later adapted for use in a Hindu context.

39

Cambodia

Female Figure

Angkor period (802 – 1431), Baphuon style, early 11th century

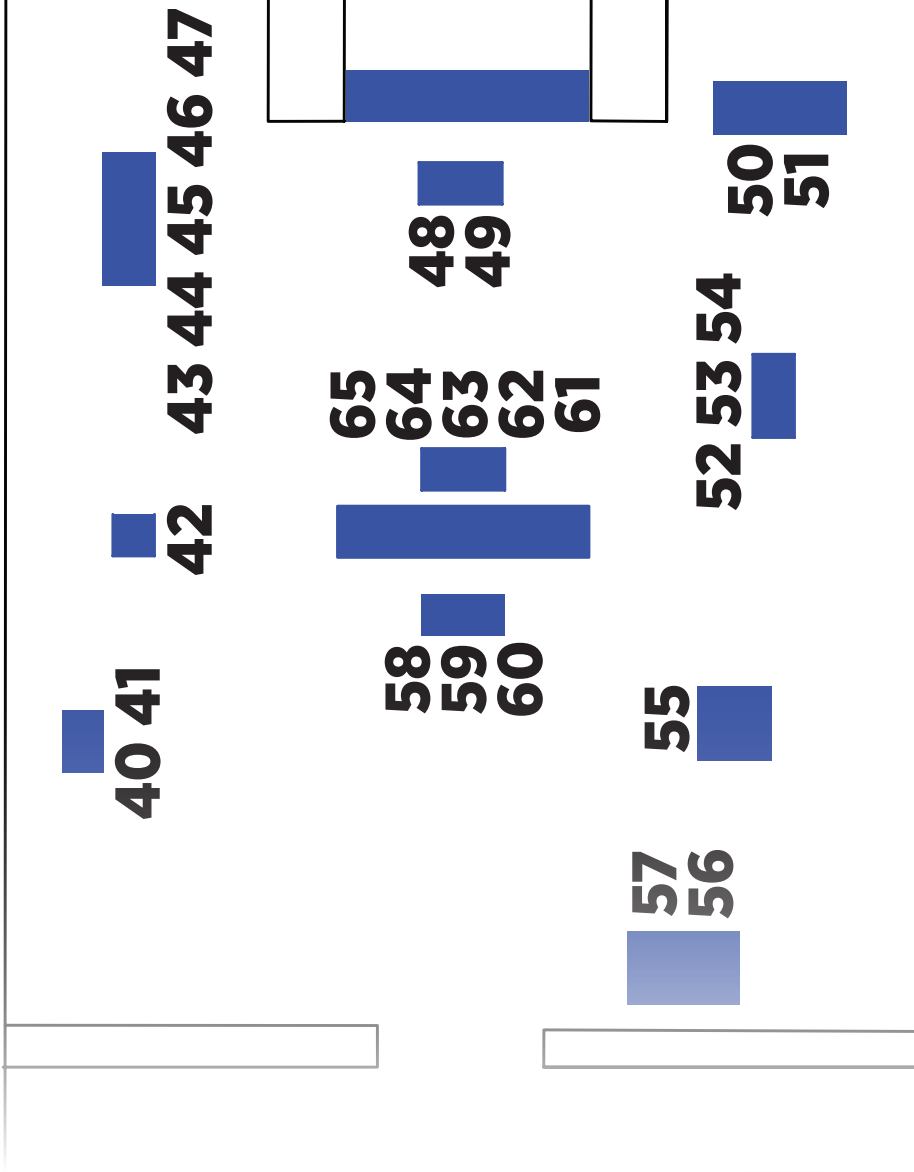
Sandstone

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.65

The slim, sensuous proportions of this female figure is typical of Cambodian works from the early 11th century. The low-relief decoration defines the lines of her the sarong, or skirt, which is wrapped around her waist and tied at the front. Additional folds of cloth fall in the center of the skirt in a stylized pattern known as a “fish-tail motif.”

