



Smithsonian Institution

OUR SHARED FUTURE: COLLECTIONS HIGHLIGHTS APRIL 2023

The following stories highlight Smithsonian collections that help to shape and champion our strategic pan-Institutional initiatives, including **Life on a Sustainable Planet**. These highlights show how the Smithsonian is focused on diverse representation within the collections and also showcases how both collections and research come together in an attempt to educate and mitigate the impacts of climate change and other types of human impacts on nature.

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM MAKES HISTORIC ACQUISITION OF ASIAN AMERICAN ART



Hisako Hibi, *Floating Clouds*, 1944, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the American Women's History Initiative Acquisitions Pool, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, 2023.6.1

The **Smithsonian American Art Museum** (SAAM) is at the forefront of a movement by museums in the United States to focus on contributions by Asian American artists and correct the narrative that kept them in the margins for decades. Melissa Ho, SAAM's curator of twentieth-century art, noted recently in the *New York Times* that this project aims to "complicate and enrich the narrative of American art," adding that "recognizing the contributions of Asian American artists is a critical part of that."

SAAM has embarked on an Asian American art initiative to expand and enrich the representation of Asian American experiences, perspectives, and artistic accomplishments in the museum's collection and public displays. The museum seeks to preserve historic works of Asian American art and support new scholarship about Asian American artists and their communities. Efforts are focusing on the research and documentation of SAAM's existing collection of works

by artists of Asian descent and the pursuit of new acquisitions that reflect the diversity and historical depth of Asian America. Major works by Tiffany Chung, Tseng Kwong Chi, Christine Sun Kim, Jiha Moon, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Chiura Obata, and Wanxin Zhang were recently added to the museum's collection.

The collecting activities of the initiative build on the ongoing success of a partnership between SAAM and the **Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center** (APAC) established in 2020, in which each unit commits expertise and funds towards acquiring art by Asian American and Pacific Islander artists. Delayed by the pandemic, the first art purchases made possible through this partnership were realized in 2022, with the acquisition of significant works by Chitra Ganesh, Kapulani Landgraf (the first Native Hawai'ian artist represented in SAAM's collection), and Stephanie Syjuco. Through APAC, gifts of art by renowned Hawai'i-based modernists Satoru Abe and Tadashi Sato also entered SAAM's collection, courtesy of the Daniel K. Inouye Institute.

An important aim of SAAM's initiative is to recuperate and reintroduce the achievements of Asian American artists who lived during the Exclusion Era (1882-1965), a period when numerous social and legal constraints were placed on people of Asian descent in the U.S. In 2023, SAAM acquired paintings by two such trailblazing Japanese American artists, Hisako Hibi and Matsusaburo George Hibi. The works were purchased from the artists' families, with funds in part from the **Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative**, now a part of the **Smithsonian American Women's History Museum**.

The Hibis were both part of a vibrant and diverse art scene that thrived in San Francisco between the World Wars. Immigrants from Japan, they met in the late 1920s when Hisako was studying oil painting at the California School of Fine Arts. Matsusaburo was already an established figure, having played a central role in the groundbreaking East West Art Society, an association that brought together artists and art traditions from Europe and Asia. Hisako was one of only three Japanese American women to have work included in the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939-40).



Matsusaburo George Hibi, *Coyotes Came Out of the Desert*, 1945, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Catherine Walden Myer Fund, 2023.5

The United States' entry into the Second World War and the 1942 issuing of Executive Order 9066 upended the Hibis' lives. Forced from their home, the Hibi family spent more than three years in government detention, mostly at the Topaz Relocation Camp in Utah. The Hibis created remarkable works of art while incarcerated at Topaz, including two paintings that went on public view at SAAM in January 2023 as part of the special exhibition *Artist to Artist*. Both works testify to the power of art to confront adversity. *Coyotes Came out of the Desert* (1945) by Matsusaburo masterfully conveys an atmosphere of dread and unease, emotions surely felt by the inmates as they lived under surveillance and grappled with the loss of their freedoms. *Floating Clouds* (1944) by Hisako looks beyond the oppressive environment of the camp towards the boundless sky as an emblem of freedom and mental escape.

