

Bard Graduate Center Gallery Spring 2017 Exhibitions

March 24–July 30, 2017



Design by the Book

Chinese Ritual Objects
and the *Sanli tu*

Focus Project



New York Crystal Palace 1853

Focus Project

Bard
Graduate
Center
Gallery

TWO GROUNDBREAKING EXHIBITIONS INITIATE EXPANSION OF FOCUS PROJECT SERIES

Bard Graduate Center is celebrating its Focus Projects' series with two exhibitions opening on March 24, 2017. *Design by the Book: Chinese Ritual Objects and the Sanli tu*, which examines a medieval Chinese book that is the oldest extant illustrated study of classical Chinese artifacts, and *New York Crystal Palace 1853*, which sheds light on a nearly forgotten aspect of New York City's cultural history, will both be on view in the Gallery at 18 West 86th Street through July 30, 2017.

About Focus Projects

A central component of Bard Graduate Center's research, teaching, and exhibition program, Focus Projects are developed and curated by faculty and visiting fellows in collaboration with students. Conceived by Dean Peter N. Miller with director of the Gallery, Nina Stritzler-Levine, Focus Projects are headed by professor and curator Ivan Gaskell, who explains, "Bard Graduate Center is a nimble institution, where the ambitions—of students, of curators, of faculty—can actually be realized through Focus Projects that provide a laboratory in which to test theories empirically and to present them functionally to a broader audience." The first Focus Project, inaugurated in 2011, was an investigation of the material relations between Indigenous peoples and newcomers on the Northwest Pacific coast in the late nineteenth century. Since then, projects have examined subjects as diverse as the design and circulation of American Christmas cards, the role of actresses as fashion setters in the Belle Époque, the fractal images of Benoît Mandelbrot, the art of Nam June Paik, the coca bag or *chuspa*—a component of Andean culture for the past 1,500 years—and the personal computer, an element of modern life for the past fifty years.



Wine Cup with Cover (jue 角). Vessel: Late Shang–Early Zhou dynasty, ca. 1200–1000 BCE Cover: Qing dynasty, 1644–1911. Bronze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1943 (43.27.1a, b). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.



Window shade, New York Crystal Palace, 1853. Machine printed on continuous paper. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Museum purchase through gift of Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt; 1944-66-1. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum / Art Resource, NY.

Design by the Book: Chinese Ritual Objects and the *Sanli tu*

Curated by François Louis, Associate Professor of History of Chinese
Art and Material Culture, Bard Graduate Center

March 24–July 30, 2017



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The *Sanli tu*, or *Illustrations to the Ritual Classics*, is a little-known medieval book that holds a key place in the history of Chinese material culture studies. Functioning much like a dictionary, it is the oldest extant illustrated study of classical Chinese ritual implements. First compiled in the second century CE, the book comes down to us in its sixth incarnation, which was produced by a classics professor named Nie Chongyi in 961, the second year of the Song dynasty (960–1279).

Nie's book not only explained the ceremonial objects described in the ancient Confucian Classics, but it also served as a basis for designing new ritual objects. The book discusses a range of items, from clothing, musical instruments, and sacrificial vessels for imperial state rites, such as the Sacrifice to Heaven, to mourning and burial paraphernalia for the court and the educated elite. For the Song dynasty, which was founded on the principles of Confucian morality, the book was of major cultural and political importance. It was first printed under imperial orders and widely promoted in schools from the tenth century onward.

The *Sanli tu* reflects an early scholarly approach that relies on interpreting only texts and images to understand ancient material culture. A century after Nie Chongyi's time, a new method of historical inquiry led scholars to study excavated antiquities as well. Their findings challenged a number of the *Sanli tu* illustrations, but the book nonetheless remained part of the discourse on classical ritual design for centuries. This exhibition brings together a small number of exquisite objects and rare books to highlight this discourse.



Wine-Offering Cup (jue 爵). China, Ming dynasty, Zhengde era, dated 1520. Bronze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.7.1). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.



■ Nie Chongyi 聶崇義. *Sanli tu* 三禮圖 (Illustrations to the Ritual Classics)

In Chinese, the concept of ritual (*li*) is more broadly defined than in English, encompassing not only rites but also etiquette and proper conduct according to rank and station. Confucian scholars promoted *li* as one of the guiding principles of their philosophical doctrine. They touted it as the superior means for organizing the state and society, promising not only divine blessings but also social order and peace. The great majority of China's emperors strove to govern according to the civilizing principles of Confucian ritual.

