

**MEDIA CONTACT**

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## Press Release

### **Mingei International Museum will reopen September 3, 2021**

#### **Enhanced and Expanded Facility for Museum of Folk Art, Craft, and Design to be a Welcoming Cultural Anchor in Balboa Park**

**San Diego, CA, June 3, 2021**—After a three-year closure for a transformational renovation, Mingei International Museum will reopen September 3, 2021, with a dynamic slate of exhibitions, commissioned artworks and public programs. Mingei's inaugural exhibitions will be **GLOBAL SPIRIT—Folk Art from the Ted Cohen Collection** and **HUMBLE SPIRIT / PRICELESS ART**, both drawn from the Museum's notable collection of folk art, craft and design from around the world.

Located in San Diego's historic [Balboa Park](#), one of the most significant cultural locations in the American West, Mingei International Museum's home is a 1915 Spanish Colonial building, known as the "House of Charm." The grand reopening will reveal a compelling new Museum of over 50,000 square feet. Enhancements include adding 10,000 square feet to exhibition and programming space and creating a new theater, education center, bistro, store and coffee bar.

In 2016, Mingei commissioned San Diego-based, nationally recognized architect **Jennifer Luce, Founder and Principal of [LUCÉ et studio](#)**, to lead a renovation and expansion project focused on accessibility, functionality and full integration of Mingei's mission-based commitment to art, craft and design throughout the building. After two years of design, planning and fundraising, the Museum closed for construction in September 2018.

"As an institution, we approached this project as a combination of three essential and interrelated components connected to our mission: **Access, Art and Architecture**," said **Director and CEO Rob Sidner**. "We are confident that the new Mingei will be a cultural anchor in Balboa Park and a source of inspiration for the San Diego region and our national and international visitors."

The reopening exhibitions exemplify Mingei's mission of presenting everyday art objects from around the world. **GLOBAL SPIRIT** showcases folk art from over 20 countries, highlighting a donation to the Museum by the Oakland-based collector and exhibition designer Ted Cohen. **HUMBLE SPIRIT / PRICELESS ART**, curated by Sidner, shines a light on objects that are made from the humblest of materials yet are full of beauty and vitality.

“For over 40 years, Mingei International Museum has celebrated and exhibited local artists, craftspeople and designers, supporting the notion that design and creativity contribute to the betterment of everyone's life,” said Board Chair **Courtenay McGowen**. “Our reopening exhibitions celebrate the spirit and artistry of everyday objects, something that feels even more relevant after so much time at home.”

Large-scale icons of Mingei's collection will also return home, with **Niki de Saint Phalle's** beloved mosaic sculpture **Nikigator** once again welcoming in visitors from Balboa Park. New, site-specific commissions—by **Petra Blaisse, Claudy Jongstra, Christina Kim** and **Jennifer Luce** in collaboration with **A. Zahner/Zahner Labs**—will be installed throughout the building, in formal and conceptual dialogue with the architecture and collection. Selections from the permanent collection will also be on view in Mingei's new, free Commons level in a presentation that establishes a connection between the museum's roots in the early-20th-century Japanese *mingei* movement and its collecting mission around the concept of “art of the people.”

The September 3 reopening kicks off a month of celebratory activities and programs that include the second annual San Diego Design Week; hands-on art making activities; performances in the galleries and theater; building and exhibition tours and artist lectures. Entry into the Museum Labor Day weekend, Friday, September 3 through Monday, September 6, will be free for all.

## ART

**GLOBAL SPIRIT—Folk Art from the Ted Cohen Collection** features over 200 works, including handcrafted masks, puppets, dolls, instruments and baskets, as well as unexpected objects such as hat boxes, a lunch box and a three-foot-tall elephant made from paper and bamboo. The varied materials and subject matter represent the Museum's mission to celebrate human creativity in all forms and will delight viewers with their color, whimsy and beauty as they reveal aspects of the lives and history of people from around the world.

**HUMBLE SPIRIT / PRICELESS ART** features works created from everyday, found materials—clay, straw, paper, cotton, tin—that are nevertheless full of spirit, beauty and delight, upending our traditional thinking about what art is. This exhibition will include Japanese brushes, Mexican combs and kites from India, among other Museum treasures. It also honors craftspeople whose names are no longer known to us yet whose imagination, skill and creativity continue to greatly enrich our lives.

