# **File name:** The Museum podcast #9 Season’s greetings from the British Museum.mp4

**Moderator questions in Bold,** Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: **Unable to decipher** = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

## (TC: 00:00:00)

**Sushma Jansari: Welcome to the Museum podcast. This is a wonderful way for you to hear much more about the whole work of the museum. We have about a thousand people who work here, and this podcast gives you a little bit of insight into the wide range of work that everybody does.**

## (TC: 00:00:16)

**Sian Toogood: Usually this podcast is presented by Sushma Jansari and Hugo Chapman. Unfortunately Hugo is unavailable due to the work-, the arduous work, I should say, of being the Keeper of Prints and Drawings. So you may recognise my voice from the archive segments, I am Sian, the producer of this podcast.**

## (TC: 00:00:35)

**Sushma Jansari: And it's wonderful to actually have your voice here, as part of the introduction, because normally, you and Alfie are, sort of, sitting over to one side, laughing madly at what we are trying to talk about, to be fair.**

## (TC: 00:00:46)

**Sian Toogood: Madly and silently.**

## (TC: 00:00:48)

**Sushma Jansari: Yes.**

## (TC: 00:00:51)

**Sian Toogood: Often.**

## (TC: 00:00:51)

**Sushma Jansari: Welcome to this side.**

## (TC: 00:00:53)

**Sian Toogood: Thanks. And I should say, 'Season's greetings, merry Christmas,' for this is the December episode.**

## (TC: 00:01:00)

**Sushma Jansari: I feel like we should have, like, Jingle Bells or something, but yes, I know, Christmas is finally coming upon us.**

## (TC: 00:01:06)

**Sian Toogood: We have been asked for music, so maybe from some kind of 'producer-ly' power I'll just (clicks fingers) and have some.**

## (TC: 00:01:12)

**Sushma Jansari: Snap it in. I like it.**

## (TC: 00:01:14)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. I might actually put something like that, just for fun. Yes.**

## (TC: 00:01:16)

**Sushma Jansari: Yes? Okay, do, do. I love it.**

## (TC: 00:01:20)

**Sian Toogood: Just because that's the power of the producer is just, I can spend some money and buy some Jingle Bells.**

## (TC: 00:01:24)

**Sushma Jansari: Hooray. Do you know what, I wonder if there were any in the collections? I know we must have-, in fact, I believe there's a whole collection of things like historic Christmas cards and things in the museum.**

## (TC: 00:01:32)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. And, in fact, later in this episode, you will hear Francesca and me talking about the-, what would you call them? They're called specimen samples, of museum Christmas cards from the 30s.**

## (TC: 00:01:48)

**Sushma Jansari: Oh wow.**

## (TC: 00:01:49)

**Sian Toogood: Which are all part of the archive. And they are, they're amazing, they're beautiful.**

## (TC: 00:01:52)

**Sushma Jansari: What kind of images are on them?**

## (TC: 00:01:55)

**Sian Toogood: Do you know, it's really weird. So there's lots of religious ones, which you would expect for Christmas, you know, the coming of the magi, all of that.**

## (TC: 00:02:01)

**Sushma Jansari: Of course.**

## (TC: 00:02:02)

**Sian Toogood: But then you've got these amazing Japanese prints, that aren't even wintry. So there was a beautiful one of a bird on a branch with a very, kind of, 'Spring-y' feeling to it, which was beautiful. And obviously all of these images are from the collection, so they're all prints or manuscripts, as was in the 30s, that were part of the collection at the time, which is quite nice.**

## (TC: 00:02:31)

**Sushma Jansari: That sounds stunning. Yes, it's nice to think outside the box in terms of Christmas images. And actually, the Japanese reference you made segues very beautifully into our interview with Tim Clark, who's Curator of the Japanese collections, and who is retiring this month. Okay, it's really wonderful to invite my colleague, Tim Clark, who's Curator of the Japanese Collections in the Department of Asia here at the British Museum, and he's going to be telling me about the many years he's spent working with the exceptional collections here. So welcome, Tim.**

## (TC: 00:03:04)

Tim Clark: Thank you, Sushma. Many, many years. 32 and counting.