EXHIBITION LAYOUT DETAIL

40-65



40

North China

Bottle

Northern Song period (960 – 1127), late 11th – early 12th century
Cizhou ware: stoneware with slip and trailed slip under glaze
Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.143

The flared lip of this bottle suggests it was likely used for serving wine, as its shape would have facilitated pouring. The squat form characterizes ceramics of the Song period. Potters created its sections—bottom, top, and neck and mouth—separately on the wheel and then assembled them into the final form. The decorative ribs were added by applying trailing lines of thick, white slip down the surface of the pot. The bottle was covered with a light brown glaze that is thinner and lighter in color on the raised ribs and appears almost black where it is densest.

41

North China

Brush Washer

Northern Song period (960 – 1127), late 11th – early 12th century
Stoneware with glaze with iron “oil spots”
Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.144

This brush washer, a shallow bowl used to rinse a calligraphy or painting brush, exhibits the rich, dark glaze characteristic of black wares made in north China in the Northern Song period. The silvery spots result from an excess of iron particles in the glaze, which rise to the surface during firing; a drop in kiln temperature fixes the spots in place. Bowls with this “oil-spot” glaze were often preferred for the ritual drinking of tea and were associated with Zen (in China, Chan) Buddhism. Known in Japan as **temmoku**, these types of black wares were widely admired, collected, and imitated.

42

North China, probably from Xiuwu or Cizhou

Bottle

Northern Song period (960 – 1127), 12th century

Cizhou ware: stoneware with sgraffito design in slip under glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.141

Bottles of this shape, known as **meiping**, may have been used for storing and serving wine. This container is among the finest examples of Cizhou ware—a ceramic type produced for popular consumption in north China. The bold peony patterns that decorate the robust body of the vase were created using the sophisticated sgraffito technique: the body of the vessel was coated first with a white slip (or clay wash) and then with a black slip. After incising the outlines of the design into the black slip, the artist shaved away the darker material to reveal the white underneath. The technical execution of this decoration suggests that the vessel was intended to be enjoyed for the visual pleasure it would give as much as for its functionality.

43

China, Henan Province

Brush Washer

Northern Song period (960 – 1127), early 12th century

Jun ware: stoneware with glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.138

The historical Chinese practices of painting and calligraphy both rely on the employment of water-soluble ink and pigments, most often applied to paper or silk. Chinese artists and scholars employ brush washers to moisten or rinse out their brushes as they paint or write. The ring handle allows the small, shallow bowl to be carried securely. The simple elegance of the form, the thick, pale blue-gray glaze, and the fine crazing—caused by the glass shrinking more than the clay as the object cools after firing—are characteristics cherished by the Northern Song Imperial court. Jun ware has also been highly regarded by Japanese and western collectors.

44

China, Henan Province

Bowl

Northern Song period (960 – 1127), 12th century

Jun ware: stoneware with glaze with suffusions from copper filings

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.137

The blue shades of this bowl, probably intended for drinking tea, are an optical effect that results from the extremely minute light-scattering droplets of glass that formed in the fired glaze. The bright purple splashes were caused by the addition of copper filings that were brushed onto the glaze prior to firing. The primary patrons of Jun ware were households with significant incomes. The pieces are usually everyday wear, like this bowl, but some were also specially made as functional items for temples and palaces or for tribute.

45

China, Hebei Province

Dish

Northern Song period (960 – 1127), early 12th century

Ding ware: porcelain with molded design under glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.140

The thin body and sophisticated design of this dish were the result of innovations made in the Ding kilns of north China. New techniques were used to prevent ceramics from warping and sticking to one another during firing, and the introduction of molds allowed more efficient production. The dragon was a common symbol of imperial power in China, and its presence on the interior of this high-quality Ding ware dish, with its impressed design of a four-clawed dragon chasing a pearl among swirling clouds, suggests an imperial connection. The design is particularly crisp and even, indicating that the mold was fresh and very carefully applied.

