A GOLDEN AGE
of CHINA
QIANLONG EMPEROR, 1736–1795
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Exhibition details

A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795
27 March – 21 June 2015

NGV International
180 St Kilda Road, Melbourne
Open daily, 10am – 5pm
(closed Tuesdays)

Tickets on sale from ngv.vic.gov.au
Adults $18 / Concession $16
Child $10 / Family (2 adults, 3 children) $55

cover: Giuseppe Castiglione
Italian 1688–1766, worked in China 1714–66,
Portrait of Qianlong Emperor in ceremonial court robe
Qing dynasty, Qianlong period 1736 (detail), coloured inks on silk, 238.5 x 179.2 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing

opposite: Giuseppe Castiglione
Italian 1688–1766, worked in China 1714–66,
Pine, hawk, and Lingzhi fungus
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period 1724 (detail), coloured inks on silk, 242.3 x 157.1 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing
A GOLDEN AGE of CHINA
Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795

MEDIA RELEASE

26 MARCH 2015

Hidden treasures from Beijing’s Palace Museum in the Forbidden City have come to Melbourne for the first time, in an Australian exclusive exhibition, A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795 tells the story of China’s foremost art collector Qianlong Emperor, one of China’s most successful rulers, fourth emperor of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and longest living emperor in Chinese history.

This exhibition provides an unprecedented opportunity to explore a rich concentration of more than 120 works from the Palace Museum’s art collection, which is built on the imperial collection of the Ming and Qing dynasties and holds some of China’s most rare and valuable works of art in its collection.

Tony Ellwood, Director, NGV, said, ‘This exhibition tells the fascinating narrative of one of China’s most influential rulers and a great champion of the arts, whose passion saw him become one of China’s foremost收藏ists and conservators of art.

‘It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to see exquisite works from Beijing’s Palace Museum in Australia and visitors can see stunning ink on silk paintings, dragon-embroidered silk court robes, precious objet d’art in gold and jade, as well as Qianlong’s own paintings and calligraphy,’ said Mr Ellwood.

The Minister for Creative Industries, Martin Foley, said, ‘A Golden Age of China gives visitors a fascinating insight into an era of China’s cultural history that resonates across the world to this day.

‘The Victorian Government is grateful to the NGV for entrusting the NGV with its treasures as part of a ground-breaking partnership between the two institutions. The exhibition comes here as a result of the strong contemporary relationship between China and Victoria,’ Mr Foley said.

The Qianlong Emperor’s long 60-year reign (1736–1795) was a particularly fascinating time in China’s history. Under his rule, China was the wealthiest and most populous nation in the world. Qianlong’s ability to preserve and foster his Manchu warrior-huntsman traditions whilst adopting the Confucian principles of political and cultural leadership, resulted in the successful governing of 150 million Chinese people.

It was his ability to adopt Chinese ways, yet honour his Manchu traditions that made him one of the most successful emperors of the Qing dynasty.

The Qianlong Emperor studied Chinese painting, loved to paint and particularly loved to practice calligraphy. The Emperor was also a passionate poet and essayist and over 40,000 poems and 1300 pieces of prose are recorded in his collected writings. Qianlong wrote more poetry in his lifetime than all the poets in the Tang dynasty (618–906) combined, a dynasty known for its golden age of poetry.

Aside from his own art practice, Qianlong combined his passion for collecting art with his role as preserver and restorer of Chinese cultural heritage. He also embraced the arts of other cultures: European, Japanese and Indian. Giuseppe Castiglione, an Italian Jesuit brother, exerted a great deal of influence over the arts in the court academy of the Qianlong Emperor.

The exhibition puts the spotlight on Qianlong’s reign and art in five separate sections; Manchu Emperor, Son of Heaven, Imperial art under the Emperor’s patronage, Imperial art of religion and Chinese scholar, art connoisseur and collector.

Visitors can enjoy a lavish display of paintings on silk and paper, silk court robes, precious-stone inlaid objet d’art and portraits of the Qianlong Emperor, Empress and imperial concubines; paintings of hunting scenes, court ceremonies and the private life of the Qianlong Emperor; and paintings of the Emperor as scholar and art collector.

The exhibition also presents paintings and calligraphy by the Emperor himself as well as classical paintings in his collection.

The exhibition includes a sumptuous display of ceremonial weapons of swords, bows and arrows, a chair made of antlers’ horns, silk court robes and ceremonial hats, amongst other ceremonial and palace treasures.

