

## ROYAL TASTE – AUDIO GUIDE

### 1) *Guru Puja Mandala of the Mount Meru World System*

Dial tel. 626-628-9690 and then enter 17#

Located in Gallery 5. Adult Tour, narrated by Yeonsoo Chee, assistant curator

This ornate mandala tray was used by its owner to give ritual offerings to the *guru*, who was understood as a spiritual teacher, enlightened master or Buddha. Buddhist art was first produced in India in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, and then traveled throughout Asia along the Silk Road, arriving in China in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Mandalas date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. While the term *guru* is Sanskrit, it is an important part of many Buddhist traditions, especially Vajrayana. Similarly the mandala is a Sanskrit term, but is also an important spiritual and ritual symbol in Buddhism that represents the universe in its ideal form. *Puja* means worship, and stresses the devotional aspect of the practice, for which this mandala tray was used.

The ritual offering of a mandala is part of the *Guru Mandala Puja*, which is performed at the beginning of meditation. The offering symbolizes all the wealth that the disciple has in his/her possession and is willing to offer to the *guru* such as rice, grains, coins and even jewels, so that the disciple may immediately be released from hatred, greed, and delusion. Mandala offering trays are made of simple wood or beaded leather, or may be more ornate like this cloisonné one, another example of the opulence of the Ming Dynasty.

Can you find the 3 circles of flowers on top of the mandala? The 8-petaled lotus in the center represents the lotus in Akanishta Paradise, the seat of all deities in the mandala palace on Mount Meru. The 8 flowers of the inner circle support 8 lucky symbols. Start with the conch shell and move clockwise, find the banner of victory, umbrella of victory, lotus, two golden fish, vase, endless knot, and Dharma wheel.

### 2) *Jade Gui Plaques (2)*

Dial tel. 626-628-9690 and then enter 13#

Located in Focus Gallery. Adult Tour, narrated by Yeonsoo Chee, assistant curator

A *gui* is a long rectangular plaque with a pointed top and flat bottom, which emperors and court officials used since antiquity as a ceremonial tool in state rituals and court meetings. They are symbols of imperial power and were given as gifts to important dignitaries. Prince Zhuang of Liang was buried with three *gui* plaques that feature plain surfaces and identical lengths. The heaviest one (19 ounces) was found in his coffin and the two lighter plaques were stored inside a box in the front chamber. Gui plaques were also important imperial wedding gifts given to noble brides during the Ming dynasty. The Prince's second wife Lady Wei, would have received the short gui with the grain pattern in dots, which symbolizes fertility and prosperity. It was a favorite burial item for royal women and has been found in the tombs of many princely consorts.

### **3) *Statues of the Eight Immortals***

**Dial tel. 626-628-9690 and then enter 15#**

**Located in Gallery 4. Family Tour, narrated by Michael Fritzen, head of education and public programs**

These 8 immortal statues are part of the Daoist group of gods and goddesses, and are also legendary figures in Chinese mythology and popular culture. It was believed that the Eight Immortals were signs of prosperity and long life and that their powers could give life or destroy evil. Their power tools were called the “Covert Eight Immortals” and they lived on a group of five islands in the Bohai Sea in northern China. The Eight Immortals were first known as the Eight Immortal Scholars of Huainan or the Eight Gentlemen, who served Liu An, a Prince of Huainan during the Western Han Dynasty around 200 BCE.

The figures have animal companions and are decorated with characteristics that describe his and her identity as a scholar, warrior, beggar, ancient man, teenager, maid, nephew, and official. Work together to find these characters by studying the details of their hair, clothes, and what they are holding or carrying. You can reference our Family Guide for more details.

### **4) *Statue of Celestial Marshal Gou of the Thunder Gate***

**Dial tel. 626-628-9690 and then enter 16#**

**Located in Gallery 4. Family Tour, narrated by Michael Fritzen, head of education and public programs**

In the early 1400s, the Emperor Yongle ordered a series of state temple buildings to be built at Wudangshan in Hubei. The Emperor believed that the Daoist god Zhenwu (also known as the Perfected Warrior) approved his taking over the throne from his nephew, and so he promoted him to be the protector of his reign. Wudangshan became the center of the cult of Zhenwu, where many statues were found in palaces donated by the Emperor in honor of the god Zhenwu, including these two statues, Celestial Marshal Gou of the Thunder Gate and Celestial Marshal.

Daoism was one of the most important religious or philosophical beliefs in China starting around 200 BCE (before common era). The word *Dao* actually means a road, and is often translated as “the Way” meaning the way things come together in life while always changing, like the *yin* and *yang*. Daoism had some thunder gods that came to the earthly world to bring rain and get rid of demons that caused illness or bad luck. These gods were assisted by marshals such as these two Celestial Marshals, who became so popular that they also had their own cults.

### **5) *Jewelry (Personal Ornaments for Females)***

**Dial tel. 626-628-9690 and then enter 14#**

**Located in Himalayan Gallery (case 6). Family Tour, narrated by Nadiya Conner, senior development associate**

Many of these hairpins were made by the royal Jewelry Service and given as imperial gifts to the brides of princes and high officials, and so they are often found in the tombs of Ming Dynasty nobles. Hairpins were more decorative than functional, and showed the noble status of the women

that wore them because they were made with gold, silver, pearls, and precious gemstones. A total of 27 hairpins were found in the tomb of Prince Zhuang of Liang, believed to be owned by his second wife, Lady Wei.

Other jewelry found included solid gold rings, necklaces, earrings, bracelets and buttons that Ming Dynasty women wore to demonstrate their family status and wealth. These were decorated with small insects such as butterflies and dragonflies, toads, mantis, flowers, and powerful, symbolic animals such as dragons, lions, and the phoenix. Can you find some of these animals hidden in the intricate designs around this gallery?

## **6) Introduction**

**Dial tel. 626-628-9690 and then enter 12#**

**Introductory text panel. Adult Tour, narrated by Christina Yu Yu, museum director**

Hello, I'm Christina Yu Yu, director of the USC Pacific Asia Museum. I'd like to welcome you to the exhibition, *Royal Taste: The Art of Princely Courts in 15<sup>th</sup> Century China*. In this exhibition, you will encounter the rich material and spiritual lives of the imperial court; especially those of princes and princesses in the early-mid Ming Dynasty China.

For centuries in many different cultures - both eastern and western – we owe the creation of great art to the royal patronage of court painters, builders of monuments and palaces, sculptors that created statues, poets and jewelers. Imperial collections were amassed, some passed down through generations, some transferred to foreign lands by conquest, and others found well preserved in tombs. This special exhibition allows us a rare look into imperial life during the Ming Dynasty because of recent archaeological discoveries of princely tombs located in the Hubei Province in central China. There is also an important connection to the Daoist Wudang Mountains, which have been declared a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site, as a Ming emperor dedicated the Wudang Mountains as homage to his protector, the Daoist god Zhenwu. These treasures and religious statues attest to the great importance of the Ming Dynasty, known as the “Empire of Great Brightness,” which overthrew the Mongol empire, established Beijing as the new capital, built the Forbidden City, and sent ships across the Indian Ocean to Arabia and East Africa long before the Europeans. Hubei Province, where the majority of pieces in the exhibition come from, housed 19 out of a total of 50 imperial palaces.

I am proud to share with you that I was born and raised in Hubei province, and glad you are joining me to explore its rich historical and cultural heritage during the Ming dynasty.