

CM MASTERPIECE
MINUTE



Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Lucas Perez, Education Coordinator at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every other Friday at 10am to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests, spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

Today's masterpieces are a pair of lidded jade food bowls possibly from Mughal India and traded to China during the Qing Dynasty, which ruled from 1644 to 1911.

This pair of matched bowls, each carved in the form of stylized chrysanthemums, came into the collection in 1924 as a gift from Mr. and Mrs. George D. Pratt. They were featured in the Official Art Exhibition of the California

Pacific International Exposition in 1935 and were generically listed in the exhibition catalogue as part of a “case of old Chinese jade.” Times have definitely changed! They sit atop carved teak woodstands (which are definitely Chinese), but their highly polished surface and the extreme “paper” thin quality of the bowls themselves, suggest they were produced in India under the Mughals—a dynasty that ruled from 1526 to 1858. Traditional Chinese lapidaries of the Qing dynasty usually put a softer polish on their wares, and they were seemingly reluctant to work jade to such anxiety-causing delicacy.

Highly translucent objects carved from milky green nephrite jade were prized during the Qing Dynasty, and the Qianlong Emperor was

especially fascinated with such “supernaturally crafted” curiosities. He amassed a giant collection of art, including thousands of extravagant gifts of tribute from around the world, like clocks, scientific instruments, jewelry, ceramics, and of course jade.

After Turkic Muslims of China’s western borderlands asked the Qianlong Emperor to liberate them from the Buddhist Dzungar Khanate--the region today known as Xingjiang (Singkiang) came under Chinese rule in 1755. Local chieftains and court officials made tribute offerings to the Emperor of fine jade objects from the city of Yarkant, which was famous for its trade in jades from the Mughal and Ottoman empires. These gifts inspired a collecting craze in China for “Hindustan” jades

(a reference to the Persian word for India), and the cosmopolitan Qianlong Emperor was their most passionate and voracious collector. The Emperor often wrote odes to favorite jade treasures in his collection, which he then had inscribed onto the surface of the very objects his poetry was celebrating.

While our jade bowls don't have an imperial provenance, they do evoke a sense of the splendor of the Qing court and the Qianlong Emperor in particular. Could you imagine eating in such luxurious style?! These beautiful objects also highlight a special period in Chinese history of flourishing cross-cultural exchange and dynamic artistic hybridity.

This has been Lucas with Masterpiece Minute.
Thanks for listening here on Virtual SDMA!

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