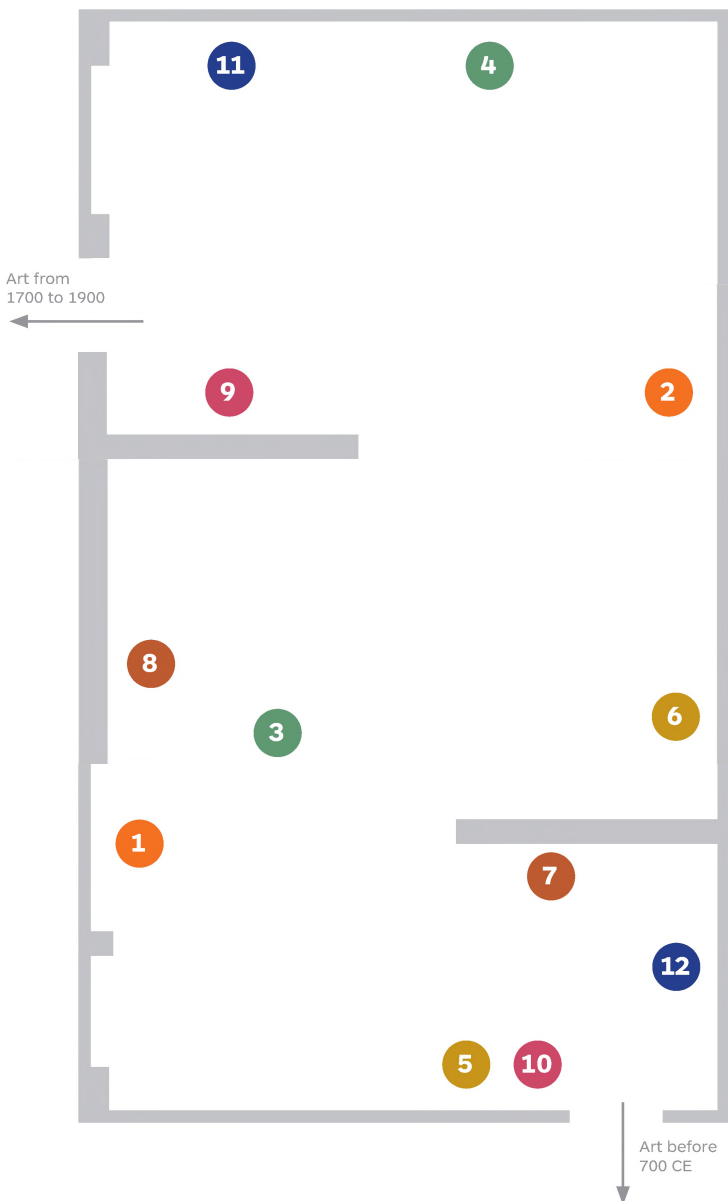


GALLERY GUIDE

ART FROM 700 TO 1700



GALLERY MAP



INTRODUCTION

This gallery brings together art and material culture from around the globe, spanning one thousand years—from 700 to 1700. Organized chronologically and regionally, the installation also features cross-cultural displays as well as more recent artworks in order to expand the stories told here.

This guide offers six themes that draw together objects from across the gallery, making connections between disparate times and places. For each theme, we illustrate specific objects that can be found using the floor map in this guide. The world map can help orient you to the geographies represented here and begins to convey the scope and diversity of the art on view.



Standing Buddha, 15th-16th century, Sawankhalok, Thailand
(2012.40.1)

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DEVOTION

How does art inspire devotion and devotion inspire art?

Whether owned by an individual or commissioned for a sacred place, many artworks in this gallery were created for acts of contemplation and worship.

Some works allowed people to express private devotion while traveling or at home. This Japanese *zushi* (portable shrine) **(1)** was probably owned by an individual, household, traveling monk, or pilgrim. This *zushi* fits in a palm and opening its doors reveals the bodhisattva (enlightened being) Jizō. Likewise, small-scale panel paintings were commissioned by wealthy Catholic patrons for their homes or private chapels. The golden surfaces of the *zushi* and the paintings would have been lit by candlelight and scented by incense offered by those praying.

Conversely, in communal spaces, devotional art is designed to be seen by people from a distance. This altarpiece **(2)** was commissioned for a Catholic convent in Florence, attended by the neighborhood and the nuns who lived there. It also acts as a public declaration of the church's identity; Saint John the Evangelist (the church's dedicated saint) is identified by an eagle. The Standing Buddha statue nearby displays divine attributes of perfection, amplifying the presence of the Buddha for group worship. Viewers would interpret his forward-facing palm, *abhaya mudra* ("fear not"), as a gesture of reassurance.



