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Press Release

Renovated and Reimagined Mingei International Museum Reopens with Folk Art, Craft and Design Infused into Every Element

Exhibitions and Commissions Inaugurating the Transformed Museum

San Diego, CA, June 3, 2021—When Mingei International Museum reopens September 3, 2021, the Museum will highlight its rich collection of historical and contemporary folk art, craft and design as never before. As part of the dynamic and welcoming transformation project, the gallery spaces will not be the only place visitors experience “art of the people.” Visitors will find functional, beautiful and surprising elements in the building’s architecture and design, including curtains, flooring, lighting, bar tops and more. In partnership with Mingei, the nationally recognized firm **LUCE et studio** envisioned the Museum’s physical transformation focusing on artist collaborations, accessibility, functionality and well-crafted and inspiring design.

In addition to the reopening exhibitions ***GLOBAL SPIRIT—Folk Art from the Ted Cohen Collection*** and ***HUMBLE SPIRIT / PRICELESS ART***, Mingei will feature objects from its permanent collection on the free Commons level, in its new Courtyard and at the entrances of the Museum. Located in the heart of historic Balboa Park, the Museum's reopening exhibitions, Commons level installation and outdoor public art connect park visitors with stunning everyday objects, inspiring them to embrace their own creativity.

REOPENING EXHIBITIONS

GLOBAL SPIRIT—Folk Art from the Ted Cohen Collection showcases folk art from more than 20 countries, highlighting a donation to the Museum by Oakland-based collector and exhibition designer, Ted Cohen. Over 200 works will be featured in this exhibition, 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 vast array of materials and subject matter is representative of the Museum’s mission to celebrate human creativity in all forms.

This exhibition inaugurates Mingei’s renovated space, newly imagined to more fully bring the art of the world and art of the people to all people. The works in this show are intended to delight the viewer with their color, whimsy and beauty, revealing aspects of the lives and history of people from around the world.

HUMBLE SPIRIT / PRICELESS ART shines a light on the humblest of materials—clay, straw, paper, cotton, tin—and objects not typically associated with luxury or ostentation. These works were created from everyday found materials, but are nevertheless full of spirit, beauty and delight, upending our traditional thinking about what art is.

The exhibition was curated by Mingei Executive Director and CEO, Rob Sidner, who commented, “I have long been interested in the art made of everyday materials and the wonders that can arise from the imagination and one’s hands when it seems there is little else to work with.” Sidner was inspired by Japanese pottery master Shoji Hamada (1894-1978), who said “One should never speak of art and money in the same breath.”

This exhibition will include Japanese brushes, Mexican combs and kites from India, among other Museum treasures. Many of the objects in this exhibition were made by persons, who were, no doubt, respected members of their communities, whose names are no longer known to us. This exhibition honors each of them and all the unknown craftspeople of the past and present whose imagination, skill and creativity continue to greatly enrich our lives.

ART OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE

The Museum’s free Commons level will also feature selections from the Museum’s permanent collection. The art displayed establishes a connection between the Mingei’s roots in the early 20th-century Japanese *mingei* movement and the Museum’s dynamic collecting mission focused on “art of the people.” Objects range from functional Japanese ceramics and indigenous baskets to whimsical folk toys and miniatures from around the globe, all celebrating the many ways art connects us across geography and time. They also showcase the intricate interplay between humans and the natural world, as well as the persistent desire to make and live with beautiful and well-crafted things. Above all, the objects are intended to spark creativity, imagination and joy.

COMMISSIONED WORKS

To explore the deeper connection between the art of Mingei, the transformative architecture and LUCE et studio’s commitment to artist collaborations, LUCE initiated a series of commissions with acclaimed women artists. These artists were invited to work with the built environment on a grand scale. The commissions serve the dual purpose of distinct, stand-alone creations and functional elements that are seamlessly integrated into the building celebrating the fusion of design, art and architecture.

Petra Blaisse is the founder of **Inside Outside**, a studio devoted to textile, landscape and exhibition design. For the Museum’s transformation, Blaisse is creating **Sessions**, a billowing, acoustic curtain that stretches along the entire length of the 40-foot retractable glass wall in the Theater. Inspiration for the curtain came from the leaf of the jacaranda tree, introduced to San Diego by designer and horticulturist Kate Sessions, considered “The Mother of Balboa Park.” The materials include double-sided dyed felt cutouts arranged in a non-uniform pattern, evoking wave-like movement. In the corner of each cutout is a button fastening the

pieces together. The felt cutouts are then backed with an additional layer of sheer silk organza featuring tones of ink blue, Yves Klein blue and light gray.

Claudy Jongstra is known worldwide for her majestic artworks and architectural installations. Jongstra's organic surfaces and nuanced tones reflect her innovations in the ancient technique of making wool felt. Working with LUCE et studio, Jongstra has created ***Truth & Beauty in Black***—a 30' felted mural that will hang above the bar as a sound-dampening textile within the new Bistro. In this large-scale installation, Jongstra explores the cultural history of indigo (a dye omnipresent in Mingei's collection) and the origins of the color black seen in Renaissance paintings. Together, Burgundian Black and Indigo make for a stunning color palette and textural surface.

