



SOCIETY FOR ASIAN ART PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2024-2025

This has been a year which has seen a small uptick in our programs as more members have been attending many of our activities, in-person and on Zoom. As we continue with the ever-popular Arts of Asia lecture series, the Events Committee has organized presentations on a variety of subjects from art to culture and visits to art galleries and antique shops as well as other cultural and fun places. The in-depth Study group continues to host long-form events, plus the Literature and Culture group's dedicated followers continue to enjoy a series of highly stimulating presentations by a wide range of scholars. The Society's Travel program continued to be sold out, with travel to exotic places like Paris, Copenhagen and Sri Lanka and within the US to visit special exhibitions.

We hope that this trend continues as our group of dedicated Board members bring you programs for your enjoyment and furthering of knowledge.

Besides our educational and cultural programs, the Society organized their customary Annual Book Sale which took place over four days from Thursday to Sunday in April. All proceeds from the Book Sale go to support the Museum's Library. Saturday evening was special this year as it coincided with the Museum and Public Library having a "Night of Ideas" which brought over 4,000 people into the Museum from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. This gave our Book Sale a big boost and greater exposure in the wider community. The Society also has a presence on social media – Facebook and Instagram--with followers increasing every day.

The Society is grateful to all of you, our members, for your support and encouragement and for attending the Society's programs. The Board works hard for you, and in turn we ask that you keep attending our programs and maintain your membership as well as encouraging others to join this organization that has been in existence for 67 years. Last but not least, the Society Office is efficiently run by our Office Manager, Susan Lai, and we thank her for her efforts and hard work.

With our heartfelt thanks to all of you,

Nazneen Spliedt
President

COMMITTEE REPORTS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Arts of Asia

The Arts of Asia lecture series consists of two series per year, each consisting of 14 speakers giving lectures filled with images on topics related to Asian themes. Each series is designed and organized by the Arts of Asia committee and an Instructor of Record, usually a member of the Asian Art Museum's curatorial staff or a faculty member from UC Berkeley.

The Fall 2024 series was titled *Beyond the Familiar: A Deeper Look into The Asian Art Museum Collection*. Chief Curatorial Director, Rob Mintz, was Instructor of Record. The series focused on the contributions of fresh ideas about objects in our collection by new curators and scholars recently associated with the Museum as well as Museum veterans.

The Spring 2025 series was titled *Visualizing the Divine* and included a lecture titled "Contemporary Nepali Art: Connecting the Past and Present" by our visiting Fulbright Scholar, Swosti Kayastha who is from Nepal. Swosti's lecture was very well received and our audience, both in-person and on Zoom, was supplemented by a large number of members of the Bay Area Nepali community. The series included other lectures on Zoroastrianism, Hindu deities, Buddhism and Egyptology.

We are hoping to include lectures centered on important exhibits in the museum as a regular practice in the Arts of Asia series, benefitting the docent community as well as museum visitors. The schedule of lectures for the two 2025 series is available on the Society for Asian Art website as are the schedules of speakers and topics from past series, in the Arts of Asia archive section.

Susan Lai, office manager for the SAA does vital organizational and communications work and prepares the beautiful announcement slides before and after the lectures and during the break. The Audio-Visual crew has been invaluable since we started broadcasting the lectures via Zoom during the pandemic. Our AV crew consists of **John O'Shea**, AV Manager, and AV Techs **Parish Braca**, **Jonathan Covey**, **Ted Desmarais**, and **Michael Mersereau**, who also edits all videos. John O'Shea



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and Michael Mersereau are also responsible for musical selections before the lecture and during the break. The Arts of Asia Committee consists of co-chairs **Larry Mock** and **Edith Benay, Peggy Mathers**, whose voice can be heard most weeks during the Q&A period following the lecture, **John Kouletsis, Daniel Raybin** and **Charita Thakkar**.

