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17 AUG 2025

CITY *of* OTHERS

SINGTEL SPECIAL EXHIBITION GALLERY

ASIAN ARTISTS IN PARIS
1920s-1940s

City of Others: Asian Artists in Paris, 1920s-1940s is a groundbreaking exhibition that examines the art history of Paris from Asian perspectives. The exhibition compares the experiences of Asian artists in Paris during a dynamic period of time, featuring works by Asian artists like Fojita Tsuguharu, Georgette Chen, Lê Phổ, Liu Kang, Pai Un-soung, Itakulla Kanae and Hamanaka Katsu. These artists met people from different cultures (cultural “others”) and were seen as outsiders (“others”) themselves, leading to vibrant exchanges of aesthetics and ideas.



Fojita Tsuguharu.
《猫のいる自画像》
Autoportrait au chat (Self-Portrait with Cat),
1926. Oil, pen and ink on canvas, 80.4 × 60.2 cm.
Gift of the artist in 1927.
Collection of Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon.
© Fondation Fojita / ADACP, Paris, 2025.
Image © MBA Lyon - Photo Martial Couderette. B 1435.

PREFACE

How did Asian artists in Paris present themselves to the world? In this section of the exhibition, see a selection of portraits and self-portraits by artists like Lê Phổ, Mai Trung Thứ, Georgette Chen, Liu Kang and Pai Un-sung. These images show how artists chose to represent themselves publicly as creative individuals while navigating public expectations and perceptions of them as migrant artists from Asia.



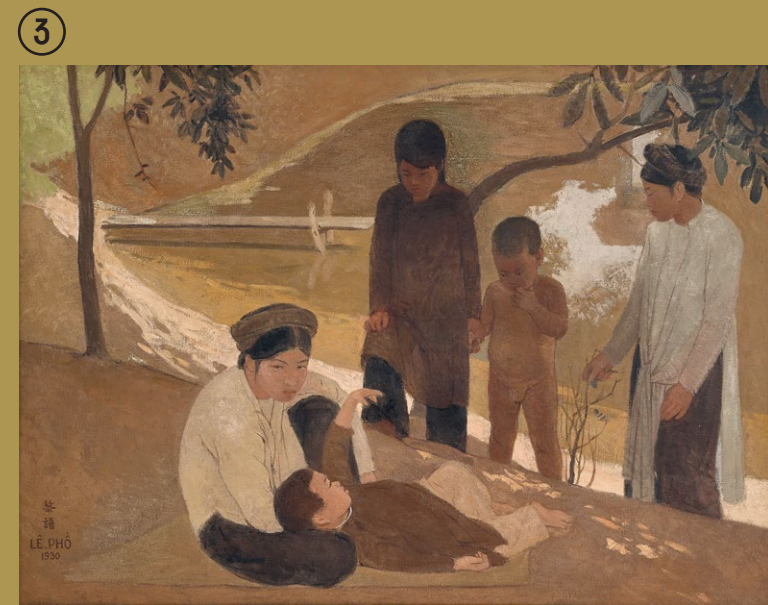
Hamanaka Katsu. *Composition*. c. 1930. Lacquer and gold leaf on wood; 2 panels, each 80 × 160 cm. Collection of Galerie Lefebvre. © ADAGP, Paris, 2025. Image courtesy of Galerie Lefebvre.

SECTION 1: WORKSHOP TO THE WORLD

By the 1920s, a taste for Asian art was already well-established in Paris, when the Art Déco movement further ignited interest in the “exotic.” This section shows decorative arts and design inspired by Asia, including lacquer wares from the atelier of Jean Dunand, and objects and jewellery from Maison Cartier. Artists from Asia were also active in Paris’s decorative art workshops. Sougawara Seizo and Hamanaka Katsu worked in collaboration with French designers while creating distinctive works of their own. Vietnamese artisans were often employed as lacquerers, and some of the first modern lacquer paintings made in Hanoi were exhibited in Paris.

SECTION 2: THEATRE OF THE COLONIES

At this time, Paris was the centre of the sprawling French colonial empire. The city became a site for both colonial propaganda and anti-colonial resistance. Art and visual culture were used to promote colonialism. An example was at the immense International Colonial Exposition of 1931. Vietnamese modern art had its first international showing in that exposition, including works by Lê Phổ, Nguyễn Phan Chánh and Vũ Cao Đàm. Meanwhile, activists in Paris from both France and Indochina—including future Vietnamese leader Hồ Chí Minh—used images, texts and exhibitions to highlight violence and exploitation in the colonies.

