

Queensland Art Gallery

Brisbane, Australia

By Siobhán Cool

It was as a young girl in Brisbane, long before discovering the treasure troves in Singapore's museums and galleries, that I first fell in love with Asian arts. The year was 1982 and the venue was the newly reopened Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) where I first began to appreciate the delicate colourings in *Ukiyo-e* prints, the lustre of porcelain and the recurrent symbolism that continues to intrigue me to this day.

The QAG is situated within the precincts of the Brisbane Cultural Centre (along with the Lyric Opera House, History Museum and the Gallery of Modern Art or GOMA). A cathedral-like space of minimal colour and changing light values, it is truly the 'living gallery' that architect Robin Gibson intended it to be. As a stunning preamble to the range of exhibitions and permanent collections, an outdoor pool flows to the inside, drawing visitors along with it and adding to the cool and quiet vibrancy of the space.

The QAG's distinguished collection includes more than 11,000 Australian and international paintings, sculptures, decorative art objects, multimedia installations and works on paper. Since the 1970s, QAG has gathered an impressive and carefully directed collection of historical Asian art to enhance its landmark collection of contemporary Asian art (now housed in GOMA). The aim of the Asian focus is to

cultivate an understanding and appreciation of neighbouring cultures and promote artistic exchange in relation to Asia's aesthetic traditions.

QAG has a distinguished Japanese ceramic collection that begins with Neolithic jars from the Jōmon (3000–2000 BCE) and Yayoi (400–300 BCE) cultures and includes a group of *tsubo* (narrow-necked lidless jars) from Japan's Six Old Kilns (the Tokoname, Seto, Shigaraki, Tamba, Bizen and Echizen kilns), dating from the Muromachi (1333–1573) and Azuchi–Mumoyama (1573–1603) periods. One can also see examples of ceramics from China's Neolithic Yangshao culture (3500–3000 BCE) to complement the collection. QAG also participates in exchange programmes with important international museums so when visiting in June, I was thrilled to see a collection of Tang Dynasty celadon ware and some Korean *buncheong* ware on long-term loans from esteemed institutions such as the Museum of Arts Tokyo, National Museum of Korea and Shanghai Museum.

Visitors to QAG are also treated to rotating samples from its collection of multi-coloured Japanese woodblock prints, *Ukiyo-e*, an art form that developed during the late 17th century Edo period. Here one can see iconic works by leading artists of this form, such as Ichiryusai (Utagawa) Hiroshige and Kitagawa Utamaro. Beautiful Japanese screens attributed to the Hasegawa School, active in the Edo period, show scenes from the influential literary text *Genji Monogatari* (*Tale of Genji*) and round out the Japanese collection.

The QAG is an easy five-minute stroll from Brisbane's city shopping district. Its blockbuster exhibitions, quintessential collections and serenely beautiful building make it a must-see when visiting the Sunshine State's capital.



Yayoi culture, Japan,
'Jar' 400–300BCE
(Yayoi period),
Earthenware, hand-
built spherical form
with flaring lip and
applied rope motif
around the body



Ichiryusai Hiroshige, Japan 1797–1858
Ryogoku, hanabi (no. 98 from 'Meisho Edo hyakkei' series) 1858
Colour woodblock print on paper



Photo by Natasha Hart

Queensland Art Gallery
Stanley Place,
South Bank,
Queensland, Australia
61 (0)7 3840 7303
www.qag.qld.gov.au

Siobhán Cool is an avid student of porcelain and is General Counsel to an Australian airline. She has been a docent at STPI since the group's inception in 2005.

Photos courtesy of Queensland Art Gallery unless otherwise noted