BIRD HOUSE REOPENS AT THE NATIONAL ZOO



A black-and-white warbler sits in a tree in the Bird Friendly Coffee Farm aviary. Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute visitors will be able to see these migratory birds up close at the renovated Bird House

The **National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute** (NZCBI) invites visitors to soar into its renovated Bird House that reopened on March 13. The innovative exhibit explores the fascinating world of migratory songbirds, waterfowl, and shorebirds native to North, Central, and South American ecosystems. Migratory birds are critical in pest control, pollination, and seed dispersal for trees, plants, and crops. Bilingual panels—in English and Spanish—tell the story of how migratory birds connect communities and contribute to healthy ecosystems across the Americas.

As Zoo visitors “migrate” through the shores of the Delaware Bay, a lush prairie pothole, and a tropical Bird Friendly coffee farm, free-flighted birds stride, paddle, tweet, and fly all around them. These multi-

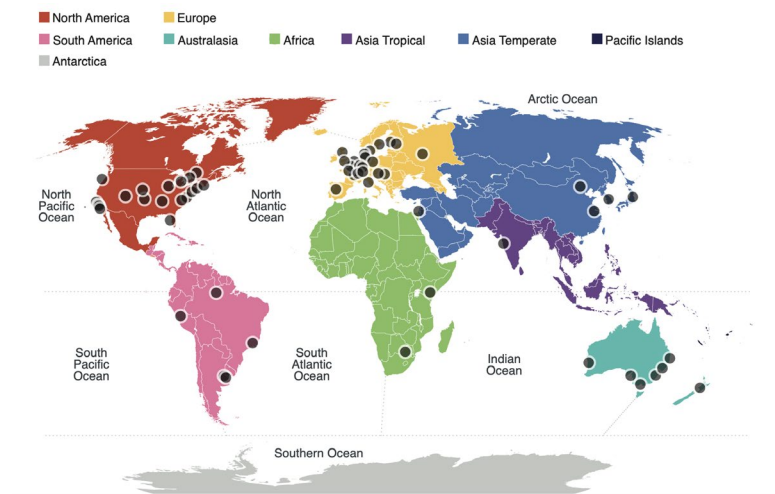
sensory, immersive aviaries mimic natural ecosystems—places that are of critical importance to the annual life cycles of migratory birds and that boost human well-being. From this exhibit, visitors can learn [seven simple actions to live bird-friendly](#) to protect native species in their own backyards.

“Now more than ever, raising awareness about the plight of migratory birds is key to their survival,” said Brandie Smith, Ph.D., John and Adrienne Mars Director, NZCBI. “As visitors walk through our spectacular aviaries and see these beautiful birds up close, I want them to appreciate the awe-inspiring journeys these animals make every year and walk away with the desire and knowledge to protect birds and their shrinking habitats.”

Upon reopening, more than 170 individual birds representing 56 species will be on view in the new Bird House and another 16 species in the surrounding outdoor exhibits on the bird plateau. “Rather than wait and see what fate holds for migratory birds, our team is proactively studying their husbandry, nutritional, and reproductive needs while they’re still common,” said Sara Hallager, curator of the Bird House. “Already, our team has had great success breeding several migratory species that breed in the United States, including indigo buntings, rose-breasted grosbeaks, Swainson’s thrush, and wood thrush. As populations decline drastically in the wild, the possibility of bringing them into human care to save their species becomes more real. We can’t wait until numbers have dwindled to a few hundred or dozen individuals.”

The Bird House closed for renovation on January 2, 2017. In keeping with NZCBI’s conservation mission, the renovated exhibit was built within the walls of the Zoo’s historic 1928 Bird House. More than 80% of the existing masonry walls were retained with the intention of reducing the building’s carbon footprint. The exhibit was designed to meet the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold standards. LEED certification will take place about six months after the exhibit opens. The building’s glass contains a ceramic frit pattern of horizontal lines, making it more visible to birds in an effort to prevent window collisions. The public opening of the Bird House on March 13 marks the completion of this six-year, \$69 million project.

