This exhibition seeks to challenge the notion that cultures cannot safely and respectfully exchange techniques, motifs, and styles with one another.

Today, the rhetoric surrounding this fine line of cultural appreciation versus cultural appropriation is polarizing, with some arguing that a thoughtful and careful combination of cultures is impossible. However, these pieces are evidence that there once was true cultural hybridity which fostered a multicultural aesthetic and built a more integrated and complex world. Such techniques of true admiration were able to exist without the modern desire for an “exotic” feel, which plagues the Western world. Constructive practices which supported understanding and artistic camaraderie were able to prevail in earlier years.

Rather than showcasing cultural imperialism, which rejects the experiences of marginalized groups and denies them agency over their own cultural practices, these pieces reflect a move towards cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridization demonstrates an effort to maintain a balance of practices and values of two or more different cultures. Here, there is an emphasis on the two-way flow of cultural diffusion.

As you move through this exhibit, we encourage you to ask yourself if we, as a modern society, are capable of emulating these examples of cultural hybridity in our own practices.
Standing at 20 inches tall, this cabinet, made of lacquered wood, ray skin, and mother of pearl, was completed by artists in Japan around the time 1600-1630. The cabinet box, sitting on four droplet shaped legs, has etched detailing along the bottom edge of the box and delicate design work on each side. The stand incorporates characteristics common to Dutch tables and furniture such as the droplet shaped legs and the wood veneered with mother-of-pearl. This piece of furniture is a fusion of both Japanese carpentry and handicraft as well as traditional Dutch styles, popular from the years 1625-1650. This functional work of art displays the respectful cultural hybridization of Dutch design with Japanese handiwork.
These tea caddies were created by Chinese artists between 1740-1780. They are made of different materials; including silver filigree, painted mica and ivory box, as well as hardwood cases with silver labels. Originally from China, Europeans were introduced to tea during the early 1600s and quickly became accustomed to decorative boxes used to encase the tea. English manufacturers refined these pieces to add stoneware reproductions and Western scenes such as boating and fishing. The commodity of tea and tea caddies were passed around through trade, allowing for original aesthetic elements found in original Chinese caddies to be incorporated with new details and styles relative to the receiving culture.
These simple and delicate porcelain figures of a man and a woman were created in Dehua, China between 1700-1720. The artist of this work is unknown though the work has been attributed to artists in Dehua, China. Having been thought by various scholars to be Adam and Eve, these figures appeal to a more Western cultural audience while still emulating traditional Chinese porcelain artistry. The combination of traditional, Chinese porcelain and the nature of who the objects may have been made for is an example of the admirable and delicate cultural hybridity that took place during the 18th and 19th century through trade between Asia and America.
Pictured here is Wu Bingjian, better known as Houqua, the leader of the Cohong, an association of merchants in Guangzhou, China authorized by the Chinese government to trade with Western merchants. The 1835 oil on canvas painting displays a straight-faced Houqua seated cross-legged in a traditional Chinese robe in his home. The painting, attributed to artists in Guangzhou, China, was later accredited to Guan Zuolin, better known as Lamqua. Lamqua learned to paint portraits in a traditional European style by studying the works of European portrait artists. Lamqua painted Houqua, a merchant who had close encounters with European culture, in traditional European style displaying the appreciation for European artistry technique and hybridizing the Western and Eastern cultures.
Works Cited