## (TC: 00:03:07)

**Sushma Jansari: My goodness, okay. I just wanted to know, I mean, what drew you to study Japanese art in the first instance?**

## (TC: 00:03:15)

Tim Clark: It was a hobby, which somewhere along the line, became a profession. So lucky me.

## (TC: 00:03:20)

**Sushma Jansari: That is very lucky, not many people can say that.**

## (TC: 00:03:23)

Tim Clark: When we were kids in junior school, we were doing projects about lots of different countries, and there was just something about Japan that I found very, very intriguing. And I guess I'm still trying to answer the question of exactly what it was that I found intriguing. And then, when I was a teenager, some friends of my parents, who were antique dealers, gave me a Japanese print. And that, if you like, looking back, was a key moment. So I started collecting Japanese prints with my pocket money, and reading about them, and I realised they opened amazing windows into traditional Japanese culture that I was keen to explore. And also I realised I wanted to learn the language. All of the Japanese prints are covered in writing, all kinds of different bits of information, and I started by wanting to read the signature of the artist on the print, and that steadily drew me into studying Japanese language.

## (TC: 00:04:17)

**Sushma Jansari: Is that what you did at university, you studied Japanese?**

## (TC: 00:04:19)

Tim Clark: Yes. I mean, it was quite important early on to get the language skills under your belt, as much as you could. And then after I'd studied Japanese I studied art history quite intensively, and brought the two things together with this dream job at the British Museum.

## (TC: 00:04:35)

**Sushma Jansari: Wow. I've got a feeling I know what the answer to this is going to be, so what parts of the collections particularly interest you?**

## (TC: 00:04:43)

Tim Clark: Well, inevitably Japanese prints. And there's the wonderful French saying, 'You only love once, the first time,' and I think that's true of my knowledge of Japanese art. And we have about 10,000 Japanese prints in the collection here, pre-modern ones, which may not be much in comparison to the huge Prints and Drawings Department, but in world terms it's a very significant collection. And so exploring that, but also, as we're curators, trying to add to that, you know, as much as we're allowed to, laying down some important collections for the future. And it's still the same excitement as I got when I was a teenager. Looking at the Japanese prints excites me visually, wanting to find out what the writing on them means, and then through the print, it's like it opens up a window onto an amazing culture in the past. So yes, I think it's the Japanese print collection still, but I really enjoy also working with the modern collections, as I know a lot of us do. I know that you do as well, Sushma.

## (TC: 00:05:50)

**Sushma Jansari: I do. Ancient historian but masquerading as someone with an interest in the contemporary as well.**

## (TC: 00:05:57)

Tim Clark: Well, it's silly to think of the BM as a place which is just of, you know, dead cultures. It's absolutely not the case.

## (TC: 00:06:02)

**Sushma Jansari: Absolutely.**

## (TC: 00:06:02)

Tim Clark: And all of the colleagues who I talk to are all interested in not only considering the past from the perspective of the present, but also trying to engage it with the present, and the here-and-now, as much as possible. And I really think our public appreciates that too.

## (TC: 00:06:19)

**Sushma Jansari: I think one of my abiding memories of you has to be at our fortnightly departmental meetings, and when you open up a folder of a new print that you'd like to acquire. And I think the passion and enthusiasm always comes through. And I've learnt so much, you know, just from those moments, those few minutes every fortnight.**

## (TC: 00:06:37)

Tim Clark: Thank you, Sushma.

## (TC: 00:06:38)

**Sushma Jansari: No, it's great. No, I think the Japanese presentations are among my favourite ones, genuinely.**

## (TC: 00:06:42)

Tim Clark: We do have a reputation of being very acquisitive when it comes to adding new things to the collection, I make no apology for that whatsoever, but again, it comes back to the fact that there are so many Japanese prints. There were originally when they were produced, and an awful lot have survived. I mean millions and millions in circulation.

## (TC: 00:07:00)

**Sushma Jansari: What sort of period are we talking about?**

## (TC: 00:07:02)

Tim Clark: We're talking about-, the earliest would be around 1650, and they go through to around 1900.

## (TC: 00:07:09)

**Sushma Jansari: Wow.**

## (TC: 00:07:10)

Tim Clark: So it's a 250-year tradition. And then in the 20th Century, of course, there's amazing Japanese prints still being made, although in rather different styles and idioms, but 1650 to 1900 is the, kind of, core of this so-called 'floating world' school.

