

**Exhibition:** *The Five Directions: Lacquer Through East Asia*

**Dates:** December 18, 2022–May 14, 2023

**Location:** Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 3)

(Los Angeles, CA—December 14, 2022) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *The Five Directions: Lacquer Through East Asia*, an exhibition offering a nuanced rethinking of lacquer in the region, celebrating Japan, Korea, China, and the Ryūkyū kingdom (Okinawa) as meeting points as well as centers in their own right.

*The Five Directions* traces the flow of materials and ideas throughout the region, where lacquer, a natural polymer derived from tree sap, was a widely circulated and prized commodity. Stylistic variations set regions apart, but the dynamic flow of techniques, materials, and visual vocabularies continued uninterrupted even during times of relative isolationism. Drawing inspiration from a spatial conception where North, South, East, and West are joined by a fifth direction, the Center, the exhibition unpacks the nature of these exchanges—as trade, tribute, and treasure. Visitors are invited to circumnavigate islands of micro-stories and trace the development of lacquer art as a multi-directional process.

This exhibition was curated by Einor K. Cervone, formerly The Mozhai Foundation Curatorial Fellow, Chinese Art Department at LACMA and currently Associate Curator of Asian Art at the Denver Museum of Art, with support from Stephen Little, the Florence and Harry Sloan Curator of Chinese, Korean, and South and Southeast Asian Art.

“Lacquer has been used for millennia throughout East Asia, fueling a lively cross-cultural exchange,” said Stephen Little. “This exhibition showcases over 80 important objects from LACMA’s collection, inviting visitors to embark on their own journey through East Asian lacquer, one of multiple routes that twist and turn, intersect, merge, and diverge again.”

## Exhibition Highlights

From the late Western Han dynasty in China, a **Lidded Cosmetic Box (lian) with Scrolling Clouds and Supernatural Creatures** (c. 100 BCE–25 CE). It is possible that these containers (likely part of a set intended for cosmetics) were used in daily life. In death, however, they came to serve the deceased for eternity. Lacquer was treasured for its resilience, which earned it a place in Daoist and popular lore as associated with immortality. Though often described today as “plastic of the premodern world,” lacquer is an organic substance whose natural durability explains its association with immortality and its use in funerary objects, escorting the dead on their final journeys.

From Korea, a **Black-lacquered Box with Auspicious Designs**, an elongated chest decorated with prancing deer carrying immortality mushrooms; cranes in midflight; thickets of bamboo; and stylized clouds—all symbols of longevity and immortality. The Ten Symbols of Longevity became a popular subject of decoration in mother-of-pearl during the mid-Joseon dynasty. The distinctive rendering of this flora and fauna can be seen not only on other Korean works but also in lacquers of neighboring regions.

The iridescent strips of mother-of-pearl on **Sano Keisuke’s *Budding of Recollection*** (2018) were harvested along various coasts, including Japan, China, and Korea. They gather—from all five directions—collecting at the center. Crowning this maki-e (sprinkled pictures) box is a minuscule finial, itself a functional box. As contemporary Japanese lacquer artist Sano Keisuke notes: “By treasuring an object and stowing it away, we in effect instigate a process of forgetting.” *Budding of Recollection* comments on universal notions of attachment and memory.

### Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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### About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 149,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region’s rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA’s spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [Lacma.org](http://Lacma.org)

**Image captions:** [left to right]*Circular Tray with Two Dragons Chasing a Flaming Pearl*, Ryūkyū Islands, c. 1700–1800, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. K. Lee in memory of Major-General E. F. Easterbrook, photo @ Museum Associates/LACMA; *Lidded Cosmetic Box (Lian) with Scrolling Clouds and Supernatural Creatures*, China, Late Western Han dynasty, about 100 BCE-25 CE, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Far Eastern Art Council Acquisition Fund, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; Shibata Zeshin, *Inrō with Design of Lacquerer Making Hats*, mid–late 19th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Raymond and Frances Bushell Collection, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; *Black-lacquered Box with Auspicious Designs*, Korea, Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 19th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with Museum Funds, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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