Tree of Life

Exhibition: June 4 – September 10, 2017
East-West Center Gallery, Honolulu, Hawai‘i

East-West Center in cooperation with World Crafts Council Asia Pacific Region, Crafts Council of India, and Society Atelier Sarawak presents

Guest Curators: Edric Ong and Manjari Nirula
EWC Gallery Curator: Michael Schuster
Installation Design: Lynne Najita
Assistant Curator: Annie Reynolds
Coordinator: Eric Chang

Featuring works by:

Kenyah, Indigenous culture of Sarawak, Malaysia:
“The tree gave birth to the first human named Lake Ajai Kuwai.”

ABOVE: “TREE OF LIFE RATTAN HAT” CATHERINE SENIA, MALAYSIA, CONTEMPORARY, RATTAN
LEFT: “TREE OF LIFE,” HUANG CHEN MEI, TAIWAN, CONTEMPORARY, LACQUER PAINTING
The Tree of Life is an archetype, theme, motif, image, spiritual concept, and mythological story that is found throughout the world. The Tree of Life is often understood to connect all forms of creation and is a cosmic conception that connects the heavens, earth, and underworld. It has influenced art creation and visual representation for millennia. These diverse representations have taken influences from indigenous cultures and major religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and other ancient religions.

The Tree of Life has diverse meaning across cultures in Asia. In Hindu mythology, it is the Cosmic Tree, for the Babylonians it was the tree with the divine fruit, for the Zoroastrians it is the Haoma Tree, while in Chinese mythology the one who eats its fruits becomes immortal.

This exhibition is beyond borders and the viewer will see diverse objects from 20 Asian countries. Although the emphasis is on textiles there are also examples of the tree of life image in a multitude of media including paintings, ceramics, basketry, metal work, jewelry, lacquer, stone, wood, and leather.

Handcrafted from natural and sustainable materials, the artwork focuses on traditional and contemporary interpretations of the Tree of Life.

Hindu Inverted Tree:

“This eternal asvattha whose roots rise on high and whose branches grow low is the pure, the Brahman, what is called Non-Death. All the worlds rest in it.” –Katha Upanishad

Manjari Nirula, co-curator from India states, “The aim of the exhibition is to create greater awareness about the importance of ecology to stimulate creativity and innovation while highlighting natural as well as cultural sustainability. Craft has the least carbon footprint and that comes through very strongly in this exhibition.”

Islamic Tree of Bliss:

A Bedouin approached the Prophet and asked, “What is bliss?” The Prophet answered: “Bliss is a tree in Paradise, a tree of a hundred years’ walk, and those under the tree are clothed by the sleeves of the tree.”

~Ibn Hanbal referencing Abû-Sa’îd al-Khudrî

Zoroastrian Haoma Tree:

“Honor to Haoma ... his branches bow down that one may enjoy them. To the soul he is the way to heaven. In the beginning Ormazd gave to Haoma the girdle glittering with stars, wherewith he girdled himself upon the tops of mountains.”

There are many indigenous cultures in Sarawak, Malaysia that address the concepts of the sacred forest. According to co-curator Edric Ong from Sarawak, Malaysia, “The Tree of Life, known as pohon budi in Malaysian language, is talking about a tree of culture, a tree of civilization, a tree from which mankind evolved. The exhibition builds bridges and healing with its message of peace and love.”
Judeo-Christian Tree of Knowledge:
“Wisdom is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon it…” –Proverbs 3:13-18

Daoist Tree of Immortality:
“The peach is a symbol of immortality, said to have grown in the orchard of the Queen Mother of the West.”
The East-West Center promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options. The Center is an independent, public, nonprofit organization with funding from the U.S. government, and additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, foundations, corporations, and governments in the region.

The East-West Center Arts Program for more than 38 years has enriched the community through concerts, lectures, symposia, and exhibitions focusing on arts of the region, and by arranging cultural and educational tours by artists who are skilled in bridging cultures.