Visitors will also experience an immersive multimedia film which traces the origins of the Forbidden City, its construction and decoration, all of which sought to uphold the authority and absolute power of the Emperor.

The NGV developed this film in collaboration with Dr Geremie Barmé, Director, Australian Centre on China in the World and Professor of Chinese History, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, informed by his important study The Forbidden City (2008).

The NGV will devote 1,100 square metres of its gallery space for this exhibition, A Golden Age of China uncovers the richness of Chinese history and culture, and reveals the human interests of a governing emperor.

The NGV gratefully acknowledges the support of Rio Tinto, principal partner of A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795, and the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795 is on display at NGV International at 180 St Kilda Road, Melbourne from 27 March 2015 to 21 June 2015. Open 10am-5pm, closed Tuesdays.

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Giuseppe Castiglione, Italian 1688–1766, worked in China 1714–66, Qianlong’s personal artist depicting Prince Hongli (Future Qianlong Emperor) and his father Yongzheng Emperor 郎世宁画弘历平安春信图像轴
Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (c. 1736) (detail), inscribed by Qianlong 40.7 x 68.2 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.
A GOLDEN AGE of CHINA
Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795

THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition of more than 124 works from the Palace Museum, Beijing, shows the opulence and splendour of China's imperial collection during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor. The Palace Museum has inherited 1.1 million works of art from the imperial collection and now holds 1.8 million national treasures. A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795 highlights some of these works, and reveals the mystery and secrets of imperial life in the Forbidden City. It tells the fascinating story of the Qianlong Emperor, one of China's greatest and most fortunate emperors, who reigned from 1736 to 1795.

Qianlong became Emperor at the age of twenty-five, ruled for sixty years and lived to the age of eighty-nine. During his rule, China was the wealthiest and most populous nation in the world. The Emperor was a poet, painter and calligrapher, and also a great art connoisseur and collector. He greatly expanded the imperial art collection he inherited from the previous dynasties, and combined his passion for collecting with his role as preserver and restorer of the Chinese cultural heritage. The Qianlong Emperor's vision was to create a new golden age modelled on the ideals of ancient China.

FORBIDDEN CITY: THE PALACE MUSEUM

The Forbidden City, or the ‘Purple Forbidden City’ (Zijincheng 紫禁城), was named after the Zweit or Pole Star, believed by the Chinese to be the centre of the cosmos and the home of the Emperor of Heaven. The Purple Forbidden City was the earthly equivalent of the Heavenly Palace. As the residence of the Son of Heaven, no one outside the imperial court was permitted inside the Forbidden City.

The complex was built on the ruins of the imperial palace of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) in the early fifteenth century, when Yongle, the third Ming emperor, relocated the capital from Nanjing (meaning ‘southern capital’) to Beijing (northern capital). Construction took place between 1406 and 1421 and involved a conscripted workforce of ten thousand craftsmen and one million labourers. With some 9000 rooms, the Forbidden City occupies an area of more than 720,000 square metres, and served as the residence of twenty-four emperors of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. In 1925, with the establishment of the Palace Museum within the Forbidden City, this palace for one (the Emperor) became a palace for all.

MANCHU EMPEROR

In 1644 Manchu horsemen crossed the Great Wall of China and ruled under the name of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Tradition has it they were invited to suppress a peasant uprising by a Chinese general, who opened the gate to the strategic ‘mountain-sea pass’ in the Great Wall. Once entered, the Manchus ruled China for the next 268 years, and their leaders proclaimed themselves as Emperors of China.

The Manchus were originally known as the Jurchens, who were descendants of semi-nomadic tribes living in the forest of present-day north-east China. Nurhaci (1559–1626) united the Jurchen tribes and founded the Later Jin dynasty. His son and successor Huang Taiji (1592–1643) renamed his people Manchu in 1635 and changed the name of Later Jin to Great Qing (清 meaning pure, clear) dynasty and adopted the title of emperor. The invaders realised that in order to retain power and preserve their identity they would have to maintain their martial spirit and superiority in archery and horsemanship, as well as their Manchu language and dress. As supreme commanders, the early Qing emperors personally led military expeditions and fought in battles, and in times of peace organised hunting activities as a form of military exercise. They also held grand ceremonies to review their troops.
SON OF HEAVEN

In imperial China the emperor was called the Son of Heaven (Tianzi 天子) and was often referred to as the True Dragon (Zheng Long 龍). The ‘Son of Heaven’ title was first used in the Zhou dynasty (eleventh – third century BC), when the Zhou rulers, who worshipped Heaven as the Supreme Being, named themselves Sons of Heaven. They claimed that they were given the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ (Tianming 天命), or authority to rule, on moral grounds. As unifier of China in 221 BC, the King of Qin proclaimed himself First Emperor (Shi huangdi 始皇帝), adopting the title of emperor (huangdi 皇帝) that had previously been used for deities and the legendary sage-emperors of the golden past.

