



## Press Release

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[smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/about/press](http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/about/press)

### **Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan** September 30, 2010 – January 16, 2011

*Exhibition combines majestic sixth-century Chinese Buddhist sculptures with digital components to reconstruct and contextualize damaged cave temples*

A 3-D digital reconstruction, with missing fragment in yellow



The University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art and the Smithsonian Institution's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery present *Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan*, a major new traveling exhibition that traces the historical origins, tragic despoliation, and digital reconstruction of one of the most important groups of Buddhist devotional sites in early medieval China. Drawing on a multi-year research and 3-D imaging project based at the Center for the Art of East Asia at the University of Chicago,

the exhibition mixes ancient objects from Xiangtangshan—considered among the finest achievements of Chinese sculpture—with innovative digital components, including a video installation that provides an immersive, kinetic re-creation of one of the largest stone temples.

Carved into the mountains of northern China, the Buddhist cave temples of Xiangtangshan (響堂山, pronounced “shahng-tahng-shahn”) were the crowning cultural achievement of the sixth-century Northern Qi dynasty. Once home to a magnificent array of sculptures—monumental Buddhas, elaborate attendant figures, and crouching monsters framed by floral motifs—the limestone caves were severely damaged in the first half of the twentieth century when their contents were chiseled away and offered for sale on the international art market. After years of intensive research, it is now possible to digitally envision much of the caves' initial appearance. *Echoes of the Past* provides new insight into Xiangtangshan's original designs and meanings while offering a new approach to understanding and interpreting damaged cultural sites.

*Echoes of the Past* is organized by the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art and the Smithsonian Institution's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. The exhibition is curated by Katherine R. Tsiang, Associate Director of the Center for the Art of East Asia, Department of Art History, University of Chicago, in consultation with Richard A. Born, Senior Curator, Smart Museum of Art, and J. Keith Wilson, Associate Director and Curator of Ancient Chinese Art, Freer and Sackler Galleries. It will be on view at the Smart Museum from September 30, 2010 to January 16, 2011 before traveling to Washington DC, Dallas, and San Diego.

## **About the Xiangtangshan Caves**

The Xiangtangshan caves were created during the Northern Qi dynasty (550–577 CE), a brief but significant period of cultural and artistic innovation in Chinese history. Translated as “Mountain of Echoing Halls,” the name *Xiangtangshan* refers to a total of 11 caves spread among three distinct sites in Hebei province. Planned and executed on a grand scale through imperial patronage, the largest of the caves was approximately 40 feet in height and over 800 square feet in area. Aided by the relative isolation of the caves, Xiangtangshan was not “discovered” until early in the twentieth century. Large-scale despoliation began in 1910 and continued for decades, as free-standing figures and other key sculptural elements were removed from the site. These fragments began to appear in public and private art collections outside of China, sold on a burgeoning antiquities market to dealers, collectors, and museums around the globe.

A contemporary view of Northern Xiangtangshan, South Cave



Because Xiangtangshan was damaged so extensively, it has been all but impossible for recent observers to appreciate the original appearance of the caves, or to understand the rich and complex artistic achievement they once represented. In 2004, the University of Chicago’s Center for the Art of East Asia launched a project to identify, locate, research, and document the dispersed stone carvings of the Xiangtangshan caves. Using sophisticated three-dimensional scanning equipment, the project’s imaging

team has photographed and scanned nearly 100 objects believed to be from Xiangtangshan, which are now located in museums and private collections across the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan. Through a collaboration with Peking University and the Fengfeng Office for the Protection and Management of Cultural Properties, the imaging team was also granted official permission to photograph and scan the Xiangtangshan cave sites. A digital archive of the project, cave sites, and dispersed sculptures is available online at <http://xts.uchicago.edu>.

## **Exhibition Overview**

*A full checklist is available upon request. For high-resolution images of works in the exhibition, please contact C.J. Lind at 773.702.0176 or [cjlind@uchicago.edu](mailto:cjlind@uchicago.edu).*

The Smart Museum’s presentation of *Echoes of the Past* includes 13 objects from Xiangtangshan and three related Northern Qi works of art. The exhibition juxtaposes dispersed sculptural fragments with a set of media projects including an immersive video installation, a brief documentary film about the present-day environs of the cave sites, and interactive touchscreen labels related to the monumental stone fragments on view. The “digital cave” video installation, overseen by media artist Jason Salavon, is a centerpiece of the exhibition, and provides an immersive, kinetic re-creation of one of the largest temples through a sequenced montage of archival photographs and contemporary 3-D images that trace an arc of despoliation, preservation, and reconstruction.



