



HERITAGE

ILLUMINATION

TSZ SHAN MONASTERY BUDDHIST ART MUSEUM



T

he human mind is beset by distractions and trivialities, a constant condition which is only aggravated by modern living. Thousands of years ago, the young prince Siddhārtha Gautama sat for years under a Bodhi tree until clarity prevailed and the Buddha came to be. From this revelation was founded a religion, a movement, a transcendent spirituality that transformed the course of humanity.

Over the ages, man has sought that enlightenment and it has inspired art that aims to edify the soul. Some of that art survives the ages and is gathered in special places to allow for genuine contemplation. Sometimes it is in a temple, sometimes a museum. In rare cases, it is both: the Tsz Shan Monastery Buddhist Art Museum.

Clarity • Compassion • Action

Mr Li contemplates this delicately crafted marvel from the Northern Qi dynasty in China (550-577 CE), one of his favourites. Qingzhou statuary's uniqueness is on full display in this icon, through an otherworldly placidity and kindness visible in the Buddha's countenance.



The Tsz Shan Monastery Buddhist Art Museum houses a collection of over 100 Buddhist artefacts from a range of time periods and styles. The Buddhist traditions represented are the three major ones: Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Southern Buddhism. Their presentation examines not only how these traditions interact with each other, but also how Buddhism integrates with other cultures.

The collection also includes 43 Dunhuang sutra manuscripts. These are collections

of holy writings from the Dunhuang area in Gansu Province. The sutras provide spiritual guidance for visitors and a focus of contemplation for scholars. Kept in strictly controlled environmental conditions, the sutras are exhibited in rotation to preserve their integrity.

It is important to remember that the artefacts transcend the status of historical record. Each one has been an object of ritual, supporting the pilgrim's walk on the path of enlightenment. In a sense, they have found a new home

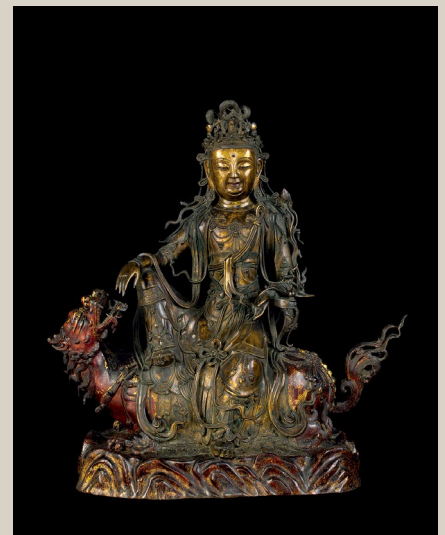
in which to play that role in Tsz Shan Monastery. The history and philosophy of Buddhism will come to life through educational programmes for visitors. The Museum's setting, deep in the heart of the Monastery, will see visitors move through the holy spaces of the larger temple before coming into the even more serene interiors where the artefacts are presented in gentle illumination.



Standing Śākyamuni Buddha comes from one of India's ancient kingdoms, now near northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. Hellenistic rule left its mark, as regional art is stylistically influenced by Greco-Roman art. The realistic style of Gandhāran sculptures is evident.



Head of Buddha with Regal Crown is a rare example of a Buddha with a crown and jewellery. The tall crown is elaborately and exquisitely constructed with continuous beads, flowers and beaded floral motifs. This Buddha head is believed to have been produced in Shanxi in the mid-Ming dynasty (c. 15th century).

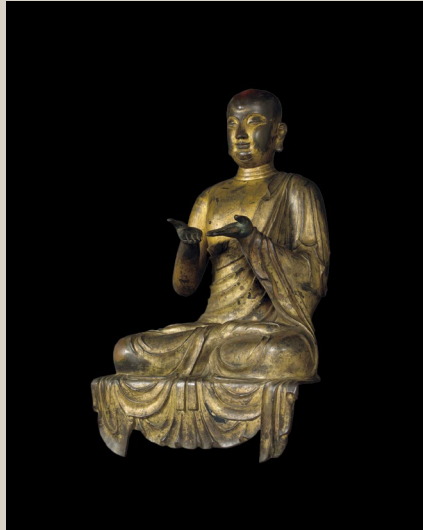


Guanyin Bodhisattva Seated on Lion Mount hails from the Chinese Ming dynasty (c. 15th century). This statue features Chinese elements for imperial Buddhist statuary using the characteristic style of early Ming (1368-1644 CE).