Literature and Culture of Asia

The Literature and Culture of Asia Committee presented a three-meeting series in Fall 2024 entitled *In Pursuit of Qu Yuan*, the 3rd century BCE Chinese poet and statesman from the Chu Kingdom during the Warring States Period (legend also associates him with the founding of the Dragon Boat Festival). Dr. Paula Varsano, the speaker, led guided discussions on history and legend, poetry, and cultural responses to this complicated figure.

The Spring 2025 series was entitled *History of Heaven*, a four-meeting series given by Dr. Brian Baumann, which viewed Heaven as the source of orientation in space and time, providing humanity with the foundation of its knowledge and political order. His lectures, held in Koret, were on Cosmogony, Soteriology, Allegory, and Time.

In Fall 2025 we will have a presentation on the 16th century Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, attributed to Wu Cheng'en. This is the source work for San Francisco Opera's upcoming *The Monkey King*. Dr. Ling Hon Lam will give two two-hour lectures on October 26 in Koret.

The committee is chaired by **Russell Wadbrook**, with co-chair **Irene Schaefer**, and committee members **Gloria Garaventa, Daniel Raybin**, and **Pamela Royse**.

Study Group

The Study Group Committee aims to organize full day or half-day events and workshops that delve deeply into various topics of interest to our members. In March 2025, Study Groups organized a well-received lecture by Professor Robert Sharf, of UC Berkeley, on Japanese Buddhism. The next scheduled event was a site visit on May 10 to the Wat Dhammararam Buddhist Temple's Sculpture Garden in Stockton with scholar M. L. Pattaratorn Chirapravati to explore the traditions of Cambodian Hindu and Theravada Buddhist iconography.

The Study Group Committee is chaired by **Debbie Wong Ottman** and co-chaired by **Kalim Winata**, with members **Jim Brown** and **Tom Ihrig**.

EVENTS FOR MEMBERS

Member Events

The Member Events Committee is chaired by **Nazneen Spliedt**. Members of the committee are **Margaret Booker, Lynne Brewer, Jim Brown, Kalpana Desai, Annie Dorsey, Anne Ewins, Anne Adams Kahn, Phyllis Kempner, Debbie Wong Ottman, Ehler Spliedt**, and **Graeme Vanderstoel**.

During the past year the committee has decided to try and hold at least one event a month, both in-person talks at the museum as well as on Zoom, and has organized visits to temples and art galleries, including other local museums and places of interest showcasing Asian art and culture. We had speakers from the Bay Area as well as from around the country and overseas including curators, Society Advisors and experts in various fields.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, the committee organized twelve plus presentations in person and/or on Zoom covering a broad range of topics from ancient to contemporary art, culture, and history and talks by living authors one of whom was Viet Than Ngyuen. Most activities were well received though the audience numbers are declining. The committee also organized a Spring Dinner at Fang Restaurant and a Holiday Party at Zentner's Gallery and arranged for the catering at the Annual Meeting and Reception.

Upper Category Member Events

The Upper Category Member Events Committee provides programs for SAA members at the Contributor, Donor and Sponsor levels. The committee co-chairs are **Anne Adams Kahn** and **Trista Berkovitz** with members **Sheila Dowell, Nancy Jacobs, Candace Zander Kahn, Phyllis Kempner, Ehler Spliedt**, and **Charita Thakkar**.

The fall season began with a talk in a private Marin home by Suzanne Lecht, the founder and owner of the famous Art Vietnam Gallery in Hanoi, who spoke about her personal collection of Vietnamese art. Next up was the annual Sponsor program which took place in September in another private Marin home. This year's Sponsor program featured former AAM Wattis Curator of South Asian and Southeast Asian Art, Forrest McGill, who discussed an unusual 15th century Thai ceramic



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in the AAM's collection.

Winter programs included the annual Donor-Sponsor program which was held in January at a private home in the East Bay. This program featured former journalist and AAM docent, Peter Sinton, who revealed how he and his wife, Beverly Sinton, began collecting Japanese fukusa. Another winter program was a Society Conversation in March at a private home in San Francisco where Fulbright scholar Swosti Kayastha explained how she began studying Nepalese art and described her current research on Nepali artists in the Bay Area.