## (TC: 00:07:26)

**Sushma Jansari: I think, talking of prints, and we can't not talk about some of the wonderful exhibitions you've worked on at the British Museum, but also in other places like the Royal Academy. I think the one I remember best is probably the Hokusai exhibition, also the Shunga exhibition, which even my mum came to visit that one.**

## (TC: 00:07:43)

Tim Clark: Good for mum.

## (TC: 00:07:43)

**Sushma Jansari: She loved it.**

## (TC: 00:07:44)

Tim Clark: Great.

## (TC: 00:07:44)

**Sushma Jansari: And she even bought the catalogue, yes. I mean, I just wondered, given the range of exhibitions you've worked on, do you have any abiding memories from any in particular?**

**Whether it's, you know, a terrifying moment, or an exciting moment, or?**

## (TC: 00:07:57)

Tim Clark: Let's dwell on the positives, shall we?

## (TC: 00:07:59)

**Sushma Jansari: Absolutely.**

## (TC: 00:08:01)

Tim Clark: Now there have been a lot of different exhibition projects I've worked on, generally as part of a team, sometimes as a lead curator, but always as part of a team, and almost always as a very direct collaboration with people in Japan and around the world. So often the shows that I've worked on have been shown in both countries in different fashions, and I've relied completely on the expertise of my Japanese colleagues to feed their amazing information into the project. The late Hokusai exhibition was probably, emotionally, the most satisfying and the most-, quite a roller-coaster, really, because it took you not only into great art, but it took you deep into somebody's life. The whole point about our project was to focus on the last 30 years of Hokusai's life, when he was aged about 60, to when he passed away at 90, and to explore how his art just got deeper and deeper, and richer and richer, the longer he stayed alive.

And it's an incredibly inspiring story, the best work he did was right at the end. I mean, we had a room at the end of the exhibition of paintings he did when he was 88, 89, and 90, just the last few months of his life. And they're, without exception, the best versions he did of subjects that he'd been exploring in a career of more than 70 years. And just, really, appreciating he was old, he was infirm, he was poor, he was really only supported by his daughter, Oi, who herself was a very accomplished painter.

And yet, in spite of all those potential handicaps, the most sublime and often spiritually very moving works came right at the end. And I think people who came to see the exhibition responded to that life journey, as well as the power of the art. (TC 00:10:00) I certainly know that all of us working on the show, you'd give a tour, and you'd get to the final room with the last three years, and you could almost inevitably predict there would be a tear in your eye by the time you finished giving the talk. It was just impossible not to crack up with the power of the story and the power of the art.

## (TC: 00:10:17)

**Sushma Jansari: I think it's also quite refreshing to learn more about the artist's family, because often, you know, we raise them up on their pedestals as these unique individuals working entirely alone in isolation, but actually, learning about his daughter and the story behind her, that was, for me, really quite eye-opening and totally unexpected.**

## (TC: 00:10:35)

Tim Clark: Well we were lucky, because there's been some new scholarship in the last few years in Japan, really trying to find out systematically, as much as it's possible, humanly, to find out about Oi, that's her artist's name. And it's frustrating, we know so little, but what information we could marshal we did, and we managed to borrow some key works by the daughter, working on her own, in her own right. And it helped to flesh out the portrait of Hokusai, as a man, as a frail old man supported by his daughter. So it was a very satisfying aspect of the whole project.

## (TC: 00:11:13)

**Sushma Jansari: Shunga was quite an unusual exhibition, let's say, for the British Museum, partly because of its subject matter. What led you to focus an entire exhibition and catalogue on that particular subject?**

## (TC: 00:11:26)

Tim Clark: Well, just for people who may not have seen the show, 'shunga', in Japanese, means 'spring picture'. And it's a word used to describe a very large and important genre of what we, as scholars, were calling 'sex art'. And it's really important you think about the fact that it's full of sex, I mean, it's extremely explicit, but it's also full of art. And that combination of sex and art, working at a very high level, together, is something that some cultures around the world are not used to, or not comfortable with, or find something which is very new for them. And it's really important, particularly when telling the story of Japanese prints, the floating world culture, to know that, situated pretty much at the heart of this culture is the libidinous culture of sex, of commercial sex, and the part that the imagery, the paintings and prints produced to incredibly beautiful, high standards, played in what I've just described as the libidinous economy. So there had been a taboo, particularly in Japan, oddly, for almost the entire 20th Century. And one of the ambitions of our project, working with colleagues here in the UK, but also very much in

Japan-, there were about 50 people involved, was, as a team, as a group, from our very different perspectives, to break down the taboo surrounding shunga, because how could you have something that was so beautiful and so culturally important, challenging, yes, to certain sensibilities, but it's there, you can't deny that it exists.

