

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

For immediate release

***Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees* highlights Spencer's remarkable Asian textiles collection**

Through May 28, 2006

Kress Gallery

MEDIA CONTACT

Mary Dusenbury, Guest Curator of Asian Art, 785.864.0143, mdusen@ku.edu

Bill Woodard, Director of Communications, 785.864.0142, dradoowb@ku.edu

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Lawrence, KS— Stacked in boxes and accessible only by ladder, the Asian textile collection at the Spencer Museum was virtually hidden from public view for almost eighty years. *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees*, an exhibition on view through May 28 in the Kress Gallery, is the result of fifteen years of quiet work behind the scenes to research, clean, conserve, re-house, photograph, publish and exhibit this little known section of the museum's collections.

The exhibition is made possible by the generosity of the David Woods Kemper Memorial Foundation, the Breidenthal-Snyder Foundation, Dave and Gunda Hiebert, the Kansas Arts Commission, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Additional support provided by corporate sponsor The World Company.

In Asia, textiles were important. Worth their weight in gold, luxury silks traversed the trade routes that linked East Asia with the Mediterranean, carrying technical knowledge and new design ideas within their structures. A venerated Buddhist abbot's robe was believed to incorporate his essence and, long after his death, was preserved as a sacred treasure by his followers. In northwest India, women embellished and protected their households and family with layers of embroidered textiles whose strong colors and vibrant patterns stood in sharp contrast to the surrounding desert. A lively interplay (and competition) between designers and craftsmen in Kashmir, France, and Great Britain transformed a simple man's sash into the opulent woman's Kashmir shawl that remained at the height of fashion for an astonishing 75 years, throughout most of the nineteenth century.

The Spencer's Asian textile collection represents great geographical breadth as well as diversity of function, technique, and patronage. The approximately 300 objects include court, merchant, military, theatrical, and folk costume, temple and household furnishings, and numerous discrete pieces of complex weaving, embroidery, and dyeing. The textiles range in date from the fifteenth to the late twentieth century. The largest number come from China, followed by Japan, the Indian subcontinent, Iran, Indonesia, Central and West Asia, and Korea.

The exhibition focuses on 90 textiles from India, Iran, China and Japan, including:

- Persian velvets and brocades
- Kashmir shawls
- Embroideries of northwest India and Pakistan
- Chinese court/official costume and Han and Manchu women's formal and informal dress
- Buddhist and Daoist costume and temple furnishings
- Japanese cotton and bast fiber costume, furnishings, and festival textiles

Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees started innocuously enough in 1990, when then-director Andrea S. Norris asked Mary Dusenbury, guest curator of the exhibition and author of the accompanying catalogue, to look at the collection and perhaps do a bit of research on one or two of the most important objects. Dusenbury's sleuthing quickly expanded when the depth, breadth and quality of the collection became apparent. Dusenbury says that she remembers that one of the first things she requested was a file cabinet and boxes and boxes of file folders. Although there were brief records in the registrar's office, there were almost no curatorial files—the museum's central file where basic information and current research about each object is kept.

The core of the Asian textile collection was part of Sallie Casey Thayer's original 1917 gift to the University of Kansas of 7,500 objects of Western and Asian art—a gift that founded the KU art museum. Throughout the twentieth century, the Asian textile collection grew almost exclusively through occasional gifts—some magnificent, others modest—until the 1990s, when the museum actively began to seek out a few key objects.

The Spencer received a great deal of support for conserving, researching, photographing and publishing the collection. We are grateful to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Japan Foundation, the Getty Grant Program, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and the Blakemore Foundation. The exhibition will remain on view through May 28.

The exhibition catalogue, published in fall 2004 by Hudson Hills Press, is available for purchase in the Spencer's Museum Shop. The shop is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 AM to 4:30 PM (Thursday until 8:30 PM) and Sunday from noon to 4:30 PM.

Programming: *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees*

All events are FREE and open to the public unless otherwise noted (\$).

