

## *Tea and Zen*

15 April – 29 August 2010



Opening 15 April, the National Gallery of Victoria will present *Tea and Zen*, a fascinating exhibition exploring the art and ritual behind the Japanese and Chinese tea ceremony.

Drawing from the NGV Collection and several private collections in Victoria, this exhibition will feature an incredible selection of tea utensils in the form of ceramics, lacquer and bamboo as well as Zen paintings and calligraphy, creating a meditative setting.

Mae Anna Pang, Senior Curator, Asian Art, NGV said tea was cultivated in China as early as the Han dynasty (206BC–AD 221).

“Chinese scholars would drink tea as a form of relaxation from the cares of everyday life and Chinese Zen (*Chan*) Buddhist monks would drink tea to stay awake during the long hours of meditation.

“This exhibition will chart the history of tea in China and Japan and its spiritual connections with Zen Buddhism, whilst tracing the philosophical meanings behind the ‘Way of Tea’,” said Dr Pang.

Tea was introduced to Japan during the Asuka (538–710) and Nara periods (538–794) by Japanese Buddhist monks who travelled to China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). The monks returned to Japan with Chinese products and inventions of paper-making, printing, written script as well as tea and its utensils.

The exhibition will begin with works from the Tang Dynasty in China then continue with pieces from the Momoyama and Edo periods (1567–1868) in Japan and finally draw attention to tea’s continuing influence on contemporary Japanese designers and artists.

A contemporary tea house by Japanese designer Uchida Shigeru will be the centre-piece of the exhibition. The contemporary tea house will be constructed from black stained oak wood and bamboo lattice walls, displaying traditional Japanese aesthetics. The tea house is designed to be both a simple and beautiful object in the spirit of Zen.

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Wayne Crothers, Curator, Asian Art, NGV said: “There could not be a more ideal work than Uchida Shigeru’s contemporary tea house to present Japanese tradition as an important and relevant influence in Japan’s contemporary society. The tea ceremony has been handed down from master to pupil and can be seen as a living art form pervading the twentieth century to the present day.”

Four tea ceremonies (*cha-no-yu*) conducted by Uresenke tea masters and their pupils will be held in the contemporary tea house throughout the exhibition, displaying the art and spirit of tea. The tea ceremonies will be held on Sunday 23 May, Wednesday 30 June, Sunday 25 July and Wednesday 25 August from 12–1pm and 2–3pm.

Frances Lindsay, NGV Deputy Director, said: “This is the first time that many of these works will be on display, showcasing the NGV’s fine collection of Asian art. This exhibition will enchant visitors as they discover the fascinating history behind the art of making tea.”

A room brochure exploring the history and art of the tea ceremony with essays by Mae Anna Pang and Wayne Crothers will accompany the exhibition.

**Tea and Zen** will be on display at NGV International, St Kilda Road from 15 April to 29 August 2010. Open 10am–5pm, closed Tuesdays. Entry is free.

For further information, please visit [ngv.vic.gov.au](http://ngv.vic.gov.au)

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**Image caption: JAPANESE Tea caddy (Natsume)** Momoyama period 1568–1600 Japan lacquer on wood, gold, silver 7.6 x 7.2 cm diameter Collection of Mrs Pauline Gandel, Melbourne