The rules and rationales of classical ritual were devised in antiquity and transmitted in three revered texts known as the Ritual Classics (*Sanli*). Composed from the fifth to the second century BCE and forming part of the canon of Confucian Classics, they are: the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), *Etiquette and Ceremonial* (*Yili*), and the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli*). By the second century CE, these texts had become sacred doctrine and, like the other Confucian Classics, gained a position of cultural importance comparable to that of the Bible in the West.

Written in arcane language and a curt style, the Confucian Classics increasingly required commentary and interpretation to remain meaningful. The *Sanli tu* can be considered such a commentary. In an encyclopedic manner, it offers 362 illustrated entries on artifacts, buildings, and concepts mentioned in the Ritual Classics.

Nie Chongyi's *Sanli tu* survives today only in monochrome printed editions. The original manuscript of 961 took the form of scrolls and included color illustrations executed by professional painters. These images were subsequently copied onto the walls of several buildings in the Imperial Academy and many local schools throughout the country. Ma Lin's 1230s portrait of the ancient sage ruler Yu in sacrificial attire may give a general idea of the lost *Sanli tu* paintings in the Academy.



Mountain Jar. China, Ming dynasty, Jiajing mark and period, 1522–1567. Porcelain. Private collection.



Chime Stone. China, Qing dynasty, Kangxi era, dated 1716 Jade with incised and gilded decoration. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Major Louis Livingston Seaman, 1903 (03.15.1). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.

The Focus Project *Design by the Book: Chinese Ritual Objects and the Sanli tu* will give a sense of the book's contents by highlighting entries, some of them famous, a few obscure. The visitor is introduced to the *Sanli tu* edition of 1676, opened to the first two entries, describing the most important ceremonial vestments of the king, the Son of Heaven, in antiquity: the Grand Fur Robe, worn only during the Sacrifice to Heaven, and the Dynastic Sacrificial Robe and Cap, worn during the ancestral sacrifices. Of the *Sanli tu*'s twenty chapters only one is dedicated to ritual paraphernalia for women—reproduced pages illustrate two ceremonial outfits for the queen in antiquity.

The exhibition also features a number of artifacts, juxtaposed against the pertinent entries in the book, many of which have never been on public view. These include a Qing-dynasty (1644-1912) chime stone, dated 1716, and bronze ritual vessels, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art; a ruler, Western Jin dynasty (265–317), from the Princeton Art Museum; a newly identified bronze bell from the Yale University Art Gallery, Northern Song dynasty (early 12th century); and a sixteenth-century blue ceramic jar likely made for the Ming Sacrifice to Heaven. A rare example of a costume made for the last Sacrifice to Heaven, performed in 1914 by President Yuan Shikai, from the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon will also be on view.

The classical rituals retained their importance until the very end of the Qing dynasty and even beyond, into the early twentieth century. Throughout this period, most Chinese regarded Confucian rules of behavior and ritual as the moral norm. The government, meanwhile, saw them as an indispensable basis for the proper organization of society and the state, ensuring divine approbation, order, and the fundamental values of civilization. The Focus Project *Design by the Book: Chinese Ritual Objects and the Sanli tu* explores not only the transmission of this long-lived text through many editions across the centuries but also disparities among descriptions, illustrations, and actual examples of ritual paraphernalia.

