For the past 15 years, over 50 exhibitions highlighting the Asia Pacific region have been presented in the East-West Center Gallery under the curatorial direction of Michael Schuster and the design of Lynne Najita. “Inside Out: 15 Years of Exhibitions at the East-West Center Gallery” reflects on the EWC Arts Program’s interdisciplinary approach to developing and presenting its unique exhibitions. Although aesthetic beauty and quality are important components in these projects, the most important guiding principle is the East-West Center’s core mission to promote better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific.

Over the last decade and a half, the EWC Gallery has produced diverse visual representations of aspects of cultures, customs, art, geography, social issues, and practice. The exhibition space is intended to create a learning experience rather than function purely as an “art” gallery.

Every object has a story within its own cultural context. Who made it and for what purpose? When and how was it used? The curator of the object decides which stories to focus the observer’s attention on. This focus is achieved through skillful exhibition design including layout and the relational placement of objects. This exhibition places emphasis on the specific practices of curating an exhibition and looks both inside the physical objects as well as inside the process of curation in order to offer new insight. Hence, this exhibition is entitled “Inside Out.”
Approach

The EWC Arts Program’s approach to exhibition research is ethnographic in nature. Ethnography is the study and the research of a people’s or community’s cultural practices. Every exhibition reflects a deep respect and high regard for the people represented. Many projects begin with curatorial participation in the field involving dialogue, interaction, and close observation of people’s diverse cultural customs including spiritual, performative, and daily-life practices. Following the initial research in the field, photo and video documentation and collection of material culture are carried out.

Furthermore, this approach is interdisciplinary and holistic often focusing on art practice and process. It is important to highlight the art object both for context and function as utilized in its own culture. The visual and performing arts are culturally based and relate closely to other aspects of life in Asia Pacific regional practices.

Presentation

Narrative, spectacle, and cultural continuity are central to the traditional arts of Asia Pacific. The objects are presented so that the audience experiences the narrative of the exhibition. The viewer is invited to make their way through the gallery to experience the narrative in a specific trajectory, similar to the way an audience is carried through a live performance. The intention is not to statically view objects but rather to engage with a living culture. Traditional arts are displayed in order to understand both their customary function and the cultural context in which they are created. Equally important is to underscore their current adaptations and relevance in contemporary society. Although the focus is commonly on the traditional, contemporary arts are also exhibited. In the contemporary, there is often a carryover from traditional practice and adaptations of iconography, technique, and/or medium to further an artist’s concept or commentary.

Content & Context

Each exhibition is a window into a world of practice, a small-scale representation. Through this exhibition, the audience peers into the EWC Arts Program’s unique curatorial process. This inside view is thematically paralleled conceptually by showing some objects on display physically inside-out; offering a view of the objects that the audience does not readily appreciate. Representing the backstory or background of an object is important to reveal. In addition to displaying the artifact, a contextual photograph or video is regularly paired in order to emphasize its living value. Furthermore, the artistic process is highlighted to enhance the appreciation of the labor and craftsmanship involved. The objects presented are commonly handcrafted using techniques developed over generations. Consequently, the significance of work practices is introduced to the audience. Depending on the focus of an exhibition, the entire spectrum from everyday utilitarian objects to crafts to high art are displayed.
Frame & Function

With each exhibition a clear frame is defined. The frame highlights either a specific theme expressed across the region such as puppets, weddings, or lacquer, or a narrow focus on a lesser-known ethnicity, culture, or history such as Hindu Chams in Vietnam, Jewish communities in India, or indigenous mountain communities of Nepal. In presenting an Asia Pacific topic the cultural uniqueness and variety across a given theme is highlighted rather than presented as a universal concept. In these instances, the subject of the exhibition may appear among many cultures yet is varied in its context. Focusing on a specific, distinct culture, community, or ethnicity that is not well-known challenges the perceptions and stereotypes about a given nation or region.

