The Taj Mahal and the Battle of Air Pollution

The government of India announced earlier this year that it is to restrict the number of daily visitors to the Taj Mahal in an attempt to preserve the 17th-century monument. One of the best known buildings in the world, and arguably India’s greatest monument, makes it one of the most-visited tourist attractions in the world. Millions of mostly Indian tourists visit the Taj Mahal every year and their numbers are increasing steadily, as domestic travel becomes easier. In future, only 40,000 local tourists will be allowed to enter the historic monument, makes it one of the most-visited tourist attractions in the world. Millions of mostly Indian tourists visit the Taj Mahal every year and their numbers are increasing steadily, as domestic travel becomes easier. In future, only 40,000 local tourists will be allowed to enter the historic monument.

As the domestic travel becomes easier, the Taj faces numerous threats, not only from air pollution, but also insects, and effluents which are deposited on the rear wall facing the heavily polluted Yamuna River. Years of interventions – including using mudpacks to draw the stain from the stone – have failed to arrest the slow decay of the building. The mausoleum was built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (r 1628-1658) in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. Commissioning started in 1631 and construction started in 1632 and was completed in 1648, with the mosque, the guest house and the main courtyard and its cloisters were added subsequently and the complex was finally completed in 1653, with the tomb being the central focus of the entire complex of the Taj Mahal.

It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983. Although the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ), which looks after 40 protected monuments, including three World Heritage Sites, Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri, delivered a court ban on the use of coal/coke in industries located in the TTZ, the ruling has failed to halt the increased air pollution in the zone. Last month, The Supreme Court ordered the state government of Uttar Pradesh to produce a ‘vision document’ outlining its plan for protecting this new wonder of the modern world alongside the National Green Tribunal which has sought a response from the Archaeological Survey of India on why the TTZ ruling has not had any affect on the pollution problem in regard to the related buildings.

News in Brief

FREER SACKLER AWARD
The Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M Sackler Gallery have been awarded a grant of more than US$1 million from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea. During the five-year programme, two masterworks from the National Museum of Korea will be on exhibit, senior scholars will be in residence and the Freer/Sackler’s annual Korean Film Festival and other public programmes will contribute to raising the profile of Korean art and culture on the National Mall. The first masterwork exhibition will be held in 2019 at the Freer/Sackler.

SANJUSANGENDO HALL, KYOTO
Preservation and repair work has now been completed on all 1,001 statues of 1,000-armed Kannon bodhisattva at Kyoto’s Sanjusangendo Hall, ending a 45-year wait. The preservation and repair work on the statues, designated as important cultural properties, started in 1973, using the Cultural Affairs Agency’s subsidy programme for such properties and national treasures. Annually, between 15 and 30 statues were overhauled, but about 40 per year were repaired starting in 2013. The work mainly involved cleaning off dust and preventing gold foil from peeling off the reliefs, the oldest of which date from the latter years of the Heian Period (794 to 1185).

HAN-DYNASTY MIRROR, JAPAN
Archaeologists in Japan have unearthed a 1,900-year-old Chinese mirror that is not only still intact, but well-preserved enough to still show a faint reflection. City officials in Fukuoka commented that such a discovery is extremely rare, according to Japanese national newspaper the Asahi Shimbun.

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Asian Art editors

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The Taj Mahal, on the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra, continues its long battle against pollution and the fight to control its burgeoning visitor numbers.
sculpture was in an Italian private collection in 1976 and sold in these two exhibitions (est $1,000,000-1,500,000). A very elegant 13th-century bronze figure of Buddha Shakyamuni on a lion throne, Tibet, 12th century, weighed 12.3 oz, on est $800/1,200,000, Sotheby’s.

**SOOTHEY’S**

**The Chew Family Collection of Chinese Paintings & Calligraphy Thursday, 22 March, 5pm**

Joan Wu, the last daughter of a general who was assassinated in the early 1940’s in the US, where she studied at USC and met and married Thomas Chew. They settled in Hong Kong where she studied at the Chinese Art Centre and ran the Dharma House. They got to know the famous and very prolific modern artist Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) who lived in Carmel in the 1960s and 1970s. The Chews received two classical paintings and eleven of his own works from Zhang and acquired others from local collectors and from sources in Taiwan. After many years abroad as a follower of Mother Teresa, their daughter, Frances Chew aki Sister Acha returned to Carmel to look after her mother until her death in 2014, and passed away in 2017. Practically their entire collection is offered here. A large horizontal Zhang Daqian Splashed landscape painting in ink and color on paper, signed Yuanweng and dated 1459 (1868), now the most sought after type among his works, and which has never been exhibited or published, is likely to attract the most attention (est $300,000-400,000).