46

China, Shaanxi Province

Cusped Bowl

Northern Song period (960 – 1127), c. early 12th century

Yaozhou ware: stoneware with combed and incised design under glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.131

High-fired, green-glazed ceramics, derived from iron oxides, were among the earliest glazes to be produced in China. Song dynasty Yaozhou wares are noted for their deeply carved, incised designs and thick olive glazes. This rare cusped bowl is decorated with fluidly carved motifs. A design of peonies and leaves on both the interior and exterior, with finer carved and combed lines enhancing the details of the peony petals, and a layer of combed lines below the twelve-lobed bowl rim result in a great complexity of pattern. The relatively thinly applied glaze pools in the carved areas, creating a darker contrast with the lighter green areas, where more of the color of the light gray ceramic body shows through.

47

China, Zhejiang Province

Censer

Yuan period (1279 – 1368), 13th – 14th century

Ge ware: stoneware with glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.146

Ancient Chinese bronze ritual vessels known as **gui** (one of which is on view in this gallery) inspired the form of this rare censer, or incense burner. Of a type known as Ge ware, the vessel's dark body is covered by a thick gray-green glaze with prominent crazing, enhanced by the application of ink. Created for the court of the Southern Song dynasty, the reference to the ancient past reflects the powerful Chinese elites' love of archaism and taste for collecting antiquities.

China, Jiangxi Province

Platter

Yuan period (1279 – 1368), mid-14th century

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.151

By the mid-14th century, the kilns at Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province were producing porcelains decorated with cobalt blue under a clear glaze for both domestic and export markets. On this platter, messages of good fortune and blessing are conveyed by the mythical Chinese **qilin** (a unicorn-like creature), which is surrounded by bamboo, morning glories, plantains, and melons.

The density and complexity of the design and the platter's large size—intended for communal dining—are characteristic of wares made for export to the Middle East. An inscription engraved on the outside of the foot ring names the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (reigned 1627–1658) and gives a date corresponding to 1652/1653 in the Western calendar, making this one of the few examples of Yuan-period porcelain known to have been preserved in India.

China, Jiangxi Province

Jar

Ming period (1368 – 1644), late 14th century

Jingdezhen ware: Porcelain with underglaze copper red

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.153

In addition to ceramics painted with underglaze blue, pieces decorated with underglaze copper were also produced at the kilns of Jingdezhen, the center of China's ceramic production since the 14th century. Copper pigment is very sensitive to temperature, and therefore the red color is difficult to achieve—in fact, the grayish tones of the red on this jar indicate that it was overfired. The central section of this jar is decorated with a profusion of flowers and plants including a pine tree, a plum tree, and bamboo, or the “three friends of winter,” which flourish under adverse conditions and are symbols of longevity, perseverance, and integrity—all the virtues of the ideal scholar-gentleman. The jar was no doubt an expensive item created for the household of someone from the educated elite or perhaps the court.

China, Jiangxi Province

Bowl

Ming period (1368 – 1644), Xuande era (1426 – 1435)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.162

This six-lobed bowl is painted with elegantly placed and painted images of fruits and flowers. Six large clusters of litchis, peaches, loquats, pomegranates, persimmons, and grapes, with six small sprays of camellias, cherries, and chrysanthemums below, encircle the exterior of this bowl, while a scrolling pattern covers its low foot ring. On the interior of the bowl, a flowering branch is painted in the center, surrounded by six large sprays of flowers: lotuses, camellias, chrysanthemums, and peonies. Just above is a band of 12 small floral sprays.

The delicate sense of vitality of these fruits and flowers, as well as the ease of their careful placement over the surface of the bowl, which gives the design a subtle sense of movement and naturalness, characterize the decoration of Xuande-era porcelains.

China, Jiangxi Province

Bowl

Ming period (1368 – 1644), early 15th century, probably Xuande era (1426 – 1435)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue
Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.169

The form and decoration of this large bowl reflect early 15th-century Chinese imperial tastes in ceramics. Fluently brushed and carefully ordered clusters of camellias, litchis, peaches, peonies, and chrysanthemums encircle the interior of the bowl, while two large pomegranates fill the bottom. A vine with large and small lotus blossoms scrolls around the exterior. Corresponding imagery embellishes the interior and exterior bands below the bowl's mouth. The careful placement of these motifs, their calligraphic treatment, and the openness of the composition characterize Xuande-era porcelains.

