

PREVIEW

# Asia Week New York

Jo Lawson-Tancred selects her highlights of the event

1. Incense burner, late 14th–15th century, China, bronze, ht 37cm. J.J. Lally & Co. (price on application)



2. *Seven Women: Applying Make-up Before a Mirror*, c. 1792–93, Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), woodblock print with mica, 36.1 x 24.1cm. Scholten Japanese Art (\$265,000)



3. Samurai armour, 17th–18th century, Japan, iron, silk, leather, ht approx. 140cm. Giuseppe Piva (\$120,000)

‘The event suffers none of the space or time constraints of a typical fair’

4. *Untitled*, 2018, Ganesh Haloi (b. 1936), gouache on paper, 47 x 64.8cm. Akar Prakar (around \$28,000)



Though New York is long established as an international hub for the Asian art market, Asia Week New York (AWNY) is striding into its second decade with the satisfaction of having increased the city’s appetite for Asian art. The lack of a fixed venue was one of the factors that contributed to the closing of the International Asian Art Fair in 2009; but AWNY turned that to its advantage, with a founding community of 16 galleries coming together to invite the public in to their permanent premises. This set in motion what is now a city-wide celebration of Asian art, with 37 dealers and six auction houses participating next month. As AWNY’s newly appointed chairman Katherine Martin notes, it suffers none of the space or time constraints of a typical fair: ‘Because we are more present in the city as a whole, there’s a lot more interaction with other institutions.’ Friendly cooperation between public and private institutions offers free access to a host of symposiums and curator-led tours, all serving the greater cause of boosting public knowledge of Asian art.

The 2020 edition sees the launch of an even richer programme of gallery talks, giving

specialists the chance to better inform the public about their objects and exhibitions. A glimpse at the busy schedule reveals ‘Restraint to Flamboyance: The Genius of Japanese Ceramic Art’ at Joan B. Mirviss on 16 March, with ‘Chinese Ink Art and the Ocean’ at Bocara Art the following day. This sharing of expertise is what makes AWNY as valuable to an amateur as it is to an authority. ‘You can see a bit of everything in a museum but have no idea whether it’s possible to actually own anything like what’s on display,’ Martin says. ‘Visitors can use Asia Week to check out different types of Asian art, figure out what they like and what suits their budget.’

Martin, who directs Scholten Japanese Art, looks forward to presenting ‘The Baron J. Bachofen von Echt Collection of Golden Age *Ukiyo-e*’. The golden age in question is the late 18th century, when woodblock printing reached its peak. Among the 22 examples here are several rare works from the 1790s by Kitagawa Utamaro, including *Seven Women: Applying Make-up Before a Mirror*, in which we see one of his renowned beauties both from behind and, by way of her reflection, face-on (Fig. 2).

There are more works on paper at James Goodman Gallery, where the California-based dealer Alan Kennedy is showing *Giant Confusion*, a comical ink impression of a man fighting off a troop of monkeys. This is one of a series of illustrations commissioned in the late 19th century by the British sea captain James Ware for the classical Chinese story *The Journey to the West*, which Ware translated into English. A still more outlandish watercolour at Kapoor Galleries from around 1740 portrays Chinnamasta, the Hindu goddess who severed her own head to feed two attendant yoginis. The Pahari master Nainsukh of Guler shows her here draped in serpents and with her blood spurting out in elegant loops.

The Indian contemporary art scene, meanwhile, is well represented by Ganesh Haloi, to whom Akar Prakar of New Delhi will dedicate its exhibition at AWNY. Haloi’s watercolour and gouache harmonies are often the product of no more than a scattering of delicate markings but, despite their spare abstraction, the artist evades the category, proposing instead that the works refer to ‘elusive atmospheric elements’. Something similar might be said of

the work of Go Hui-dong (1886–1995), the first Korean artist to try to introduce Western painting styles to his home country. He eventually shifted to a more traditional Korean style, this fusion of influences emerging in the ink sketch *Autumn Landscape* (1956), presented by Kang Collection Korean Art, in which an attractive scene of pink blossom in blue mist is dramatised by chiaroscuro effects.

Auctioning the collection of statues and ceramics amassed by the Chicago philanthropists James and Marilynn Alsdorf across both an evening sale on 18 March and a day sale on 19 March, Christie’s offers an exceptionally rare Sui Dynasty marble bust of the Buddha. Among several exquisitely preserved bowls from around the 18th century is a dome-shaped beehive water pot bearing three dragon roundels beneath a rich peach-bloom glaze.

The fiery, winged theme continues with a Ming dynasty incense burner in the form of a goose, which should stand out at J.J. Lally & Co.’s exhibition ‘Elegantly Made: Art for the Chinese Literati’ (Fig. 1). Incense would smoulder within the bronze body of the bird, topped by a generous plumage, while aromatic

smoke escaped from its open beak. Newcomer Thomas Murray is offering a cast-iron betelnut cutter from Java, which takes the form of a sultan, stylised in a manner typical of the region’s shadow puppets. Details of the figure’s courtly dress and *keris* (dagger) catch the eye in glimmering inlaid gold.

More miniature metalwork will be a highlight of Bonhams’ sale on 17 March, in the form of a pair of silver and gilt copper-alloy statues portraying the seventh Karmapa and fourth Shamarpa, leaders of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. The matching figures are easily distinguishable by the colours of their hats, black for the Karmapa and red for the Shamarpa, or ‘Red Hat Karmapa’.

The fashioning of an Edo-period suit of samurai armour carries its own markers of identity, with an extravagance typical of the tastes of the Mori family, whose crest it bears. It has a cuirass wrapped in gold silk brocade with turquoise details and a gold alloy trim (Fig. 3). Its visual splendour, however, belies the suit’s heavy-metal strength and bullet-proof plates. Travelling to New York with Milanese dealer Giuseppe Piva, it is one of

many enticing fragments of history on offer at AWNY, each inviting a second look.

Among the institutional exhibitions running concurrently, visitors shouldn’t miss ‘Kyoto: Capital of Artistic Imagination’ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (until 20 September), which boasts masterpieces in lacquer, ceramics, metalwork and textiles from the ancient to the contemporary. In Midtown Manhattan, meanwhile, catch the Japan Society’s topical ‘Boro Textiles: Sustainable Aesthetics’ (until 14 June), an introduction to the patchwork garments worn by peasants in the Tohoku region of north-east Honshu. A reasonable subway ride away, the Brooklyn Museum is following the recent opening of its reinstated Arts of Asia galleries with a special lecture on 13 March that will highlight its East Asian collection. **A**

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**Asia Week New York is at various venues from 12–19 March. For more details go to [www.asiaweekny.com](http://www.asiaweekny.com).**