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Vancouver Art Gallery unveils landmark exhibition *The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors*

Almost 200 rare treasures from Beijing's Palace Museum—some never before seen outside China—lead audiences through a realm of wealth and power

Media breakfast and preview: [Thursday, October 16, 2014, 9:00am](#)
at the Vancouver Art Gallery (750 Hornby Street, Vancouver, BC)
Media attending please RSVP to Debra Zhou (dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca)

October 9, 2014, Vancouver, BC – After much anticipation, *The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors* will be unveiled to the public at the Vancouver Art Gallery on Saturday, October 18, 2014. Nearly 200 treasured objects from the collection of Beijing's Palace Museum will be under the spotlight, revealing the centre of the Chinese empire—The Forbidden City—a palace once closed from public sight for five centuries of imperial rule. This unprecedented exhibition will offer Gallery visitors a glimpse of an iconic and long-hidden era of Chinese cultural history.

From the finest Ming porcelain to the emperor's own garments, these examples of exquisite works of art range from as early as 500CE and onwards to the early 20th century. Many objects in the exhibition, including textiles, calligraphy, paintings and armour, have never before travelled outside the Forbidden City. Due to the exhibition's significant number of light-sensitive and fragile textiles, calligraphy and paintings, the Vancouver Art Gallery's presentation introduces new objects that differ from the exhibition's previous stop at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, offering new narratives that illuminate life inside the Forbidden City.

"We are proud to bring this magnificent collection of rare objects from Beijing's Palace Museum to Vancouver, a city with one of the fastest-growing Asian populations in North America. Through this exhibition and its various educational programs, we hope to deepen our visitors' knowledge of Chinese history and culture, and to inspire new dialogues between China and Canada," said Director Kathleen S. Bartels. "We are extremely grateful for significant support from CNOOC Limited and The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, whose contributions have exceeded any exhibition support the Gallery has ever received. We also extend our great appreciation to Pamela and David Richardson as the Gallery's Visionary Partner for Scholarship and Publications, supporting the exhibition guidebook."

About the exhibition

For the last five centuries of the empire, which fell in 1911, Chinese emperors called the Forbidden City, located in the heart of Beijing, their home. With only the emperor, his household and special visitors allowed inside its walls, this immense palace captured the world's attention for its power, wealth and mystery. The exhibition's narrative for the Vancouver Art Gallery is conceived by Timothy Brook, who is a scholar of Chinese history at the Department of History, University of British Columbia. The exhibition leads visitors through the realms of the Imperial Palace in the following nine sections:

Upon **Entering** the exhibition, we meet the greatest triple generation of emperors in Chinese history, from the Aisin-Gioro family, as it is largely their Forbidden City that we know today as the Palace Museum. **Reigning** portrays the seat of imperial power within the Forbidden City, the emperor's throne and extraordinary icons that demonstrate his power to the outside world. In order to rule an expansive empire, the emperor required a powerful army, made evident in the **Warring** section, which features ceremonial armour and weaponry.

In **Symbols**, we see the colours, dress and iconography reserved for only the emperor. As emperors needed sons, **Lineage** explores the world of the empresses and concubines who lived in the Inner Courts and served the emperor, featuring textile, scene paintings and personal adornments associated with the task of producing an heir to the throne. In **Texting**, we see the emperor at his most constant task, which was to put pen to paper by signing political documents, composing poems and penning calligraphy. The ornate objects of daily living in the Forbidden City are displayed in **Consuming**—from a jade teacup to a dog's coat or the emperor's gilded footbath. These objects were wildly expensive and finely crafted for the use and amusement of the imperial household alone.

The **Collecting** section features the finest examples from the emperor's immense collections of precious ceramics, bronzes and cloisonné that were crafted in China and sequestered in his private chamber, as well as objects from beyond China's borders such as brass clocks, scientific instruments and European exotica gifted to the emperor by foreign dignitaries.

Finally, with **Farewell My Emperor**, we get a parting glimpse of the end of Imperial China and the afterlife of Aisin-Gioro Puyi, the last emperor of the Forbidden City.