During this period, the cobalt used for the underglaze decoration was imported from the Middle East or Central Asia, resulting in a characteristic "heaped-and-piled" effect of thick, dark areas within the painting.

China, Jiangxi province

Bowl

Ming period (1368 – 1644), Chenghua era (1465 – 1487)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.171

Many collectors of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain consider the high-quality works of the Ming Chenghua era the finest ever produced. These ceramics have thin, luminous porcelain bodies with carefully painted designs. Bowls painted with precise and fluid floral motifs, such as this one, are known to connoisseurs as “palace bowls” and are characteristic of the reign of the Chenghua emperor.

A stylized pattern of six large lotus blossoms linked by scrolling leafy vines surrounds the outside of the bowl. In China, the lotus is an emblem of summer and is also associated with purity and integrity. The curving vines are in visual harmony with the curved silhouette of the bowl. The foot ring is fittingly embellished with a stylized blue-and-white decoration of undulating water.

China, Jiangxi province

Flask

Ming period (1368 – 1644), early 15th century, probably Yongle era (1403 – 1424)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue
Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.160

A dynamic, three-clawed dragon stretches across either side of this impressive flask. The dragons prance against a backdrop of floating, scrolling lotus vines that populate their natural habitat, whether sea or sky. Classic early Ming-style dragons, they have massive heads with upturned snouts, strong serpentine bodies, and large scales. Chinese dragons are powerful but benign creatures long associated with the emperor in China. During the Ming period, objects with three-or four-clawed dragons functioned as imperial gifts to members of the court or to foreign rulers and dignitaries. Similar large flasks are in collections in Tehran and Istanbul, suggesting this one was likely created for the export market.

China, Jiangxi province

Bowl

Ming period (1368 – 1644), Chenghua era (1465 – 1487)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.172

This Chenghua-era “palace bowl” possesses the thin potting, the lightly applied, slightly honey-colored, clear, smooth glaze, and the precise painting for which blue-and-white porcelains of this era are so admired. Six large chrysanthemum blossoms and six smaller, partially opened blossoms are fluidly linked by exceptionally fine and exquisite scrolling vines and delicately veined leaves in a continuous line, with no clear beginning or end to the pattern. The naturalistic design has been carefully placed to cover the exterior of the bowl and to suggest the organic movement and growth of actual plants. Flowers on porcelains generally have auspicious meanings, and the chrysanthemum, a symbol of autumn in China, also has associations with long life, fidelity, and joy.

China, Jiangxi Province

Covered Jar with wucai decoration

Ming period (1368 – 1644), Jiajing era (1522 – 1566)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue and overglaze enamels Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.182a, b

Decorated with an animated scene of goldfish swimming in their natural habitat, this covered jar exemplifies the **wucai**, or “five-color” technique. Rather than relying completely on outlines of underglaze blue for the design, artists instead painted colored enamels directly onto the fired glaze, which allowed them to work in a freer and more detailed manner. The subject matter is filled with auspicious symbolism: fish swimming in nature imply harmony, while eight fish constitute a visual pun for “vast fortune,” because the Chinese pronunciation of the two phrases is similar. The bold and lively movement of the fish and aquatic plants on this jar typifies a new aesthetic in early 16th-century imperial ceramics. Its large size and thick potting indicate that it may have been used as an outdoor garden decoration.