Collaboration & Audience

The curatorial perspective is guided by deep collaboration with specialists, knowledge bearers, and practitioners. The collaborators are either directly involved as practitioners within the culture or are knowledgeable scholars who have spent years studying the subject presented. Exhibition opening events typically include related performing arts presentations or authentic rituals, from purification ceremonies to blessings by spiritual practitioners. Guest curators or specialists are regularly invited for residencies to connect with different audiences. In order for the exhibitions to be experiential, practitioners are frequently invited to teach or share the cultural expressions presented. Local groups are invited to partner and share their unique diasporic cultures. This creates a rich and dynamic experience for those involved but also for the larger community. Through these exhibitions the East-West Center Arts Program connects with a wide-ranging audience—from grade school children, to retirement communities, to academics of the field; from the East-West Center community to the general public. On one hand the audience is introduced to unseen beauty while on the other hand the less visible communities are given the respect, understanding, and visibility deserved.
The East-West Center promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options. The Center is an independent, public, nonprofit organization with funding from the U.S. government, and additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, foundations, corporations, and governments in the region.

The East-West Center Arts Program for nearly 40 years has enriched the community through concerts, exhibitions, and community engagement focused on arts of the Asia Pacific region, and by arranging cultural and educational programs by artists who are skilled in bridging cultures.

EWC Arts Team: Karen Knudsen, director, Office of External Affairs; Eric Chang, arts program coordinator; Michael Schuster, Ph.D., curator; Annie Reynolds, Ph.D., arts program assistant; William Feltz, adjunct arts specialist; Carolyn Eguchi, program officer; Gary Yoshida, development officer; Jennifer Leger, development assistant; Hunter Kaye, student assistant

Mahalo: Leslee Michelsen, Kristin Remington, Shangi La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design, Sara Oka, Honolulu Museum of Art, Kirstin Pauka, UH Mānoa Department of Theatre and Dance, Lynne Najita, Kennedy & Preiss Graphic Design, LeiLani Ng, Colorprints Inc., Peter Young, Shayne Hasegawa, Derek Ferrar, Phyllis Tabusa, Lucy Kamealoha, Deanna O’Brien, Dana Almodova, Melanie Keller, Tina Tom, Patsy Hiraoka, Marie Ebesu, Reynold Balintec, EWC Facilities Management

Special Events

In the EWC Gallery with free admission, open seating, no reservations
Guided exhibition tours will be offered Sundays at 3:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 19, 2:00–3:30 p.m. Exhibition Gala Opening including reception, gallery walkthrough with the curators, and presentation of 8-minute video art piece, “Wisdoms of the East and West” accompanied by live music by Made Widana and Annie Reynolds

Sunday, June 2, 2:00–3:00 p.m. Illustrated Talk: “Decolonizing the Narrative” by Neal V. Hitch, Executive Director of Hawaiian Mission Houses

Sunday, June 30, 2:00–3:00 p.m. Illustrated Talk: “Highlights and Untold Stories” by Neida Bangerter, Director of Schaefer International Gallery at Maui Arts and Cultural Center

Sunday, July 14, 2:00–3:00 p.m. Illustrated Talk: “Mānoa Heritage Center: Inspiring People to be Thoughtful Stewards of their Communities” by Mary Cooke, MHC Founder, and Jessica Welch, MHC Executive Director

Sunday, August 4, 2:00–3:00 p.m. Illustrated Talk: “Introducing the Hawai‘i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts” by Jonathan Johnson, SFCA Executive Director

Sunday, September 8, 2:00–3:00 p.m. Illustrated Talk: “Creating Spaces for Thinking Critically about Museums: Curriculum, Programs, and Community Partnerships” by Karen Kosasa, Associate Professor of American Studies, UH Mānoa

East-West Center Gallery
John A. Burns Hall, 1601 East-West Road (corner Dole St. & East-West Rd.)

Gallery admission is free
Hours: Open Weekdays 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. and Sundays Noon–4:00 p.m.
Closed Saturdays and May 26, 27, July 4, Sept. 1, 2
Parking on the UH Mānoa campus is normally free and ample on Sundays.
Free school & group tours available.

For further information: 944-7177
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http://arts.EastWestCenter.org