1



2

PRECIOUS POSSESSIONS

Who wanted to own art and why?

While some of the artworks and objects in this space were created for public spaces like churches and temples, many were simply bought and owned by people who wanted beautiful objects to bring a sense of luxury to their lives. Many of the ceramics, like the one below (3), were made for the market—meaning made ahead of time (often in a workshop) for sale to whoever could afford them. Its bright turquoise surface is circled with seated men wearing courtly robes in an array of patterns and colors. Inscribed with good wishes and rendered in dazzling color, we can imagine the appeal such an object would have held for the original owner living in Iran at the end of the 12th century.

Likewise, many of the later oil paintings in this gallery were made for an upper-middle to wealthy class that valued having art in their homes. A painting (4) by the Dutch artist Hendrik Martensz Sorgh depicts a scene that might strike us as odd for such a home—a group of peasants drinking, smoking, and enjoying a card game. Such genre scenes were popular in the 17th century, often with a moralizing tone meant to denounce the evils of tobacco and alcohol. The person who owned this likely prized it for its masterful brushwork and use of color, while also enjoying the opportunity to glimpse into the daily life of a class below their own.



3



4

THE LIVES OF WOMEN

What can art tell us about women's lives and concepts of gender in the past?

Objects like sculptures, ceramic vessels, and paintings can help us understand women's public, devotional, domestic, and intellectual spheres. More directly, objects that depict women offer us glimpses into which aspects of their lives were commemorated by artists.

Two female figures (5), sitting astride horses, demonstrate the prominence of horse riding in Tang China, which grew out of the Empire's expansion into Central Asia, a region with long equestrian traditions. The women wear short tunics with close-fitting sleeves, a style taken from Persian fashion, as well as wide-brimmed hats which would have had attached veils. Female riders were active participants in a burgeoning equestrian culture, yet still governed by cultural norms that expected women to cover from head to toe when in public.

A *desco da parto* (birth tray) (6), offers evidence into the lives of women in early 16th-century Tuscany. These trays were used to bring nourishment to women who had just given birth, a practice we see depicted on the *desco* itself. Given to new mothers to commemorate births, trays such as this would have been hung as decoration in the home after their practical postpartum use. This *desco*, made for a wealthy Sienese woman, also provides us a view of the women who worked in service for these families, like the woman seated in the foreground, already caring for the newborn child.



5



6

CRAFT AND THE WORKSHOP

Who met the demands and desires for art?

Workshops of specialized and highly skilled artisans produced many objects now found in museum collections, from ceramic vessels to religious paintings to funerary goods. Centers of production adapted to supply pressures in diverse ways that show us how the role of the individual artist evolved and how class operated within these societies.

Chan Chan, the capital of the Chimú Empire, was a dense urban center of royal residences and craftspeople's workshops. As artisans lived and worked in these spaces, they fueled invention and transmitted technical mastery to other potters. Chimú craftspeople used molds to mass produce the shining blackware in this gallery (7). The seams left by the two-part molds were carefully smoothed away, and their characteristic gleaming black surfaces were the result of an innovative firing technique.

In 12th-century Siena, Italy, the desire for art led to competition for major commissions from the state, the church, and the aristocracy. Painters' workshops followed a master-apprentice system to increase productivity and income. While this panel of an angel (8) from Duccio's Maestà altarpiece has been attributed to the artist's own hand, his workshop would have prepared pigments and contributed elements of the overall painting. In this way, paintings credited to one artist are often products of the visible and invisible labor of many.



7



8

IN SEARCH OF COLOR

How did artists find and create colors?

Every color in this gallery has a story to tell—stories of desire, trade, and experimentation. Blue, for instance, was a highly sought after pigment for art and objects across many cultures. In Maya art, a special blue glaze, seen on the sculpture below (9), was achieved by mixing añil (the indigo plant native to the region) with a type of local clay. Known as Maya blue, the glaze was developed around the 4th or 5th century CE and is thought to have played an important role not just in art, but in some Maya ceremonies and rituals. While plants like indigo were a common source of blue in many places and periods, minerals and stones were also used. In Renaissance Italy, for example, vibrant blue was achieved using the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli, which was mined in Afghanistan. The pigment was so prized that its cost exceeded that of gold.

Red was derived from a variety of sources, including plants, minerals, and even insects. In pottery, bright red was particularly difficult to achieve. The potters of Iznik, in Turkey, are known for developing a unique bright red glaze, seen in the roses in the plate below (10). Made from a type of earth known as Armenian bole, true Iznik red is easily distinguishable by its raised surface. Iznik pottery was admired and imitated in Europe, but Iznik red proved impossible to perfectly replicate.



