

# IN & OUT OF CONTEXT

Asia Society Celebrates the Collections at 60

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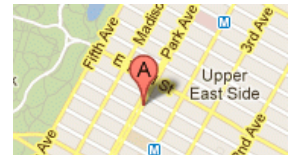
*ARTWORKS (23) (#ARTWORKS)*

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On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Asia Society, this exhibition celebrates the legacy of collecting and exhibiting Asian art that John D. Rockefeller 3rd (1906–1978) and Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller (1909–1992) set in motion for Asia Society. Even when taken out of their original cultural contexts these artworks can serve as a conduit for sharing the talent, skill, imagination, and deep history of the peoples of Asia. In this exhibition, historical and contemporary works are juxtaposed to trigger more informed and distinctive ways of thinking about the artworks, their creators, and how they are displayed.

Before John D. Rockefeller 3rd established Asia Society in 1956, he had been deeply involved with the arts and culture of Asia. Rockefeller firmly believed that art was an indispensable tool for understanding societies, especially in Asia, and thus made culture central to the new multidisciplinary organization that would encompass all aspects and all parts of Asia. From 1963 to 1978, the Rockefellers worked with art historian Sherman E. Lee (1918–2008) as an advisor to build their collection. Together they assembled a group of spectacular historical works—including sculpture, painting, and decorative arts from East, Southeast, and South Asia, and the Himalayas—that became the core of the Asia Society collection of traditional art. This collection is distinguished by the high proportion of acclaimed masterpieces, to which additional high quality gifts and acquisitions have been added since the original bequest to Asia Society.

As a complement to these holdings, Asia Society inaugurated a collection of contemporary Asian and Asian American art in 2007. While the traditional collection began with a desire to create a better understanding among cultures, the impetus for the Museum's collection of innovative new media art was to broaden the understanding of Asia's artistic production through works that demonstrate a savvy, and nuanced understanding of advances in new technologies, many of which were first developed in Asia. Using video, photography, and other new media, contemporary artists from Asia and the diaspora have been able to respond to the shifting sociopolitical, economic, and cultural changes that are occurring across the region. The joining together of these facets of Asia Society's inimitable collection showcases the breadth and depth of creative expression across Asia. Moreover it reflects the rich and diverse cultural history of the region and highlights how elements of the past continue to be present in much of today's art.

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