

## An EAA interview with the 2016 Franklin R. Buchanan Prizewinners Dorinda Neave, Lara C. W. Blanchard, and Marika Sardar for *Asian Art*



Dorinda Neave



Lara C. W. Blanchard



Marika Sardar

*This is our twentieth consecutive interview with the recipients of the AAS Franklin R. Buchanan Prize. This year's winners are Dorinda Neave, Lara Blanchard, and Marika Sardar, who are coauthors of the textbook *Asian Art* (Pearson, 2014). *Asian Art* is an accessible introduction for students to Asian art history, the emergence and evolution of Asian art in all its diversity, and the patterns of continuity and change between the arts and cultures of various regions comprising Asia.*

*Dorinda Neave is an Art Historian, Art Curator, and Writer who taught Art History at Capilano University from 1989 until 2016. Lara C. W. Blanchard is an Associate Professor of Art History and Asian Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York, where she has taught since 2001. Marika Sardar is Associate Curator of Southern Asian and Islamic Art at The San Diego Museum of Art and previously worked at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York.*

**Lucien:** *Dorinda, Lara, and Marika, congratulations to you and others who assisted you in the creation of *Asian Art*. What factors influenced you to make the substantial commitment of time and effort that resulted in this excellent pedagogical tool?*

**Dorinda Neave:** Thanks for your congratulations, Lucien. We were delighted to receive the 2016 Buchanan Prize for the textbook *Asian Art*. The creation of *Asian Art* was indeed a large project and the result of teamwork. Although Lara Blanchard, Marika Sardar, Miranda Bruce-Mitford (contributor to the chapter on Southeast Asian art), and myself were responsible for writing the text, numerous others, for example, the talented teams at the publishing houses Pearson Education Inc. and Laurence King Publishing Ltd., were an integral part of the project.

When I started teaching the Asian art survey course in 1992, I was unable to find a textbook that addressed the curriculum I had devised. The existing textbooks on Asian art, such as Sherman Lee's *A History of Far Eastern Art* and John D. La Plante's *Asian Art*, first published in the 1960s, had not been sufficiently revised over time. Despite the obvious merits of these pioneering texts, I found that the books' contents, style, and format were outdated. Since the 1960s, and particularly during the last decade, Asian art history has undergone a radical transformation in scholarship, methodology, and pedagogy. Astonishing new archaeological discoveries, dramatic developments in contemporary Asian art, and revised methods of studying/teaching art history have contributed to this overhaul. Where was a textbook on Asian art that kept pace with these changes? In 2004, upon asking a Pearson's representative in Humanities for an up-to-date textbook on Asian art, I was told it did not exist and asked, "Why don't you write the textbook?" In the 1960s, both Sherman Lee and La Plante were sole authors of their books. Today, a book that embraces the multifaceted material associated with Asian art and includes the necessary high production values, both for hard copy and multimedia, requires a team. From the initial conception of the project to the publication date in 2014, ten years elapsed. It was indeed a "substantial commitment of time and effort," but well worth the rigorous journey.

**Lara C. W. Blanchard:** I teach at a small liberal arts college, and the Intro-

duction to Asian Art course that I have created there serves as an introductory course for the Art History major, as well as for the Asian Studies major. In recent years, I've been teaching this course every semester, so I have developed really specific ideas about what I need to accomplish in it. I need to give my students a good foundation in Asian histories, religions, politics, and philosophies, but I also need to teach them how to analyze art and architecture, and finally I want to convey the multiplicity of Asian cultures and what art and architecture reveal about societal and cultural developments. When I was first approached about this project, I happened to have a sabbatical coming up, and I thought it would be an amazing thing to be able to write the book that I wanted to use in my classroom.

**Marika Sardar:** I joined the project long after Dorinda had made her proposal to Pearson, so I give credit to her for creating the heart and soul of the book and its innovative approach. Having been invited to write, however, I was very excited to really rethink how South Asian art history is presented. This meant expanding the types of objects typically discussed and the ways in which they are contextualized, as well as the overarching goals of emphasizing the role of women and including contemporary art. For me, it was also important to present to students the subtle shifts scholars have made in how we understand the South Asian responses to outside artistic influences, be it Islamic art starting in the twelfth century or European art starting in the sixteenth century.

**Lucien:** *As someone who teaches integrated courses on a regular basis about the histories of China, the Korean peninsula, and Japan, I am familiar with good introductory art surveys that are limited to the separate cultures but have never seen a classroom-friendly book for nonspecialists with the scope and range of this text. If other publications such as yours exist and are available, what are the attributes of your book that you think separate your text from similar publications?*

**Dorinda:** Currently, and surprisingly, there are no new publications similar to our textbook that are available or even exist. Our textbook emerged as a response to the need for a new Asian art survey text. In particular, it was important to provide an up-to-date option to earlier books on the subject by Lee and La Plante. By drawing on recent scholarship in Asian

studies, our text corrected and updated existing material, discussed the contributions of women artists and patrons, explored the representation of women in Asian art, and provided information on contemporary art and current trends. Consideration was also given to neglected areas of scholarship in survey texts relating to indigenous Asian peoples, such as the Ainu and their culture in Japan. Earlier books, especially *Asian Art* by La Plante, focused on India, China, and Japan at the expense of Southeast Asia and Korea. More in-depth coverage of the art of these areas is another differentiating factor of our text.