And we needed to shine a light on it, we needed to do that in an intelligent and sophisticated way, and hopefully, by breaking the taboo once and for all, to reintegrate shunga into a proper position within the history of Japanese culture and art. And I think it was pretty successful. We had all kinds of nervousness before we opened the show, because the art is completely explicit, and we thought about it quite hard, the way we're going to present the material, but as it turned out, the reaction was almost uniformly positive. People were appreciative that we'd, I guess, taken the risk and put this material on display, but most importantly, they just responded directly to the pictures, the paintings, and the prints that they were seeing, and just found it a very enjoyable and satisfying experience.

## (TC: 00:14:00)

**Sushma Jansari: And actually quite refreshing.**

## (TC: 00:14:01)

Tim Clark: Just finally, for once in my career, positive reviews from across the board, from the Morning

Star to the Daily Telegraph.

## (TC: 00:14:09)

**Sushma Jansari: Wow, well done. Everyone loves sex art.**

## (TC: 00:14:10)

Tim Clark: It seems that sex, as a subject, was not politically sensitive in any way at all.

## (TC: 00:14:17)

**Sushma Jansari: That's wonderful, perfect, thank you. You mentioned that the Shunga exhibition travelled to Japan in a slightly different form. How was it received there?**

## (TC: 00:14:27)

Tim Clark: I think, in its own way, it was equally successful, and in some ways more significant, because we all want a culture that produces something magnificent to be able to embrace it and share it with the rest of the world. I don't know if that will continue to be the case, but certainly with the exhibition, that was staged at the small, private Eisei-Bunko Museum in Tokyo, I mean, I think they had a quarter of a million people, in a very short space of time, queueing around the block. And again, a uniformly positive response to the show. A lot of women came to see it as well as men, which, that's perhaps not a surprise, but it was good to see, shall we say, but it was framed in rather a different way from how we showed it in London. The particular museum that took the exhibition, the Eisei-Bunko, was the private museum of a former Prime Minister of Japan, Mr Hosokawa, and his family have been involved in samurai politics for 500 years. And so one of the aspects which they drew out in the Japan show was shunga and the ruling class, because we think of the art of the floating world as primarily directed towards the ordinary people in the cities, and that's absolutely true, but samurai were living for large parts of their life in the cities as well, they were equally addicted to all the pleasures that a city has to offer, but not just that.

It became very clear, in the course of studying shunga, that we tend to be more familiar with the popular colour prints aimed at a mass audience, but that there are the most incredible painted versions of shunga which were clearly done by high-ranked artists for very high-ranked patrons, including some of the top samurai families in the country, and some of the, really, most important artists associated with them. And that was, really, an appropriate aspect to shunga which they chose to draw out in the show at the Eisei- Bunko Museum.

## (TC: 00:16:24)

**Sushma Jansari: Can I ask you, when you talk about the 'floating world', what exactly is that?**

## (TC: 00:16:28)

Tim Clark: 'Floating world' is a physical location, primarily in the city of Edo, what's now Tokyo, and it's the world of the brothel districts and the popular Kabuki theatre. So it's actual places you could go to and have a floating world experience, but it's also a kind of mindset. And it's very much a mindset that's associated with the burgeoning merchant class, and the townspeople, as I say, from around 1650 onwards, right through to the end of the 19th Century. And these people are deliberately barred from politics by the samurai. The samurai retain complete monopoly on political power, and therefore, it's almost like they're encouraging the merchants to, you know, just make money and spend it. Anyway, an ethos grows up in the city of Edo, what's now Tokyo, you make hay while the sun shines. If you have money, you spend it. You don't worry too much about tomorrow. And of course it's a city where there were regularly massive fires and great destruction, and who knows, your warehouses may be burned down tomorrow. So this philosophy of, if you've got money, spending it in the world of pleasure. When you get onto the world of the brothel districts, of course, we're talking about massive sexual exploitation, and that's something that, when you're studying floating world art, you've always got to keep very firmly, you know, in focus in your brain, as you're enjoying the beauty of the art.

