



# Tree of Life

September 23  
to October 10, 2017

58 master artists from 20 Asian  
countries create traditional and  
contemporary interpretations  
of the Tree of Life



Canadian Society  
for Asian Arts





Jai Prakash, miniature painting in  
Kalamkari style

# Tree of Life

## Introduction

Three hundred and eighty-five million years ago the first trees began to populate the earth. Since then the tree has evolved, transforming itself into sixty thousand species that have spread around the planet. The Banyan, Baobab, Cypress, Cedar, Ash, Fig, and Yew appeared with their own size, shape, and color, and each was given special significance by the people who lived around them.

The tree embodied life's mysteries, emerging from a tiny seed and growing upwards to become the largest living thing on earth. It provided food, shelter, and building materials for humans and became a universal symbol at the center of their attempts to understand themselves and the world.



The tree is one of the oldest and most reoccurring human symbols. Its earliest representations are thought to be cave paintings created by artists in Europe, Indonesia, and South America. Painted on rock walls using plant based dyes, these images show human figures gathered below trees or holding tree-like symbols. Carbon dating has placed these paintings as being produced some 25,000 to 30,000 years ago.

Since that time, various cultures have developed and refined their own visual language and understanding of the world. The Tree of Life emerged as an archetype, theme, motif, mythological story, and spiritual concept and is found across cultures and throughout human history. It is a cosmic conception that connects all forms of creation, unites the heavens, the earth, and the underworld, and is a representation of everlasting life. Its various interpretations, from indigenous cultures to major religions, have influenced art, architecture, and visual representation for millennia.

Ancient Mayan civilization pictured a Ceiba tree at the centre of a universe that connected the three layers of the world; Greek cosmology incorporated an Apple tree, which grew in the middle of a tranquil garden, and whose golden fruit conferred immortality; Indigenous peoples of the North-west coast believed deeply in the healing and spiritual powers of the Cedar tree.

Norse mythology had nine worlds that were connected by the branches and roots of Yggdrasil, a cosmic Ash tree; Babylonians celebrated a magical tree with divine fruit that grew in the centre of paradise; ancient Egyptians believed in a Tree of Life that brought everything into existence; Zoroastrians in Persia revered the Haoma Tree of Healing.



Kimono batik Ketapang style



Chinese cosmology considered the Peach tree as the tree of the Taoist Immortals – one bite of its fruit bestowed immediate immortality; Shinto, a Japanese religion, incorporated the Sakaki tree in mythology and sacred rituals; Korean folk belief placed the Dangnamu, or divine tree, as lying at the center of the universe; the Vedanta, an ancient body of Indian scriptural works, considered the Asvattha, a Sacred Fig tree which is inverted with its roots upwards and its branches down, as an infinite and eternal cosmic tree.

The Kabbalah of Judaism uses the Tree of life as a central mystic symbol; Islam refers to the Tree of Bliss and Tree of Immortality; Christianity describes the Tree of Life in the books of Genesis and Revelations; Buddhists revere the Bodhi tree under which Buddha gained enlightenment.

As our understanding of the world evolved, the concept of the Tree of Life remained in human consciousness. Darwin used the Tree of Life as a metaphor for the phylogenetic tree of common descent in a famous passage in the “Origin of Species.” Gustav Klimt created an acclaimed painting depicting the Tree of Life in the early twentieth century. In contemporary times, a respect and recognition of the importance of trees has been reaffirmed, and artists from many countries create art that incorporates the Tree of Life in their work.



Edric Ong, indigo dyeing



## The Exhibition

This international exhibition explores ways in which the Tree of Life has been represented in Central, South, East, and South-east Asia and includes the artwork of 58 artists and craftspeople, many of whom are masters of their chosen form, and some who are Living National Treasures\* in their countries of origin. The artworks are as diverse as the cultures they originate from and are both traditional and contemporary. They are handcrafted from natural and sustainable materials using plant-based dyes, and include textiles, paintings, ceramics, weaving, leather, lacquerware, jewellery, stone, wood, and metal.

Manjari Nirula, co-curator of the exhibition from India, states that the aim of the exhibition is “to create greater awareness about the importance of ecology, to stimulate creativity as well as highlight cultural sustainability. Craft supports thousands of producers globally and has a very small carbon footprint. The roots of the tree are our beliefs, the trunk is our mind and body and the branches are our wisdom.”



Edric Ong, co-curator from Sarawak, Malaysia, tells of the many indigenous cultures in Malaysia that address the concepts of the sacred forest. He states, “The tree of life in Malaysia is known as the Puhon Budi and speaks of a tree of culture, a tree of civilization, a tree from which all mankind evolved. This exhibition builds bridges and brings healing across cultures presenting similarities rather than difference.”

The Canadian Society for Asian Arts and the Canadian Curators Ray Hartley and Sheila Hall are pleased to present this exhibition in Vancouver and hope you will find pleasure and meaning in this exchange of diverse cultural expressions.

