At the Forefront of an Evolution

Everyday visitors walk the paths of Pacific Bonsai Museum who have never before seen a bonsai. Imagine the excitement and awe they feel as they see their very first bonsai amidst the towering firs of the Pacific Northwest, connecting with nature on both a grand and small scale.

Known for its Asian origins, bonsai art in America is progressing into something unique to our culture. Pacific Bonsai Museum is at the forefront of this evolution. We honor the origins of bonsai art by pushing boundaries through our bonsai display and exhibits.

2016 will long be remembered as the year Pacific Bonsai Museum took bonsai art in a provocative new direction. Our groundbreaking exhibit Decked-Out: From Scroll to Skateboard drew visitors from around the world to experience the collision of street art and bonsai for the very first time. We hope you come to know PBM not only as a place of beauty, culture, history and nature, but also as a museum that takes risks, one that is willing to innovate. Look for another bold, first-of-its-kind program to launch in the months ahead. The LAB, Pacific Bonsai Museum’s Living Art of Bonsai collaborative will elevate the art of bonsai by serving as an incubator for bonsai design.

Bolstered by powerful partnerships, the Museum’s educational programs engaged visitors at the Museum and in our community in surprising new ways in 2016. Working together with the Puget Sound Bonsai Association, the Seattle Art Museum, King County Libraries as well as businesses and community organizations extended the Museum’s reach to connect people to nature through the living art of bonsai.

Because of you, Pacific Bonsai Museum continues to offer access to all. Your generous support keeps the Museum’s outdoor art display open to everyone in our community. In 2016, we welcomed more than 35,000 visitors — thank you!

We invite you to join us as we continue to discover a new expression of an ancient art!

Warm regards,

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238. Creeping Hydrangea (Hydrangea petiolaris)
Artist: David De Groot
In training since: 1989
As you look back at 2016, what stands out?

Top of the list is the Decked-Out: From Scroll to Skateboard exhibit becoming a reality after conceptualizing it in my head for nearly four years. Decked-Out showed how modern art can be incorporated into the traditional framework of bonsai. The artistic diversity of the participating artists was greater than I could have hoped for and it was inspiring to see how bonsai influenced another group of artists.

We also kicked-off a new era of collections management. With generous grant support, we began the process of creating a digital collections database. This is a major undertaking but vital to preserving the history of the Museum and the history of bonsai in America. In the future, we hope to offer access to this database via the Museum’s website.

Why is PBM pushing the boundaries of bonsai traditions?

Thanks to curator emeritus David De Groot, Pacific Bonsai Museum has a long history of juxtaposing bonsai with other visual arts. David consistently created thematic exhibitions involving multiple artists, pairing their art with the bonsai. I approach our exhibits in a similar manner and have made exhibits the primary focus of the Museum’s display space. We aim to explore and pursue bonsai in ways that surprise our visitors and enhance their ability to connect with bonsai, with each other and with nature. We strive to make bonsai relevant and significant to an American audience, something that I have yet to see at other major public bonsai displays in the United States. Personally, I am eager to explore what American bonsai will become. It’s exciting to think about how much more we can do!

Were there any additions to the collection in 2016?

The Museum received three significant bonsai donations in 2016 thanks to the generosity of these individuals. A Japanese white pine donated by former Weyerhaeuser executive Bill Franklin was imported from Japan many years ago and cultivated off and on by Museum curator emeritus, David de Groot. A Japanese yew styled by Isao Omachi and imported from Japan in recent years was displayed by Carl Wooldridge at the 5th U.S. National Bonsai Exhibit in Rochester, New York where he then donated the tree to PBM. A buttonwood was donated by bonsai artist Paul Pikel. Paul collected and cultivated this tree for over 15 years where it was featured in many bonsai publications and received several accolades, including the All-American Award at the 4th U.S. National Bonsai Exhibit for best native tree with an American made pot and stand. Each tree adds something special to the Museum’s collection and we are very grateful for the opportunity to continue caring for these trees.
How would you describe the art of bonsai ceramics?

