



Belz Museum of Asian & Judaic Art

Belz Museum of Asian & Judaic Art, founded in 1998, houses the largest and most comprehensive collection of Asian art in the southern region of the United States. China is represented by outstanding works of art that are characteristic of an ancient culture with rich artistic traditions. The collection of more than 1000 objects, which range in date from 202 BC to the early twentieth century, includes intricately carved jades and ivories, paintings, ceramics, textiles, and funerary art.

In addition to the Asian collection, the collection of Judaica (historical and literal pieces relating to Judaism) reflects the artistic journey of some of Israel's most celebrated contemporary artists including, Daniel Kafri, Nicki Imber, and Ofra Friedland.

Location:

Located in the heart of downtown Memphis, the museum is just one block west of the famous Peabody Hotel and is accessible from the Main Street Trolley line. The museum is within walking distance of great shopping, dining, and Memphis' own Beale Street.

Temporary Hours of Operation:

Tuesday – Friday

10:00 a.m. To 3:00 p.m.

Saturday – Sunday

12:00 p.m. To 5:00 p.m.

Admission:

Adults: \$6.00

Seniors: \$5.00

Students: \$4.00

Dynasty Room

The museum's opulent Dynasty Room is available for meetings, seminars, lectures, receptions, and other special events; for your next occasion, call **(901)523-ARTS**.

Museum Gift Shop

The Belz Museum's Gift Shop houses a variety of one-of-a-kind gift items perfect for birthdays, anniversaries, or any special occasion. The shop features beautiful imported treasures such as ceramic and sculptures, lacquer boxes, and custom jewelry.

Guided Adult & Student Tours Available (Special discounted rates apply)

Belz Museum of Asian & Judaic Art

119 South Main Street – Concourse Level, Memphis, TN 38103

(901) 523-ARTS

www.belzmuseum.org

The Story of the Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art

To look at the scope of Jack Belz' collection, one could draw the conclusion that he is fascinated with time. As a child, he collected timepieces, purchasing every clock and watch he could find at antique stores and gift shops. As he grew older, his interest grew to the ancient, drawing him to times of powerful Asian emperors and majestic mammoths. In business, he lovingly worked on restoring forgotten buildings to their past beauty. And, always present, was his passion for the journey of the Jewish faith, which took him through both times of great celebration and great struggle. Art, beauty, and artisanship throughout time are a passion for Jack Belz, and his devotion to his collection is apparent at the Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art.

Belz, Chairman and CEO of Belz Enterprises, is the patriarch of one of the most influential families in Memphis history. The Belz family is credited with the renewal of Downtown Memphis, sparked by the company's renovation, and reopening of the Peabody Hotel in 1981. Since that time, the eight-block Peabody Place district and the Peabody Place Retail and Entertainment Center have shaped Downtown Memphis into a vibrant community. The company continues to develop projects not only in Memphis, but throughout the country.

Belz and his wife Marilyn began collecting Asian art in 1968, when the couple wandered into an Asian art gallery in Los Angeles. New to the culture, they were fascinated by the intricate details of what they saw. By the time they left for home, they had purchased an ivory chess set and a serpentine ball-in-ball, which is several balls carved one inside the other made from serpentine, a type of stone which is often referred to as jade.

This initial purchase sparked an interest in Asian art that continues to this day. Belz began purchasing jade and ivory sculptures, ceremonial objects, and other Asian artwork from dealers around the country. Many of the pieces were garnered from dealers in New York City who quickly became close friends of the Belz family and integral to their journey of Asian culture through art.

Along with his admiration for the ancient Asian culture, Belz continuously searched for pieces that expressed his spirituality through art. On a trip to Israel, Jack Belz met and befriended artist Daniel Kafri. Through the years, Belz has purchased more than 50 sculptures from Kafri, many of which are on display at the Belz Museum. Other Kafri sculptures can be found in various Belz projects throughout Memphis.

As time went on, Belz' collection of Judaic art continued to grow, much like his Asian collection. He acquired impressive bronze statues, ceremonial pieces, illuminated parchments and several paintings from well-known Israeli artists.

It wasn't until 1995 that the idea for a museum sparked. That year, Belz had agreed to donate some of his collection to a temporary exhibition at the Pink Palace Museum. The display was part of a complementary exhibit to the *Wonders: Imperial Tombs of China* exhibition taking place at the Cook Convention Center.

Belz' pieces were well received by the public, and Belz conceived the idea of a museum on the concourse level of the Goldsmith's building on Main Street, which would later become Pembroke Square, part of the up and coming Peabody Place district.

The Belz team worked with Tom Miller, chief curator for the Pink Palace Museum in Memphis, and Elinor Hawkins, a mural artist, to create an exhibition space that would take

visitors on a journey through both time and culture. Miller and Belz created the layout for the objects, and Hawkins created flow with her murals of the Chinese countryside.

In 1998, pieces were moved into the museum and the finishing touches were applied. Only a small portion of the space the museum occupies now was used then. The meeting spaces, additional display and storage areas were added a few years later when the museum took over the entire floor.

In October of 1998, the Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art, known then as the Peabody Place Museum, opened to the public. To follow, some of the existing space was remodeled and the Judaic gallery was created in 2004, although Judaica was always included in the museum's collection.