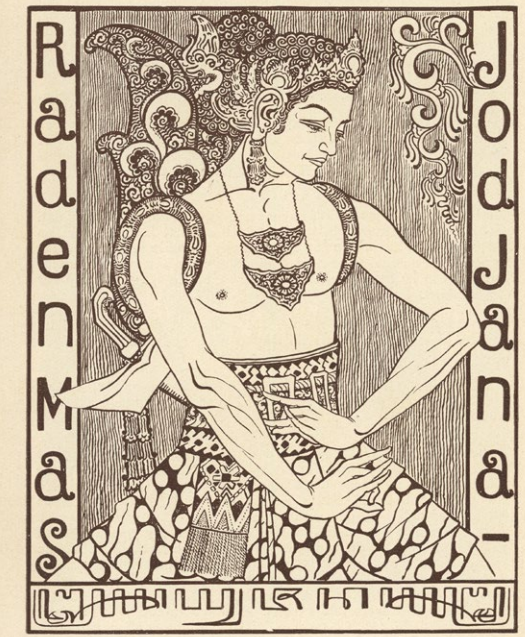
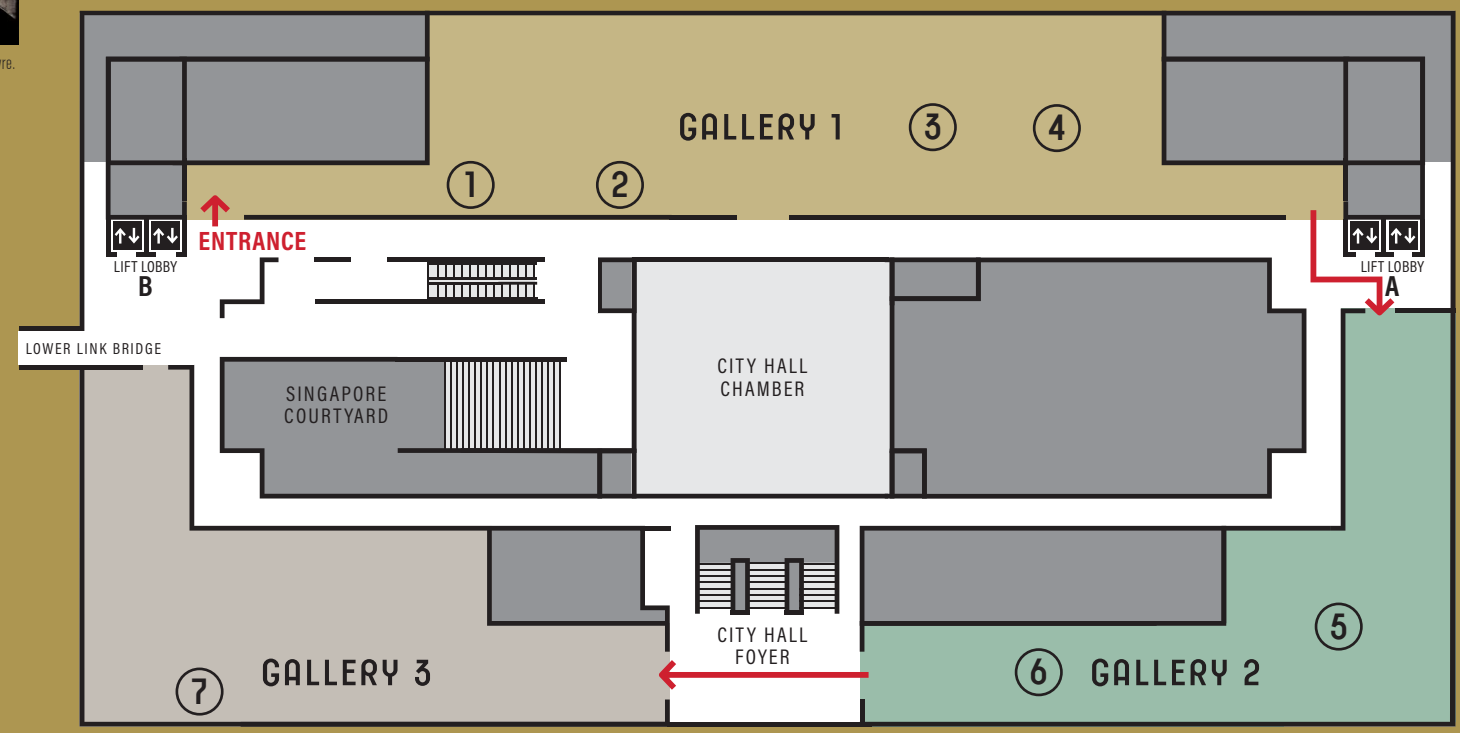


Lê Phổ. *L'Âge heureux (The Happy Age)*. 1930. Oil on canvas, 126 × 177 cm. Private American collection. Image © Aguttes.

SECTION 3: SPECTACLE AND STAGE

Dancers from Asia were part of the dynamic culture of 1920s-1940s Paris. Asian dance first appeared in Paris at World and Colonial Expositions, but by the 1920s it was also featured in popular venues like night clubs, music halls and theatres. Some venues presented caricatured versions of Asian dance, but others offered dancers from Asia opportunities to experiment with new forms. Dancers like Raden Mas Jodjana from Indonesia, Komori Toshi from Japan and Uday Shankar from India developed new dance forms during their years in Paris. This section of the exhibition presents dance archives and film clips, providing an expanded context for Asian artists in Paris.

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Booklet of press clippings and images of Raden Mas Jodjana, c. 1920s-30s. Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive.

SECTION 4: SITES OF EXHIBITION

From annual salons to commercial galleries, Paris offered an intense concentration of venues for artists around the world to exhibit their work.

Artists had to be strategic to forge their careers, often relying on networks of teachers and friends for support. Many Asian artists opted to exhibit at the Salon d'automne, a large-scale salon which exhibited both academic and modern types of work. At the same time, nationally themed exhibitions of Asian art took place, such as special exhibitions of Japanese and Chinese modern art at the Jeu de Paume Museum in 1929 and 1933. French museums acquired works of modern Asian art from such venues.

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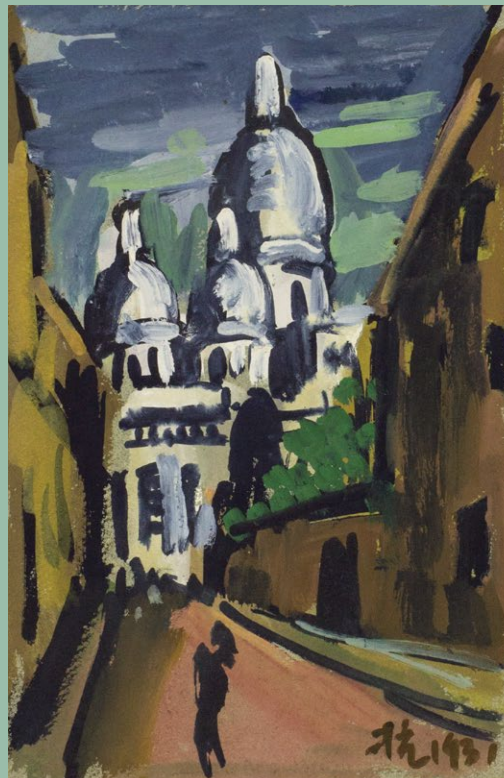


Itakulla Kanae.
《赤衣の女》
(Woman in Red Dress).
1929. Oil on canvas.
116.8 × 80.3 cm.
Collection of Matsudo
City Board of Education.
Image courtesy of
Matsudo City Board of
Education.

SECTION 5: STUDIO AND STREET

The experience of daily life as an artist in Paris had a strong influence on what artists produced. Many artists made work reflecting the streetscapes in which they lived and the people they encountered. Filled with studios, informal art schools and cafés, the district of Montparnasse was a popular area for artists. Foujita Tsuguharu was one such prominent figure in the Montparnasse community, and along with other foreign artists residing there, developed a style that became known as the “School of Paris.” Many emigrant artists from Asia, including Pan Yuliang and Sanyu, also chose to settle in or near Montparnasse because of its reputation as an artistic hub.

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Liu Kang.
View of Sacré-Cœur.
1931.
Gouache on paper, 25 × 16.5 cm.
Collection of the family of Liu Kang.
© Liu Kang Family.

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Amrita Sher-Gil.
Untitled (Woman Wearing Shawl).
c. 1932.
Oil on canvas, 42 × 33 cm.
Collection of the Dabriwala family.

SECTION 6: AFTERMATHS

The aftermath of World War II saw drastic changes. Like other sectors of society, the art world grappled with the trauma of the war. Artists sought out new visual languages to break with the past, especially abstraction, which was then taken up by new generation of artists arriving in Paris from Asia.

At the same time, brutal wars of decolonisation—such as the First Indochina War, 1946-1954—changed the position of artists from the colonies. After gaining independence from the French, Vietnamese art in Paris was no longer considered “colonial art,” and emigrant Vietnamese artists forged new paths for their careers. However, it could be difficult to return to their country of origin.

Chinese artists who remained in France after World War II also struggled with marginality in Paris, as well as their distance from China.

Meanwhile, decolonisation gave new energy to modernisms arising elsewhere in the world.

PROGRAMMES

In conjunction with *City of Others: Asian Artists in Paris, 1920s-1940s*, we are bringing together a variety of discussions, tours and screenings for you learn more about the exhibition.