Final programs this spring were a Society Conversation in a private San Francisco home in April with Berkeley professor Mark Blum speaking about the early development of Buddhist art in Japan and a visit to the Paul Thiebaud Gallery in North Beach in May to view works by contemporary Asian American artists.

Travel

The Travel Committee is chaired by **Marsha Vargas Handley**, with members **Ed Baer, Neaera Baer, Lynne Brewer, Kalpana Desai, Sheila Dowell, Kalena Gregory, Mark Gross, Mary Hunt, Anne Adams Kahn, Bianca Larson, Sharon Roe, and Gail Uilkema**.

SAA Travel's first trip of the fiscal year was to Copenhagen and Stockholm from August 9-20, 2024 followed by a trip to Seattle from September 24-27. 2025 started off with a very successful trip to Sri Lanka from January 18 to February 3 to visit a number of UNESCO World Heritage sites as well as to enjoy the beautiful country. The last trip this fiscal year was a trip to Minneapolis from May 12-16. The coming fiscal year has another trip to Mongolia from July 2-18, a trip to Los Angeles from September 15-20 and a trip to Thailand January 13-23, 2026 with the scholar Julian Brown. Watch the Newsletter for Save the Date announcements and when the trips will be offered for registration.

PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Library/Book Sale

The Library Committee is chaired by **Kirk Gibson**, assisted by **Ehler Spliedt**. The SAA continued its support of the AAM library with a monthly donation of \$1,500, for a total of \$18,000 for the year. This money helps buy new books and subscriptions to a wide variety of periodicals.

The committee, assisted by a wonderful group of volunteers, organized the Annual Book Sale which took place in the Loggia of the museum on April 3 – 6, 2025. It was a 4-day book sale and included a First Free Sunday at the museum, as well as two major events open to the public. This year's sale netted over \$14,000. The entire proceeds were donated to the AAM library as part of the SAA's annual donation to the museum.

Newsletter

The Newsletter Committee edits and publishes the bi-monthly SAA Newsletter, which informs members of ongoing SAA activities and ways to register for them. The latest issue can be found on the SAA website. The Newsletter is now only offered digitally. The Newsletter Committee is chaired by **Janet Constantinou** and joined by co-editor **Susan Lai**.

Social Media

During the past year, The Social Media Committee's activities have focused on growing our following on Instagram and Facebook. As of this writing, we have 267 Facebook followers and 754 Instagram followers. Some of these followers are individuals, and some are organizations. While our core followers are our own members, the majority are new people attracted by our posts about the Arts of Asia lectures and pictures of our SAA trips. The Arts of Asia posts are scheduled to appear on the feeds on the Monday preceding each Friday lecture. The Office Manager forwards images from the lecturers that are delivering the lectures. In the absence of lecturers' images, we use open-source images that mirror material that will be covered in the upcoming lecture. Other posts go up as is timely after trips or before other SAA programs. Occasionally, we "boost" (pay for additional exposure to non-followers).

We thank each of our members who follows our Social Media Instagram and Facebook feeds and encourage others to do so. Of the two feeds, Instagram gives us the most exposure to new people from varied demographics.

The committee is chaired by **Candace Zander Kahn**, with member **Anne Katz**.



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DEVELOPMENT AND OUTREACH

Advisors

The Advisors Committee interacts with SAA Advisors and maintains the list of the Advisory Board. This year we added 2 new Advisors on the list, with a total of 23 Advisors on the Board and 2 advisors emeriti. Forrest McGill and Laura Allen were invited to join this Board on their retirement from the Asian Art Museum. The committee always welcomes recommendations, particularly of scholars from fields not already represented.

The committee arranged an annual lunch for the Advisors hosted by the SAA Board in the Peterson Room at the museum. The Advisors and all board members always look forward to this opportunity to meet in person and interact with each other.

