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Over 250 Intricate Works of Silver Now on Permanent View at the Bowers



September 12, 2020 (Santa Ana, California) – Now open at the Bowers Museum on permanent display in the newly dedicated “Anne Shih Collection” in the East West Bank Gallery, *Miao: Masters of Silver* features over 250 intricate works of silver, *Miao: Masters of Silver* features jewelry and textiles primarily made in China’s Guizhou Province, where the largest population of Miao people reside. Male silversmiths create a variety of ornaments through casting, smelting, repoussé (a reverse hammering technique), forging, engraving, knitting, coiling, cutting, and other methods. Concepts such as beauty, unity, fortune, and pride are expressed as visual abstractions and geometric motifs.

Silver itself is symbolic of light, the moon, fertility, and protection against evil, but it also represents a woman’s wealth and plays a role in courtship. Families spare no expense in adorning their daughters, purchasing additional pieces as they are able. Worn mostly in large festivals, the headdresses, combs, earrings, necklaces, breastplates, bracelets, rings, ornaments, and the counterweights on display here can weigh up to twenty pounds. The fine work aims to attract suitors who look at each garment as measures of the wearer’s qualities. In marriage, silver acts a woman’s dowry and is eventually passed down from mother to daughter.

This installation is accompanied by a Digital Guide with highlights from the collection. Access the Digital Guide at guide.bowers.org. *Miao: Masters of Silver* is free with General Admission. Details and tickets available at bowers.org. [Click Here](#) or visit Bowers’ YouTube Channel to watch a sneak peek of the installation.

Building a Legacy

Nearly twenty years ago, the Board of Governors at Bowers Museum pledged to develop two collections that the Museum could become known for: The Pacific Islands and Chinese Minority cultures. Now, thanks in no small part of Bowers’ Chairwoman Anne Shih, the Bowers Museum has almost 500 examples of fine Miao silver and it is possibly the finest such collection. In gratitude for Anne’s generosity, the Bowers has named the space in the East West Bank Gallery housing *Miao: Masters of Silver*, “The Anne Shih Collection.”



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Miao Culture

The Miao culture thrives in China's remote southern provinces and beyond the country's border where they call themselves Hmong. As one of the largest minority groups in China, the population of around nine million is composed of at least one hundred sixty subgroups spread across many diverse regions. Each speaks individual dialects, passes on their history orally, practices unique customs, and wears a variety of clothing styles. The silver jewelry and textiles in this gallery are primarily made in China's Guizhou Province, where the largest population of Miao people reside.



Festival Headdress

Though mostly made by the Miao, a selection of this silver was made by neighboring minority groups including the Dong, Li and Yi cultures, and is presented to illustrate the diversity of silver seen throughout the region. Male silversmiths create a variety of ornaments through casting, smelting, repoussé (a reverse hammering technique), forging, engraving, knitting, coiling, cutting, and other methods. Concepts such as beauty, unity, fortune, and pride are expressed as visual abstractions and geometric motifs. Elements of nature in abundant forms adorn silver ornaments just as they do Miao textiles. Flowers and auspicious animals, including birds, frogs, and fish symbolic of fertility, long life, and prosperity, are especially prevalent.



Cuff Bracelets

Silver itself is symbolic of light, the moon, fertility, and protection against evil, but it also represents a woman's wealth and plays a role in courtship. Families spare no expense in adorning their daughters, purchasing additional pieces as they are able. Worn mostly at festivals and weddings, a full outfit of the headdresses, combs, earrings, necklaces, breastplates, bracelets, rings, ornaments, and counterweights on display can weigh over thirty pounds.

About Bowers Museum

The Bowers Museum has earned an international reputation through its world-class exhibitions, including *Guo Pei: Couture Beyond*; *A Quest for Beauty: Van Cleef & Arpels*; *Warriors, Tombs and Temples: China's Enduring Legacy*; *Terra Cotta Warriors: Guardians of China's First Emperor*; and *Mummies—Death and the Afterlife: Treasures from the British Museum*, and the current presentation of *Inside the Walt Disney Archives* on view through February 28, 2021; in addition to its own extensive art collections from the Pacific Rim. While at the Bowers visitors can enjoy a leisurely luncheon the award-winning Patina restaurant, **Tangata** and browse the rare and exotic at the **Bowers Museum Gallery Store**. Visit bowers.org for information and tickets.



Necklace with Hanging Ornaments