Although the imperial throne was won by military force, the Manchus realised they could not rule China on horseback: as a minority ethnic group, they needed to adopt Chinese ways to rule 150 million Han Chinese. The Manchu Emperor proclaimed himself the ‘Son of Heaven’, Ruler of the Universe. The Manchus inherited the intricate and hierarchical political structure of the previous Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and linked themselves to the illustrious rulers of the past dynasties of China, becoming part of this great lineage.

The Qianlong Emperor was Prince Hongli (1711–1799) of the Manchu clan of Aisin Gioro, fourth son of the Yongzheng Emperor (reign 1722–35). He was a favourite of his father and grandfather, Kangxi Emperor (reign 1662–1722), who recognised Hongli’s abilities in both martial and scholarly accomplishments from a young age. Hongli was selected to become the Qianlong Emperor in 1736 on the basis of merit. Qianlong (乾隆) is the name of his reign (1736–95); ‘Qian’ 乾 meaning Heaven and ‘long’ 隆 meaning eminence.

Qianlong was the sixth Manchu emperor and the fourth emperor of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). After reigning for sixty years, not wanting to outshine his grandfather who ruled as emperor for sixty-one years, he abdicated in 1795 in favour of his fifteenth son, who became the Jiaqing Emperor (reign 1796–1820). After he abdicated, Qianlong lived to the age of eighty-nine, making him the longest living emperor in the history of China. During his reign, China became the wealthiest and most populous nation in the world. Chinese silk, porcelain, lacquer and tea was in great demand in many parts of the world at this time, and great wealth was gained through trade with other nations.

To ensure succession to the throne, the Qing emperors had many wives. The empress was the principal wife and performed official duties, but there were other imperial consorts beneath her. The Manchu imperial family tradition required that an empress came from a renowned Manchu family. Court ladies were classified into eight basic ranks, with the empress occupying the first and highest rank. Qianlong had more than forty consorts and fathered seventeen sons and ten daughters.

While the Outer Court formed the ceremonial area of the Forbidden City, the Inner Court served as the private residence of the Emperor and his family. The rear palaces of the Inner Court are the most enclosed and secluded areas of the Forbidden City. Except for the imperial guards, the Emperor was the only man allowed inside the Forbidden City after dark. The Emperor and his wives’ personal attendants were low-status palace women and eunuchs recruited mainly from desperately poor Han Chinese families in northern China. Manchus were not allowed to become eunuchs. Eunuchs served in the imperial court as early as the Qin (221–207 BC) and Han (206 BC – 220 AD) dynasties.

IMPERIAL ART UNDER THE EMPEROR’S PATRONAGE

Qianlong Emperor played an important role in his court academy of art, and in his imperial workshops in the Forbidden City, Suzhou, Yangzhou and Guangzhou (Canton). Every work had to gain his approval before it was produced. The works here show Qianlong’s fondness for jade and his exotic taste for European decorative arts and painting with enamel; including snuff bottles, European clocks and Chinoiserie (decorative arts based on the European imagination of China). The arts commissioned by the Emperor demonstrate the opulence and wealth of his imperial court at the time.

One of the key figures in establishing the new aesthetic at the Qianlong court was the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), whose illusionistic approach to painting revolutionised the art of the court academy. Born in Milan, Castiglione arrived in Beijing in 1715 as a young missionary of twenty-seven and remained in Beijing until his death in 1766. He painted for three emperors: Kangxi (reign 1662–1722), Yongzheng (reign 1722–35) and Qianlong (reign 1736–95). Known by his Chinese name ‘Lang Shining’, Castiglione introduced many Western techniques to Chinese court artists.