EWC Arts Team: Karen Knudsen, director, Office of External Affairs; Michael Schuster, Ph.D., curator; Eric Chang, arts program coordinator; Annie Reynolds, arts program assistant; William Feltz, adjunct arts specialist; June Kuramoto, program officer; Gary Yoshida, Elizabeth Kuoka, development officers; Kisore Sherreitt, Hunter Kaye, student assistants.

Mahalo: Edric Ong, Manjari Nirula, Dr. Ghada Hijjawi-Qaddumi, Shruthi Issac, Ramsay Ong, Michael Lim, Datin Dayang Mariani A bang Zain, Cheri Vasek, June Kuramoto, Lynne Najita, Kennedy Kaye, student assistants.

& Preiss Graphic Design, Leilani Ng, Colorprints Inc., Rosselyn L. Lah, Lepau Restaurant (Kuching), development officers; Kisore Sherreitt, Hunter Kaye, student assistants.

M athew N gau Jau: textile design (Sarawak); Deepak Sankit: enamel jewelry (India); Jai Prakash: miniature painting (India); Matthew Ngau Jau: painting, saph lute music (Sarawak); Edric Ong: textile design (Sarawak); Ramsay Ong: painting, collage, beading (Sarawak); Jai Prakash: miniature painting (India); Deepak Sankit: enamel jewelry (India).

Visiting artists during the opening week:

- Matthew Ngau Jau: painting, saph lute music (Sarawak);
- Edric Ong: textile design (Sarawak);
- Ramsay Ong: painting, collage, beading (Sarawak);
- Jai Prakash: miniature painting (India);
- Deepak Sankit: enamel jewelry (India).

East-West Center Arts Program is supported by EWC Arts ‘Ohana members, Barbara B. Smith, Jean E. Rolles, Jackie Chan Foundation USA, and other generous donors.

Special Events

In the EWC Gallery with free admission.

Sunday, June 4, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Exhibition Gala Opening including reception, art demonstrations, short performance, and exhibition tour with guest curators Edric Ong and Manjari Nirula, with opening remarks by Dr. Ghada Hijjawi-Qaddumi, President, World Crafts Council-Asia Pacific Region

Sunday, June 11, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “The ‘Tree of Life’ Exhibition: An Overview of the International Collection” by guest curator Edric Ong

Sunday, July 9, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “The Buddhist Bodhi Tree” by Patricia Masters, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Sunday, July 23, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “Tree of Life: ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua” Learn about Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death threatening Hawai‘i’s Tree of Life with Christy Martin, CGAPS-Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (a project of the Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit, UH-Mānoa)

Sunday, August 13, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “Tree of Life: Forest Transitions in Southeast Asia and Nepal” by Jefferson Fox, East-West Center

Sunday, August 27, 2:00–3:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 10, 2:00–4:30 p.m.
Film: “Tree of Life” a 2011 American experimental epic drama written and directed by Terrence Malick and starring Brad Pitt, Sean Penn, and Jessica Chastain; 139 min.

Buddhist Bodhi Tree:
“King Pasenadi of Kosala entered the sacred park at Bodh Gaya, saw the Bodhi Tree and exclaimed: ‘The roots of this tree are lovely and inspiring, quiet and undisturbed by voices, with an atmosphere of seclusion, remote from people, favorable for retreat...’” –Dhammacetiya Sutta

East-West Center Gallery
John A. Burns Hall, 1601 East-West Road (corner Dole St. & East-West Rd.)

Gallery admission is free.

Hours: Open Weekdays 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. and Sundays Noon–4:00 p.m.
Closed Saturdays, July 4, September 3 & 4.

Parking on the UH-Mānoa campus is normally free and ample on Sundays.

Free school & group tours available

For further information: 944-7177
arts@EastWestCenter.org

http://arts.EastWestCenter.org

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