For more information about the programmes, please visit nationalgallery.sg/CityofOthers2025.

SYMPOSIUM

CITY OF OTHERS, CITY OF MIGRANTS: ART AND CULTURE IN INTERWAR PARIS

Join us for an engaging symposium exploring the role of Asian migrants in shaping the cultural and artistic landscapes of Interwar Paris. This programme will also feature insightful research presentations on *City of Others*, led by our exhibition curators. More information will be available soon on our website.

PERFORMANCES

CREATIVE INTERPRETATIONS BY NAFA

Sat, 12 Apr | 2pm & 4pm | City Hall Wing, Level 2,
Singapore Courtyard | Free

See the exhibition *City of Others* in a different lens through the creative response by BA (Hons) Performance Making (Dance and Theatre) students and Diploma elective (Visual Arts) students from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

DANCE PROGRAMME RESPONSE

Sat, 10 May | 2.30pm & 4pm | City Hall Wing, Level 3,
City Hall Chamber | Free

Join us for an exciting dance and movement response to select artworks on display for *City of Others: Asian Artists in Paris, 1920s-1940s*.

FAMILY AND KIDS PROGRAMMES

DROP-IN ACTIVITY

May | City Hall Wing, Level 1,
Keppel Centre for Art Education | Free

Join us for a drop-in activity inspired by the *City of Others* exhibition at the Keppel Centre for Art Education's Expression Workshop!

TOURS

WEEKLY

Thu–Sun | 3.30pm (English)

Sat–Sun | 1.30pm (Mandarin)

CURATOR TOURS

Sat, 5 & 26 April | 2 pm

Sun, 15 & 22 June | 2 pm

Led by exhibition curators, these special tours delve into Asian art in Paris during the dynamic era of artistic migration before World War II. Gain insight into the exhibition and explore the cultural exchanges that shaped the living experiences of modern Asian artists in Europe.

PUBLICATIONS

EXHIBITION BOOKLET

CITY OF OTHERS: ASIAN ARTISTS IN PARIS, 1920s–1940s: EXHIBITION CONCEPT

Approx. 48 pages | paperback | \$14 incl. GST

Discover the lives and works of Asian artists in Paris during the extraordinary period of the 1920s-1940s. This full-coloured guide presents key highlights of the exhibition and essential curatorial texts in a handy format.

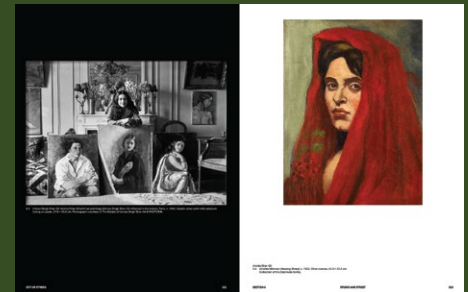
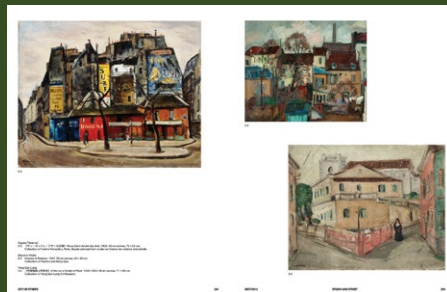


EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

CITY OF OTHERS: ASIAN ARTISTS IN PARIS, 1920s–1940s

Approx. 396 pages | paperback | \$55 incl. GST

This groundbreaking compendium to the exhibition spotlights well-known artists like Fougita Tsuguharu, Sanyu, Xu Beihong, Georgette Chen and Lê Phổ and presents new research on visionaries in the adjacent disciplines of dance and design. With critical attention to issues of colonialism, reception and migrant experience, this publication challenges ideas about the development of modernism in conditions of globalised exchange. With close to 200 artwork and 100 archival images presented in full-colour, as well as translations into English of primary sources—such as artists' letters, press reviews and exhibition texts from the period—the catalogue is an exciting source of new comparative research on modern art, for scholars and the general reader alike.

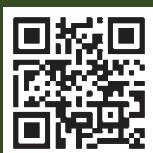


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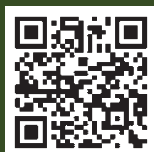
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NON-RESIDENTS: **\$35**

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SPECIAL EXHIBITION <i>CITY OF OTHERS</i>	\$25	\$15
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* Rates for locals apply to Singaporeans and Permanent Residents.

[^] From qualifying institutions only. Valid verification is required.

AN ACCESSIBLE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

The Gallery is committed to creating an inclusive experience that can be enjoyed by visitors with access needs.



SCAN FOR ACCESS GUIDE

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Daily 10am–7pm

General ticket sales end 30 minutes before closing time.



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