The museum's name was changed to the Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art in January 2007 to better reflect the two cultures represented and the Belz family's enormous contribution to the collection.

To the credit of Jack Belz, since its opening, the museum has emerged as a centerpiece of downtown Memphis that has served a critical role in both the development of the urban center and the cultural identity of the city.

Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art

Did you know...

- The Belz Museum is the only fine arts museum in Downtown Memphis. It holds more than 1400 pieces in both its Asian and Judaic collections and spans more than 29,000 square feet of display space.
- The Qing Dynasty endured in China for more than 260 years. The last imperial Dynasty of China, the Qing Dynasty began in 1644 and lasted until 1911. The Asian art collection at the Belz Museum centers on this dynasty.
- Jade, which is featured prominently at the Belz Museum, is as hard as steel. On the Mohs scale of hardness, jade ranks 6.7, while steel ranks 7 and diamonds rank 10. Because of its strength, jade was used as far back as 7,000 years ago to make weapons, but it is better known today as a beautiful gemstone in art and jewelry. Chinese artisans often worked for decades to create a single jade sculpture, since it must be abraded – it cannot be cut with ordinary tools.
- Chinese dragons were a powerful symbol of the Emperor in many Chinese royal dynasties. The imperial throne was often called the Dragon Throne, and commoners were forbidden from wearing any clothing featuring a dragon symbol. During the late Qing Dynasty, the dragon was even adopted as the national Chinese flag. In Chinese legend, it is said that many future Emperors were born with a birthmark resembling a dragon. The Belz Museum holds many examples of the reverence reserved for the dragon, from Emperor's robes to ceremonial objects.
- The Emperor's throne throughout the Qing Dynasty was made with a cinnabar lacquer, a derivative of mercury. Although the material is highly toxic, it was thought to have magical powers and was used extensively in imperial court furnishings. Among the museum's Asian art collection is a cinnabar lacquer throne and footstool that was part of the Emperor's personal quarters.
- The heaviest object at the Belz Museum is *Dream of the Red Mansion*, a jade sculpture that weighs one ton. Carved from a single boulder, the exquisite piece depicts a scene from the well-known Chinese novel of the same name, written during the Qing Dynasty.
- The oldest object at the Belz Museum is a dinosaur egg dating back more than 100 million years.
- The Belz Museum is home to the largest display of work by Daniel Kafri anywhere in the world. Kafri, an Israeli artist known for his striking bronze sculptures, has become a close friend of the Belz family. Mr. Belz is the world's biggest collector of Kafri's work.

Annual Events at The Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art

Chinese New Year Family Day Events

In cooperation with local businesses, Education Centers and Memphis Museums, The Belz Museum holds an annual Chinese New Year Family Day Event. The Museum is open to the public for free that day. We offer art activities, crafts, storytelling, cultural demonstrations, and lectures. At that time, the Museum Staff also presents awards for its Annual Art Competition in five age-specified groups.

It is a wonderful time to learn something new about the Chinese culture!

Armed Forces Day

Held the on National Armed Forces Day in May, this event is a time for the public to show their appreciation to all Service Personnel – active, in-active and retired. The Museum is free to all guest of the Museum. There are giveaways and the Museum accepts donations for Veterans Associations. Also, on this day, there are docent led tours every hour!

Smithsonian Day

Held on a Saturday in the fall, this day is a free day to the public! In co-operation with the Smithsonian family of Museums, The Belz Museum is open for extended hours (10 am – 6 pm). We also, have a discount on all gift shop items, two movie screenings, and art activities throughout the day.

BELZ MUSEUM
of Asian & Judaic Art
AT PEABODY PLACE

March 2019

Belinda D Fish
Director / Education Coordinator
Belz Museum of Asian & Judaic Art
119 South Main Street
Memphis, TN 38103

Dear Future Patrons,

I would like to personally invite you to visit the Belz Museum of Asian & Judaic Art. Visited by tourists from around the world, the museum offers an awe-inspiring collection of rare Asian masterpieces and stunning Judaic works of art.

Located in the Pembroke Square Building, at 119 South Main Street, the Belz Museum visits ancient China through an amazing collection of artworks including a stunning display of jade that ranges from intricate figurines to a life-size jade carriage. The collection also has a variety of mammoth tusk and ivory carvings, beautiful animal figurines and an extensive display of royal and ceremonial objects dating back to the Qing dynasty. Visitors learn about each special piece and its significance to Asian history through accompanying materials or special guided tours.

The Asian collection is only part of the impressive collection at the Belz Museum. The Judaic collection highlights hundreds of powerful and emotional works of art created by Jewish artists living and working in Israel. Visitors discover traditional Judaic items such as special Passover plates and a large Chanukah menorah, as well as touching paintings and sculptures which reflect components of Jewish faith and history.

To help give you a better understanding of our unique museum or if you would like any additional information on the Belz Museum or to arrange a group tour, please call me at (901) 523-ARTS or email me at belinda.fish@belzmuseum.org. You can also visit our museum website at www.belzmuseum.org.

Yours sincerely,
Belinda D Fish
Director / Education Coordinator