**Gilt-bronze figure of Buddha Shakyamuni on a lion throne, Tibet, 12th century, weight 12.3 oz, on est $800/1,200,000, Sotheby’s.**

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**SOTHEBY’S**

**Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy, Friday, 22 March, 10am & 2pm**

**Approximately 230 lots, est $7,200,000-10,000,000**

The sale is evenly divided between calligraphy and painting. Over 60 per cent of the works are modern works with numerous works by Zhang Daqian, Pu Ru, and other major modern artists. The two top lots are hanging scrolls in ink and colour on paper by late Qing master Wu Changshuo (1844-1927). One depicts Plum Blossom, the other Pine and Gardenia. Each has a $400,000-600,000 estimate. A calligraphy handscroll of poems in cursive script by the eminent Ming-dynasty calligrapher and calligrapher Wen Peng (1499-1573), son of the artist Wen Zhengming, dated 1560, has the seals of the artist and colophons by Xiang Haping (1890-1978) and Wang Yinzhuang (1937-1991). The estimate is $120/160,000.

There are several sequences of single owner Chinese-American collections of paintings. The 12 lots from the Willoughby and Juliana Koo Collection combine paintings and calligraphy, and a set of six, framed Six Shi Poems in Running Script in ink on paper by Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) is very interesting because the artist had given it to Li Hanhuang, the elder brother of Li Hongzhang who became Prime Minister ($600,000-800,000). The classical and modern painting collection of noted scholar and professor of Chinese art history at the University of Kansas, Dr Chu-tung-Li, is divided between this sale and Saturday’s (30 lots in each). Many modern paintings from the Tai Jingrong Family collection were acquired directly from the artists by this well-known Taiwan calligrapher (1902-1999) and have sterling provenance. **SOTHEBY’S Saturday at Sotheby’s: Asian Art Saturday, 24 March, 10am**

**Approximately 230 lots, est $1,300,000-2,300,000**

This sale has continued to be very well received, and this time it will proceed without a session break. About three-quarters (300 lots) is devoted to Chinese ceramics and works of art with some furniture (12 lots) and a few textiles (10 QIng-dynasty dragon robes, framed and paired) and an early 18th-century QIng-dynasty carpet. A small selection of 30 snuff bottles as well as a similar number of jades and handkerchief carvings rounds out the Chinese works of art section. One of the earlier pieces of furniture is an 18th-19th century Qing-dynasty huanghuali Ming-style side table. The 12 lots are $400/600,000 estimate. A calligraphy hanging scroll in ink and colour on paper by Pu Ru, and other major modern artists. The two top lots are hanging scrolls in ink and colour on paper by late Qing master Wu Changshuo (1844-1927). One depicts Plum Blossom, the other Pine and Gardenia. Each has a $400,000-600,000 estimate. A calligraphy handscroll of poems in cursive script by the eminent Ming-dynasty calligrapher and calligrapher Wen Peng (1499-1573), son of the artist Wen Zhengming, dated 1560, has the seals of the artist and colophons by Xiang Haping (1890-1978) and Wang Yinzhuang (1937-1991). The estimate is $120/160,000.

This year Sotheby’s has two selling exhibitions. The first, *Liu Chen: The World Comes to Him*, is devoted to the work of painter, teacher, curator and cultural advocate Liu Chen (1905-1995). Born in Peking, he moved to Hong Kong at the age of five and never returned to the rest of his life. His work was very influential in the development of 20th-century Chinese art and reflected the numerous outside influences he was exposed to through his reading of Classic and western texts. The 29 paintings spanning six decades range from Western-style oils and watercolours, to Chinese ink landscapes and collages and encapsulate life in Hong Kong during Chiang’s time. The second exhibition, *The Great Pagodas*, shows 30 photographs chosen by author and photography historian, Clark Worwicz. Worwicz had photographed the great pagodas of China, India, and Nepal, among other places. His book, *The Great Pagodas of India*, was published in 1987. The 30 photographs were captured during the Tang dynasty, music was an important item at court and the all-female orchestra, to a widespread discontent over his dereliction of his duties caused a provincial governor An Lushan to revolt. He did so, declared himself the first emperor of Xian and began his march on the capital, Chang’an. Ming Huang was forced to flee to Sichuan, together with his entire family, including Yang Guifei, but the entire entourage were blocked by Tibetan soldiers. The soldiers, allies of An, demanded her death, at which the emperor, now weeping profusely, ordered his chief eunuch to string her with a piece of yellow silk. A year later, he was allowed to return to Chang’an (present-day Xian), where he remained as ‘Retired Emperor’ for the rest of his life. This topic of this tragic love story is not unfamiliar to us. The story of lovers being torn apart is told from ancient times, and seen in the West as Dido and Anna and Romeo and Juliette.

Apart from the centrepiece Ming-dynasty handscroll, the museum has added some 25 contextual works of art, including numerous musical instruments, a Tang sancai-glazed equestrian figure, other tomb sculptures, and characters by Shi Xiu, Ohakuma Masahiro, Hokkei and Harunobu. During the Tang dynasty, music was an important art form at court and contributed to the widespread discontent over his dereliction of his duties caused a provincial governor An Lushan to revolt. He did so, declared himself the first emperor of Xian and began his march on the capital, Chang’an. Ming Huang was forced to flee to Sichuan, together with his entire family, including Yang Guifei, but the entire entourage were blocked by Tibetan soldiers. The soldiers,