

“My Top Ten List”

Bob Jacobsen

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Criteria:

1. **Beauty:** What’s the punch in an object that makes you notice it?
2. **Historical significance:** Artist, era, whether inscribed. Known for a long time. Whether Chinese themselves define as important, including the three great philosophies: Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Chinese consider paintings and calligraphy as top arts.
3. **Size counts:** Gallery presence. Heft will stop people and get them to think in new ways.
4. **Condition:** Complete and original in look. Intent of age. Whether broken or cracked, then repaired earlier.
5. **Rarity.** Objects others don’t have
6. **Classic object.**
7. **“A” or “B” list.** It’s best to have an A work by an A artist. It’s Ok to have an A work by a B artist – a brilliant piece allows you to talk about the tradition.

Jacobsen narrowed list to 19 or 20 objects that were favorites to Jacobsen as a curator. All are masterpieces. Sometimes a masterpiece can be an entire collection, such as our bronzes, which are the third best collection in the U.S. Before naming his Top Ten (or 11 or 12), Jacobsen alerted us to 19 (or so) pieces we should not overlook.

Masterpiece Collections:

Han Horses: Each of the three is distinctive and important in its own right. The middle one shows striding in a way familiar to us in the Western tradition.

Furniture: We have 13 objects that are the #1 of their kind in the world.

Jade: 175 objects, dating from 5,000 BC to early 19th c. Especially strong in objects from Sung Dynasty. Pillsbury Collection. Incense burner from Searle & Walker collections. The curator from NY’s Met said, “Piece for piece, this is the finest late jade collection in the country.”

Pillsbury Bronzes

18th Century Court materials: Carpets, brocades through Ch'ing:

300 Court textiles, which are very fine and cover all areas. **300 non-royal garments**. Total: 600, which is top in this country. They were collected at a time when old clothing/robes were thrown out because they were associated with the aristocracy and "old ways." Foreign collectors who just loved them gathered many of the textiles.

Gold & silver: Back to Shang Dynasty. Kempe Collection. Headdress – other ½ is in Stockholm, Sweden.


Gold crown - 51.27.190 (no image available)

Miao Collection: Late 19-mid-20th c Chinese ancestors of the Hmong. 1,300 objects including Miao costumes, the largest silver ornaments, and over 90 necklaces. Late 19th - mid-20th c.

Lacquer: 70-80 pieces total. 12-13 Ming. Go back to 400-300 BC. Obscure objects

Rhinoceros Horn: 52 objects from rhino horn, an obscure little collection. Chinese love these.

Paintings: Over 450 in collection, 100 on view at any time. Chinese see as most important. Most of ours: A quality by B artists. Great literati collection.

	<p><u>Flower Vase, 12th – 13th c., Chin Dynasty, 99.174.1</u> Uses iron oxide, with the glaze splashed on. The firing process allows the glaze to drip and run in a natural way. There is a beautiful shoulder on the vase, with a Buddhist shape.</p>
<p>(Image not available)</p>	<p><u>Vase, Late 18th c., Ch'ing Dynasty, 37.56a, b</u> Indian/Moghul style. Jade, which was abraded using ground quartz. Took at least one year to work. Imagine – someone presents you with this expensive hunk of jade. They say we'd like a tall vase with the lid off. Light should pass through. We'd like four feathered shoulders and free-hanging rings. Astonishingly light. It weighs only an ounce or two! Would shatter like glass if you dropped it.</p>



Terracotta Warriors, Tomb of Shih-huang-ti, 210-209 BC

6,000 life-sized soldiers. It's an incredible find, however none of these are RARE. There are more than 6,000 of them! Represents China at its best – mass made, but with tremendous skill. Also, mass produced silk and blue-and-white, Demonstrating the ability to undercut other markets. Even though they are not rare, they are very popular: When we had exhibit with terracotta warriors in 1985 – set a record for visitors. China has a genius for mass-producing and exporting. Does so because of huge population, brilliant craftsmanship and brilliant minds. More rare: bronze carriages from this era.

Beautiful seated figure, rare and half human size. Of a master in charge of the royal stable. He has a handsome face with hands in correct proportion to his body. Made about 100 years after Shih-huang-ti, early Han Dynasty (Unable to identify object).



Blue and White (Peahen) Dish, Yuan

Dynasty, 87.62 Has been on cover of book, so experts think it's important. Was on the cover of a Sotheby's catalogue. It shows the beginning of blue-and-white porcelain as a popularized export item for Islamic and foreign market. Chinese thought was garish. 100 years later the court accepted this style. It's missing a chip. Still, very expensive. Great object – but not in the top 10!

(Image not available)

Recessed-leg Altar Table (Great Altar







Table), Late Ming-Early Ch'ing, 99.120 12-1/2 feet long. Made of Huang-hua-li hard wood, out of one solid plank, the largest known of this wood type. There have been two or three articles written about it.






