

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

MEDIA RELEASE

Curator Mary M. Dusenbury to discuss challenges of creating *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees* exhibition

Quest to conserve, photograph, augment, publish and present the Spencer's world-class collection of Asian textiles began in 1990

LECTURE: Thursday, February 9, 2006 / 7 PM / SMA Auditorium / Free admission

EXHIBITION: On view through May 28 in the Kress Gallery and South Balcony Gallery

MEDIA CONTACT

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Lawrence, KS — The opening last week of the exhibition *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees: Asian Textiles in the Spencer Museum of Art* culminated a long-term museum project to bring this little-known but spectacular collection into full relief and greater perspective. Next Thursday, Feb. 9, at 7 PM in the SMA Auditorium, **guest curator of Asian art Mary M. Dusenbury** will speak on the topic "**Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees: The Making of an Exhibition,**" offering a revealing and entertaining behind-the-scenes story of how this superlative collection of Asian textiles has been acquired, preserved, published and presented at Kansas' flagship university.

Dusenbury, who in addition to organizing the exhibition authored the accompanying catalogue published by Hudson Hills Press, says *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees* started innocuously enough in 1990, when then-director Andrea S. Norris asked her 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 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.

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. The collection's core 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 to strengthen the holdings.

Thus, *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees* 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**.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

"The presentation of this small but important part of our collection is something we can be proud of not only at the Spencer Museum of Art and the University of Kansas, but throughout the state of Kansas," says **Spencer director Saralyn Reece Hardy**. "We hope that Kansans will join us in celebrating these beautiful textiles from South and East Asia, treasures that remind us that we are part of a global society with interesting and distinct cultural traditions. Collections like this provide opportunities for Kansans to join important global dialogues about the things that matter to all of us."

Hardy says the exhibition and its wide variety of related programming offer something for everyone.

"We have Family Days and Children's Art Appreciation Classes planned on themes from these works, we have a film series, we have gallery conversations and docent- and curator-led tours, and we'd love it if we could have guests from all 105 counties in the state come see the work before it goes down in May," Hardy says.

CLOTH & CULTURE TRANSFORMS MUSEUM WITH FABRIC & RELATED THEMES

Inspired by and in company with the *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees* exhibition, *Cloth & Culture* drapes the museum in fabric both literally (*The Indigo Project*) and figuratively (*The Poetry Project*). From exterior banners and landscaping (*The Pine Tree Project*) to the color of the walls and the content therein, *Cloth & Culture @ The Spencer* is intended to encourage ideas by exploring cloth's capacities to inform and transform the human experience physically, emotionally and philosophically.

Cloth & Culture @ The Spencer is made possible by corporate sponsor **Sabatini Architects Inc.**, and comprises three distinct projects, described below.

The Pine Tree Project

An exterior landscaping project at the museum front entrance creates a "micro-forest" of pine trees. Traditional music from Asian countries and two enormous dragon banners flank the front doors and announce the themes of the exhibition.

Why are pine trees important to represent? During the harshest winter storms, the long-lived pine tree remains fragrant and beautiful. At peace with their environment during the changing seasons and years, pine trees often appear on Japanese wedding textiles as symbols of enduring harmony, fortitude and beauty.

For their support of The Pine Tree Project, the Spencer thanks **Reed Dillon & Associates** and, from KU, the **Department of Design & Construction Management and the Department of Facilities Operations**.

The Poetry Project

Poets from the University of Kansas and surrounding regions have written poems and short prose essays about cloth, which are installed in the main floor hallway. Some submitted poems written in the past; most wrote new poems for the project. The poems are intended to frame *Flowers, Dragons, & Pine Trees* in a broader context, one that considers the intimacy of cloth, its impact on the experience of being human and the historic and ongoing role of cloth in culture.

The poets are: **Brian Daldorph, Maija Rhee Devine, Sonja Joline, Silvia Kofler, Stan Lombardo, Jim McCrary, Judith Roitman, Elizabeth Schultz and Phyllis Galley Westover**. More poetry will be added throughout the run of the exhibition.

The Indigo Project

Under the direction of faculty advisors **Mary Anne Jordan** and **David Brackett**, **textile design students in the KU school of Fine Arts' Department of Art and Design** set up indigo vats and dyed, tied, stitched and bound cloth to swathe the Central Court and alcoves in layers of fabric. The project comments on the ability of cloth to transform space. The students were: **Lindsey Alonzo, Samantha Bennett, Johanna Bushman, Kimberly Eichler, Karla Freiheit, Savannah Garrett, Megan Illgner, Julia Karll, Amy Kersley, Zahra Knott, Lindsey Lang, Brittany Pickell, Ariel Sherman, Steve Sobczak, Shana Talley, Heather Williamson, and Tom Witzofsky**.

In addition, museum volunteers **Kathie Baldwin, Gwen Dobson, Kathe Dougherty, Georgann Eglinski, Dee Link, Marie Meyen, and Saundy Milroy** stitched endless yards of fabric for the walls, furniture and piano. **Ligia Simmons** sewed the covers for the benches.

BACKGROUND ON THE SPENCER'S ASIAN TEXTILES COLLECTION

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

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 / Join us for the morning as KU faculty, students and the public consider the many meanings and roles of textiles in our lives.

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

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Also find the Spencer...

- On the Web: www.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