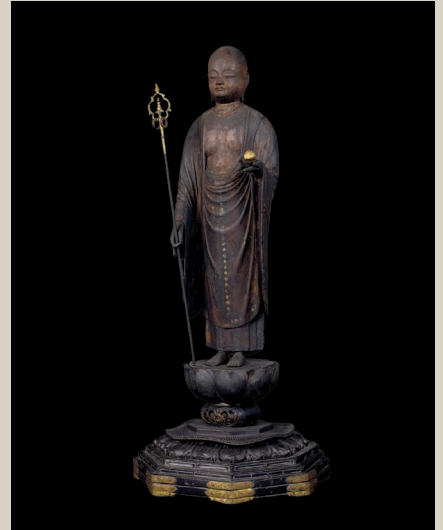
Śākyamuni Buddha was meditating under the Bodhi tree when a mighty storm arose. The Nāga King, lord of divine semi-serpent people, left his throne to protect the Buddha by wrapping him in seven coils. *Seated Buddha Protected by the Nāga King* is from the Cambodia Khmer Empire (c. 12th to 13th century).



Sixteen Great Luohans were asked by Buddha to stay in the mortal world as Dharma protectors. The gilt bronze *Seated Luohan* (Ming dynasty, c. early 15th century) depicts one of them, gracefully.

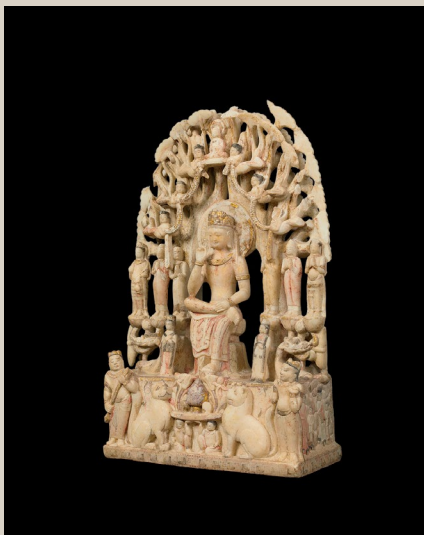


Standing Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva vowed to stay on Earth, denying himself Nirvana and Buddhahood, until all the hells were emptied. This statue is from the Japanese Kamakura period (1192-1333 CE), and is an appropriate exhibit as Kṣitigarbha had a profound influence on Chinese and Japanese Buddhism.

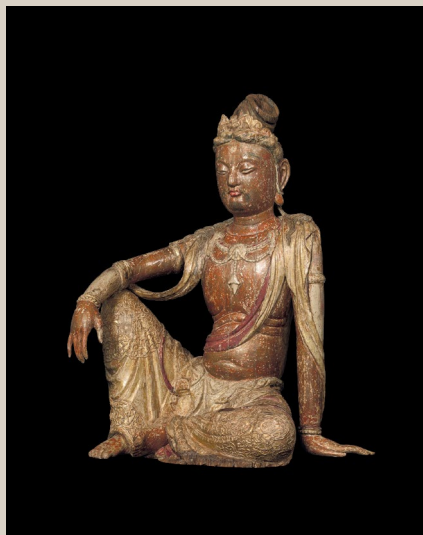


“Masterpieces are a portal to the past and the future, seamlessly weaving together the Dharma of purity, integrity and impermanence.”