LECTURES / 7 PM / SMA Auditorium

February 9 / Mary Dusenbury, guest curator, on "Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees: The Making of an Exhibition" / Reception follows in the Central Court

April 20 / Carol Bier, on "From Classical to Conventional: Evolution of the Persian Carpet" / Bier is a research associate for Islamic textiles at The Textile Museum in Washington, DC

GALLERY TALKS / Kress Gallery

February 18 / Mary Dusenbury, guest curator / 12:30 PM

February 23 / Mary Dusenbury, guest curator / 12:15 PM

FILM SERIES / SMA Auditorium

Embroidered Cinema: Textiles & Textures in Asian Films

February 12 / *Weeping Camel* / 3 PM / Co-sponsored with the Center for East Asian Studies
Set in Mongolia's Gobi region, *Weeping Camel* is an enchanting story of cultural wonder that follows the adventures of a family of herders.

February 16 / *The Last Emperor* / 6 PM
This lavish epic recounts the life of the last Emperor of China, Pu Yi.

February 23 / *Bride and Prejudice* / 7 PM
Bollywood-style music, dance and spectacle merge with love, vanity and social pressures in Indian version of Jane Austen's classic romance "Pride and Prejudice."

March 9 / *Taste of Cherry* / 7 PM
This sublime and deceptively simple parable follows a middle-aged man who has decided to end his life. Driving through the hilly outskirts of Tehran, Iran in search of someone who will bury him if he succeeds or rescue him if he fails.

April 27 / *Memoirs of a Geisha* / 7 PM
Set in a mysterious and exotic world which still casts a potent spell today, the story begins in the years before World War II, when a Japanese child is torn from her penniless family to work as a servant in a geisha house.

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Family Days: 1-3 PM / SMA Central Court & Galleries

- February 12 / "Chinese Lanterns" / Hands-on activities include a rice-paper lantern making in honor of the Chinese Lantern Festival on February 13
- April 9 / "Shibori" / Learn about a traditional Japanese tie-dyeing technique in Asian textiles and enjoy hands-on projects for the whole family

Children's Art Appreciation classes / 10:30 AM & 1:30 PM / \$ / Pre-registration required / Contact Karen Gerety, education department, at 785.864.0137, kcgerety@ku.edu

- February 25 / "Symbols in Stitches" / Learn about symbols in the exhibition ***Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees: Asian Textiles in the Spencer Museum of Art*** and experiment with basic stitching techniques to make an embroidered imaginary animal
- April 1 / "Playing with Pattern" / Learn about patterns in the exhibition ***Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees: Asian Textiles in the Spencer Museum of Art*** and use stencils to decorate a fabric collage

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

February 18 / Educator workshop on *Furoshiki* / 10:30 AM / Pre-registration required / Contact Randi Hacker rhacker@ku.edu 785.864.3832 / Co-sponsored by the Center for East Asian Studies

March 3 / Town & Gown Forum: "Cloth, Culture, and Cosmos" / 9 AM – 12 PM / SMA Kress Gallery / Co-sponsored by the Hall Center for the Humanities

April 12, 19, & 26 / KU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute: "Cloth and Culture" / 3-5 PM / \$ /Mary Dusenbury instructor / Class sponsored by KU Continuing Education / Enrollment required / Contact University of Kansas Continuing Education, 785.864.KUCE(5823) www.kuce.org or kuce@ku.edu

April 21 / "Bring in Your Textiles" / 12 PM / SMA Central Court / Rug and textiles appreciation afternoon with Carol Bier and Mary Dusenbury / Visitors are encouraged to bring in their rugs or textiles and meet with experts in the field.

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Spencer Museum of Art

The University of Kansas

1301 Mississippi St

Lawrence 66045-7500

785.864.4710

Also find the Spencer...

- **On the Web:** www.spencerart.ku.edu
- **E-mail:** spencerart@ku.edu

Gallery hours

Tues., Wed., Fri., & Saturday 10 AM—5 PM

Thurs. 10 AM—9 PM

Sun. Noon—5 PM

Closed Monday

Museum Shop closes 30 minutes before the galleries close.

- **Free parking in Lot 91 after 5 PM on weekdays and all day weekends, excepting home football games.**
- **Parking garage adjacent to Kansas Union is \$1 per hour weekdays, free on Saturdays and Sundays (but unavailable on home football games).**