And that was certainly the case with the Shunga exhibition, being aware of the sensitivities of sexual exploitation, even as you're celebrating the beautiful pictures showing people mutually, apparently, enjoying sex together.

## (TC: 00:18:19)

**Sushma Jansari: Moving to, I suppose, your last, sort of, big project at the British Museum, which was an incredible loan of religiously and culturally significant objects from Nara, which had been on display in Room 3 and also in the Japanese Gallery. Could you tell us how something like that would come about, given that these objects, as far as I understand, have never travelled outside Nara before, certainly not all the way here to the UK.**

## (TC: 00:18:49)

Tim Clark: Well, if I'm allowed a little bit of reflection after 30 years, over that long period we've worked with many different constituencies in Japan, that's been one of the very interesting things about the job.

National, local, private, public, pretty much you name it, we've worked with them in some form or other. And on this occasion I was approached by Nara Prefecture, which is the local government for this part of Japan, and they wanted to reach out to the world. In the period leading up to the Olympics next year, in 2020, they wanted to emphasise the international roots of Nara, which is completely appropriate. In some ways you can say it's the eastern terminus of the Silk Roads, these great trading networks across Asia.

And Nara was the capital of Japan in the 8th Century, from 710 until 784, and it's a period when great

swathes of continental culture are arriving from Tang China, often via the Korean peninsula, and native Japanese culture is being totally transformed, not just by (TC 00:20:00) the new religion, Buddhism, but also by writing system, by new forms of government, by new technologies. And with a short space of a couple of hundred years, Japanese society and culture have completely transformed. So Nara, those people who know Japan, who've visited Japan, know that it has a special place in Japanese culture, and I think, actually, in the hearts of the Japanese people, because there has been an unbroken traditional culture since the 8th Century in this city.

It's undergone many trials and tribulations, but always reborn, and this unbroken threads, particularly religion and religious art, that stretch right back to the early 700s. So Nara said, 'Could we work to create a project together?' And it's as we were working on the project that it took on the form that it's finally assumed, which is fifteen amazing religious treasures from Nara, generally sculptures, Buddhist sculptures and Shinto sculptures, dating from around 600AD through to around 1400. And we've combined these three-dimensional works from Nara with paintings from the British Museum's collection, because it turns out-, I say 'turns out', I mean, I'm sure it was deliberate policy, but the British Museum has some extraordinary paintings from Nara, mainly acquired, purchased, in the 1960s, as recently as that. So what we've been able to do, is to put the three-dimensional versions of the iconography together with the two-dimensional version in a painting. And whereas the sculpture may have lost all of its original colouring, often the painting has preserved it. So you can play off the three-dimensional sculptures against the two-dimensional paintings, and really get a very satisfying and rich experience. They're sublime. I mean, they're absolutely sublime, the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, which Nara have so generously loaned. I'm thinking of one of the star features up in the Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries, right in the centre of the gallery.

It's a gilt bronze figure that stands about 80cm high, and it shows the infant Buddha, Shakyamuni, just after his birth. And, famously, immediately after his birth, the Buddha could speak and walk, and he points to Heaven and Earth and declares his sublime status. And this gilt bronze statue was very likely used in 752 at the original consecration ceremonies for the huge, great bronze Buddha, a version of which still survives in Nara. So to think that this object was in that place, at that time, with an Indian monk, Bodhisena, officiating at the opening ceremonies, and a thousand or so monks assembled in their incredible robes, symbolising, really, that Buddhism had arrived and become safely established, almost as a state religion in Japan in this period. And there is the object that was, you know, used on that occasion. What could be more exciting?

