

Tang Dynasty China: Art

618-907 CE



THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition presents some of the artwork of the period including some of the rare scrolls that have survived (sometimes in copied form) as well as frescoes from some of the imperial tombs.

It shows 24 handscrolls from 7 different museums located in three countries as well frescoes from four different tombs. Five of visitors (grave good figurines) are held in private collections whilst the remaining ten are from six museums in four different countries.

The Tang Dynasty, spanning from 618 to 907 CE, is celebrated as a golden age in Chinese history, marked by remarkable achievements in politics, culture, and the arts. Under the Tang emperors, China expanded its territories, solidified its central administration, and experienced unprecedented economic growth.

This era saw the Tang Dynasty playing a crucial role in the Silk Road, fostering extensive trade networks that connected China with Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. Chang'an, the dynasty's cosmopolitan capital, became a key hub for traders, scholars, and artists, contributing to a vibrant exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural practices.

The Tang period is renowned for its cultural flourishing, with advancements in poetry, painting, and calligraphy reaching new heights. This cultural and economic exchange significantly influenced the regions connected by the Silk Road, showcasing the Tang Dynasty's far-reaching impact.

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FEATURED IN THE EXHIBITION



SCENE WITH MUSICIANS AND DANCERS

Fresco from tomb of Han Xiu (672-739)
Xi'an China

Han Xiu was a prominent Tang Dynasty official, is located in Xi'an, China. Han Xiu served as a chancellor and held various important governmental positions. His tomb was only discovered in 2014 and contains the earliest 'landscape' painting ever discovered.

The scene with musicians and dancers is a vivid depiction of Tang Dynasty cultural life. This fresco portrays an elegant garden gathering, where performers entertain an audience, reflecting the refined tastes and sophisticated social customs of the era.

The musicians are shown playing traditional instruments, likely including the pipa (a plucked string instrument), flutes, and drums, while dancers engage in graceful movements.

The detailed rendering of their attire, including flowing robes and elaborate hairstyles, highlights the high fashion of the Tang court.

The setting, with lush trees and decorative carpets, emphasizes a sense of leisure and celebration.

This mural not only showcases the artistic talents of Tang artisans but also provides insights into the importance of music and dance in elite social and ceremonial functions.

Such scenes were meant to reflect the owner's status and cultural sophistication, immortalizing their legacy and affluence in the afterlife. The fresco is a valuable piece of cultural heritage, illustrating the Tang Dynasty's prosperity and its patronage of the arts.



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THREE AMBASSADORS

Fresco from tomb of Prince Yide (682-701)
Qianling Mausoleum

Prince Yide (682-701) was the only son of Emperor Zhongsong and Empress Wei. However, he ran afoul of his grandmother, Empress Wu Zetian, who ordered his suicide. He was subsequently pardoned and posthumously reburied. In this scene, three Tang officials escort the ambassadors, but who are they? The speculation is that the bald one represents Byzantium, the one with long sleeves represents Silla (Korea) and the one with the fur hat, represents one of the northern minorities.

PRINCESS AND ATTENDANTS

Heights +/-100cms

PENN Museum, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania, USA.

Its not often that a virtual museum is visited by royalty. The princess (centre) is sitting on a small stool flanked by two, rather aloof, attendants. Note, too, that the attendants have their hands clasped under bright coloured napkins (as a sign of respect in the presence of a superior).

The colours and the patterns of the brocade are dazzling. The details in the figures, typically dressed in period attire with elaborate headdresses, highlight the Tang Dynasty's artistic skill and cultural practices.



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VAN LIBEN (阎立本) REGAL ASSEMBLY

28.1 x 238.1 cms

National Palace Museum,
Taipei, Taiwan.

Van Liben (阎立本) was a prominent Tang Dynasty painter and official. His "Regal Assembly" depicts a grand court scene from the Tang Dynasty, showcasing the emperor surrounded by officials and dignitaries. The painting highlights the hierarchical structure and ceremonial grandeur of the imperial court, with detailed portrayals of elaborate attire and dignified postures.

Celebrated for its historical significance and artistic excellence, it offers a vivid glimpse into the sophisticated and powerful Tang court life.

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<https://silkroadvirtualmuseum.com> to enter the Museum