Chinese Qianlong Emperor admiring blossom while playing qin (Zither) 清人画弘历观荷抚琴图轴	Qing dynasty, Qianlong period 1753 (detail), coloured inks on silk, 239.5 x 156.2 cm (image and sheet). The Palace Museum, Beijing
Shamanism was a religious practice of the Manchus and the peoples of north-east Asia. Shamanic rituals were established at the Qing court immediately after the Manchus’ entry into Beijing in 1644. In his traditional role as the Son of Heaven, the Qianlong Emperor performed ancient rituals and sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and the nature spirits of the Sun and Moon, wind, thunder, water, fire and earth.

As befitting a universal monarch at the centre of the world, Qianlong lent his support to a variety of religions, such as Ancestor Worship and Confucianism, popular Daoism and Chinese Mahayana Buddhism of the Han Chinese, as well as Christianity and Islam. The Manchu emperors embraced Tibetan Buddhism – the teaching of the Buddha as followed in Tibet. They favoured Tibetan Buddhism as practised by the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect, the order of the Dalai Lamas.

The Qianlong Emperor believed deeply in Tibetan Buddhism, which reached its greatest popularity at the court under him. His Guru or spiritual teacher was Rolpay Dorji. As one of the four highest incarnations in Tibetan Buddhism, Rolpay Dorje was also the Emperor’s spiritual adviser.

Like earlier Manchu emperors, Qianlong Emperor assumed the role of a traditional Chinese scholar. It is said he was a child prodigy, and at the age of six began studying the Chinese classics with Chinese tutors at the Hanlin Academy. He was also a passionate poet and essayist. No less than 13,000 prose pieces and 40,000 poems have been attributed to him. The Emperor also learned to write Chinese calligraphy and ink painting in the scholar-amateur style between the ages of eighteen and nineteen.

Most of all, Qianlong was a dedicated collector of Chinese art. The Manchu rulers inherited the ancient palace collection of the Ming (1368–1644) and earlier dynasties. But the real renewal and expansion of the imperial collection came under the personal direction of the Qianlong Emperor. He played multiple roles of collector, connoisseur, art historian, curator, registrar and conservator. Qianlong combined his passion for collecting with his role as preserver and restorer of the Chinese cultural heritage. His models were the emperors of ancient China, as well as the highly educated Chinese scholars whom he aimed to emulate. He had the vision of creating a new golden age modelled on the ideals of the past.
A GOLDEN AGE of CHINA
Qianlong Emperor, 1736-1795
盛世乾隆

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Voluntary Guide Tours
Daily, 11.30am
Cost Exhibition admission fee
Meet Exhibition entrance

Access Tours
Sat 11 Apr
• 10.30am Audio Describing tour for people who are blind or have low vision
• 1pm Auslan tour for people who are deaf or hard of hearing
Cost Exhibition admission fee
Meet Information Desk, Ground level

Access Day
Tue 16 Jun, 10am-1pm
Join us for a variety of guided tours including Auslan, audio describing and all abilities tours.
Cost Exhibition admission fee
Meet Exhibition entrance

Opening weekend talks
Sat 28 Mar
• 11am Senior Curator of Asian Art and curator Dr Mae Anna Pang discusses Emperor Qianlong's collection of paintings, sculpture, military, armour and personal objects from the Forbidden City.
• 12pm Senior Curator of International Art Dr Ted Gott discusses Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione, the garden designer, poet, calligrapher and devoted Tibetan Buddhist, Qianlong thought of himself as a ‘Caicunwaih’, an ideal or universal ruler who, through his virtue and wisdom, could transform the world. The Qianlong reign marks the high-point of late-traditional Chinese statecraft; to this day, it is regarded as a touchstone by those who would dominate China in his stead. But what was the Manchu-Qing dynasty? What are the characteristics of an emperor like Qianlong? Also, how has Qianlong shaped the Hermitage's 250 year journey from Imperial Palace to State Museum.

Cost Exhibition admission fee
Meet Exhibition space

Lecture Series: The reign of Qianlong
Sat 28 Mar, 2pm: Qianlong Emperor foremost collector of Chinese art
The Qianlong Emperor assumed the role of a traditional Chinese scholar, said to be a child prodigy, he was a poet, calligrapher and painter. He played the multiple roles of collector, connoisseur, art historian, curator, registrar and conservator. The Emperor combined his passion for collecting with his role as preserver and restorer of the Chinese cultural heritage. He had the vision of creating a new golden age modelled on the ideals of the past. Discover the Emperor’s hidden treasures from the Palace Museum in the Forbidden City.

