ROYAL TASTE
THE ART OF PRINCELY COURTS IN 15TH-CENTURY CHINA

DID YOU KNOW...
USC Pacific Asia Museum is the first museum in Los Angeles to feature contemporary art from Asia and the Pacific Islands?
Welcome to the USC Pacific Asia Museum’s exhibition

ROYAL TASTE: 
THE ART OF PRINCELY COURTS IN 
FIFTEENTH-CENTURY CHINA

Let’s go exploring! In this exhibition, we are going to discover how regional prince and princesses of ancient China lived 600 years ago. Some artifacts you will be looking at were buried in their tombs.

MESSAGE TO CARE GIVERS
Work together! Encourage your kids to find, look, imagine and discuss. Let the kids be your tour guides. Be sure to check out the Audio Guide and QR codes for more information.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE TO SOMEONE SPECIAL, AND HOW WOULD YOU WRAP IT?

Giving and receiving gifts played a big part of a Chinese royal’s life in the Ming Dynasty (ruled by one family). The types of gifts and their decorations were important.

This ancient Chinese vase was given as a gift to important people. It would be filled with wine or other tasty liquids. Spot a dragon on the container. Important objects were often decorated with symbols and images of animals, plants and artful designs, each with a special meaning.

DRAGON – power & protection
PHOENIX – purity & harmony
LOTUS – peace & prosperity
Design your own symbol-inspired container to give to someone important.
People in ancient China practiced the religion of Daoism. The Eight Immortals were seven gods and one goddess in the Daoist religion. They were thought of as role models and guides. The royals believed the Immortals helped them get over problems in their lives.

Get closer to the Eight Immortals. Each Immortal looks a certain way based on its strengths. The Elegant Scholar is dressed in fancy robes and carries a sword. The robes show he is important and the sword helps him battle evil. FIND each of the Eight Immortals by matching the descriptions below with the images.

A. ZHANG Guolao ‘An Ancient Man’—Often he is shown riding a donkey, which when not needed to travel can be folded up and put in his pocket. He carries a bamboo tube (called a fish drum) with two hooked rods that are used as drumsticks.

B. LI Tieguai ‘Diseased Beggar’—Often shown with a dirty face and scraggly beard and carrying a crutch. He is able to alleviate suffering with special medicine that he carries in his gourd.

C. ZHONGLI Quan ‘A Defeated Warrior’—He is born with a large chest and has a very large belly caused by his liking food. He holds a feather or fan.

D. LU Dongbin ‘An Elegant Scholar’—He is dressed in his scholar robes, hat and carries a sword on his back that repels evil spirits.

E. LAN Caihe ‘An Eternal Teenager’—He is shown with his hair in two topknots and holding a basket of flowers or peaches of immortality. He often uses a crane to get around.

F. HE Xiangu ‘An Immortal Maid’—The only female member of the group. She holds a lotus and stands next to a deer.

G. HAN Xiangzi ‘A Difficult Nephew’—Often seen with a flute and ram.

H. CAO Guojiu ‘A Penitent Official’—He is shown grasping a pair of clappers and rests on a cat with horns.
The Eight Immortals are celebrating the Peach Festival with the Queen Mother of the West in the garden. Paintings of this theme were often given as birthday gifts.

If you were invited to the party, which guest would you hang out with? What part of the garden would you explore? What type of gift would you give to the Queen Mother?
FIND all of the Eight Immortals and the Queen Mother.

DID YOU KNOW...
The peach in China is a symbol of long life?

(traditional Asian style of reading). WHAT DO YOU SEE?
Imagine the types of things you might wear if you were a royal today. List and draw them below.

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Princes of the Ming Dynasty wore golden belts to show their status and power. The belts were made of solid gold and decorated with precious gemstones such as rubies and emeralds brought from faraway places. Only noble people were allowed to wear jewelry like this belt.

Princesses also decorated themselves to show off their nobility. FIND these pieces of jewelry in the exhibition.

- RING
- PENDANT
- HAIRPIN
- HEADDRESS
- BRACELET
- EARRINGS
Princes wore many different types of crowns. The type of crown you are looking at was only worn by emperors and princes and during ceremonies honoring their ancestors and gods/goddesses. It was called a Mian crown. The square part of the crown represents Earth and the round part represents the Heaven.

What do hats tell you about the person who wears them? If you were a prince or princess in China, what would your crown look like? Share your ideas.

Design your own crown.
During the Ming Dynasty, royals decorated their palaces and built temples to important gods and goddesses. The god, Zhenwu, was believed to be the protector of the country and the perfect warrior. He is often seen with bare feet, long hair, and riding a turtle; all symbols of his important status.

People believe that Zhenwu can remove demons, sickness and evil.

DID YOU KNOW...

Many gods or goddesses took on other shapes. Zhenwu could turn himself into a snake. What form would you take and why?

WHAT BAD THINGS WOULD YOU ASK HIM TO REMOVE?
Royals and Daoists displayed statues like the one you are looking at in their homes or in temples. This statue is of Marshal Gou. Picture this sculpture in the dark, lit only by oil lamps. How would it make you feel?

IN one hand, Marshal Gou holds what is left of a hammer and a spike, it is used to chase away demons and illness. Notice he has a third eye, which looks out for trouble. He is also covered in decorated armor, which protects him from evil. The statue also has bulging eyes and an open mouth to show off his power.

DID YOU KNOW...

Marshal Gou may look fierce and dangerous, but his job is a good one: to protect people on earth. Who protects you, and how?

FIND the second Thunder Gate statue, how are they alike and different?

Try to imitate Marshal Gou’s face and body position.
Dragons are imaginary creatures with the characteristics of real animals. They may be scary in many cultures, but dragons are considered symbols of power, peace and prosperity in Asia. FIND other dragons in the museum.

p.2, Blue-and-White Meiping with Dragon Motif
Hongwu reign (1368–98) or earlier
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration
Excavated from the tomb of Prince Jing of Ying, Zhongxiang, 2006
On Loan from the Hubei Provincial Museum

p.5, Statues of the Eight Immortals
16th century
Yellow poplar wood
On Loan from the Hubei Provincial Museum

p.6–7, Formerly attributed to Liu Songnian (1174–1224)
Assembled Immortals Celebrating Longevity
15th–16th century
Handscroll, ink and colors on silk
On Loan from the Hubei Provincial Museum

p.8, Belt Plaques
15th century, before 1441
Gold and gemstones
Excavated from the tomb of Prince Zhuang of Liang, Zhongxiang, 2001
On Loan from the Hubei Provincial Museum

p.9, Restored Ceremonial Nine-Tasseled Crown
15th century, before 1441
Gold and gemstones
Excavated from the tomb of Prince Zhuang of Liang, Zhongxiang, 2001
On Loan from the Hubei Provincial Museum

p.10, Statue of Zhenwu
16th century
Bronze
On Loan from the Hubei Provincial Museum

p.11, Statue of Celestial Marshal
15th century
Gilt bronze and polychrome
On Loan from the Wudang Mountain Museum

p.12, Stem Cup with Cover and Holder
1437
Gold lid, gilt silver stand
Excavated from the tomb of Prince Zhuang of Liang, Zhongxiang, 2001
On Loan from the Hubei Provincial Museum

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