## COMMISSIONED WORKS

The new Mingei features commissioned artworks by **Petra Blaisse, Claudy Jongstra, Christina Kim, Sharon Stampfer** and **Billie Tsien**. Blaisse, the founder of [Inside Outside](#), a studio devoted to textile, landscape and exhibition design, is creating **Sessions**, a billowing felt and organza curtain inspired by Balboa Park's jacaranda trees that will be installed along the 40-foot retractable glass wall in the Theater. [Claudy Jongstra](#), known worldwide for her innovations in wool felt, has created **Truth & Beauty in Black**—a 30' mural, exploring the cultural histories of indigo and black pigments, that will be installed in the new Bistro.

**Kim**, founder of eco-conscious Los Angeles design house [dosa](#), has created two projects. *sugi/kuruminoki* is a pair of diaphanous window screens, each an abstraction of a George Nakashima drawing, for the Founders' Gallery, home to the Museum's iconic Nakashima table. Kim is also designing and fabricating *liquid2solid*—a series of flowing, hand-sewn curtains to be used in the galleries, each made from off-cut waste of Dyneema® fabric. Designer, metalsmith and artist **Sharon Stampfer** crafted *Two thousand seven hundred twenty-two miles Hand in Hand* a recessed pull on the exterior of the Founder's Gallery door. **Tsien** of **Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects** has designed three gallery benches titled, *EAST|WEST*, for Museum visitors to use and admire. Embedded in the surface of these long, sleek benches are a root burl, referencing the 'root' stools and seats of ancient Asian and African cultures.

Architect **Jennifer Luce**, collaborated with [A. Zahner/Zahner Labs](#), to create two architectural installations: *Suspended Refrain*, a perforated metal ceiling on the Commons level echoing a player piano roll, and *Hedgerow*, a digitally cut, hand-turned brass picket fence that defines the new public courtyard.

For additional perspectives on these commissioned works, [click here](#) to watch Rob Sidner and Jennifer Luce discuss Blaisse's curtain, [here](#) to hear from Christina Kim about her projects, and [here](#) for a conversation between Sidner, Luce and representatives from Zahner.

## THE RETURN OF MINGEI ICONS

*Nikigator*, the beloved mosaic alligator by French-American artist Niki de Saint Phalle, will return to the Plaza de Panama, just south of the Museum's East entrances, while Saint Phalle's large-scale sculpture, *The Poet and His Muse*, will take up a new position welcoming visitors through the brand-new West Entrance in Alcazar Garden. The west wall of the Museum Courtyard will showcase *Variations on a Gold Theme*, a large-scale mural by San Diego artists Ellamarie and Jackson Woolley, displayed for the first time at the Balboa Park site. Inside the Museum, longtime visitor favorite *A Palace for Wednesday* by Alice Hudson will once again be on view, as will highlights from the Museum's extensive Bead Collection.

## ARCHITECTURE

In 2015, the Museum identified needed improvements to the facility and committed to a vision of making the Museum more visible and welcoming to millions of Balboa Park visitors. By translating Mingei's mission, goals and aspirations into a dynamic and new environment, San Diego based architect Jennifer Luce, Founder and Principal of LUCE et studio, designed a project that promotes an enhanced dialogue between Mingei, its surroundings, and the other cultural institutions within the park.

The free **Commons** level (main floor) of the Museum, accessible from the Plaza de Panama and Alcazar Garden, will be open and free to the public at all times. With a significant art installation of permanent collection objects, **Shop Mingei**, a new bistro, a walk-up coffee bar and an outdoor courtyard, this "living room for the Park" will provide ample gathering space and a warm welcome to Park visitors. Opening a new entry point—connecting Alcazar Garden continuously through the ground-level open and public spaces to the Plaza de Panama—provides the public a sense of exploration and discovery.

The upstairs **Gallery** level will include newly configured, flexible gallery spaces totaling 15,000 square feet, each with a sculpted plaster ceiling referencing origami and reflecting light in a striking way. This level will also host Mingei's Art Reference Library; the Founders' Gallery, home to the Museum's iconic Nakashima table; and two upper-level terraces overlooking the Plaza de Panama that will be open to the public for the first time in decades. By reclaiming lost spaces within a static footprint, visitors will now have a new opportunity to experience the full size and history of the building and enjoy views of the Plaza previously unavailable.

New architectural elements and spaces help activate and support the mission of Mingei. They include an annex featuring a flexible 120-seat Theater with a retractable 40-foot glass wall opening onto a new amphitheater with unobstructed views of historic Palm Canyon. It will also serve as a communal resource, available to partnering cultural institutions throughout the region. Its roof will become an outdoor Courtyard for informal gatherings, intimate outdoor lectures or programmed events.