The Xiangtangshan sculptures on view at the Smart Museum are on loan from the Asian Museum of San Francisco, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Sackler Collections at Columbia University, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. As the exhibition tours, it will be supplemented by additional loans, and select venues will incorporate objects from their own permanent collections.

### **Related Programs**

*Unless noted, all programs are held at the Smart Museum and are free and open to the public. Visit [smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar](http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar) for more information.*

Thursday, September 30, 5:30–7:30 pm

#### **Opening Reception and Concert**

Celebrate the opening of *Echoes of the Past* with an eclectic, meditative performance by members of the acclaimed Spoonbender Orchestra. The group will debut *Gallery Echo Sutras I–IV*, an original score by composer Jeffrey Rukaman which combines gong-chime and contemporary elements to create an evocative soundscape that pays homage to the music of ancient China.

*The concert begins promptly at 5:30 pm and is followed by a reception and exhibition viewing.*

Friday, October 15, 12 pm

#### **Lunch-hour Talk: “The Life of the Buddha”**

Learn about the life and teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, founder of Buddhism, as illustrated by paintings, sculptures, and other works of art during this free lunch-hour talk by Seunghye Lee, a PhD candidate in art history at the University of Chicago.

*Free, but space is limited. RSVP to [kristypeterson@uchicago.edu](mailto:kristypeterson@uchicago.edu) or 773.702.2351.*

Saturday, October 23, 9 am–4 pm

#### **Symposium**

Join leading scholars for a free symposium that examines the history, culture, iconography, and religious function of the Xiangtangshan temple caves. Speakers include Paul Copp (University of Chicago), Katherine R. Tsiang (University of Chicago), Daisy Yiyou Wang (Smithsonian Institution, Freer and Sackler Galleries), J. Keith Wilson (Smithsonian Institution, Freer and Sackler Galleries), Dorothy Wong (University of Virginia), and Victor Xiong (Western Michigan University).

*For additional information, a list of presentation topics, and to reserve a box lunch, visit [smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar/symposium](http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar/symposium).*

Sunday, October 24, 2 pm

#### **Artist Talk: Jason Salavon**

Meet artist and University of Chicago faculty member Jason Salavon for a gallery discussion about striking a balance between art and information in two technologically complex projects

on view at the Smart Museum—his video installation *Everything, All at Once (Part III)* and the interpretive “digital cave” component of the exhibition *Echoes of the Past*.

*This program is part of Chicago Artists Month 2010, the fifteenth annual celebration of Chicago’s vibrant visual art community coordinated by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. For more information, visit [www.chicagoartistsmonth.org](http://www.chicagoartistsmonth.org).*

Thursday, November 4, 4:30–7:30 pm

**Teacher Workshop: Reading the Past**

*Smart Museum of Art (5550 S Greenwood Ave) and Oriental Institute (1155 E 58th St)*

Discover how new advances in imaging technology are helping us to “read” the past during this free workshop that connects classroom lessons to the Buddhist sculptures of Xiangtangshan and clay tablets from the ancient Middle East. Open to K–12 educators, the workshop includes tours of the Smart Museum and Oriental Institute as well as a talk by Matthew W. Stolper, professor of Assyriology at the University of Chicago.

*CPDUs available. Free, but space is limited. RSVP to [kristypeterson@uchicago.edu](mailto:kristypeterson@uchicago.edu) or 773.702.2351. Presented by the Smart Museum of Art and the Oriental Institute. Sponsored by the Arts and Science Initiative/Office of the Provost, University of Chicago.*

Friday, November 5, 12 pm

**Lunch-hour Talk: “Symbols and Meaning of Buddhist Art”**

Explore the major Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities in the bewilderingly complex Buddhist pantheon during this free lunch-hour talk by Seunghye Lee, a PhD candidate in art history at the University of Chicago.

*Free, but space is limited. RSVP to [kristypeterson@uchicago.edu](mailto:kristypeterson@uchicago.edu) or 773.702.2351.*

Sunday, November 14, 1–4 pm

**Family Day: Ancient Echoes**

Experience the art of ancient China during an afternoon of free family art activities. Look at Buddhist stone carvings and explore digital recreations of a cave temple. Join in an artist-led workshop and make your own *mandala* (sacred art circle). Plus, create a watercolor painting of your own paradise or make a footprint tablet.

