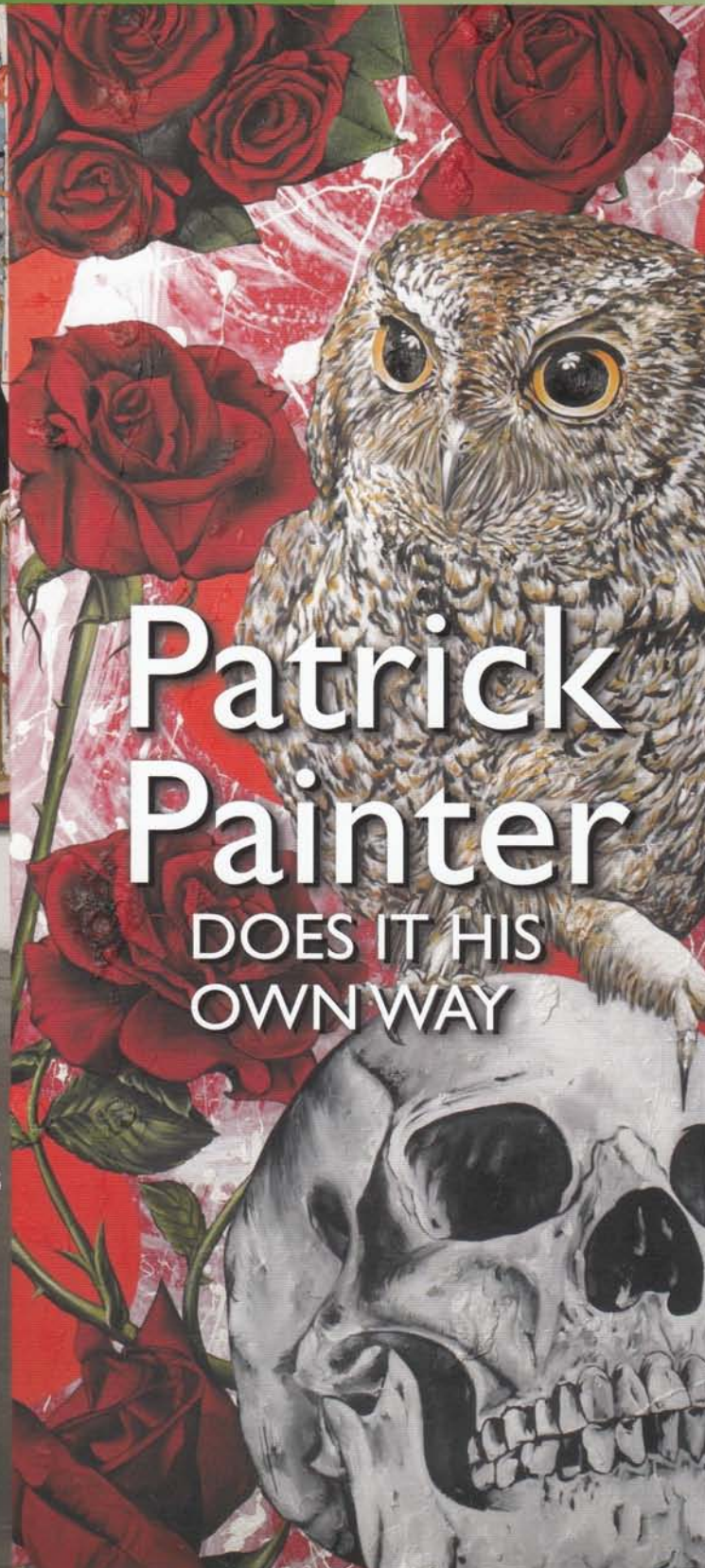


ART and living

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Patrick Painter

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SAN FRANCISCO TRIBAL & OCEANIC ART, NEW YORK TRIBAL & OCEANIC ART, LOS ANGELES ASIAN & TRIBAL ARTS SHOW

BILL CASKEY AND ELIZABETH LEES, FOUNDERS; MICHAEL HARRISON, PARTICIPATING DEALER

You might not expect to see a living, breathing ancestral spirit straight off the boat from New Guinea sitting squarely in an art show in New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco, but that's just what you'll find at New York and San Francisco's Tribal and Oceanic Art Shows and Los Angeles's Asian and Tribal Arts Show.

Oceanic art dealer Michael Harrison can also be found here. "I'm very specialized in Oceanic art—an expert in this field," he says. "I made 45 trips to New Guinea and have 15 years experience collecting, as well as an M.A. in African and Oceanic Art."

Long a fascination for anthropologists and archaeologists, tribal and Oceanic art now fascinates collectors; it's the talk of the art world. Says Bill Caskey, founder of these fairs, "People are just discovering it."

The collector's task to distinguish between artifact and art. The show's task: to evaluate the work. As such, these shows owe their reputation to a painstaking and rigorous authentication and selection process. "12 different committees have vetted the art and removed anything fake or overly restored before the doors open," explains Caskey.

Caskey started out collecting Mexican and Native American tribal art. While he considers San Francisco Tribal and Oceanic Art his most important show, all of his events have caught the attention of curators who come to acquire Oceanic art—the work of peoples from Hawaii west to New Guinea—or African tribal art, often dark and unusual.

But there's no glory here for the artists: they're usually anonymous.

Religious beliefs are more integral to the art than the artist's persona.