*\*Living National Treasures are individuals certified as preservers of important, intangible, cultural properties.*



Tzulo Cho on his indigo farm

Bharti Dayal,  
Mahdubani painting



## Exhibition Sponsor



Canadian Society  
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### The Canadian Society for Asian Arts (CSAA)

The Canadian Society for Asian Arts was founded in 1969 as a non-profit multicultural organization by a diverse group of volunteer scholars, collectors, and other individuals who shared an interest in and a passion for Asian arts and culture. Since that time the CSAA has presented hundreds of events on Asian arts and culture.

The CSAA is uniquely pan-Asian in its mission, its program, its membership, and its governing Board. The purpose of the Society is to promote the appreciation and understanding of the arts of Asia by bringing quality programs, exhibitions and publications to interested groups and individuals in Canada and by exploring links among the cultures of Asia.

[canadiansocietyforasianarts.org](http://canadiansocietyforasianarts.org)

## Exhibition Gallery



### Vancouver Lipont Art Centre

Vancouver Lipont Art Centre is a new commercial art space housed at Lipont Place and located in Richmond, British Columbia. It is a 21,000 ft<sup>2</sup> multifunctional venue for art exhibitions, events, meetings and art and film performances. It is one of the largest and most flexible arts and cultural spaces in Metro Vancouver.

The Centre represents local and international contemporary artists and advocates the integration of business, art, design and culture. Guided by the idea of “Internet plus” and supported by YKLM™’s online platforms, it brings new vigour and vitality to the Metro Vancouver art scene. Lipont Place is happy to host the Tree of Life Exhibition in cooperation with The Canadian Society for Asian Arts.

[www.lipont.com](http://www.lipont.com)



## Curators

Edric Ong, *Malaysia*

Manjari Nirula, *India*

Sheila Hall and

Ray Hartley, *Canada*

## Artists

Bakhtiar Ajis

Bailou

Chandrabhushan

Tzulo Cho

Chimmi Choden

Narong Daun

Bharti Dayal

Sanju Devi

Dudung

Bangie Embol

Alphonso Guinoo

Hasnak Gasim

Ibu Hasnah

Abdul Jabbar

Niranjan Jonnalgada

Prakash Joshi

Chen Kai

Peth Kim

Ismail Kamaliah

Ismail Khatri

Michael Lim

Oei Khing Lim

Master Lu

Paola Manfredi

Maqbool

Padmashri Kailash Meher

Huang Chen Mei

Abhayna Moktan

Ibu Nela

Malavika Neogi Chatterjee

Azar Nakisae

Nancy Ngali

Matthew Ngau Jau

Niranjan

Edric Ong

Ramsay Ong

Tusau Padan

Petra Pelita

Jai Prakash

Vladimir Puchkovski

Rafiquiddin

Rumah Rakuji

Ramaniah

Chinthaka Ratnayake

Ibu Hasmah

Peeraphong

Rattanaseenurangkul

Deepak Sankit

Catherine Senia

Vikram Singh

Asif Shaikh

Gulam Nabi Sheikh

Shreekaladevi

Bhaju Shyam

Nirmala Songket

Soraya

Ram Soni

Sribhas C. Supakar

Tatiana Vorotnikova

Yu Yuan



Above  
Jai Prakash,  
miniature painter



Left  
Azar Nakisae,  
weaver



## Tree of Life Supporters

The Canadian Society for Asian Arts' (CSAA) programs are realized through generous donations of time and resources.

First and foremost, the Society acknowledges the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia. Our deep appreciation to Brenda Crabtree, Aboriginal Program Manager, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, and Daoping Bao, President and CEO, Premier Exhibitions, for generously supporting the curators and artists. Thanks also to the BC Achievement Foundation for their aid and to Toni Zhang McAfee, Executive Director of the Vancouver Lipont Art Centre, and her team for their invaluable assistance.

Sincerest thanks to Guest Curators Manjari Nirula, India and Edric Ong, Malaysia and the many artists in the exhibition for their time and commitment to this project. Our gratitude for the assistance and support of the World Craft Council-Asia Pacific Region, Craft Council of India, the Raza Foundation in Delhi, India, The Society Atelier Sarawak, Malaysia and the Design Company of Edric Ong. We would also like to acknowledge the East-West Centre in Hawaii and Curator Michael Schuster and his team for their assistance with the exhibition.

Committed CSAA members, Board of Directors, and friends ensure program success and include: Dr. Chan and Mrs. Peggy Gunn; Anthony Phillips; Margo Palmer, CSAA President; Sam Carter, CSAA Vice-President and Professor Emeritus, Emily Carr University of Art and Design; Sheila Hall, CSAA Board member and Emeritus Faculty, Emily Carr University of Art and Design; Ray Hartley and Sheila Hall, Canadian Curators; and Patrick Gunn, Graphic Designer.

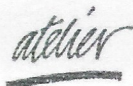
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Japanese Shibori  
tea ceremony  
textile



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WORLD CRAFTS COUNCIL  
ASIA PACIFIC REGION