China, Jiangxi Province

Bowl

Qing period (1644 – 1911), Yongzheng era (1723 – 1735)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with overglaze enamels

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.186

In its range of opaque overglazed enamel colors, this elegantly painted bowl exhibits the amazing breakthroughs in color availability that occurred during the Qing period. This was a time when European Jesuits served at court, and Chinese artists collaborated with their counterparts in imperial workshops. The wide range of colors available to porcelain painters at this time appears in the varied hues of the landscape and flora, as well as in the delicately painted feathers of the two quail standing upon green grass. The rocky landscape on this bowl, consisting of a Chinese red-berry shrub, narcissus, rocks, and lingzhi fungus (reputed to confer immortality when ingested), suggests that it was meant to convey birthday or New Year's greetings. Here, the artist joined these sentiments with another auspicious theme: the paired quails (**shuang an**), which can be read as a rebus for "peace" and "prosperity." The composition of the painting around the exterior of the bowl reveals itself, like that of a Chinese handscroll, as the viewer turns the object.

China, Jiangxi Province

Bowl

Qing period (1644 – 1911), Yongzheng era (1723 – 1735)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with overglaze enamels

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.186

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China, Jiangxi Province

Dish

Qing period (1644 – 1911), Yongzheng era (1723 – 1735)

Porcelain painted with overglaze enamels (Jingdezhen ware)

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.188

The beautiful shapes, refined bodies, sophisticated colors, and elegant painting that characterize Qing-period porcelains are embodied in this dish. It is decorated with an auspicious design, extending from the exterior to the interior, of five bats and eight peaches hanging from blossoming branches. In Chinese, **wufu** (five bats) is a homonym for the phrase “Five Happinesses” and thus symbolizes them: wealth, health, longevity, a virtuous life, and a natural death. The eight peaches combine an auspicious number with a fruit that symbolizes longevity.

An important element in Qing-period painted porcelains is the addition of shades of pink to the overglaze enamel palette. An opaque white derived from a lead arsenite and a pale pink from colloidal gold were among the last opaque overglaze enamels to be developed, possibly because they are very difficult to manufacture. This palette of colors that includes pale shades of green and pink is called **fencai** (powdery colors) or **ruancai** (soft colors). In the West, it is known as **famille rose** (pink family).

58

North China

Footed Dish

Tang period (618 – 906), 8th century

Sancai ware: earthenware with stamped design under multicolored lead glazes and traces of pigment

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.128

The form of this three-footed earthenware dish derives from similar metalwork pieces from Iran and western Central Asia. While the blue clouds are a traditional Chinese motif, the stylization of the flower at the center of the dish into geometricized shapes reflects foreign aesthetics. These designs were stamped into the clay, and the white dots resulted from applying a glaze-resistant material. The low-fired multicolored lead glazes used to decorate this piece are known as three-color or **sancai** glazes. **Sancai** pieces are among the best-known and finest examples of ceramics from the Tang period.

59

North China

Court Lady

Tang period (618 – 906), 8th century

Sancai ware: earthenware with multicolored lead glazes and traces of pigment

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.113

For many centuries, Chinese elites commissioned **mingqi** (spirit goods) for the tombs of their deceased family members. These low-fired earthenwares served as surrogates for the actual humans, animals, and objects needed to ensure that the tomb's inhabitants preserved their social and economic status in the afterlife and to keep the spirits of the deceased content. Likely part of a large ensemble representing court musicians, this seated court lady wears a high-waisted dress of the period and holds a pair of cymbals. The generous application of cobalt blue glaze, an expensive pigment imported to China from Iran in the 8th century, indicates that no expense was spared.

North China

Jar

Tang period (618 - 906), 8th - 9th century

Stoneware with glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.130

This wide-mouthed vessel with an out-turned lip and a bulbous body likely served as a storage jar. The presence of two handles, which were probably used not to hold the jar but to help secure a cover on it, offers further evidence of its use. Each of these wide, curved handles terminates in a pointed leaf-shaped end that is pressed against the shoulder of the jar. The upper part of the body and the interior are coated with a layer of dark brown glaze, while the lower portion of the body was left unglazed.

