

Press Release

Mingei International Museum's Bold, New Exhibition *Blue Gold: The Art and Science of Indigo* Celebrates Magical Transformation of Plants into Color

Opens September 14, 2024

July 9, 2024, SAN DIEGO, CA — It's the color of ocean tides, a starry dusk sky, and a pair of vintage Levi's. Indigo blue is all around, but harnessing this hue is a complex feat of chemistry and botanical transformation. The exhibition ***Blue Gold: The Art and Science of Indigo***, opening at Mingei International Museum in Balboa Park on September 14, 2024 combines art, craft, science, and history to explore this color's past and present. The show is among more than 70 exhibitions and programs presented as part of Getty's 2024 PST ART initiative returning in September with its latest edition, [PST ART: Art & Science Collide](#). This landmark regional event explores the intersections of art and science.

Blue Gold explores the extraordinary process of transforming plants into pigments. Indigo has a long and multifaceted history of cultivation, production, and distribution that will resonate with anyone who loves the color blue and shares a curiosity for the chemistry and indigenous knowledge behind its process. *Blue Gold* will present indigo as a compelling manifestation of art and science. Over 180 works representing 30 countries include featured objects from Mingei's permanent collection, works on loan from national and international organizations, and commissioned work created for this exhibition by gifted artists and craftspeople, including Christina Kim and Porfirio Gutiérrez, among others. Learn about Featured Artists and Collaborations [here](#).

The indigo dye process involves grinding leaves from the Indigofera plant into powder, boiling the powder into a rich liquid, and fermenting it to complete a transformative chemical reaction. Indigo dye has been used for thousands of years, spanning all continents, cultures, and methods. From ancient Mesopotamia to present-day West Africa, indigo has an expansive heritage that transcends that of other dyeing methods, even in contemporary times. Indigo's beauty and ubiquity have eclipsed the unpleasant realities of its growth and manufacture, including hard labor and pollution and its association with colonialism and slavery. This exhibition highlights the importance of nuanced conversations that celebrate beauty without skipping over a grim past.

From 7th century textiles to 20th century kimonos, the exhibition not only highlights brilliant textiles and works of contemporary art and craft from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, but also examines indigo's many other uses in the realms of science, spiritual practice, and more.

Mingei Director of Exhibitions and Chief Curator, Dr. Emily Hanna, notes that “Indigo, a deep blue dye derived from green plants, has been used by cultures across the world. The title of this exhibition alludes to its value as a commodity, but also elevates its aesthetic worth.”

Major Themes

Upon entering the gallery, visitors will be immersed in a sea of blue hues. Indigo-dyed objects, specimens, and stories are supplemented with the themes below. In Mingei Studio, young visitors can interact with kid-friendly, educational activities and hands-on demonstrations that walk through the steps of indigo dyeing from plant to pigment.

What Is Indigo?

Uses of Indigo

From Plant to Dye

Indigo Dying Techniques Around the World

The Legacy of Indigo Trade

The Rise of Synthetics and Rebirth of Natural Indigo

30 Countries represented in *Blue Gold*

Japan, Laos, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, China, India, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Niger, Egypt, United States, Bermuda, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Palestine, France, England, Greece, Turkey.

Curators

Dr. Emily Hanna, Director of Exhibitions and Chief Curator; Guusje Sanders, Curator, Barbara Hanson Forsyth, Guest Co-Curator

This exhibition is made possible with support from Getty through its PST ART: Art & Science Collide initiative. Additional support was provided by Gordon Brodfuehrer, the Harold and Colene Brown Family Foundation, Catherine and Robert Palmer, and the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.

Download exhibition images [HERE](#).

ABOUT MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM

Located in San Diego's Balboa Park, Mingei International Museum collects, preserves and exhibits folk art, craft and design from all eras and cultures of the world. Within a newly reopened facility that includes an education center, theater, shop, restaurant and plenty of free, accessible public space, the Museum offers inspiring exhibitions and diverse community and educational programs to more than 100,000 visitors a year. As the presenter of [San Diego Design Week](#) and a partner to over 50 local artists and art and cultural organizations, Mingei puts celebrating creativity at the core of its mission through workshops, film festivals, lectures and more. Mingei is a nonprofit institution funded by admission, individuals, and institutional support.

ABOUT PST ART

Southern California's landmark arts event, PST ART, returns in September 2024 with more than 70 exhibitions from museums and other institutions across the region, all exploring the intersections of art and science, both past and present. Dozens of cultural, scientific, and community organizations will join the latest edition, PST ART: *Art & Science Collide*, with exhibitions on subjects ranging from ancient cosmologies to Indigenous sci-fi, and from environmental justice to artificial intelligence. *Art & Science Collide* will share groundbreaking research, create indelible experiences for the public, and generate new ways of understanding our complex world. PST ART is presented by Getty. For more information about PST ART: *Art & Science Collide*, please visit pst.art

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