**Lara:** To add to what Dorinda has said, I'm really grateful to have been working with a team. Our book is coauthored, which allowed each of us to write about our own areas of expertise.

**Marika:** I very much like how the structure of the book permitted an in-depth look into specific cultures while fostering an understanding of the connections that unite the different parts of Asia.

**Lucien:** *In my opinion, your book is well-written and accessible to nonspecialists, the images are striking, and, as mentioned, the scope of the book includes content on the three major areas of Asia. Your range of treatment (prehistory to contemporary art) is impressive, and the book, excluding back matter, is a relatively succinct 381 pages. What guidelines did you formulate or follow that resulted in the development of such an apparently manageable text for instructors?*

**Dorinda:** Yes, creating a manageable, versatile text for instructors that could be used over two semesters or, most likely, for a one-semester course was foremost in our minds at the outset. An important goal was to avoid overwhelming both instructors and students with a barrage of information. The senior editors at Pearson Education Inc. gave us strict guidelines as to the overall size of the book, the number of pages for each chapter, and the ratio of text to images. Distilling the richness of Asian art with all its aspects into 381 pages was challenging. I think the textbook offers instructors a manageable framework for teaching a survey course in Asian art, which can then be supplemented by additional readings of their own choosing.

**Lara:** If I am remembering correctly, we had a strict limit of approximately thirty images per chapter! That meant thinking very strategically about which examples to include. In my chapters, I tried to make sure that every image contributed information about an aspect of Chinese society or culture that was not being covered elsewhere, unless the point was to demonstrate connections between different regions or different historical periods. The hardest chapter for me to write was the chapter closest to my own area of specialization. It was agonizing for me to leave out certain works of art.

**Lucien:** *The danger of many survey texts is the “one fact after another” syndrome. From my read of portions of your text, you avoided this pitfall. The “boxes” that accompany each chapter and have titles such as “Closer Look,” “Compare,” and “Point of View” offer interesting opportunities for student and instructor reflection. For the benefit of our readers, can you specify why you included these pedagogical aids and why you believe they complement the narrative?*

**Dorinda:** For purposes of clarity and cohesion, the material is organized according to region and chronology. The arts of South and Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan, positioned within their various sociopolitical, historical, religious, and cultural contexts, provide the focus of the book. To prevent the content from disintegrating into a series of dry, disconnected facts, attention was given both to the uniqueness of each culture but also to interrelationships between cultures and their binding narratives—for example, the diffusion of Buddhism from India to other parts of Asia and its widespread impact on the arts. Chapters are also linked stylistically and pedagogically by the “boxes,” with titles such as “Closer Look,” “Com-

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pare,” “Techniques,” and “Point Of View,” which as you mention provide opportunities for student and instructor reflection. These pedagogical aids encourage students to examine specific works in more detail and promote critical thinking about concepts introduced earlier in the text. In “Closer Look,” for example, a specific work is discussed in detail with explanatory labels pointing out the work's outstanding features. In chapter 11, the painting of a festival, *Tano Day*, by the Korean artist Sin Yunbok (1758–?), is examined and an explanation provided as to why it was a controversial painting for the period.

**Lara:** For me, the boxes were an opportunity to go into more depth without interrupting the narrative of the chapter. The “Point of View” box in chapter 9, for example, presents translations of the writing of Dong Qichang, one of the most important figures in Chinese painting history. I wanted not only to comment on his ideas but also to give a sample of the great wealth of primary sources that we have in Asian art history, such as the writing of painters, connoisseurs, and critics. The “Compare” boxes were a natural addition. Art historians very commonly use image comparisons in their classrooms. Presenting a comparison is a good way to get students to think analytically, starting with visual similarities and differences, and moving on to conceptual similarities and differences.

**Marika:** I was following a well-established structure by the time I started writing, but I found it quite useful as a way to get a jump start on the project. It guided me toward approaching each time period I covered not by a listing of “greatest hits” but toward creating a series of short narratives about select works in dialogue, and thinking about how together they demonstrated the varied and complicated nature of each era under discussion. And since there wasn't enough space to write about each object in detail, I thought the boxes allowed for a nice graphic way to point out specific aspects of a certain work and were a useful way to get students to use their visual analysis skills.

**Lucien:** *I think the book will be useful not only for survey-level undergraduate and high school art history courses but also for those of us who teach general survey courses that encompass more than one Asian culture. Can you briefly elaborate upon what web-based resources your publisher makes available for educators or students who purchase your book?*

**Dorinda:** In addition to the richly illustrated hard copy text, Pearson Education Inc. provides an eText and access to an online pedagogical aid called *MySearchLab*, designed to help students explore the discipline of Art History and Asian Art in greater depth. Audio pronunciation of personal and geographical names and terms are included in the eText for educators and students unfamiliar with Asian languages. Students can download the eText to a tablet device like the iPad using the free Pearson eText app. *MySearchLab* provides research and writing tools, including access to academic journals. Instructors who use the textbook in their classes are provided with a set of image PowerPoints featuring most of the works of art in the text.

**Lucien:** *Dorinda, Lara, and Marika, thanks for the interview!* ■



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