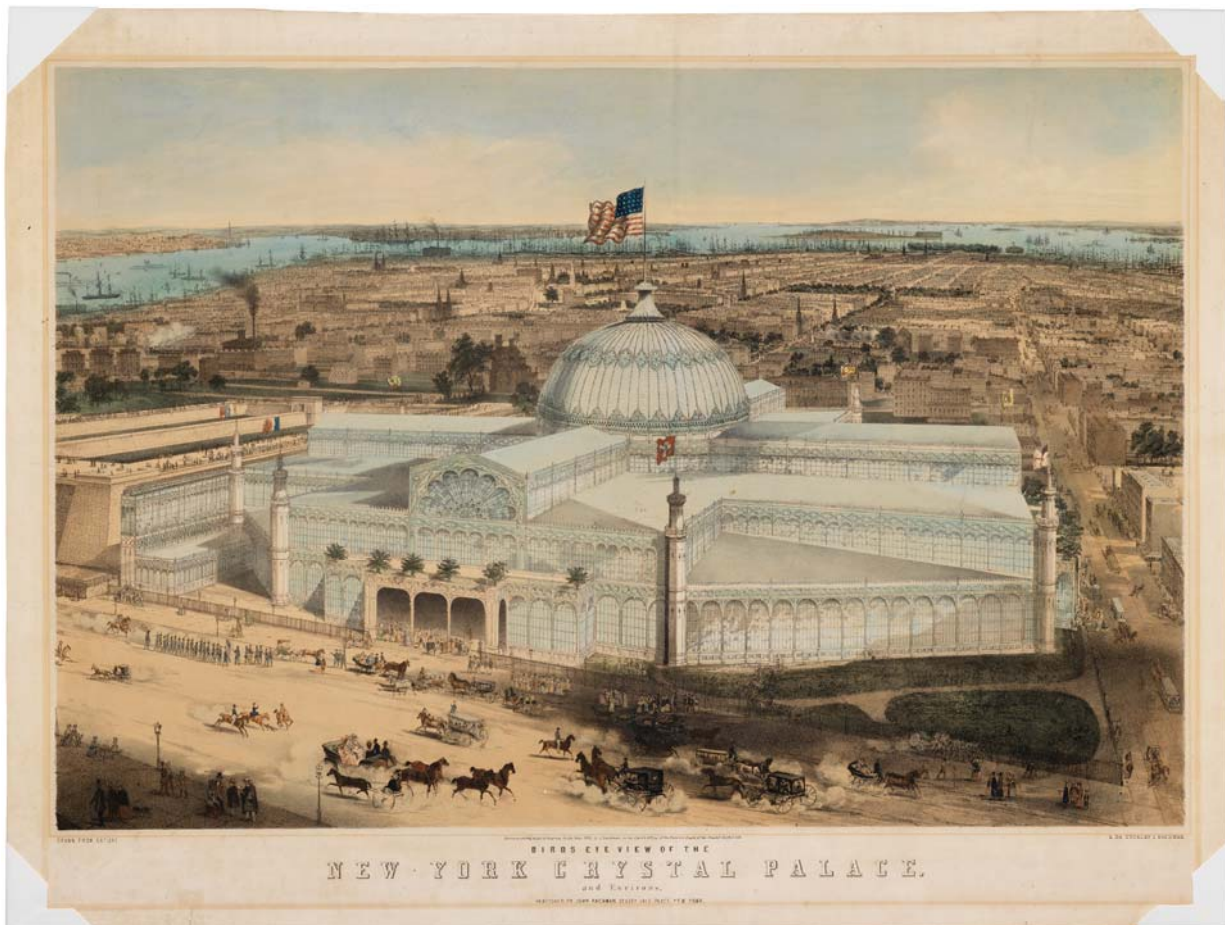
Design by the Book: Chinese Ritual Objects and the Sanli tu is accompanied by a richly illustrated book by François Louis that includes a glossary of the *Sanli tu*'s 362 entries. It will be available in the Gallery and online at store.bgc.bard.edu.

The Focus Project was curated by François Louis, associate professor of history of Chinese art and material culture. Bard Graduate Center students were critical collaborators in all facets of the exhibition.

New York Crystal Palace 1853

Curated by David Jaffee, Professor and Head
of New Media Research, Bard Graduate Center

March 24–July 30, 2017



The New York Crystal Palace, which opened in 1853 (formally the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations) — the first world’s fair held in the United States and one of the city’s first tourist attractions, with over one million visitors— was an impressive cast-iron structure on the site of present-day Bryant Park in New York City. This exhibition, *New York Crystal Palace 1853*, examines how the Crystal Palace showcased an enormous range of manufactured consumer goods and technological marvels of the age—a key part of rising claims in New York and the United States to consumer and cultural stature. And, perhaps more significantly, the objects displayed in the Gallery and the digital components of the exhibition emphasize the experience of those who visited the Crystal Palace in 1853.

Entering the Gallery, visitors will be introduced to the immense structure itself and its imprint on the expanding metropolis. Designed by architects Georg J. B. Carstensen and Charles Gildermeister with a Greek cross at its center and a soaring dome above, the building boasted a fireproof construction. A series of prints of the structure, including bird’s-eye views by John Bachman and William Wellstood that captures all of lower Manhattan and the harbor in color, will provide a sense of its monumentality. The experience of going to the fair, including the transportation needed to get there and the commerce that sprang up around it, can be explored in an interactive component of the digital publication. This theme is reinforced through a rare artifact, a surviving season ticket, and an image of an early turnstile.