MAPPING THE WORLD’S NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS



Kirk Johnson, Sant Director of the **National Museum of Natural History (NMHNNH)**, and Ian F. P. Owens (formerly Deputy Director of NMNH and now the Executive Director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology) co-led a group of 156 museum directors and scientists to map the total collections from 73 of the world’s largest natural history museums in 28 countries. This is the first step of an ambitious effort to inventory global holdings that can help scientists and decision-makers find solutions to urgent, wide-ranging issues such as climate change, food insecurity, human health, pandemic preparedness, and wildlife conservation.

The survey confirmed an aggregate collection of more than 1.1 billion objects, managed by more than 4,500 science staff and nearly 4,000 volunteers. The findings were in *Science* magazine on March 24 in the paper “A Global Approach for Natural History Museum Collections.” “We wanted to find a fast way to estimate the size and composition of the global collection so that we could begin to build a collective strategy for the future,” said Johnson.

FIRST LADY JILL BIDEN'S INAUGURAL ENSEMBLES ADDED TO HISTORIC FIRST LADIES COLLECTION

First Lady of the United States Dr. Jill Biden formally presented the dress and coat ensembles she wore to both the 2021 presidential inauguration day and evening celebrations to the Smithsonian's First Ladies Collection during a January ceremony at the **National Museum of American History**. Dr. Biden's presentation of both sets of inaugural attire is a historic first for the exhibit. The two ensembles were immediately displayed at the center of the museum's popular "The First Ladies" exhibition.



Dr. Biden's daytime inaugural ensemble was an ocean blue wool tapered tweed dress, hand embellished with pearls and crystals in a delicate floral pattern, with its matching overcoat accented by a dark blue velvet collar and cuffs, designed by Alexandra O'Neill, Founder and Designer of Markarian.

Dr. Biden also presented her evening inaugural attire, designed by Gabriela Hearst, Founder and Creative Director of Gabriela Hearst, which included an ivory silk wool cady dress and an ivory double-breasted cashmere coat, with embroidery reflecting the federal flowers from every state and territory of the U.S. as a symbol of unity. Also, marking the historic nature of the inauguration, conducted in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Biden's matching face mask for each ensemble will be on display for the collection. The COVID-19 pandemic precautions precluded an official inaugural ball for the first couple, who celebrated with a nationally televised inaugural concert and firework display.

Dr. Biden joined the ranks of other First Ladies who also had inaugurations that did not feature balls due to war, the Depression or other reasons, including Eleanor Roosevelt, Edith Wilson, Florence Harding, Lou Hoover, Grace Coolidge, and Betty Ford.

Both ensembles are gifts of the individual designers to the National Museum of American History.

BREEDING COLLECTIONS TO SAVE SPECIES: SIBERIAN TIGER BABIES



Zoo veterinary staff use an ultrasound machine on Nikita, a female Amur tiger, under anesthesia for an artificial insemination procedure.

The mighty Amur tiger once prowled vast areas of northeast Asia, including eastern Russia, the Korean peninsula, and parts of China and Mongolia. Now, there are more Amur tigers living in captivity in zoos around the world than in the wild. Also known as the Siberian tiger, it's the largest cat on the planet. The **National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute (NZCBI)** is home to two Amur tigers, Nikita and Metis. In early March, NZCBI staff performed an artificial insemination on the female tiger, Nikita, using sperm collected from Metis. It was an attempt to boost the tiger population, passing on the two endangered tigers' genes to the next generation.

"These animals are rapidly on the decline, and we need to intervene as humans because a lot of the problems that they're facing are human-caused problems," says Craig Saffoe, curator of great cats at the NZCBI. Out of the nine tiger subspecies that once existed in the wild, three have already gone extinct. Amur tigers are endangered—there are only about 360 in the wild—and are threatened by poaching and habitat destruction from farms and urban sprawl.

Zoos help tigers and other endangered species survive by ensuring a sustainable, genetically diverse captive population of the animals—a sort of insurance policy in case wild populations are wiped out. This is called a [species survival plan](#), and it's coordinated with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

"We have studied animal reproduction for many decades, and we have developed all those techniques of assisted reproductive technologies that are really helping us to produce animals when they cannot breed naturally," said Pierre Comizzoli, a reproductive physiologist who led a team of scientists performing the insemination.

"Our fingers are crossed," says Saffoe. "This is kind of like, for any humans out there who have had anxious moments waiting to figure out if you've got a little one coming—it's kind of the same thing, where we're the anxious parents in this case."