Bonsai ceramics in the US is still at an early developmental stage. There are a growing number of bonsai artists who are willing to push the boundaries beyond strict tradition. They’re eager to try native species of trees, to look around their surroundings for inspiration, and to recognize their own cultural uniqueness. This naturally extends to the selection of locally made containers by artists with similar sensibilities. The question is, are there enough ceramic artists who will educate themselves as to what bonsai is and are willing to work with bonsai artists in a collaborative way? You’re told as a ceramics artist to find your own voice, find your own unique way and that often translates into something so personal that the tree looks like a sore thumb coming out of the pot. There’s still a lot of room there for creativity and finding your own way as a bonsai potter, but you’re no longer just working for yourself. You’re working for the bonsai artist and for the tree.

What constitutes a successful pairing between tree and container?

Beyond the basic design elements such as proportion, shape, visual weight, dynamics, surface finish, and color, I use the word gestalt to describe the big picture, the entirety of the composition on display — the tree, container, table and possibly even accent and scroll that all add up together to create the big picture, the gestalt of bonsai. If it’s successful all the elements combine to create a unified whole that is greater than the sum of the individual parts. As all these pieces come together, everything can be tweaked and repositioned, even the tree can be restyled, so that the whole overall effect is changed. With a thoughtful awareness to all these subtle components, each piece not only complements but enhances the characteristics of the tree.

What do you see on the horizon for bonsai ceramics in America?

Hopefully, people willing to take some leaps of faith and try new things. There’s potential for bonsai containers to tell a story that lifts the tree into a literal or abstract narrative that you don’t normally associate with bonsai and to me that becomes revolutionary, that becomes truly unique and new, and that’s what’s really exciting. They’re not all going to be successful, but when it comes together and it creates something larger than the tree and the container, that’s what art is and art is not willing to just lean back on old traditions. Art is always pushing the envelope and bonsai is going to be recognized as art if there are people willing to take the chance.

Ron Lang is a renowned bonsai potter based in North Carolina. He began working with clay in 1971 and for 30 years served as the Chairman of the Ceramics Department at Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland. He has a background in sculptural ceramics and is now primarily focusing on bonsai pottery.
Exploring New Ways to Connect with Bonsai

Bonsai may be an ancient art but it is unfamiliar to many. In 2016, we aimed to engage new audiences and invited all to explore how a living art from a foreign land could be relevant in their lives and in our American culture. We kicked off the year with the eighth annual Stone Images exhibit, presented in conjunction with the Viewing Stone Study Group of the Puget Sound Bonsai Association. Next up, the Decked-Out: From Scroll to Skateboard exhibit. Opening day of Decked-Out included art-making, artist panel discussions, and thanks to a partnership with the King County Library Systems, a poetry workshop with Washington State Poet Laureate Tod Marshall. The collision of street-art and bonsai spoke to visitors like never before, explaining the basics of three-point bonsai display in a modern, relatable way.

Pacific Bonsai Museum reached out to school art docents at the Interurban Center for the Arts to see if they would like to learn about bonsai — they said absolutely! They quickly took what they learned and brought it to local classrooms, teaching students about bonsai and helping them create their own drawings of skateboard and bonsai displays.

We rounded out the year with free tours of the collection every Sunday, a bring-your-own-tree bonsai workshop with North Carolina bonsai artist Danny Coffey, and the third annual A Bonsai Solstice — your one chance a year to walk through the Museum after dark and see the trees by candlelight. Throughout 2016, Pacific Bonsai Museum also ventured outside the Museum walls to bring bonsai to new audiences. Events included the Seattle Art Museum Family Day at Olympic Sculpture Park, the Asia Pacific Cultural Center’s New Year Celebration at the Tacoma Dome and Kinokuniya Bookstore’s Art Festival.

Pacific Bonsai Museum is a community gathering place — a place to get outside, learn something new and gain a new perspective on the natural world around us. The programs of 2016 proved that bonsai can be modern, relevant and American. Looking ahead, we hope to build on this momentum by expanding our educational programming, forming new partnerships in the community and continuing to be a place to connect with living art.