For the dealer or collector, however, that reality poses certain occupational dangers. "If ancestral spirits are not treated in a respectful way, bad luck will come," Harrison says. According to Harrison, the art world can be just as harsh. "You're only as good as your best piece," he says. —Lisa Stahl



(Above Left): Tatmal Maskette, Papua New Guinea. Photo courtesy of TAD Tribal Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

(Above Right): Tashkent Suzani, circa 1900 (detail). Photo Courtesy of Clive Rogers, England.

(Bottom): Bill Caskey and Elizabeth Lees

LOS ANGELES ASIAN & TRIBAL ARTS SHOW, SAN FRANCISCO ARTS OF PACIFIC ASIA SHOW, NEW YORK ARTS OF PACIFIC ASIA SHOW

BILL CASKEY AND ELIZABETH LEES, FOUNDERS; LESLEE LEONG, PARTICIPATING DEALER

Across dynasties, continents, cultures, and generations, the art of Asia has found its way into prominent museums and the homes of collectors the world over. And some of it may have been discovered at the one of the highly successful Asian art shows run by Bill Caskey and Elizabeth Lees.

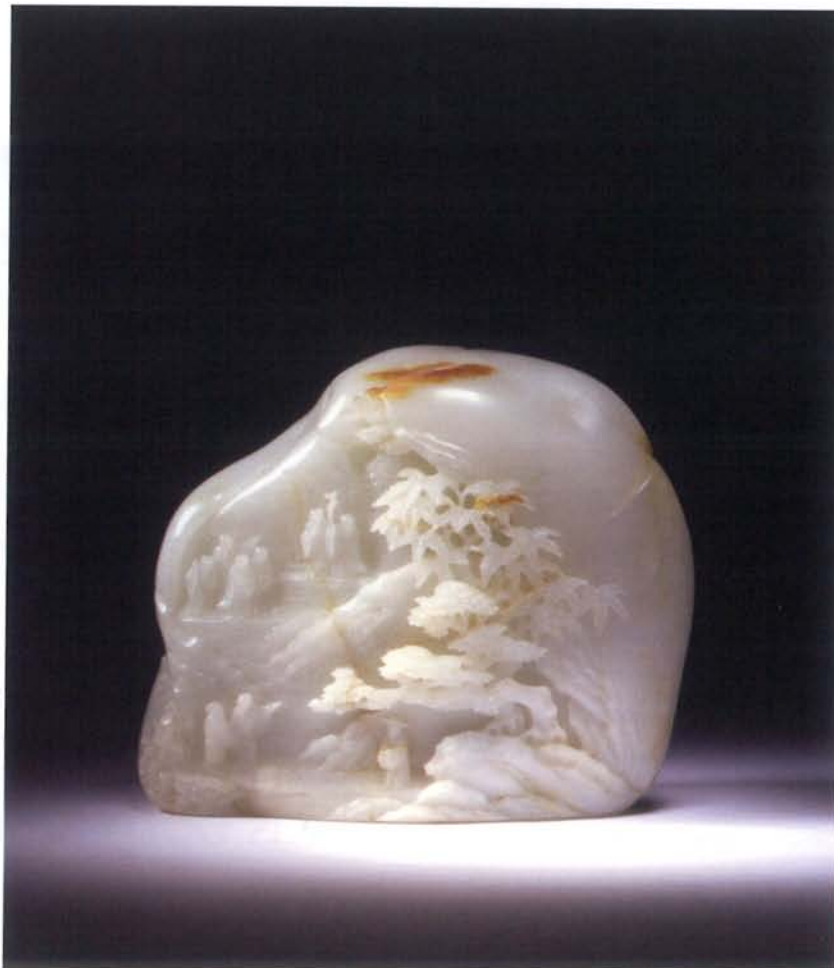
Annual events in their respective cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, Caskey and Lees's shows are very selective. According to Caskey, "There's a long waiting list of exhibitors who want to get into the show. It's the largest and most important art show of this type in the world."

One reason is reputation. Museum curators and collectors authenticate the art before doors open. Another reason is quality of exhibits. F. Suie One Co., a Chinese antique business founded in 1888, has exhibited here since 1995. Leslee Leong, the founder's granddaughter, now runs the business. Her acquisitions include stunning gold-lacquered wood pieces dating to the Ming dynasty and carved jade sculptures and fine ceramic porcelains—some as old as 2000 B.C. According to Leong, some pieces came from the tombs of emperors, and some have also been shown at the Smithsonian.

Caskey Lees Inc.'s Asian art shows also typically feature high-end Chinese and Japanese prints, antique textiles, carpets, furniture, paintings and sculpture. New York's fair is the most successful of the three, according to Caskey.

While the show is primarily focused on art antiques, 10% of the exhibits here are contemporary art, which is increasing in popularity. "China and India are very hot economies, and the art is also very hot," says Caskey. Leong agrees: "China is leading the front of the contemporary art world with art that's very refined, very sophisticated, very avant-garde." —*Lisa Stahl*

(Below): Marla C. Berns of the Fowler Museum at UCLA presents John and Anne Summerfield with the Art and Living Art to Life Award at the Los Angeles Asian & Tribal Arts Show, November 2008.



(Right): Imperial white jade mountain, China, Qianlong (1736-95). Provenance: Important Private English Collection, Louis Joseph, London, Eisenbach-Erie Collection