## (TC: 00:23:19)

**Sushma Jansari: Absolutely. I think, for me, one of the most surprising objects was of a dragon deity. I can't say I know a great deal about the earlier religions of Japan, but that was a really striking sculpture, I'd never seen anything quite like it before.**

## (TC: 00:23:33)

Tim Clark: Naga? Yes, I think that Japan, because it's at the eastern end of the Silk Road trading routes, has become a kind of repository for all kinds of amazing things picked up along the way. They come through China and Korea, but undoubtedly some of them come from India. And Bodhisena travelled all the way to get to Nara, to officiate at these ceremonies. So there's a real sense in which Nara is one of the great world repository's of huge arcs of Asian culture, which have, amazingly, been preserved, notwithstanding civil wars, and fires, and destruction, to this present day.

## (TC: 00:24:23)

**Sushma Jansari: Could you tell us a bit more about the Japanese collections here at the British Museum. Were there Japanese objects in Sloane's collection, for example, or were they more recent acquisitions?**

## (TC: 00:24:34)

Tim Clark: Yes. The history of modern Japan is that, rather suddenly, in around 1860, what had been a relatively closed culture suddenly was forced to reopen to international trade. The famous Black Ships of Commodore Perry and the establishment of the treaty ports. So 1860 is a, kind of, watershed, and it's after 1860 that you get large numbers of Japanese objects entering into the BM's collections. Some of them directly from Japan, some through the hands of collectors, as is the case with all of our great collections, but actually, there were Japanese objects in the original founding collections of the British Museum, which yes, came from Sloane. And Sloane had purchases, almost outright, the collection of Engelbert Kaempfer, who had been in Japan in the 1690s for a couple of years. So Kaempfer went to Japan, acquired all these objects, and some paintings and records. He came back to Europe, he then wrote what was the most famous book about Japan in the 18th Century, 'The History of Japan', which was first published in London, in English translation, and with an association with Sloane. So you can see this amazing enlightenment constellation of collectors, and scholars. And so one object that sticks in my mind is a pair of lady's silk slippers, which Kaempfer had acquired in Japan in the 1690s, and found their way into Sloane's collection. They're still there, and they're a little bit battered, but they have this beautiful, kind of, salmon pink silk.

And, again, it's an unexpected and sudden human connection with somebody who must have worn those slippers in Japan in the 1690s that I find very rewarding with these collections. We have great art in this collection, and that's always going to be really celebrated, but we're not just an art museum, are we?

## (TC: 00:26:31)

**Sushma Jansari: We are certainly not. I remember all of the ethnographic collections, the Japanese material, and when you and your colleagues have always been very kind to come over and, sort of,**

**help me identify some of this material when I was first working on it. It was fascinating, you know, everything from dolls houses to, well, the mermaid, the famous mermaid from Japan as well.**

## (TC: 00:26:51)

Tim Clark: And it means we can flesh out the story of human history, doesn't it? We can inspire people with amazing works of art, but then build around that this extraordinary constellation.

## (TC: 00:27:03)

**Sushma Jansari: Yes, the fuller lives of people, I think. So you mentioned that you've been here at the British Museum for 32 years, which is quite a long time. What have been your most enjoyable moments here, and what have you enjoyed most about working at this institution?**

## (TC: 00:27:19)

Tim Clark: Yes, working as a curator at the BM has been my one and only job. They call us 'the lifers'. And before that I realise I was studying, you know, a good ten years to learn the skills, and the language, and go and live in Japan and so on. So yes, it's been quite a commitment of time. It's the people isn't it? I mean, it's the human connections, not just with the amazing staff we have here, but because the world is curious about the British Museum and wants to come here, wants to work with us, just all the time. Every day, literally every day, receiving communications, or meetings, or being invited to go to places. And in my case, I mean, it's been this extraordinary relationship with Japan, right from the start. I came to the British Museum from three years living in Tokyo, so I was completely immersed, I felt, in Japanese culture at that time. Going straight from there into Bloomsbury culture, but nevertheless maintaining and growing all of the relationships that I'd formed while I was living in Japan, and building on those through, just, endless, wonderful projects. And it's our museum, isn't it? I mean, we happen to work here, but we work here on behalf of everybody else who is in the world, so that's a great privilege. And I think people get that, particularly when they visit the British Museum and see behind the scenes, see the kind of work we're doing, they become part of the family, and it's an ever-expanding family.