The Vancouver presentation of *The Forbidden City* is supported by CNOOC Limited as Presenting Corporate Sponsor, and The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation as Presenting Foundation Sponsor in association with China Global: The Vancouver Society for Promotion of Chinese Art and Culture.

"The Forbidden City exhibition tells the story of China's history," said Fang Zhi, CEO, Nexen Energy ULC, a wholly owned subsidiary of CNOOC Limited. "We are excited to play a role in sharing this piece of China's history with Canadians, so we can better understand each other and work in cooperation to build the future."

"For many decades it has been my goal to provide people in the West, particularly in Canada, with richer opportunities to appreciate Chinese culture," said Robert H. N. Ho, founder of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. "Vancouver is often referred to as the gateway to Asia, a city which has been a nexus in various aspects from commerce to education. Ten years ago I established The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation to support cultural and educational projects that encourage an appreciation of Chinese culture. Through this landmark exhibition featuring treasures from Beijing's Palace Museum, our foundation hopes to provide an engaging opportunity that makes Chinese culture relevant and accessible to a global audience, cultivating mutual understanding and respect."

In conjunction with *The Forbidden City*, the Vancouver Art Gallery will present a dynamic range of education and public programs, including lectures, curator's tours, weekly family activities and K-12 school programs. Guided tours of the exhibition will be available in both English and Mandarin every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, starting October 23, free with Gallery admission.

About the Forbidden City

The Forbidden City, built in Beijing in the opening decades of the fifteenth century, was the residence and seat of power of 24 emperors for five centuries until the end of the imperial era in 1911. Consisting of nearly 9,000 rooms, 980 buildings, more than 90 architectural complexes on a magnificent site spanning 720,000 square metres, it survives as a daunting memorial of China's imperial era. In 1925, the Forbidden City was re-named Beijing's Palace Museum, one year after the last emperor Puyi went into exile. In 1961, the Forbidden City was designated one of China's foremost protected cultural heritage sites and became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987. Today, the Palace Museum is considered one of the world's most important and most visited museums, offering a unique opportunity to consider the political, social and cultural developments of late dynastic China.

The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors is organized by the Palace Museum, Beijing, China and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. The exhibition is curated by Dr. Chen Shen, Bishop White Chair of East Asian Archaeology and Dr. Wen-chien Cheng, Louise Hawley Stone Chair of Far Eastern Art at the Royal Ontario Museum.

Coordinating Curators for the Vancouver Art Gallery presentation are Timothy Brook, Republic of China Chair, Department of History and Institute for Asian Research at the University of British Columbia and Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director, Vancouver Art Gallery.

A Media reception and tour of the exhibition will take place on **Thursday, October 16, 9:00am** at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Media attending please RSVP to Debra Zhou (dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca).

Related Events

Tuesday, October 28, 7pm

Lecture by Patricia Berger, UBC Robson Square, Theatre-Room C300 (lower level) 800 Robson Street

Tuesday, November 4, 7pm

Lecture by Dr. Chen Shen, at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Room 4East

Saturday, November 8, 3pm

Curator's Tour by Timothy Brook, at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Friday, November 14, 8pm-1am

FUSE: Art, Music and Performance, at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Saturday-Sunday, November 29-30, 10am-5pm

Family FUSE Weekend: Learn and Play, at the Vancouver Art Gallery

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Vase, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, porcelain with red and blue-green enamels © The Palace Museum

Bell, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, 1736–95, gilt bronze © The Palace Museum

Emperor's ceremonial armour, Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period, cotton padding, woven silk, gilt copper studs and metal plate © The Palace Museum

Portrait of Emperor Qianlong in ceremonial robe, Anonymous, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, ink and colour on silk © The Palace Museum

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Images and interviews are available upon request.

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About the Vancouver Art Gallery

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of the most respected and innovative visual arts institutions in Canada and is committed to strengthening links among artists and among the diverse communities throughout the city, province, and beyond. The Gallery features the work of international ground-breaking artists, both historic and contemporary, and provides a global platform for British Columbia's dynamic artistic community. Its growing collection represents the most comprehensive resource for visual culture in British Columbia and is the principal repository for visual art produced in the region, as well as related works by other notable Canadian and international artists.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts. We thank everyone for their continuing generosity.