Speaker Dr Mae Anna Pang, Senior Curator of Asian Art, NGV and Curator of A Golden Age of China, Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795
• 4 Apr, 2pm: The Three Main Halls of the Forbidden City: Architectural Persistence and Change
Exploring the persistence and changes in architectural design and planning during the Ming-Qing period, this study traces the main features of the original buildings and their positions by examining the present buildings and the platform, relevant historical records and pictorial evidence, and comparing them with extant buildings of the similar status constructed around the same period.

Speaker Professor Qinghua Guo, Asian Architecture and Planning, Melbourne School of Design, The University of Melbourne
• 11 Apr, 2pm: A Day in the life of the Emperor in the Forbidden City
The eighteenth-century Manchu-Qing emperor Qianlong enjoyed one of the longest reigns in China's two-millennia dynastic history. Ruler, social exemplar, patriarch, warrior, garden designer, poet, calligrapher and devoted Tibetan Buddhist, Qianlong thought of himself as a ‘Caicunwaih’, an ideal or universal ruler who, through his virtue and wisdom, could transform the world. The Qianlong reign marks the high-point of late-traditional Chinese statecraft; to this day, it is regarded as a touchstone by those who would dominate China in his stead. But what was the Manchu-Qing dynasty? What are the characteristics of an emperor like Qianlong? Also, how has Qianlong shaped the Hermitage's 250 year journey from Imperial Palace to State Museum.

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Film: The Last Emperor
Sat 10 May, 2pm
(1987, 163 mins, M)
A dramatic history of Pu Yi, the last Emperor of China, from his lofty birth and brief reign in the Forbidden City; through his abdication, his decline and dissolute lifestyle, and finally to his obscure existence as just another peasant worker in the People's Republic.
Cost Free
Venue Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, Ground Level, NGV International

Floor Talk Series – A Treasured Work
• Wed 6 May, 11am: Curator of International Decorative Arts and Antiquities, Dr Matthew Martin, discusses the Lidded box with European figures and Qianlong reign mark as an example of the phenomenon of ‘occidenterie’ – Chinese art that evoked Western visual culture for consumption by Chinese audiences.

Speaker Dr Matthew Martin, Curator, International Decorative Arts & Antiquities
• Wed 13 May, 11am: Curator of International Art, Sophie Mathieson, discusses clocks and scientific instruments as an international currency in the global Enlightenment

Speaker Sophie Mathieson, Curator, International Art
• Wed 20 May, 11am: Amanda Dunsmore, Senior Curator of International Decorative Arts and Antiquities discusses the function and symbolism of the treasures of the scholar’s study, as they are known.

Speaker Amanda Dunsmore, Senior Curator, International Decorative Arts and Antiquities
• Wed 27 May, 11am: Curator of Asian Art, Carol Cains, discusses the painting Qianlong Emperor playing the role of Vimalakirti by Ding Guanpeng.

Speaker Carol Cains, Curator, Asian Art
• Wed 3 Jun, 11am: Curator of Asian Art, Wayne Crotters, discusses hand scrolls painted by the Qianlong Emperor of subjects in two of China’s most historic cities, The West Lake in Hangzhou and Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou.

Speaker Wayne Crotters, Curator, Asian Art

Cost Exhibition admission fee
Venue Exhibition space

Floor Talk: Ceremonial Vessels
Sat 13 Jun, 1pm
Join Iain Clark, an independent researcher with special interest in Chinese ceramic ceremonial vessels, for a brief explanation of the four moon-white ritual ceramics from the Qianlong period of the Qing dynasty (1735–95).

Speaker Iain Clark, historian and independent researcher

Cost Exhibition admission fee
Venue Exhibition space

Film Series: Great Collections
• Secrets of the Forbidden City
Sat 6 Jun, 2pm
(2008, 90 mins, Unrated)
The extraordinary story of how the largest palace on earth, The Forbidden City in Beijing, came to be built.
Cost Free
Venue Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, Ground Level, NGV International

The Great Museum
Sat 13 Jun, 2pm
(2014, 94 mins, Unrated)
A curious, witty and humorous peek behind the scenes at a world-famous cultural institution. The film observes the various processes involved in creating a perfect setting for art. From the managing director to the cleaning services team, from the curators to the art historians.
Cost Free
Venue Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, Ground Level, NGV International