The main Gallery space will be laid out in an approximation of the fair itself. An image of the Crystal Palace’s interior suggests the vast two-story space with its impressive luminescent dome. Nineteenth-century advances in printing technology put into the hands of visitors several guidebooks and newspapers chronicling the fair, which ran for an astonishing fifteen months (July 14, 1853 to November 1, 1854). These can be examined alongside another innovative digital interactive component that explores one of the printed panoramic views of the vast exhibits at the Crystal Palace. Police too have their presence—this marked the first regular appearance of uniformed officers in New York City—through artifacts of the chief of police, George W. Matsell.

Objects expressing technology and innovation, art and taste will lure the Gallery visitor further inside. The daguerreotype, one of the newer technologies of the time, will be represented through an early camera outfitted with a Harrison lens, a rare daguerreotype of the Crystal Palace interior, and salt prints—including one of John Whipple’s Moon, ingeniously taken through a telescope, and Victor Prevost’s marvelous photograph of the Crystal Palace building. William Sidney Mount, the Long Island genre painter, was also an inventor, and one of his rare “Cradle of Harmony” violins, patented in 1852, will be displayed. An 1851-patented Colt percussion revolver, notable for its precision steel and engraving, will also be on view. The section will be anchored by an early model Singer sewing machine (patented 1851), which was demonstrated at the fair.

The Crystal Palace sculpture gallery will be represented by a Parian marble reproduction of Hiram Powers’ *The Greek Slave*, which was known to London audiences



Brass token of Fitzgibbon Daguerreotype Gallery, 1853. Brass. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society, 0000.999.57047.



Daguerreotype camera, ca. 1853-54. Unknown (body); C.C. Harrison, New York (lens). George Eastman Museum, 1974.00037.2330

as well. Other decorative objects displayed in 1853 showed the dazzling skills of immigrant artisans and are represented by a grand rosewood armchair from a parlor suite, a selection of pottery and porcelain, and cut and pressed glass. Of particular note is the cherub carved by Ernst Plassmann for a gigantic Renaissance Revival sideboard, now lost, made for the fair by Bulkley and Herter.

As one of the city's first tourist attractions, it is no surprise that the fair fostered a variety of mementos. Along with awards and tokens, the rich range of souvenirs and curious promotional materials included utilitarian objects such as a soda water bottle, dedicated polka music, and a vividly printed window shade. The exhibition concludes with a piece of fused glass from the remains of the building, which burned to the ground in 1858.

New York Crystal Palace 1853 is accompanied by a digital publication that also includes the Gallery's interactive components. Building upon David Jaffee's 2014 Focus Project *Visualizing 19th-Century New York*, it contains essays on topics such as the food and drink available to Crystal Palace visitors and the development of the uniformed police who patrolled the display areas, explains more about some of the fascinating objects exhibited in the Crystal Palace building, and explores the wider range of public activities happening outside the exposition. Audio tours will offer first-hand accounts by individuals such as Walt Whitman, an enthusiastic and frequent visitor, as well as personal stories from two imagined characters—Philip DeGrasse, an African-American carter who lived in Seneca Village and brought his wares to the exhibit grounds, and “Aunt Kitty,” a country rube brought to life from a serialized fictional account.

New York Crystal Palace 1853 was curated by David Jaffee, professor and head of new media research, who died on January 20, 2017 after overseeing the major components of the exhibition. Bard Graduate Center students were critical collaborators in all facets of the exhibition, helping to research and develop the digital interactive features and audio tours along with writing the texts that appear both in the gallery and in the digital publication and its components.

Support for *New York Crystal Palace 1853* is generously provided by The Henry Luce Foundation and other generous donors.



Soda water bottle, ca 1850-60. Union Glass Works, Philadelphia. Mold-blown glass. Collection of The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John R. Graham Jr. in memory of Louise Wood Tillman, 86.4.262.

Bard Graduate Center Gallery

Bard Graduate Center Gallery organizes pioneering exhibitions on decorative arts, design history, and material culture, with leading scholars, curators, and institutions worldwide. We provide opportunities for faculty and students to gain experience in exhibition making. Our projects and publications break down traditional barriers between academic and curatorial forms of inquiry.

We offer our visitors a thought-provoking experience in an intimate townhouse setting on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Plan your visit at bgc.bard.edu.