China, Jiangxi Province

Wine Cup

Ming period (1368 – 1644), Chenghua era (1465 – 1487)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue and overglaze enamels

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.175

Among the most prized Chenghua-era porcelains are small, delicate, thinly potted wine cups embellished with a combination of underglaze cobalt blue and overglaze enamels. This cup was decorated using a rare technique known as **doucai**, or “joined-colors.” In this method, the main outlines of the design are painted directly onto the unglazed body in cobalt blue before the porcelain is glazed and fired. Colored enamels are painted over the glaze to fill in the outlined shapes, and a second firing at a lower temperature fixes these enamels.

On this cup, the deep red and delicate shades of green, yellow, and blue overglaze colors add vibrancy to the motifs of dragons in floral medallions and floating flowers, which stand out against the luminous white of the glazed porcelain. The overglaze colors match the underglaze outlines perfectly. The precision needed for this type of decoration made **doucai** porcelains very difficult and expensive to produce—perhaps why most ceramics decorated in this method are small.

China, Jiangxi Province

Dish

Ming period (1368 – 1644), mid- to late 15th century, probably Chenghua era (1465 – 1487)

Jingdezhen ware: Porcelain with copper red glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.177

The development of the bright copper-red glaze on this dish, known as **jihong** (sacrificial red), was among the Ming dynasty's artistic achievements. However, red-glazed porcelains of the period are extremely rare, as the red color of the glaze was very difficult to achieve. Standard for copper-red porcelains, the white of the body is exposed at the rim of the plate, as gravity left the glaze at the rim so thin that there is too little colloidal copper to allow the red color to emerge.

According to historical records, red was considered a symbol for the sun, and red-glazed vessels were used at the altar of the sun in the imperial capital, Beijing. Red was also the banner color of the Ming imperial family, whose surname, Zhu, can be translated as “red.”

China, Jiangxi Province

Stem Cup

Ming period (1368 – 1644), mid- to late 15th century,
probably Chenghua era (1465 – 1487)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue and
overglaze red enamel

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection,
1979.176

Chenghua-era porcelains are known for their refined white bodies and delicately painted decoration. The stem cup, essentially a short bowl mounted on a tall foot, has traditionally served ceremonial purposes in China—such cups are often placed on ritual altars. On the exterior of this example, blue-winged creatures fly above overglaze-red waves, perhaps a reference to China's position in the fifteenth century as the world's preeminent seafaring empire. In addition to the winged dragon at the interior base of the bowl, the creatures on the outside include winged fish, elephants, horses, and deer. The **leiwen** (thunder scroll) band just below the exterior lip of the cup recalls a decorative pattern frequently found on ritual bronzes of the Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BC)—an allusion to China's ancient past.

China, Jiangxi Province

Bottle

Ming period (1368 – 1644), early 15th century,
probably Yongle era (1403 – 1424)

Porcelain with incised design under glaze

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection,
1979.156

Among the most famed and frequently produced ceramics during the Yongle era are those with a warm white glaze known as **tian bai** (sweet white ware). The decoration on the bottle is difficult to see—an extremely delicate incised pattern of a stylized lotus flower near the center of the back and front. This kind of finely worked pattern, known as **anhua** (hidden decoration), was popular on Yongle-period white ware.

This bottle's flattened gourd shape is derived from Middle Eastern metalwork and ceramic flasks. The combination of a foreign shape with a Chinese design highlights the cross-cultural dialogue in the newly reopened ceramic trade during the Ming dynasty.

China, Jiangxi Province

Bowl

Ming period (1368 – 1644), Xuande era (1426 – 1435)

Jingdezhen ware: porcelain painted with underglaze cobalt blue and copper red

Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.167

Ceramics were first employed for imperial dining in the early 15th century, leading to the creation of new shapes and increased production for daily use. The shape of this thinly potted bowl suggests it was once part of a large set of dishes used for this purpose.

The combination of two high-fired colors, cobalt blue and copper red, was an innovation of the Xuande era and was reserved for particularly luxurious works. In the 15th century, the motif of a dragon chasing a pearl became a prominent imperial symbol in the arts. The two five-clawed dragons encircling this bowl indicate it was intended for use by the emperor. The flaming pearl may represent the sun or the moon, both symbols of the power of the emperor.

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