Two blue and yellow-ground dishes, Early 18th c., Ch'ing Dynasty, 2001.33.1





Bunch of flowers. Had to go to auction to get them – hate to do that because you're up against all kinds of wealthy collectors/museums. But these are **flawless**. Had to pay 3x what hoped. Had an expert collector in to look at them. Said, "They're the best there is." Said he was

	<p>Jacobsen's competitor for them at the auction. Sing collection certified.</p>
	<p><u>Yamantaka Mandala, Monks of the Gyuto Tantric University, 1991, 92.44</u> The piece attracted a great audience, and is now one of the most popular objects. New and different culture in town. 3M could help us bond the sand to preserve it for future generations. The Abbott agreed to allow, despite the cultural tradition of destroying it to show the transience of life. Abbott saw as spreading Lamaist Buddhism. There's nothing wrong with a new object.</p>
<p>(Image not available)</p>	<p><u>Bhadrakalpika Sutra, c. 1500, Tibet 2002.89.3</u> Largest sutra in the gallery. Complete 297-page manuscript. Dated. Finest in the country.</p>
	<p><u>Table Screen, c. 1800, 97.134.7a,b.</u> Solid marble insert that reads on both sides. Royal. Would have been placed in doorway or behind royal person. Only one known. Extremely rare. Had to go to auction to get it. Bruce Dayton went with Jacobsen, which was a great advantage in the bidding war.</p>
	<p><u>Folding Screen (In Wu Family Reception Hall), Late 17th c., 96.124.1a-l.</u> By contrast, Jacobsen found this in a Hong Kong warehouse, where he viewed it in murky light. The 12 panel paintings had been removed. Owner tried to sell paintings and frame separately, but hadn't succeeded. Needed repair. Only Ming/early Ch'ing screen with original panels that he knows of. Both this and the Table screen above are in the Ch'ing tradition. They are equal in importance to the MIA. But Jacobsen got the folding screen for 1/10 the price.</p>
	<p><u>Figure of a Rabbit, 8th-9th c., 2004.132.4.</u> Porcelain. T'ang. People love because it's adorable. But it's also extremely rare. Only three of these in the world. Also important: represents the beginning of porcelain.</p>

	<p><u>White-and-Russett jadeite Covered Vase, 18th c., 92.103.7a,b.</u> Showpiece. Star. On the cover of a book in the 1940s. Double dragon: Character for long life. White on back. Carved on front to show russet color.</p>
	<p><u>Wedding procession, Ming Dynasty, 89.60.1.</u> Skill level: Made by factories that produce roof tile. It would be as if he asked if you want a roof tile put on your coffee table. Chinese say it's not fine art. Meant to be in the tomb. But it is a complete set. Rare to have. We have the house, the meal, the bride, groom, horse with rider, rider-less horse.</p>
	<p><u>Bronze Vessel in the Shape of an Owl, Late 14th-13th c., 50.46.116.</u> Charming – like the bunny Rabbit. Use for ritual wine. Animal symbolism. RARE. Five known. This is the most naturalistic of those five known. Not in ideal shape. Lot of repair to the bottom. Probably not its original feet.</p>
	<p><u>Sheng Ting, 6th c. B.C., 2005.92</u> Massive bronze caste. But not perfect. Has total replacement of one phalange. Masterpiece of late Chou bronze casting. Centerpiece.</p>
<p>The Top Ten List (or More)</p>	
	<p>1. <u>Chien (Ritual Water Basin), 500-400 B.C. 50.46.103</u> Jacobsen put this in the “In Pursuit of a Masterpiece Show.” It is gorgeous. It was inscribed. It's historical. We know when it was made. The casting is superb. Molds – we know right where it comes from. We could trace its maker.</p>
	<p>2. <u>Celestial Bronze Horse, 25-220 A.D. 2002.45.</u> Huge amount paid for it. Only one in America. Great size – 40-50”. Had to be special tomb. Spritely young stallion in large scale. Great for telling the story of the Silk Road. Horses Imported along the Silk Road from Ferghana in Central Asia in trade for silk. Defined Chinese sculpture. RARE piece in</p>