Christina Kim, founder of eco-conscious Los Angeles design house dosa, has created ***sugi/kuruminoki***—a pair of diaphanous window screens to be installed in the Founders' Gallery, home to the Museum's iconic Nakashima table. Each screen is an abstraction of a George Nakashima drawing of trees he admired. Kim will also design and fabricate ***liquid2solid***—a series of flowing, hand-sewn temporary curtains to be used in the galleries, each made from off-cut waste of Dyneema®, a technological fabric.

Billie Tsien of **Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects** has designed three gallery benches for Museum visitors to use and admire. Tsien's work ***EAST|WEST*** references the 'root' stools and seats of ancient Asian and African cultures. Embedded in the surface of the sleek, wide and long wood bench is a root burl reclaimed by Tsien's long-time woodworking collaborator in New Jersey.

Sharon Stampfer is a designer, metalsmith and artist crafting ***Two thousand seven hundred twenty-two miles Hand in Hand*** a recessed pull on the exterior of the Founder's Gallery door. Functioning as a sculpted door handle, Stampfer's work maps the physical distance and philosophical connection between the Nakashima Studio in New Hope, Pennsylvania and the Mingei International Museum in San Diego, California. ***Hand in Hand*** is contoured to receive the hand as an invitation to form a relationship, a bond based on trust, forged by human contact.

THE RETURN OF MINGEI ICONS

Nikigator, the beloved mosaic alligator, a public work of art and play by French-American self-taught artist **Niki de Saint Phalle** (1930-2002), will once again welcome Balboa Park visitors into the Museum. Saint Phalle's other cherished large-scale mosaic sculpture, ***The Poet and His Muse***, will take up a new position welcoming visitors through the brand-new West Entrance from Alcazar Garden. Saint Phalle spent her final years in La Jolla, California, making large-scale sculptures covered with mirrors, glass and polished stones similar to the ***Nikigator*** and ***The Poet and His Muse***.

The west wall of the Museum **Courtyard** will showcase ***Variations on a Gold Theme***, a large scale (12'h X 36'w) enamel-on-copper mural by San Diego-based artists, Ellamarie and Jackson Woolley, displayed for the first time at the Balboa Park site.

Inside the Museum, ***A Palace for Wednesday*** will once again be visible from all sides for an intimate glimpse into the enchanted fairy world brought to life with twigs, leaves, wire, shells and imagination. Created by artist Alice Hudson, this whimsical structure, filled with fascinating characters, has been a longtime visitor favorite at Mingei. Highlights from the Museum's extensive **Bead Collection** will also return to view in the Museum's gallery space. This collection includes ancient and modern beads from over 100 countries from nearly every era and culture in human history.

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.

CRAFTED ESSENTIALS

- The bistro bar counter will be at the center of the bustling life on the Commons level, serving as a visual and social focus for the dining space. Inspired by the craft and detail found in the works of George Nakashima, Sam Maloof and others, this island top is made from three-foot-inch thick solid old growth California walnut, found and reclaimed by local company, **Tule Peak Timber**, especially for Mingei. Ten large slabs make up a 30' length span. Each slab maintains its natural beauty and character imperfections and the whole top is 'stitched' together with metal butterfly joints as well as quilted inlays of wood.
- With a goal of subtly creating separate areas of use in the open Commons level, architect Jennifer Luce worked with **A. Zahner** to create ***Suspended Refrain***, a perforated metal ceiling above **Shop Mingei** and **Café Mingei**. The cambered ceiling canopy is composed of five ribbons, digitally die-cut and punched to authentically render a player piano roll song, "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?", a favorite of executive director Rob Sidner.
- Architect Jennifer Luce, again in collaboration with metal fabricator A. Zahner/Zahner Labs, also created ***Hedgerow***, a sculptural fence that defines the new public courtyard. Sixty-four individually crafted brass pickets are cut by digital processes and then hand-turned and twisted to represent a celebration of a traditional material (brass) rendered in the 21st century by machine and hand.
- White oak floors in the Exhibition Galleries, Library, Founders' Gallery and Theater were sustainability harvested and hand-crafted by **Dinesen** based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Dinesen logs come from sustainable forests in Germany, producing beautiful and distinctive long, wide boards. The Dinesen floor planks are also crafted with butterfly joints, used to strengthen or repair boards with flaws, saving limited natural material.
- On the **Gallery** level the sculpted plaster ceiling references origami, a staple in the Museum's collection, reflecting light in a striking way.

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. Mingei.org

In partnership with Mingei, the nationally recognized firm, [LUCÉ et studio](#), envisioned the Museum's physical transformation focusing on artist collaborations, accessibility, functionality and well-crafted and inspiring design. The renovation is being carried out by **Layton Construction**, a nationally ranked commercial contractor. Construction management is provided by **Gardiner & Theobald**, a nearly 200-year-old London-based firm.

A video overview of the transformation is available at: [MINGEI'S TRANSFORMATION: A VIRTUAL TOUR](#).

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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](#)