

We invite our readers to submit a short (300-400 words) article about a favourite museum in Asia, Australia or New Zealand or to write about an Asian collection elsewhere in the world. Please send submissions to Virginia Sheridan, Assistant Editor, at vasheridan@mac.com

The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia

By Margaret White

The Art Gallery of New South Wales is like an old friend. When visiting Sydney, I frequently stroll to the Domain where the museum's warm, sandstone façade beckons. While inside, it can be hard to concentrate on the exhibits when one's eyes are drawn to the stunning harbour views outside. The museum's happy buzz makes me eager to reconnect with its permanent art collections, attend a lecture, view the latest exhibition or meet colleagues with whom I used to guide, in the Members' Room. Here, I can read the latest journals and browse through references, whilst grabbing a coffee or light lunch.

Of special interest to me is the Asian collection, developed over the past 20 years. In 2003, a Gallery extension, resembling a glowing lantern at night, was opened to showcase its ever-expanding acquisitions. These mirror Australia's increased cultural and trade connections with Asia and celebrate its cultural diversity. Most importantly, individuals and their broad interests define this collection. Whilst highlighting the antiquity of Asian arts and cultures, the collection demonstrates that these are continuing and contemporary. Some of the additions familiar to us in Singapore include Southeast Asian textiles, Buddhist and Hindu sculptures, Chinese ceramics and landscape paintings, as well as less familiar exhibits such as Korean celadon ceramics and a Japanese tea room.

Some of my favourites are Japanese, especially the *kabuki* theatre actors' woodblock prints and the *bijin ga*, literally, 'paintings of beautiful women' and symbols of a feminine ideal. These were connected with the pleasure-seeking aesthetic of the 'Floating World' (*Ukiyo-e*) of Edo,

Views In and Around Kyoto (Rakuchu-Rakugai zu), circa 1660, left side of pair of six-fold screens; colour and gold on paper



Katsukawa SHUN'EI Portrait of a Beautiful Woman (*Bijin*), 1790s hanging scroll; ink & colour on silk

Japan (1615-1868). In this special category, the individual's personality is conveyed by pose, gesture and the choice and colour of her kimono, not by facial expression. Woodblock prints, initially considered advertising in Japan, were much admired in the 19th century and sought out as inspiration by European artists such as Monet and Van Gogh.

The Japanese gold-ground screens are eye catching, particularly one pair of six-fold screens painted in ink pigments and gold on paper, dating from the Edo period, entitled *Views In and Around Kyoto*. I enjoy 'taking a journey' through what is actually an accurate map of Kyoto, Japan's cultural and political capital from about the 9th century. The unknown artist was probably a town painter (*machi-eshi*) typical of a large number of independent artists who established their own studios and borrowed stylistically from the different schools of painting.

Interest in the Gallery's Asian collection has been stimulated by daily guided tours, lecture series and temporary exhibitions such as the romantic epic, *The Tale of Genji*, also *Intimate Encounters*, focused on exquisite Indian miniature paintings. I often join tours and have surprised some of my guiding friends! The Gallery is a wonderful link between Singapore and Australia and I feel fortunate to be able to walk in both worlds.

Margaret White has lived in Singapore for 17 years, during which time she has been involved in nearly every aspect of FOM, including serving as president in 1999-2000. Prior to moving to Singapore, Margaret worked in museums in the US and Australia. She is an eclectic collector of antique textiles, carpets, paintings and ceramics, all of which provide inspiration for her own work as a painter.

Photos courtesy of Art Gallery of New South Wales

Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery Road, The Domain
Sydney NSW 2000, Australia

Gallery Hours
Thurs - Tues 10:00 am - 5:00 pm
Wed 10:00 am - 9:00 pm
Admission free, except some special exhibitions
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au