Photos, clockwise from top left: visitors enjoy hot chocolate at A Bonsai Solstice; poetry from the workshop with WA State Poet Laureate Tod Marshall; a bonsai demo during the Decked-Out opening; Booking.com volunteers helping out at the Decked-Out opening; development coordinator Joanna Chromik at SAM Family Day at Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle; student drawing from the ICA art docent program; artists Solace and Henry do live-painting at the closing of Decked-Out; artist Danny Coffey works on a tree in the PBM workshop; Booking.com volunteers for Decked-Out opening; art-making at the Decked-Out opening.
THANK YOU!

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Your gift to Pacific Bonsai Museum helps cultivate the next generation of bonsai art enthusiasts, care for our growing bonsai collection and keep our outdoor display open for all who seek a connection with nature — thank you.

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Linda Showell

“The Pacific Bonsai Museum is such a very special place combining art and nature in a contemplative, peaceful environment. In 2013, with the thought that it might not exist anymore, I wanted to make a donation (even before the structure was in place to accept donations). Also, being relatively new to the actual creating of a bonsai, I hoped to volunteer in the future to learn more. The time and effort put in by all of the staff (as well as the volunteers) is extraordinary and it’s a privilege to be part of that commitment.”
— Millie Russell, Donor

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130. Catlin Elm (Ulmus parvifolia ‘Catlin’)
Artist: John Naka
In training since: 1970

Your gift to Pacific Bonsai Museum helps cultivate the next generation of bonsai art enthusiasts, care for our growing bonsai collection and keep our outdoor display open for all who seek a connection with nature — thank you.

THANK YOU!
THANK YOU!

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Thank you to our wonderful volunteers who contributed 1202 hours of their time and made the successes of 2016 possible!

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Lynn Paletta
Jordan Pugsley
Victoria Ridgeway
Mille Russell
Joel Schwarz
Ladd Smith
Gary Wharton

“I love to volunteer at the museum because it is an honor to work with such a passionate group of people. I believe we all feel fortunate to be so close to such a splendid collection of plants, knowing the immense care and dedication it takes to keep them healthy and beautiful. To witness visitors’ eyes and smiles light up when they get up close to the trees, see the detail in each tree, or realize how old the tree is, is such a rewarding experience.”
— Ladd Smith, Volunteer

“Membership with the Pacific Bonsai Museum is a ticket to an incredible journey through nature’s powerful canvas on a stage of exciting artistry. The trees and special exhibits at the Bonsai Museum are masterpieces of fine art—like a Renoir painting or a great stage play—that I can observe every day in the making through all the seasons of the year. An enthralling stroll through the artworks at the Pacific Bonsai Museum?...Priceless!”
— Gary Kiyonaga, Member

139. Coast Redwood (Sequoia sempervirens)
Artist: Toichi Domoto
In training since: 1960
**35,822 Visitors**
From all 50 states and 48 countries

- **148** Bonsai in collection
- **221** Tours participants
- **1202** Volunteer Hours

**REVENUE**
- 45% Foundation grants - $200,122
- 12% Individual gifts - $52,207
- 4% Gifts in-kind, earned income & other - $18,626
- 11% Donated assets - $46,900
- 28% Endowment payout - $126,400

Total Operating Revenue: $444,255

**EXPENSE**
- 48% Collections, grounds & facilities - $306,057
- 14% Exhibits & public programs - $89,743
- 22% Development & Marketing - $137,594
- 17% Administration - $106,084

Total Operating Expense: $639,478

NOTE: The Museum also recorded $77,893 in other income from donated land, $255,000 in transfer from reserves and $291,735 in other expense from land lease, depreciation, and asset disposal expenses. The release from reserves is part of the Museum’s plan to allow fundraising to ramp up over time.

133. Formosan Juniper (Juniperus formosana)
Artist: Amy Liang
In training since: 1962
Connecting people to nature through the living art of bonsai

160. Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*). Artist: Leo Cunningham; In training since: 1986

PACIFIC BONSAI MUSEUM

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