A highlight of the renovation is the reveal of a grand new staircase leading to the second-level galleries, set in the building's historic Tower (a space never before occupied) spotlighting the Museum's Dale Chihuly glass sculpture, ***Mingei International Museum Chandelier***, which will be suspended over the staircase.

Behind the scenes, the redesign will support best practices in art handling, registration and scholarly research. A new, light-filled Education Center will provide a hub for students, educators and learners of all ages to engage in hands-on activities.

The project was awarded an AIA San Diego Design Award in 2019 in the "Unbuilt" category.

## **ACCESS**

The Museum will be open to the public seven days a week. Hours will be 10 am to 5 pm Saturday through Wednesday, with expanded evening hours until 8 pm on Thursdays and Fridays.

Multiple new entrances lead to the Commons level, placing visitors at the center. Mingei believes "art belongs to everyone"—a value embraced as part of the focus on opening up the building, literally and figuratively, to the public. Connected to the Alcazar Garden and grand public space of the Plaza de Panama, the Commons level of the museum will be admission-free to all.

Admission to the second-level galleries will be \$14 for adults, \$10 for seniors and members of the military, and free at all times for children under age 18. In addition to curated exhibitions, the Gallery Level of the Museum will feature the Frances Hamilton White Art Library, outdoor terraces, and permanent collection installations of toys, beads, furniture and more.

A number of community access and education programs will ensure opportunities for all regional residents to experience and enjoy the Museum. With COVID-19 safety and health protocols on everyone's mind, Mingei will offer guests individual, all gender restrooms; ample access to outdoor space on all three levels of the Museum; and a brand new, state-of-the-art ventilation system, providing frequent air recirculation throughout the building.

## **OPENING SCHEDULE**

Media Opening  
September 3, 8:30 am

Free Public Opening  
September 3–6, 10 am–5 pm

San Diego Design Week  
September 8–12  
[sddesignweek.org](http://sddesignweek.org)

Media virtual and in-person advance tours upon request.

## **ABOUT MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM**

Located in San Diego's Balboa Park, Mingei International Museum collects, preserves, and exhibits "Art of the World, Art of the People," including folk art, craft and design from all eras and cultures of the world. Established in 1978 by potter and professor Martha Longenecker, Mingei honors anonymous craftsmen from ancient times to contemporary designers. The Museum opens a window on the great world, revealing similarities and distinctions of individuals and cultures through enduring expressions of human creativity. The Museum also provides the opportunity for an ever-increasing number of people of diverse ages and backgrounds to explore and express their own creativity. A nonprofit institution funded by admission, individuals, and regional support, the Museum offers inspiring exhibitions and diverse community and educational programs to more than 100,000 visitors a year.

## **ABOUT LUCE ET STUDIO**

Designer, artist, and architect Jennifer Luce established [LUCE et studio](http://luceetstudio.com) in 1990, building a practice that merges the languages of industrial manufacturing and refined minimalism to create architecture distinguished by material innovations and spatial transitions. Her artistic influences and discoveries—evident in each carefully composed work—stem from her family background in textile design and art.

LUCE et studio routinely uses new technologies to innovate while seeking an authenticity that speaks to the tactility and narrative of handcraft. The threshold between the two worlds is a conversation explored at each level of execution, from concept and precise detailing to final construction. The studio has garnered 28 American Institute of Architects (AIA) awards and a *BusinessWeek* “Design Excellence Award” and was honored as “Design Vanguard of the Year” by Architectural Record Magazine.

## FUNDING

Mingei is still actively engaged in a capital fundraising campaign with a goal of \$55 million to cover the entire scope of its transformation project, including planning, construction and all related soft costs. The total raised toward the goal to date is nearly \$47 million.

Key donations to date include lead gifts from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies and Frances Hamilton White, and additional major gifts from Ron and Lucille Neeley, The Donald C. and Elizabeth M. Dickinson Foundation, the Elizabeth and Walter Smoyer Family Trust, The Dr. Seuss Fund at The San Diego Foundation, Price Philanthropies and Joan and Irwin Jacobs. Over 500 donors have supported the project thus far, including the Museum’s entire board of trustees. Visit [mingei.org/transformation](https://mingei.org/transformation) to learn more about helping to complete the campaign for the transformed Mingei International Museum.

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Exhibition photos available for download at: <https://airtable.com/shrZTzPQhA8XE8a1F>

Renderings and Building photographs: <https://airtable.com/shr2YkVrBReSnWZzs>

A video overview of the transformation is available [here](#)