Public Programs

Reading Room: Wendy's Subway X BGC

In conjunction with Bard Graduate Center's spring Focus Projects, we have invited Brooklyn-based literary organization Wendy's Subway to curate a Reading Room in the ground floor of the Gallery.

The Reading Room at Bard Graduate Center promotes community engagement with artists' books, periodicals, and other publications selected by Wendy's Subway for their relationship to the spring exhibitions and public programs. The installation is accompanied by a series of readings and workshops that gather together some of the boldest voices in contemporary poetry, literature, and performance. Readers are invited to browse the Reading Room anytime the Gallery is open; admission and wifi are free.

Wendy's Subway is a non-profit library and writing space located in Brooklyn that hosts a range of public programs, including readings and screenings, interdisciplinary talks and lectures, discussion and reading groups, and writing workshops. The non-circulating library holds a collection of books and documents with a special focus on poetry, art, theory, and philosophy, as well as the Laurin Raiken Archive, an extensive resource for the study of art history and criticism.

Made in New York

Glenn Adamson talks about the history of making in New York City.

Wednesday, April 19, 7 pm

Marginalized Histories of NYC: Panel Discussion

Thursday, May 11, 7 pm

Scholars whose work explores the histories of marginalized communities in New York will explore how the cultural traditions and expertise of diverse communities

have contributed to defining and revitalizing the city's vibrant and dynamic character, often overcoming institutionalized discrimination and prejudice to do so.

Confirmed Participants:

Lorin Thomas, PhD, professor of history, Rutgers University, and author of *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in New York City*;

Tia Powell Harris, president and executive director, Weeksville Heritage Center;

Sarah Schulman, novelist, playwright, LGBTQ activist and Distinguished Professor of the Humanities, Empire State College (SUNY);

Todd Fine, preservationist, historian, president of the Washington Street Historical Society, a nonprofit that advocates for the physical preservation of the "Little Syria" neighborhood of downtown Manhattan, and PhD candidate, CUNY.

Focus Festival 2017 April 8–9

Bard Graduate Center's 2017 Focus Festival brings thinkers and artists together in a two-day festival of interdisciplinary programming that draws inspiration from the key themes of the two spring Focus Projects. Featuring poet Claudia Rankine, essayist Garnette Cadogan, scholar Michael Puett, archeologist Cynthia Copeland and thinker and curator Jack Tchen and others, the Focus Festival will create a conversation across history in an attempt to see how ideas raised by the two exhibitions resonate in our contemporary moment.

Object Talks

Object Talks are offered in the Gallery on Thursdays at 6 pm, 6:45 pm, and 7:30 pm. Admission is free and no registration is required.

In this intimate evening program, graduate student educators share their personal research into individual exhibition objects in short, animated talks. Highlighting details that cannot be found anywhere else, these ten-minute Object Talks provide a forum for connecting history, things, ideas, and people.

Second Sundays @ BGC

On the second Sunday of each month, from 11 am to 4 pm, a family-friendly open house is hosted in the Gallery. Educator-led Gallery explorations, discussions, and hands-on workshops are designed to foster creative exchange between children and their adult partners. Gallery Admission is free. Hands-on workshops are \$20.

Exhibition Tours

Led by students in Bard Graduate Center's master's program, the Gallery offers school and group tours six days a week. Exhibition tours are free for all New York City public schools. To schedule a tour, please call 212.501.3013 or e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu.

Location and Hours

Bard Graduate Center Gallery is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue.

Gallery hours are Tuesday and Friday through Sunday, 11 am to 5 pm. Wednesday and Thursday, 11 am to 8 pm. Suggested admission is \$7 general, \$5 seniors and students.

For information about Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit bgc.bard.edu/gallery.

For press information and images, please e-mail hollis.barnhart@bgc.bard.edu or call 212.501.3074.

Front Page: 1. Ceremonial vestments, 1914. China. Silk, gold. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Murray Warner Collection of Oriental Art, MWCH 45:61-62, 45:9a-b. 2. Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations medal, 1853. White metal. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society, 1940.100.1018. **Third Page:** Bell. China, Northern Song dynasty, early 12th century. Bronze. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. George Hopper Fitch B.A. 1932, 1958.82. **Sixth Page:** John Bachman. *Birds Eye View of the New York Crystal Palace and Environs*, 1853. Hand-colored lithograph. Museum of the City of New York, 29.100.2387.