Hermitage Revealed
Sat 20 Jun, 2pm
(2014, 83 mins, unrated)
The State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg is one of the largest and most visited museums in the world, holding over 3 million treasures and world class masterpieces in stunning architectural settings. To celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2014, Marly Kimnment’s film reveals the remarkable stories that have shaped the Hermitage’s 250 year journey from Imperial Palace to State Museum.
Cost Free
Venue Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, Ground Level, NGV International

Lecture: The beginning of the Qing Dynasty
Sun 21 Jun, 11am
Join the President of NGV Volunteer Guides, Ramona Chua, for an in depth exploration of the beginning of the Qing Dynasty. Discover the history of the Manchus, where they came from and how they came to rule China for 268 years. The Qianlong Emperor’s long 60-year reign (1736–1795) was a particularly fascinating time in China’s history where he was a leader of the Golden Age of China. Take a closer look at the paintings and objects created during Qianlong’s reign, and featured in the exhibition.

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Cost Free
Venue Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, Ground Level, NGV International

Code P1539
Exhibition entry fees are waived for all school students courtesy of Principal Partner, Rio Tinto.

From early years to tertiary level, a diverse range of programs for students and teachers will explore A Golden Age of China. For further information visit ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/education/

Highlights include:

Introductory talk
All levels
Enter the Forbidden City and discover hidden treasures. Explore the world of the Qianlong Emperor who was descended from the Manchu rulers and became the sixth Manchu emperor and the fourth emperor of the Qing dynasty. Examine the external self of the emperor to discover his inner self. What lead the Emperor to become a scholar, art collector and connoisseur of cultural heritage? What were his interests and what legacy did he leave?

Cost $7

Imperial robes workshop
All levels
Become an Emperor for a day. The Qianlong Emperor's robes were sumptuous, embroidered with auspicious symbols and made of yellow silk reserved for the Son of Heaven. Create your own design for a ceremonial robe, headdress or court shoes inspired by the symbolism imbedded in the treasures of the Forbidden Palace. Includes introductory talk.

Cost $18 (2 hours)

Calligraphy and painting workshop
All levels
Become a scholar for a day. The Qianlong Emperor studied Chinese painting, loved to paint and particularly loved to practice calligraphy. He was also passionate about poetry and added inscriptions to the paintings in the Imperial collection. Create your own poem and practice brush painting to produce your own scroll painting. Includes introductory talk.

Cost $16 (2 hours)

Collection Connections: Ancient History
Recommended for Year 7
The NGV Asian collection spans objects and artworks from Neolithic China, and the Shang dynasty to the last great dynasty of the Qing. Trace the ancient history of China through bronze vessels and ceramic and jade artefacts, as well as paintings on silk and other textiles. Gain an understanding of how these objects reflect the society in which they were produced, as well as a rich resource for insights into rituals, philosophy, religion and cultural beliefs.

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Publications

A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795
Ding Meng and Mae Anna Pang
Publisher: National Gallery of Victoria
290 x 220mm, portrait, paperback, 144 pages
Fully illustrated in colour
ISBN: 9780724104048
Category: Asian Art
Published: March 2015
$29.95

Featuring more than 120 works from the prestigious Palace Museum, Beijing this beautifully illustrated volume reveals the richness of Chinese history and culture, the opulence and splendour of the imperial art collection under Qianlong, and the intriguing character of a significant ruler who became the greatest art collector in eighteenth-century China.

Merchandise

Browse the NGV design store for a range of Qianlong Emperor inspired products, including postcards, greeting cards, textile pieces, and an exclusive range of porcelain by Victorian artist Bridget Bodenham, inspired by the paintings of the Emperor’s clothing.

Dining

Persimmon
Try our four course Chinese-inspired market menu designed weekly with the freshest ingredients. Cost $55, with matching wines $85.

Gallery Kitchen
Enjoy lunch in Gallery Kitchen and try the Chinese specials of the day including braised pork belly, buns, noodles and more.

Tea Room
Enjoy a relaxing break with an extensive range of teas in the Tea Room including Oolong and Chrysanthemum tea.

