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Oscar-Winning Film Designer Tim Yip and Minneapolis Institute of Art Collaborate on Exhibition of Chinese Bronzes

The exhibition, opening March 4, 2023, will feature thematic rooms designed by Yip to engage the senses, drawing on objects from the museum's exceptional Chinese art collection

MINNEAPOLIS—Feb 6, 2023—The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) will organize and present an exhibition of about 150 of the museum's ancient Chinese bronzes in "Eternal Offerings: Chinese Ritual Bronzes," a collaboration with the Academy Award-winning art director and film designer Tim Yip, best known for his work on the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Yip will work with Liu Yang, chair of Asian Art and curator of Chinese art at Mia, to create a novel presentation of the museum's renowned collection. The vibrant display will include fascinating narrative and thematic backdrops designed by Yip and Liu to evoke the culture and traditions in which these objects were used. The exhibition will be on view March 4 to May 21, 2023.

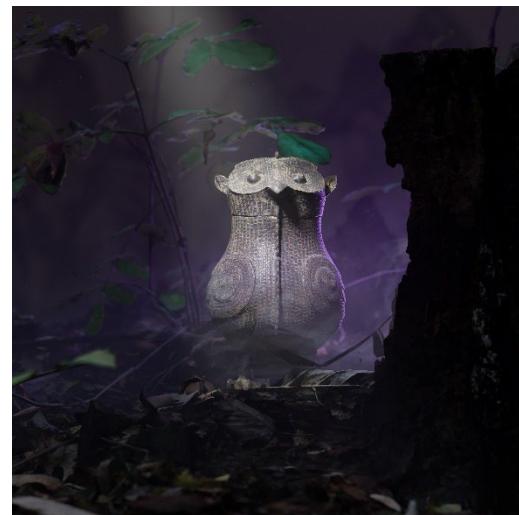
In ancient Chinese society, bronze vessels held great ritual significance. They were not merely elegant and exquisite objects, but also symbols of power. Bronze vessels for wine and food were used to make offerings to the heavenly and ancestral spirits, a practice based on the belief that life continued after death and that reciprocity existed between the deceased and their living kin. Through Liu's dramatic narrative themes and Yip's sound designs, projections, and light displays, each gallery in the exhibition will evoke a unique facet of the rituals performed to honor the divinities. Across seven galleries, visitors will experience the stages of a full ritual ceremony, from the solemnity of the temple to the exhilaration of a lavish banquet.

Mia's collection of Chinese art comprises more than 7,000 objects ranging from Neolithic jades to contemporary works created by cutting-edge artists. For its stylistic diversity and condition, Mia's collection of some 200 ancient Chinese bronzes is one of the nation's top collections of its kind. Important examples, including many outstanding vessels from the late Shang to Zhou dynasties (c. 1200s–200s bce), will be on view in the exhibition.

"Mia has one of the world's greatest collections of ancient Chinese bronzes outside China, which makes this exhibition possible," said Liu. "Personally, it is exciting for me to work with Tim Yip to highlight these objects in an unexpected and fresh way. The show departs from ordinary exhibition experiences, instead shifting our perspectives through a new kind of installation design that emphasizes the power of our senses. It will be a full sensory experience."

The exhibition will progress through a series of galleries that will lead visitors into a world where art merges with the aesthetics of theater and film. There they will learn about the significance and centuries-long history of these objects and the ritual activities they are associated with.

- The first gallery is a transitional space designed to shift the mood and encourage an open frame of mind. Shards of bronze are suspended from the ceiling to evoke fragmentary memories of the ancient past. A brief introduction and a sampling of ancient poems will provide context for the exhibition.



China, zun wine vessel in the shape of an owl, 13th–12th century bce, bronze, Bequest of Alfred F. Pillsbury 50.46.116