*All materials are provided. Best for children ages 4–12, accompanied by an adult.*

Thursday, November 18, 5:30–7:30 pm

**Enlightened Sketching at the Smart**

Hone your figure drawing skills while sketching from a live model and the monumental Buddha and bodhisattva sculptures on view in *Echoes of the Past*. All skill levels welcome. All materials provided. The exercises will be led by an instructor.

*Presented in collaboration with the University of Chicago’s Department of Visual Arts.*

Friday, November 19, 12 pm

**Lunch-hour Talk: “The Divine and the Demonic in the Buddhist Pantheon at Xiangtangshan”**

Discover the range of fearsome deities—demons, monsters, and hybridized spirits—depicted in the sculptures of Xiangtangshan during this lunch-hour talk by Katherine R. Tsiang, *Echoes of*

*the Past* curator and associate director of the Center for the Art of East Asia at the University of Chicago.

*Free, but space is limited. RSVP to kristypeterson@uchicago.edu or 773.702.2351.*

Friday, January 7 and 14, 12 pm

### **Meditation Workshops: “Thought for Food”**

Feed your spirit, examine body awareness, and try visualization exercises during these two free meditation workshops led by Tim Boyd, a practicing Buddhist and vice president of the Theosophical Society.

*Free, but space is limited. RSVP to kristypeterson@uchicago.edu or 773.702.2351.*

Sunday, January 16, 2 pm

### **Curator Tour**

Meet the Smart Museum’s senior curator Richard A. Born and manager of interactive interpretation Melissa Kinkley for a closing-day tour of the ancient art and digital technologies at the heart of *Echoes of the Past*.

### **Exhibition Catalogue**

As the first comprehensive publication on the Xiangtangshan caves in English, this exhibition catalogue is a major contribution to the study of Buddhist and Chinese art. The full-color, 256-page volume features significant new essays by some of the leading experts in the field, as well as illustrated catalogue entries explaining the historical, religious, and artistic significance of all the objects in the show. In addition, two essays examine the role of advanced digital technologies in both the Xiangtangshan research project and the exhibition itself.

*Available in fall 2010, the catalogue is published by the Smart Museum and distributed by the University of Chicago Press. \$45.*

### **Exhibition Tour**

After its premiere at the Smart Museum, *Echoes of the Past* will embark on a national tour. An expanded presentation at the Sackler Gallery will include several additional objects from the Freer Gallery of Art collection, which are not permitted to travel to other museums.

**Smart Museum of Art**, University of Chicago, September 30, 2010–January 16, 2011

**Arthur M. Sackler Gallery**, Washington, DC, February 26–July 31, 2011

**The Meadows Museum** at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, September 11, 2011–January 8, 2012

**The San Diego Museum of Art**, San Diego, February 18–May 27, 2012

### **Curators**

Katherine R. Tsiang, Associate Director of the Center for the Art of East Asia, Department of Art History, University of Chicago, in consultation with Richard A. Born, Senior Curator, Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago and J. Keith Wilson, Associate Director and Curator of Ancient Chinese Art, Freer and Sackler Galleries.

**Credits**

*Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan* is organized by the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago and by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. Major funding is provided by the Leon Levy Foundation, the Smart Family Foundation, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Additional support for the Smart Museum’s presentation is generously provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the University of Chicago Women’s Board, and Helen Zell. The exhibition catalogue was made possible by Fred Eychaner and Tommy Yang Guo, with additional support from Furthermore: a program of the J. M. Kaplan Fund.



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*Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

**About the Smart Museum of Art**

As the art museum of the University of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art is home to acclaimed special exhibitions and a permanent collection that spans five thousand years of artistic creation. Working in close collaboration with scholars from the University of Chicago, the Smart has established itself as a leading academic art museum and an engine of adventurous thinking about the visual arts and their place in society.

**About the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery**

The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the neighboring Freer Gallery of Art together form the national museum of Asian art for the United States. As part of the Smithsonian Institution the galleries both are dedicated to advancing public knowledge about the arts and cultures of Asia through exhibitions, publications, research and education.

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**Smart Museum of Art**

**University of Chicago**

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**Hours**

Tues, Wed, Fri      10 am–4 pm  
Thurs                10 am–8 pm  
Sat and Sun        11 am–5 pm

Galleries closed Mondays and holidays

Café and Museum Shop open daily

**Admission is always free**