9



10

TRACES OF CONFLICT

How does art bear witness to past conflicts?

The years between 700 and 1700 witnessed the rapid, violent, and intertwined expansions of empires, religious conflicts, wars, and European colonial projects. Though few objects on display here make direct visual reference to conflict, its traces can be found throughout the gallery. Take, for example, Hendrick van Streek's painting of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam **(11)**, which presents a sunlit 17th-century church interior. Looking closely at the walls, windows, and columns, we see that this was once a Catholic church, built with Gothic pointed arches, but it has been whitewashed and stripped of its religious art. The conflicts over art during the 16th-century Protestant Reformation have left their marks on this space.

Some objects present us with direct evidence of violence. A stone sculpture from what is now Costa Rica depicts a standing figure holding a decapitated head **(12)**. It reflects a relatively broad practice of taking trophy heads in lower Central and northern South America. In Costa Rica, historians think this practice was related to territorial conflicts between chiefdoms and had connections to beliefs about agricultural fertility. We know much less about trophy heads than we otherwise may have because of two later interventions: colonial conquest, which violently erased populations and their oral histories, and extractive archaeological practices, which removed such sculptures from their mortuary contexts. These, too, are traces of conflict left on this object.



11



12

WORLD MAP



This map highlights many of the objects in this guide and can help orient you to where they were made. You may notice that there are regions that are not well represented in the Museum's collection from this period—most notably Africa and North America. The collection reflects the changing interests and tastes of generations of MHC faculty, museum curators, and donors. Most of the objects in this gallery came to MHCAM as gifts or purchases in the 20th or early 21st century.

The unequal chronological and geographic distribution of the collection is a result not only of shifting collecting priorities and fluctuations in the art market, but also evolving ethical and legal standards. Changes to international laws have impacted how art from this period is collected, especially from countries formerly under colonial rule or subject to Nazi-era looting. We invite you to explore the provenance booklet in the gallery to learn more about each object's history.

GLOSSARY

Altarpiece—large paintings that are often placed above a ritual table in a Christian church to serve as visual reminders of the spiritual themes of Mass (the central act of public worship)

Blackware—an umbrella term for the distinctive all-black pottery from the north coast of Peru, the result of reducing or stopping the oxidation of a vessel's surface during the firing process

Ceramic mold—a three-dimensional form used to shape clay into precise and uniform copies

Commission—a work of art that is requested and paid for by a specific patron (purchaser), rather than made for the market to be sold to any buyer

Gothic—a style of art and architecture in Europe from roughly 1200 to 1400 that is known for its pointed arches and use of gold backgrounds in religious paintings

Pigment—the colorful foundation for paints, glazes, and other materials; derived from many sources, including plants, stones, and insects

Protestant Reformation—a 16th-century movement to reform the Catholic Church that led to the establishment of a separate branch of Christianity with its own distinct approaches to art and architecture

Renaissance—literally meaning “rebirth,” the Renaissance was a period of the arts in Europe from the 14th to the 16th century characterized by interest in Classical (Greek and Roman) art and the visible world

Workshop—a commercial artistic enterprise in which multiple people, often with different skills and specialties, work together to create goods for sale

IMAGE CAPTIONS

- 1 *Votive image of Bodhisattva (Jizō)*, Japan, 14th century (1.Q.C)
- 2 Bartolomeo di Giovanni, *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Evangelist, Benedict, Romuald, and Jerome*, Florence, Italy, 1498 (2013.18)
- 3 *Handled jug with princely figures*, Iran, late 12th – early 13th centuries (2012.40.15)
- 4 Hendrik Martensz Sorgh, *An Inn Interior with Peasants*, Netherlands, ca. 1641–1645 (2012.13)
- 5 *Equestrian figures*, China, 618–906 (1964.5a.J.C and 1964.5b.J.C)
- 6 *Desco da parto*, Siena, Italy, 1520–1540 (2018.20)
- 7 *Stirrup-spouted vessel with crayfish*, Chan Chan Valley, Peru, 1100–1400 (1985.17.1)
- 8 Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Angel pinnacle from Maesta altarpiece*, Siena, Italy, 1308–1311 (1965.45.P.PI)
- 9 *Dish with saz leaf and cypress tree*, Iznik, Turkey, ca. 1580–1590 (2006.5)
- 10 *Standing female dignitary*, Campeche, Mexico, 700–900 (1975.15.21)
- 11 Hendrick van Streek, *Interior of the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam*, Netherlands, ca. 1690–1700 (2009.2.1)
- 12 *Figure holding trophy head*, Costa Rica, 1100–1500 (2016.10.13)