

A COMPLETE MAP OF THE WORLD

This small, focused exhibition uses a rare woodblock print to look at the convergence of China and Europe – Ma Junliang’s map of the world, *Jingban tianwen quantu*. It is a starting point to consider the interaction between China and Europe and highlights the consequences of these cross-cultural encounters.

The map offers viewers a Chinese perspective about power and the nature of the world with China at the centre. Unique in scope, *Capital Edition of a Complete Map (of the World Based on) Astronomy* illustrates the nature of intellectual exchange between imperial China and European Jesuit missionaries in the late 18th century. The map itself is a one-sheet compilation of three very different maps combining Eastern and Western understanding of the

world. The two smaller maps at the top incorporate historical maps from European and Asian sources and act as a testament to sharing knowledge in the 18th century. The larger map is Ma’s rendition of the Qing-dynasty empire and beyond, which details mountain ranges, rivers, lakes, and deserts. It includes overland travel routes and even prominent landmarks like the Great Wall and offers a historical statement of power that places China at the world’s centre that still resonates today. Also on view are 18th-century decorative objects that feature novel combinations of Chinese and European imagery that reveal the results of scientific and technical exchanges between skilled craftsmen at Chinese court.

In the 18th century, the

Qing dynasty reached its greatest geographical expanse, extending its control in the southwest as well as including large portions of Central Asia. Increased Chinese imperial interaction with the outside world and interest in western scientific and technical knowledge from the late 16th through the 18th centuries led to an expansion of geographic knowledge and significant engagement with European learning. Combining Eastern and Western studies, including exchanging knowledge of astronomy, geometry, physics, medicine, and anatomy, both Chinese and European cartographers were able to fill great gaps in their understanding of the world.

Contact with Europe led to the presence and later the employment of Jesuits at the Qing court. The main goal of

these European priests was the conversion of the Chinese to Catholicism. Their knowledge, scientific implements, and works of decorative art were also of great interest to Chinese rulers. Imperial workshops, in part manned by Jesuits, included a glass works, an armoury, a clock manufacturer, precious metal and stone works, a lacquer and wood works, an enamel workshop, and a map workshop.

The decorative and functional objects on view in this exhibition provide a unique inroad for examining the results of cross-cultural encounters. Snuff, tobacco that was ground into powdered form and spiced with aromatic substances, had become popular in China by this period and elites even believed the powder had



Snuff bottle, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–95), painted enamel on copper.

Metropolitan Museum of Art: Bequest of Edmund C Converse, 1921 © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY

medicinal properties. Production of cunning and artful bottles to properly store and dispense snuff in China’s humid climate reached aesthetic and technological

heights by the second half of the 18th century. The three snuff containers embellished with exotic images of Europeans, on display in the exhibition, are all examples of this skill.

At the same time, renewed interest in glass production on the part of the Chinese court, coupled with the Jesuits’ need for optical glass for scientific instruments, led to the introduction and development of new glass manufacturing techniques. These included overlay glass and diamond-point engraving as seen in an overlaid cameo glass vase in the exhibition.

The show is part of Asia Society’s *In Focus* series, which invites viewers to take an in-depth look at a single, significant work of art and explore its context.

• A Complete Map of the World, The Eighteenth-Century Convergence of China and Europe, until 5 May, Asia Society, asiasoc.org

MF HUSAIN Art and the Nation

One of the founding members of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group, MF Husain created the iconic mural-sized painting, *Lightning*, for then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s Congress Party public rally in 1975, the same year that a state of emergency was

imposed across India. The twelve massive panels that comprise the work were painted with great energy and force, are littered with visual references to India and the 1970s, and though absent visually, to Indira Gandhi. Ironically, by the 1970s, Husain’s alignments



Detail from *Lightning* (1975) by MF Husain, oil on canvas, 3 x 18 m, Marguerite and Kent Charugundla Collection. Photo courtesy of Tamarind Art.

with the political leader resulted in the loss of support of some members of the intelligentsia and artistic community. In the following decades, the rise of the Hindu right closed off the artistic strategies that made creating this work possible for Husain, which ultimately led to his exile from India.

• MF Husain: Art and the Nation, until 4 August, Asia Society, asiasoc.org

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RADICALISM IN THE WILDERNESS

This is the first full-scale exhibition focusing on the radical experiments of Japanese artists in the 1960s. Centering on Matsuzawa Yutaka and art collectives The Play and GUN (Group Ultra Niigata), the exhibition charts their contributions toward disrupting and ‘dematerialising’ existing artmaking conventions in the global postwar era. *Radicalism in the Wilderness* showcases the artists’ revolutionary, boundary-defying conceptual works from the decade, which expanded the definition of ‘visual art’ through language, performance, mail art, land art, and political art. To be able to explore thoroughly this theme, Japan Society has drawn extensively from institutional and private holdings, as well as from the personal collections of the artists.

Throughout the 1960s, the imaginative and innovative works by Matsuzawa, The Play, and GUN figuratively and literally explored the

concept of ‘wilderness’. From the remote landscapes and settings selected for many of their performances and conceptual works, notably far outside metropolitan Tokyo, these artists strategically positioned themselves at the vanguard of a new global movement in radical experimentalism by seeking the theoretical foundation of their work outside conventional artmaking and the institution of art. The irreverent and playful conceptual experiments of these artists were informed by and responded to the complex social, political, and cultural issues of the 1960s, such as the Apollo Space Programme, Vietnam War, and the international student protests around the world.

As Dr Reiko Tomi, co-curator of the exhibition explained, ‘1960s Japan is an exciting place in the study of postwar modernism. The state of international contemporaneity was embodied



Gun, Event to Change the Image of Snow (1970), photograph by Hanaga Mitsutoshi, photo panel, 100 x 100 cm

by many strains of practices found not just in Tokyo, but also in outside regions, which I call the “wilderness”, where artists devised alternative strategies departing from the mainstream and metropolitan modes of contemporary art. Significantly, these artists achieved global relevance by drawing on their local contexts, although that was barely recognized at the time’. Dr Tomi is author of the related book, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art*

in Japan (MIT Press, 2016), on which the exhibition is based.

Taken together, the bodies of work by these artists bridge national and trans-national art histories, deconstructing a Eurocentric point of view and play a crucial role in establishing the concept of international contemporaneity as the new, post-object-based paradigm for postwar art.

• *Radicalism in the Wilderness: Japanese Artists in the Global 1960s*, until 9 June, at Japan Society Gallery, japansociety.org

FROM MECCA TO SUFI SHRINES

Curated by Yousuf Saeed, an independent filmmaker and researcher based in India, the exhibition features the ephemeral objects and devotional art produced for popular consumption in the Islamic world, in particular in South Asia. Included are

mass-printed Islamic posters and calendar art from India and Pakistan, which often depict images of the Hajj pilgrimage; South Asian Sufi shrines and saints; and calligraphy and talismans linked to other religious faiths found in the region. The exhibition raises the

question of why such vibrant visual cultures continue to thrive in the South Asian Islamic world despite the scepticism and suspicion of Islamic authorities on popular art’s legitimacy, as well as why images and popular culture are inevitabilities for popular piety

despite orthodox Muslims’ increasing dissociation from them.

• *From Mecca to Sufi Shrines: Islamic Poster Art from South Asia*, from 13 March to 5 May, at the Charles B Wang Center Skylight Gallery, Stony Brook, New York, stonybrook.edu