	<p>great condition. Vitality. Striated effect all over shows especially where leather saddle was. Realism of that day.</p>
	<p>3. Money Tree, 1st- 2nd c., 2002.47a-rrr. Taoist Gallery – great gallery. Has the world’s largest Huang-hua-li hardwood table. Taoist deities. This money tree is one of 3-4 in North America. Advent of the female matron of western heaven: Hsi Wang-mu, Queen Mother of the West. Became cult figure in Taoism. Here, she’s already enshrined (early representation). Eventually incorporated into the Taoist pantheon. Leaves are Han dynasty coins. Ours is a little more elongated than others. Phoenix on top – complete. Entertained by long-sleeve dancer. Monkey off bottom, grabbed coin for owner of the tree so that he doesn’t have to soil his hands.</p>
	<p>4. Cosmetic Case, 1st c. B.C., 2001.69.2.1a,b. Gorgeous cloud pattern. Mirror case. Three small lacquer boxes inside – all decorated with silver inlay. Four wooden hair combs. Red and ochre lacquer. Images of striding animals. Treasured heirloom above ground. Goes with her into the grave “because you have to keep yourself up in the afterlife.” Because it’s organic material we can Carbon 14 date to 1st c. BC – late Han.</p>
	<p>5. Avalokitesvara, 571, 18.5 Large scale. Missing an arm. Has an inscription. Tells a story: Temple destroyed. Community got together to repair. This is beginning of Buddhist sculpture. Gives names, donors who gave for the repair. Name of temple precinct. We know the name of the temple, who paid, the date. The inscription puts this object in the art history books.</p>
	<p>6. Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching (Yuan Mi), 524, 46.23.1a-d. This was a brilliant purchase by a predecessor of Jacobsen’s. Today, you wouldn’t be able to get it out of China. It belonged to a Royal Prince in 524. It draws its inspiration from Chinese ink paintings. Playing with space and recession. Front stage setting of clouds and smaller trees in the back. No paintings from this era survive.</p>

	<p>But this tells us a lot about the 6th c. China. Confucian mythology. Beginning of landscape painting. Parallel: Nothing like this in Europe at the time. Two figures are playing bell, as in funeral ceremony. Two flying dragons around lotus (Buddhism & Taoism overtones). Low relief. Lightly incised.</p>
	<p>7. T'ang Tomb Retinue Horses, early 8th c., 49.1.5. Excavated from royal imperial site (An Chia Kou near Lo-yang in Hunan Province) and recorded. Complete set: Five pairs of court officials, warrior guardians, earth spirits, horses, and camels. Rare cobalt glue glaze. Excellent condition. Only one other set - in the British Museum. That one lacks the blue and the finesse of ours. Did research. This confirms Jacobsen's theory of royal burials. Lokapalas- beautifully molded; contrast to the static character of the court dignitaries, two powerful guardian deities who each strike a vigorous pose. All are beautifully molded. Largest blue horse in the world. Excavated and documented. All belong together. Five pairs of things. Shows these were part of royal T'ang burials.</p>
	<p>8. Pair of Camels, one with rider, 618-906, 2004.205.1.2a,b. These camels are a great opening to talk about the Silk Road. There are two kinds of camels - the two-hump Bactrian, used on northern desert routes of Mongolia, and the one-hump Dromedary, which could stand the heat. Wonderful scale. Big. Powerful. No kid can just walk by them without stopping.</p>
	<p>9. Flying Dragon, 8th c., 2007.87.22.1-2. Just as beautiful on one side as the other. Flag standard pushed into it. Carrying pole. Buddhist rituals. Court oriented. Dragon chasing the pearl of wisdom - see so much in Ch'ing. Don't know of any other pair anywhere.</p>

	<p>10. Double Fish Bowl, 12-13th c., 43.1. Perfect color and condition. Entry into ceramic collection. Lung-ch'uan celadon. We're strong with Sung</p>
	<p>11. Bodisattva Kuan-yin, late 11th-early 12th c., 98.62a-h. Wooden structure. Few exist. The 13th c. – terminal point for invigorating Buddhist sculpture. High spirit about it. Very important: the surface condition. Original surface – overlay of gold. Stenciled work and gold pigment. Red and green – original pigments. Pure Sung. Would have had a crown encircling head.</p>
<p>6 More Excellent Objects:</p>	
	<p>. The Bodhisattva Kuan-yin and Flying Apsaras, 12th century, 50.41.1. Buddhist gallery. Fragment of large painting. Bodhisattva (green ring) with Apsaras. This would be a 10 in almost anybody else's museum! Hardly any other frescos of this type have survived. 12th c.</p>
	<p>2. The Three Purities, late 16th c., 2002.126.2.1; 2002.126.2.2; & 2002.126.2.3 (Not on view). Ming. Set of three celestial deities from pantheon. By 4th & 5th c. Taoists imitate Buddhists to attract more people. Cross over of style. These are large. One in charge of education. One in charge of ceremonies and codebook. Iconographs – pagoda, flames, fungus – aspects of Taoist. Jacobsen found in N.Y. Wanted them to be remounted. Moon & sun constellation. Lao Tse, writer of I Ching. Lived 6th c. B.C. White hair and wispy beard. The three of these would have been over main altar. Animals, floral decorations, other creatures. 8 Taoist immortals. Only complete set of Ming – three worthies. Three big paintings. Down now. Ming Taoism. Scriptures of three philosophies. Historic, important of Taoist paintings.</p>