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- The next gallery will highlight a world of wildness, including bronze birds, tigers, and mythical beasts. This space represents animism, shamanism, divination, and the worship of gods and ancestors. A transparent, fabric scrim, with a projection of the Yellow River, will form a flowing backdrop for a *zun* wine vessel in the shape of an owl from the Late Shang dynasty (1200s–1100s bce). The walls will be decorated with images of mountains and animals taken from ancient bronzes.
- Visitors will then move to a gallery meant to evoke an ancestral temple. Vast fabric curtains, printed with images of a temple interior, will hang in the center of the room, creating a mysterious and solemn atmosphere. Rows of bronze containers for food and wine, ritual objects used within the ancient temple, will be on display. Bronze daggers and spears will line the walls. Special lighting will evoke daytime in the first half of the gallery, and nighttime in the second.
- The next gallery is dominated by an earthen altar that leads the eye upward toward a projection of a moving sky. This simulated altar represents a ritual activity of ancient China in which fire and smoke were used to communicate with heavenly deities. The center of the altar will hold a large bronze cauldron; one smaller cauldron will sit in each of the four corners of the room. Other types of vessels will be scattered in groups around the altar. The objects in this room were believed to facilitate communication with the spiritual world through their mysterious ornamented surfaces and the food and wine they contained.
- After the solemnity of the temple visit, visitors will move to a boisterous and joyful banquet hall. Ceremonies held in Bronze Age China always ended with feasts in which the descendants of the worshiped ancestors consumed the foods and wine that were prepared for the spirits. This was a way to communicate and connect with the deceased and to seek their blessing for the family's well-being. Included in this section will be bronze vessels for serving food and drink.
- The next gallery is devoted to the concept of *li*, a moral code used to maintain social structures and hierarchies. *Li* covered every aspect of society, but its main purpose was to promote the continuation of the ruler's lineage. Bronze vessels and musical instruments on display, including bronze bells from the 500s and 400s bce, embody the concept of *li*, reflecting social codes and hierarchy in their design, decoration, and use. A standout piece in this section is a *gui* food vessel from the early 900s bce, adorned with a phoenix; the mythological creature was a popular motif in bronze decoration at the time and was even likened to the Zhou ruler himself.
- The final gallery will feature large-scale 3D scans projected on gallery walls, highlighting the intricate surface ornamentation of different bronzes. A select group of objects will be displayed on a mirror. These correspond to the bronze shards seen in the first room, completing the visitor's spiritual journey through "Eternal Offerings."

"In this exhibition, I intend to create a new multidimensional perspective for looking at bronzes," said designer Tim Yip. "I want visitors to feel through their ears, body, eyes, and other senses, which will allow them to rediscover the ancient bronzes and the impact of their beauty and mystery."

"We are excited to partner with the legendary Tim Yip to highlight such a fascinating subset of our collection of Asian art," said Katie Luber, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President of Mia. "Yip's unique and sensorial designs will transport our visitors back to the past while they learn more about the importance of these items in the daily and ritual lives of the ancient Chinese. This is a can't-miss experience."

This exhibition is made possible by major sponsors the National Endowment for the Humanities, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Bei Shan Tang Foundation, and Thomson Reuters; generous sponsors the Henry Luce Foundation, Blakemore Foundation, and Christie's; media sponsor the Star Tribune and additional support provided by the Chinese Heritage Foundation.

Lighting design for "Eternal Offerings" is by A. J. Weissbard.

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Minneapolis Institute of Art
2400 Third Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404

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About Tim Yip

Tim Yip is known as a visual artist, costume designer, and art director for theater and film. Using ancient culture as inspiration, he works in contemporary art, costume, film, and more. His work on *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2001) won him the Oscar for Best Art Direction and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award for Best Costume Design. He is the first Chinese person to receive these awards. His costumes have been featured in stage productions of *The King and I* and *Rite of Spring*, the Netflix production *Marco Polo*, the Hong Kong Ballet and the English National Ballet, and the Chinese Olympic team. His art has been featured in exhibitions in Taiwan, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United States.

About Liu Yang

After completing his PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 1997, Liu Yang served as the senior curator of Chinese art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. There he mounted an impressive number of major exhibitions, including shows on Chinese painting, Buddhist sculpture, jades, and bronzes. Since joining Mia in 2011, Liu has curated several popular exhibitions, including "China's Terracotta Warriors: The First Emperor's Legacy" and "Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty," an unprecedented collaboration with theater artist Robert Wilson highlighting the drama, rituals, and opulence of the Qing Empire.

Press Contacts

Minneapolis Institute of Art

Molly Lax

+1 612 870 3171

mlax@artsmia.org

PAVE Communications & Consulting

Kat Harding

+1 440 759 8148

kat@paveconsult.com

Carmichael Lynch Relate

mia@clynch.com

About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

For more information, call + 1 612.870.3000 or visit artsmia.org.

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