Additional Offerings

Qianlong Emperor and Qianlong Emperor appraising: One or two 清人画弘历是一是二图挂屏
Qing dynasty, Qianlong period 1736–95, screen painting painted and signed by Qianlong Emperor in the summer of 1780 and with two seals of the Qianlong Emperor, also inscribed with poem by Qianlong Emperor, coloured inks on silk, 92.2 x 121.5 cm.
The Palace Museum, Beijing
A GOLDEN AGE of CHINA
Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

The Victorian Government is proud to support A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795 at the National Gallery of Victoria. This impressive exhibition displays more than 120 works from the prestigious Palace Museum, Beijing – China’s national museum and home to more than 1.8 million works of art.

The exhibition tells the story of one of the most dynamic and rich periods in Chinese history. It is told through the eyes of the Qianlong Emperor, a captivating ruler and lover of art and culture who became the greatest art collector of his time.

Audiences will gain an unprecedented opportunity to see rare works from the Emperor’s imperial collection, including large-scale paintings on silk, imperial seals made from gold, ivory and jade, opulent silk court robes, ceremonial hats, swords, bows and arrows and jewellery. The works are magnificent in their artisanship and diversity.

On behalf of the people of Victoria, I sincerely thank the People’s Republic of China and the Palace Museum for allowing these treasures to travel to the National Gallery of Victoria. I congratulate the National Gallery of Victoria’s Council of Trustees, Director, Tony Ellwood, and staff for their vision and commitment to presenting this exhibition and publication. I also gratefully acknowledge the exhibition’s sponsors and partners, whose vital support makes an international collaboration of this scale possible.

I encourage all Australians to view this stunning exhibition. A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795 represents a wonderful opportunity to build on Melbourne’s reputation as Australia’s art and culture capital and to forge stronger business, personal and cultural ties between China and Victoria.

The Honourable Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria

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Chinese: Buddhist statue of Guanyin, Bodhisattva of Compassion with Qianlong reign mark. Qing dynasty, Qianlong period 1736–95, inscribed in Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian and Tibetan when commissioned by Qianlong Emperor in 1748, gold, silver, coral, sapphire, ruby, pearls, 91.0 x 46.5 x 31.0 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing
Rio Tinto
Principal Partner
Rio Tinto is proud to support this exhibition of magnificent works from the imperial collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. Aside from the quality of the works on display, A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795 highlights the value of the arts as both an enriching influence on society and a medium for building respect and understanding between different cultures.

The Qianlong Emperor was renowned for his art collection and saw his cultural heritage as one of the pillars supporting the golden age over which he reigned. His legacy provides us with great insight into Chinese culture and creativity that can help further strengthen the relationship between modern China and Australia.

Rio Tinto has a long history of trade and partnership with China, and recognises that the key to any successful partnership is the type of mutual respect and understanding that A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795 will help develop. We hope you enjoy the exhibition, and that it inspires new heights of cooperation and creativity between Australia and China while reinforcing the value of the arts to any society.

Air China
Official Airline Partner
Air China is proud to be partnering with the National Gallery of Victoria to support A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795. As Official Airline Partner and National flag carrier of the People’s Republic of China, we aim to play a significant role in local community, to support the National Gallery of Victoria cultivating knowledge of China’s diverse history and, fostering a deeper understanding of rich Chinese culture. We are very honoured to be a partner of the NGV and to be contributing to the dialogue between China and Australia through the shared language of art and our services.

Bank of Melbourne
Major Partner
Bank of Melbourne is Victoria’s fresh take on a local, full-service bank. With a network approaching 100 branches and our Collins Street head office and call centre, we’re helping Victorians own their dream home, start and grow their business, and get set for retirement. Since the bank’s relaunch almost 4 years ago, it’s supported the organisations and events that really matter to Victorians. Bank of Melbourne’s dedicated Asian Business team is proud to support A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795, showcasing pieces from The Palace Museum’s important collection.

Telstra
Major Partner
Telstra is a long term supporter of the arts and recently announced its three year creative partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria. At Telstra we’re all about bringing you brilliant experiences and inspiring people to connect. We’re proud to be a Major Partner of A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor, 1736–1795, and hope you enjoy the exhibition.

Australia-China Council
Supporter
I congratulate the National Gallery of Victoria on putting together this comprehensive exhibition showcasing works from the collection of Chinese Emperor Qianlong. This exhibition is a significant endeavour that has served to strengthen cultural engagement with China, and provides a portal for the Australian public to glimpse some of the richness of China’s cultural and historic legacy. Since its establishment in 1978, the Australia-China Council has played a pre-eminent role in fostering cultural and artistic engagement with China and we are pleased to be associated with this important exhibition.