

PHOENIX

Symbol of Virtue, Peace, and Harmony

March 2nd - May 6th, 2023

Throckmorton Fine Art is pleased to present an expansive exhibit of jade carvings of the mystical bird long present in Chinese mythology—the phoenix. The show will display over sixty jade carvings, each of which are exquisite pieces of ornamental and/or ceremonial sculpture in their own right. The exhibit features artworks produced by cultures that span the history of Chinese civilization, from the late Neolithic period through to the early 20th century.

Phoenix (Fenghuang) imagery was widespread throughout the many periods of Chinese history, and these masterful carvings were the talisman of the cultures that produced them. A belief in the importance of “fortune” is an enduring, and charming, characteristic of Chinese mythology. But the phoenix is also a symbol of harmony, and so these talismans were—and are—symbols of hope.

Some of the works on view include a large, yet impossibly thin “cloud” shaped pendant with bird figures from the Hongshan (4700-2500 BCE) culture. There are eccentric ornamental fittings and pendants from the Shang (1600–1100 BCE) and Zhou periods (1066–221 BCE). From the Han Period (206 BCE–220 CE), there are pendants, belt hooks, and other adornments decorated with meticulously carved relief work. Other works included highlight the craftsmanship of the Tang (618 – 907 CE), Yuan (1279 – 1368 CE), and Qing (1644–1912 CE) periods. Separated by millennia, these cultures differ in their visual language, yet all exhibit a reverence for avian imagery.

A catalogue accompanies the exhibit and includes an erudite history of Chinese jade birds by the foremost expert on the subject, Gu Fang, Senior Fellow of the Institute of Archeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The jade carvings exhibited were collected by Spencer Throckmorton over a

twenty-seven-year period, and each has been thoroughly studied and vetted by Mr. Gu Fang.

All objects on display are exceedingly rare, such as a group of gilt Warring States pendants. There is also a stunning eighteenth century “marriage phoenix” comprised of two halves that, when brought together, form a single white jade pendant. The abundance of jade birds represented throughout the long history of Chinese civilizations is apparent in the show. They offer a fascinating window into both the role of jade and of the phoenix in Chinese culture.

Front Page Top: Phoenix Pendant, Qing Dynasty, 1644 - 1912 CE, Gilt Jade, H: 2 1/4 in. W: 5 in.

Above: Cloud-Shaped Phoenix Pendant, Late Neolithic Period, Hongshan Culture, 4700 - 2500 BCE, Jade, H: 3 7/8 in. W: 10 1/8 in.

Bottom Left: Horned Owl, Late Neolithic Period, Hongshan Culture, 4700 - 2500 BCE, Jade, H: 2 5/16 in. W: 2 5/8 in.

Bottom Right: Dragon and Phoenix Openwork Pendant, Qing Dynasty, 1644 - 1912 CE, Jade, H: 3 7/8 in. W: 1 7/8 in.

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