The committee is chaired by **Nazneen Spliedt**, with members **Jeanne Dorward**, and **Pamela Royse**. This year we added two members to the committee, **Larry Mock** and **Russell Wadbrook**.

Membership

Membership in the SAA declined over the past year by 37 members, from 416 to 379, about a 9% decrease. The decrease in membership is due to (1) discontinuation of the docent education program that required docents to obtain membership in the SAA and (2) deaths and incapacity of members. The committee predicts this decreasing membership trend will continue at a pace of 10% per year, based on this year and last year's experiences.

We continue to try various initiatives to expand membership. In September we collaborated with the Museum and the Member Events Committee in presenting a program for children and their parents featuring a new children's book, *Simone*, by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Viet Thanh Nguyen, author of *The Sympathizer* (now an HBO mini-series), and his illustrator, Minnie Phan. The program drew at least 50 adults and more than a dozen children, many of whom had not visited the Museum or attended an SAA program.

We also have placed requests in our bi-monthly Newsletter that Members encourage their friends and family members to join the SAA so that they can learn and travel together.

We are in the process of making a prototype stand-alone sign to be placed in various locations in the Museum that would encourage Museum-goers to also join the SAA with a QR code directly on the sign. The Museum would need to approve the signage, but we are hopeful they will do so.

We are also continuing our outreach to possible members from out of town through initiatives such as our new Out of Region category of membership. This category allows SAA members to view lectures online without having to pay an AAM membership fee.

The Membership Committee is chaired by **Julia Molander**, joined by member **Janet Constantinou**.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Bylaws and Operating Procedures

The committee periodically updates the SAA Operating Procedures, Bylaws and Policies to keep them current and accurate. During this fiscal year, the Bylaws were examined and changes are being considered for review by the full SAA Board.

The committee is chaired by Secretary **Anne Katz**, with member **Julia Molander**.

Finance

Buoyed by positive financial market conditions during the first seven months of fiscal year 2024–2025, SAA equity continues to grow, posting a \$285,000 gain in total assets. However, future economic conditions remain uncertain. Continued inflation combined with a slowdown in unemployment has resulted in increased market volatility. Under the leadership of our Investment Chair **Sandra Pan**, the Society's portfolio is well positioned to minimize any long-term market decline.

In addition to our investment portfolio, the Society receives financial support from both individual donations as well as our Annual Book Sale, which in 2024 generated over \$13,000. All funds from the Book Sale are donated to the museum. This is over and above our \$1,500 monthly contribution to the museum's library fund.



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The Finance Committee meets monthly, usually on the third Wednesday of every month, the week before our monthly Board meeting. In addition to Treasurer **Jim Brown** and Assistant Treasurer **Dan Raybin**, committee members include Interim Board President **Nazneen Spliedt**, Vice President **Julia Molander**, Investment Committee Chair **Sandra Pan**, former Board Presidents **Gloria Garaventa**, **Marsha Vargas Handley**, and **Ehler Spliedt**, and former Treasurer **Ed Baer**.

Investment

The Investment Committee, led by Chairperson **Sandra Pan**, meets quarterly to review the status of SAA investments. Committee members include Treasurer **Jim Brown**, **Trista Berkovitz**, **Julia Molander**, and **Howard Moreland**. Former President **Gloria Garaventa** also participates in discussions.

The portfolio has undergone a transition from the First Republic Wealth Management Platform to JPM Wealth Management. Throughout this process, our advisor has provided steadfast guidance, working closely with the committee to implement investments from the bequest received in 2023. As a result, we successfully allocated the proceeds in alignment with our 60/40 asset allocation target.

In the fall of 2024, upon the Investment Committee's recommendation and with board approval, we restructured the two investment accounts to better align them with their respective purposes and goals. As of year-end, the General Portfolio maintains a 60/40 allocation, while the Stout Account—designed for long-term growth and more closely resembling an endowment—now targets a 65/35 allocation.

Both portfolios have performed well, reaching one of the highest combined values in our investment history while effectively supporting the Society's donation and operating needs.