

For Immediate Release

From Fishing Tools to Stunning Contemporary Installations, New Mingei International Museum Exhibition Presents More than 60 Craft and Art Objects that Explore the Relationship between People and Fish

January 13, 2026, SAN DIEGO, CA — From May 2 – November 1, 2026, Mingei International Museum will present more than 60 craft and art objects that illuminate the relationship between people and fish in the new, temporary exhibition ***To Catch a Fish***. The showcase will include both utilitarian fishing objects like hand-crafted basketry fish traps, scrapers, weights, and nets, as well as works with spiritual significance and symbolism such as amulets, garments, images of saints, and even kites.

The special exhibition will also include two standout installations:

- A stunning new work of contemporary art by Marianne Nicolson addressing the mystical undersea realm, and the delicate relationship between human beings and the wealth of resources from the ocean.
- Artist Robert Lang's wall of fish created from origami paper made from the ashes of the artist's work and personal possessions burned in the 2025 Los Angeles Wildfires.

The exhibition is curated by Emily Hanna, Ph.D., director of exhibitions and chief curator at Mingei International Museum.

"We live in a significant coastal region in close relationship to our waters and ocean wildlife. *To Catch a Fish* is a global show with local relevance," said **Jessica Hanson York, Executive Director and CEO**. "Chief Curator Emily Hanna has assembled a special exhibition that not only spans time and geography, but is also diverse in its contents, presenting practical tools, decorative objects and moving, contemporary art contributions - a human experience translated as a utilitarian practice for survival, a root of culture and tradition, and as a subject of lore and wonder."

Fishing objects from around the globe

Seventy percent of our planet is covered in water, from shallow, freshwater streams to the deepest saltwater oceans, and those waters are inhabited by as many as 30,000 species of fish. Because fish are an important source of food for people, fishing is an activity undertaken by communities around the world. In its efforts to present this global perspective, *To Catch a Fish* will showcase objects from over 20 countries.

Fishing objects presented in *To Catch a Fish* date back to 350 BC and some examples include:

- An effigy fish scraper: Shaped like fish bodies, these 300 BC - 300 AD-century objects were made by La Tolita culture (Colombia/Ecuador) and were used to descale fish
- Indonesian shrimp traps made out of reed: Used for small-scale fishing, the traps displayed are beautiful showcases of craftsmanship

- Exquisite glass fishing floats from Japan: Now popular decorative objects, these beautiful, hollow glass spheres were mainly used in the late 1800s to mid-1900s in coastal fishing communities to ensure nets floated at the surface or a specific depth.

“When people enter into nature, they are crossing a kind of threshold, and particularly when they cross the threshold into water,” said **Dr. Emily Hanna**. “There is an element of mystery connected to that, and a kind of reverence. Fish are an important source of sustenance for people around the world, but home to fish is not the natural home of human beings. This show presents many beautiful, hand-crafted objects used for fishing but also objects that reflect the mystical view of fish and water, and how people connect to that, broadening our sense of reality to include the mythical.”

Fish as cultural symbols

To Catch a Fish also explores appreciations of fish as cultural emblems of abundance and good fortune or as religious, spiritual, or political symbols.

To illustrate these perspectives, the exhibitions will also present:

- Mermaids crafted from various materials
- Charms, effigies and talismen
- Jewelry, textiles and objects of adornment

Renowned contemporary artists: Marianne Nicolson, Robert J. Lang

Exhibition highlights include unique installations by two contemporary artists.

To Catch a Fish features new work created by artist-activist **Marianne Nicolson**. Nicolson is Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw First Nations, part of the Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwak'wala speaking peoples) of the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada. Her featured installation, entitled *The Halibut Hooks*, features a large scale, 30-foot light projection recreating the image of a painted Kwakwaka'wakw house-front on the gallery wall. Hand-made, traditional halibut hooks made by Nicolson are suspended from the ceiling, casting shadows on the house front. In this way, the ceiling of the gallery becomes the surface of the sea, and the viewers become potential catch, looking up from the sea bottom. The animation of individual halibut hooks in the installation reflects this spiritual connectedness.

The Kwakwaka'wakw lived in large communal homes often considered animate beings or microcosms of the universe during sacred ceremonies. Housefronts were painted with the crests of the house owner and family of the occupants. Today the Kwakwaka'wakw face the extreme imbalance in contemporary commercial harvesting practices and the endangered health of the oceans.

The special exhibition also features an art installation by **Robert Lang** entitled *Vertical Pond III: From the Ashes*.

Inspired by a predecessor work, “Vertical Pond II,” which was destroyed in the Eaton Fire, along with the artist’s studio, materials, and artwork, Robert J. Lang’s *Vertical Pond III* demonstrates connection and resurrection. The installation is a wall-mounted collection of origami koi, each koi folded individually from an uncut square, each square from a hand-made sheet of paper that incorporates ashes from the studio and the ashes of its predecessor, *Vertical Pond II*. Lang created the paper in collaboration with longtime friends and master papermakers Michael LaFosse and Richard Alexander of the Origamido Studio.

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ABOUT MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM

Mingei International Museum, located in San Diego's Balboa Park Cultural District, celebrates human creativity through multicultural works of folk art, craft, and design. Inspired by the Japanese mingei (art of the people) movement, Mingei cares deeply about design functionality, handmade craft, and bringing out the creativity that lives in all of us. In addition to rotating gallery exhibitions and event programming, Mingei's gift shop, theater, education center, restaurant, and café are backdrops for finding inspiration and connecting with the community. 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 THE BALBOA PARK CULTURAL DISTRICT

Located in the heart of San Diego, the Balboa Park Cultural District is home to a variety of arts and culture offerings. The 1,200 acre public park has been a hub for art, science, history, and culture since the 1915 Panama-California Exposition. The Cultural District includes Balboa Park's central mesa, particularly 17 museums, performing arts centers, gardens, and of course, the world famous San Diego Zoo. Thanks to organizations like the City of San Diego, Forever Balboa Park, the Balboa Park Cultural Partnership, and staff members of various institutions, the Balboa Park Cultural District is a major tourist destination.

Media Contact

Cait Mello, Creative Director
cmello@mingei.org