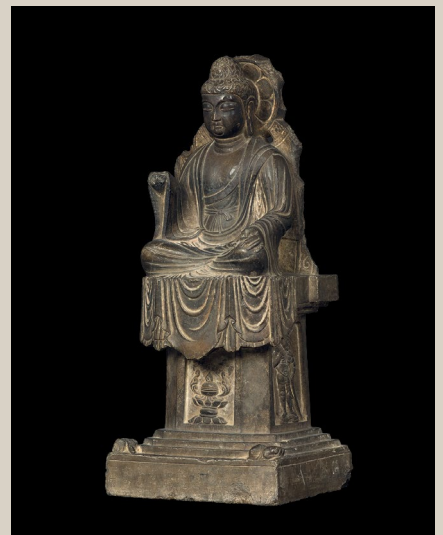
Mr Li Ka-shing



Pensive Bodhisattva is also from the Chinese Northern Qi dynasty (550-577 CE). This unusually large piece (over 60cm tall) displays meticulous carving and is exceedingly rare among white stone sculptures of this era.



Art over the centuries isn't static. This *Seated Guanyin Bodhisattva* is originally from the Chinese Liao dynasty (916-1125 CE). But a restoration during the Ming dynasty saw gelled appliqué cloud motifs and colloidal gold paint added around the knees, hundreds of years after its creation.



Seated Amitābha Buddha was made during China's first year of the Chuigong reign Tang dynasty (685 CE). The votive inscription on the front edge of the base shows that this Amitābha statue was presented by a dutiful son in honour of his deceased parents.



The Monastery's Abbot, the Venerable Dr Thong Hong (second from right) welcomes guests including Hong Kong SAR Chief Executive Mrs Carrie Lam (left of centre), LKSF Chairman Mr Li Ka-shing (fourth from right), Director of Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong SAR Mr Wang Zhimin (third from right), Chairman of the Board of Tsz Shan Monastery Mr Victor T K Li (third from left), Deputy President of The Buddhist Association of China the Venerable Ming Sheng (second from left), President of The Hong Kong Buddhist Association the Venerable Kuan Yun (right), and Deputy Chairman of the Board of Tsz Shan Monastery Mr Richard Li (left).

Tsz Shan Monastery, conceived in 2003 and more than 10 years in the making, provides a refuge for the soul, a 'pure land' in Hong Kong that offers learning and community engagement alongside enlightenment. In March 2019, it unveiled a stunning collection of Buddhist art within the Tsz Shan Monastery Buddhist Art Museum, cosseted under the 76-metre tall, iconic Guanyin statue that looks out across the Hong Kong countryside to the ocean.

"The quest for peace and tranquility is more relevant than ever in our hectic everyday existence."

Mr Li Ka-shing

Funded by his namesake foundation, Mr Li Ka-shing's sharing spirit has enabled the creation of a haven that, in his words, "takes visitors on a journey through space and time, and enriches those who seek transcendence and spiritual realisations with an opportunity to explore beyond the symbolism and the art for the essence of the Buddha's teachings". That haven is supported by a dedicated cohort of monks, scholars, monastery team members and volunteers whose contribution is essential to the Monastery's tranquillity and good functioning.

Many were on hand when Mr Li, benefactor of the Monastery and Chairman of the Li Ka Shing Foundation (LKSF), spoke at the official opening of the Museum. Quoting his favourite Dharma teachings in the Diamond Sutra that posits that all phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a phantom, Mr Li believes that grasping the world beyond the immediate happenings of daily life is an art and we all need to find answers to the bold and hard questions "Who am I? What should I do with my life?" and most

importantly "In what direction should we move forward and thrive together?" The future – whatever it might be – is defined by our purposeful trajectory of wisdom, compassion and undertakings. He hopes Tsz Shan Monastery can be a space for such quiet contemplation and orientations.

Mr Li drew a direct line between core Buddhist values as expressed in the Eightfold Path – Right View, Right Intention, Right Action, Right Speech, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. This philosophy manifests in the world as the practical action that is the *modus vivendi* (way of life) of Hong Kong, "forever the sinew of the Hong Kong story".

The Museum presents the perfect environment for visitors to consider these issues among the relics of antiquity. This investment in humanity's karma was provided for by a HK\$3 billion grant from the Foundation which supported the land acquisition, building of the Monastery, creation of the Museum, and the daily operating expenses. □



Tsz Shan Monastery is protected by the serene presence of Guanyin in the verdant hills of Hong Kong.