

Chinese Freemason's Lantern

This lantern was part of a privately owned collection and was acquired by the Royal BC Museum in 2010. It is the oldest known Chinese Freemason's Lantern from Victoria's Chinatown and was made between the 1910s and 1930s.

One of the most delightful components of the lantern is its ingenious inner workings. Rising heat from two light bulbs in the base cause the fan and the shaft to rotate, which moves the horse riders that circle the lantern on a bamboo ring. A wheel made of card moves parts of the birds and animals on its painted panels by means of long black hairs attached like puppet strings. The air movement from the fan causes the threads to move. The deer bobs its head, crabs wave their pincers, and the centipede wiggles about.

A high-quality digital animation in the exhibition shows how the lantern once rotated, moved and glowed. royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/chinese_new_year/default.aspx

The lantern is a tall, hexagonal cylinder, 117 cm high by 63 cm wide, of split bamboo covered with a fine, semi-transparent Chinese paper. The paper is intricately decorated with overlays of coloured hand-cut paper, cellophane, hand-brushed Chinese calligraphy and hand-painted water colour designs. There is an inset hexagon with a hand-painted poem and a painting on each of the six panels. These poems may have multiple meanings and these meanings may have been hidden in the paintings below. The lantern has coloured lights at the top and a decorative fringed base.

Conservation Treatment – Live Exhibit

Tuesday through Saturday from 11 am to 4 pm

Lisa Bengston is an Object Conservator at the Royal BC Museum. She cares for the museum's collections using science-based conservation treatments. During the *Tradition in Felicities* exhibition Lisa will be a living exhibit, cleaning and stabilizing the lantern in view of visitors.

Lisa does not restore objects to full operation or new appearance, she preserves the existing historical materials. Unfortunately, this lantern will never again operate as it once did. Lisa plans to clean all surfaces; repair the bamboo frame; stabilize the damaged papers; attach new threads to the moving parts; replace the cellophane with a plastic film; clean the fringe and preserve the lights and wiring. A panel in the exhibition shows the treatment process, step-by-step, so visitors may still learn about the process when Lisa is working away from the gallery.

Photographs of conservation work and the animated lantern video are available on request.

Media contact:

Royal BC Museum Media Enquiries
250-387-3207
news@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca