



San Antonio  
Museum  
of Art

## San Antonio Museum of Art Announces New Acquisitions To Its Expansive Collection of Chinese Art

**San Antonio, TX—June 22, 2021**—The San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA) announced today the acquisition of important historic Chinese artworks, including a gilt openwork crown and a gilt plaque decorated with a standing lion, both from the Liao dynasty (907–1125); a set of jade belt plaques from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and a set of gilt silver hairpins embellished with kingfisher feathers from the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). These new artworks expand SAMA’s stellar collection of Chinese art, which has particular strengths in ceramics from the dawn of Chinese civilization to modern time. The new acquisitions are part of an ongoing effort to enhance under-represented areas within the Museum’s wider Asian art collection such as metal work and jade.

“The artworks announced today capture the incredible artistry and skill of Chinese craftsman from across history, while also illuminating the importance of these objects—and the imagery and material they hold—to Chinese culture and society,” said Shawn Yuan, Associate Curator of Asian Art. “We are delighted to enhance the Museum’s Chinese art holdings with these stunning works, which further our ability to share narratives and develop understanding of Chinese material culture through time.”

### *Crown*

China, Liao dynasty (907-1125)

Gilt bronze

H. 11 7/16”

Purchased with funds provided by the Bessie Timon Endowment Fund

2021.1.1

The magnificent gilt crown is a mortuary item for a noblewoman of the semi-nomadic Khitan people, who lived in today’s northern China and Mongolia in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century. The domed cap is covered with chased floral scrolls and surmounted by a lotus flower and a now-missing deity. On each of the attached standing “wings,” two glorious phoenixes, with wide spreading wings and long tails, are positioned among scudding clouds. This crown is an example of the luxurious lifestyle of the Khitan elite, who established the powerful Liao dynasty and controlled an enormous landmass bordering Korea to the east and central Asia to the west. Acquiring this crown helps the Museum to present a more complete image of the rich Liao dynasty material culture, along with the Museum’s expansive collection of Liao ceramics.

### *Plaque with a Standing Lion*

China, Liao dynasty (907-1125)

Gilt bronze

L. 8 3/8” W. 4 7/8”

Purchased with funds provided by the Bessie Timon Endowment Fund

2021.1.2

The gilt bronze plaque decorated with a standing lion is an example of the impressive craftsmanship of the Liao dynasty. The energetic lion, hammered in low relief, stands on his left hind leg while thrusting the other forward. The lion’s broad chest rises, and his massive head turns backward as his flamboyant mane sweeps upward. Under the bushy eyebrows, the lion’s eyes focus intensely on a flaming pearl. The

imagery has a Buddhist origin: the lion guards the Buddha's teaching while the flaming pearl represents the Buddha's wisdom. The images of a lion with protective power rarely seen on other Liao works in the Museum's collection.

### *Belt Plaques*

China, Ming dynasty (1368-1644)

Jade

Elongated tab: 3.5"x1.4"; rectangular: 3.1"x1.4", 2.2"x1.4", 1.4"x0.7"; tear-drop: 1.4"x1.3"

Purchased with funds provided by the Bessie Timon Endowment Fund

2021.1.3.a-r

The set of eighteen jade plaques is the first important jade work to enter the Chinese collection. Jade has been China's most valued gemstone since the dawn of its civilization. These plaques were once attached to belts worn by noblemen. The rectangular plaques are carved in high relief with lively scenes of male figures teasing frolicking lions with ribbons—an auspicious subject with a long history in Chinese art. The hardness of jade is second only to that of diamonds. The delicate carvings on these plaques present the impressive craftsmanship of the jade carver.

### *Hairpins*

China, Qing dynasty (1644-1911)

Silver and kingfisher feather

5 3/4" to 5 1/4"x3 1/4" by 3 1/8"

Purchased with funds provided by the Bessie Timon Endowment Fund

2021.1.4.a-c

The set of three gilt silver hair pins is an exciting addition to SAMA's collection of Chinese dragon robes, embroidered brocade, shoes, and jewelry—all items from the wardrobes of upper-class families. All three hairpins are inlaid with kingfisher feathers, whose colors are as brilliant as azurite, lapis, cobalt, and turquoise. They were iridescent under the sunlight, creating a dazzling visual effect. Kingfisher feathers were a luxury material used on hair ornaments and crowns for thousands of years. The dominant image on each hairpin is a stylized bat with foliate wings outlined in thin silver. Bats are considered auspicious because the word *bat* is pronounced the same as luck and blessing.

### **About the San Antonio Museum of Art**

The San Antonio Museum of Art serves as a forum to explore and connect with art that spans the world's geographies, artistic periods, genres, and cultures. Its collection contains nearly 30,000 works representing 5,000 years of history. Housed in the historic Lone Star Brewery on the Museum Reach of San Antonio's River Walk, the San Antonio Museum of Art is committed to promoting the rich cultural heritage and life of the city. The Museum hosts hundreds of events and public programs each year, including concerts, performances, tours, lectures, symposia, and interactive experiences. As an active civic leader, the Museum is dedicated to enriching the cultural life of the city and the region, and to supporting its creative community.

###

### **For more information, please contact:**

Alina E. Sumajin

PAVE Communications & Consulting

alina@paveconsult.com / 646-369-2050