3. **Folding Roundback Chair, late 16th c., 98.80.3.** One of only two known. Other one in Shanghai museum. This is the widest and oldest surviving one. 3 or 4 or 5 other roundback chairs have similar reinforcing hardware. Grand scale. Made for very important people. Craftsmanship is extraordinary. Original. Purchased at auction from a German collection. Gorgeous lotus scrolling ironwork. Chair had rope across. Not nice. Replaced with woven seat, more like would have had. Highly acclaimed piece. This is the chair that a visitor sat on and broke! I found out about the damage when someone from Hong Kong emailed me. Then heard from Europe. Seen as most expensive chair in the world! One of only two.. Most elegant.



4. **Imperial Throne, 18th c., 93.32a-d.** You'd look at it and think it's French taste. But it's Chinese taste. Crown. Five dragons. Bought in France. Epitome of Court taste in 18th c. **Top of its class** in lacquer furniture. Every inch is decorated






5. **Imperial Portrait of Prince Duo-Lo, c. 1775, 83.30.** Paid world record price in 1970s. Honorific painting of a very accomplished prince. Would have been displayed in great hall of state. 11' high. Shows lifestyle – seated on red lacquer throne. Pile carpet. Dragon screen behind him. This is the biggest and greatest of these in the world.



6. **Jade Mountain Illustrating the Gathering of Poets at the Lan T'ing Pavilion, 1784, 92.103.13.** Great size, tradition, greatest poem, great carving. Chinese looked back to 4th c. Poem by *Lan T'ing Su* ("Prelude to the Orchid Pavilion"), a famous poem composed in 353 by Wang Hsi-chih, perhaps the greatest calligrapher of the Far East. Seal and poem of Emperor Qianlong. Landscape. Jade fields. One of four carved jades during his reign. Smallest of four, but largest piece of historic jade outside of China.

Other Objects Not to be Overlooked, but that did not make the list:	
	Early Jade For pure aesthetics. Symbols. Represent standards.
	Alms bowl, c. 1100, 2000.87.3 Black Sung Dynasty lacquer. Made of organic materials, so we can Carbon date it (c.1088 or 1100 AD). Only possession of monk. Idea of austerity.
	Silver Inlaid Bronze Chariot Fitting, 3rd-2nd c. B.C., 2001.135.2 Decorative bronze fitting for an umbrella-like canopy, chariot parasol, to shield occupants of open carriage. Functional beauty! Decorated with highly stylized dragons, animal forms, circles, triangles and spirals. Art rococo gone wild. Rare. Later ones were incised, rather than silver inlaid. We've treated it so won't tarnish.
(Image not available)	Plate, 8th c., 51.28.3 Silver with gilding. Classic Persian peacock design.
	Ewer with Pheasant-Head Stopper, 8th c. 50.1a,b. White ware vase with chicken head. Millions of pieces were made. Rare, unblemished example of the beginning of ceramic for trade. Head stopper. Ewer – shows influenced by Islamic trade. Rare. Three of these in the world. One in Tokyo. Another in Chinese museum.
	Sung Painting. Hand scroll. Landscape. 13 th c. Ends in mist. Beginning of landscape tradition. Mountains. Narrative unrolled. Hardest kind of painting to get. Bought in 1979-80 at an auction for less than \$6,000. Worth more than \$500,000 today (Unable to identify object).
	Teabowl with Leaf Décor, 12-13th c., 98.74 Brown ware with leaf. Charming bowl by Buddhist monks. Imagine them drinking tea in serene setting, getting to the bottom of the bowl and seeing the leaf

	<p><u>Album of Ten Finger Paintings, Kao Ch-I-pei, 99.176.1-11</u> Water Buffalo. Starts buffalo form with thumbprint.</p>
	<p>Ceramics. Red collection. Monochrome. Ch'ing. Minneapolis is known for it.</p>
	<p><u>Landscape After Huang Kung-wang, Wang Yu, 1752, 2000.206.</u> Ch'ing. Orthodox. Painter was one of four minor Wangs. 8' high. Not biggest name. Second generation</p>
	<p><u>Double Album of Miniature Landscape Paintings, Fang Shih-shu, 1723: 2009.206.</u> "A" painter, 'AAA' work. Best miniature album. Chinese orthodox. Signed, dated. Minute writing. 10,000 li in one square inch. Panels the size of a playing card. Each detailed. Twenty-four tiny landscapes and eight leaves of accompanying calligraphy is a masterpiece of the miniature genre. Final inscription here reads: "<i>to view 10,000 miles in less than a foot.</i>" Strong ownership history.</p>