So yes, I'm going to be continuing my research at the BM, they're going to keep giving me a desk and allowing me to use the books, so it's not a complete sign-off, but my work will be changing into being going back to perhaps a, kind of, graduate student, following my curiosity rather than facing deadlines.

## (TC: 00:29:12)

**Sushma Jansari: Oh god, lucky you. So my final question is, given your experience, what's your advice to someone who is quite new to working with such historically important collections, as a curator, at a national museum, because we have challenges that, you know, are in many ways**

**unique, in other ways very similar to ones faced by people in other museums as well, but what would your advice be?**

## (TC: 00:29:42)

Tim Clark: Personally I have never pretended to know more than I actually know. So I think admitting what you don't know, because how can anybody grasp the essence of 30,000 Japan-related objects that are in this collection? And also, just ask people for help, (TC 00:30:00) because we're fortunate to plug into this amazing international network of people who really do know. I found that if you don't know, and you ask somebody, they generally tell you. And that involves them in the process of enriching the knowledge that is such an important part of the collections. So it's a win-win-win situation.

## (TC: 00:30:19)

**Sushma Jansari: So, thank you so much for speaking to me today, Tim. I'm looking forward to seeing you at the next departmental meeting.**

## (TC: 00:30:25)

Tim Clark: Indeed. Thank you for your questions.

## (TC: 00:31:15)

**Sian Toogood: Now I've worked with Tim a lot over the last eight years of working here, because, as you can probably tell from his interview, he is amazing on camera. And you can check out, actually, some of his films on the museum's YouTube channel, so do have a look. And I think he has some books in the shop, certainly about shunga and Hokusai.**

## (TC: 00:31:36)

**Sushma Jansari: Yes, they are some of the most beautifully illustrated catalogues you can buy. I mean, they really are very beautiful, but also, obviously, the content is very interesting as well. I think it's fascinating, because, I mean, people like me, I don't know a great deal about Japanese art or prints, and I've learned so much, you know, just by flicking through some of these and, well, going to the exhibitions.**

## (TC: 00:31:58)

**Sian Toogood: I think that is one of the great things about working in a museum, because you do get museum fatigue, I think. I used to go to museums all the time, and then I started working in**

**museums, and then I just never go. Never again. (Laughter)**

## (TC: 00:32:12)

**Sushma Jansari: Okay.**

## (TC: 00:32:12)

**Sian Toogood: I mean, like, no, well, obviously I come to the British Museum every single day, and I go to all of their exhibitions, and I do try-, I went to the Gormley.**

## (TC: 00:32:20)

**Sushma Jansari: Okay.**

## (TC: 00:32:20)

**Sian Toogood: And to the Lucien Freud at the RA, both excellent, but you do get this museum fatigue, where you walk in, and you're just, like, 'Ugh,' but working with the people in a museum, you just get these interesting conversations. And I think that's kind of what we're trying to do here, right? Is to, like, take these conversations that you and I might have with a colleague in the canteen, and make them available to the entire public. Whether that's about, you know, curating the Japanese collections for 38 years, or putting an additional power point into a Grade One listed gallery. They're so exciting in different ways, but they're just really interesting.**

## (TC: 00:33:01)

**Sushma Jansari: And it's wonderful, because actually all of these little moments, sort of, build up and give you a fascinating insight into just how wide-ranging the collections and the work here really is. You know, as you say, when you bump into people in the canteen, they could be working on cuneiform tablets, they could be working on beautiful 19th Century prints or drawings, or the most incredibly detailed fragments that came from the Sutton Hoo excavations. So it's really wonderful, and, you know, it's one of those things, you learn something new every single day, and that is no exaggeration.**

## (TC: 00:33:36)

**Sian Toogood: And actually, this is quite a nice moment to ask our audience, actually, to get in touch with us, and to tell us what aspects of museum life you might be interested in. So you could, you know, Tweet at us at @britishmuseum, or you can rate and review us on iTunes if you would**

**like to, that would be really helpful to us, but it would be wonderful to hear from you, to find out what elements of museum life you're interested in. And on that note, let's go to the archive, to talk about something much less academic and wonderful than-, well, much less wonderful? I don't know.**

## (TC: 00:34:16)

**Sushma Jansari: I don't know, I think beautiful postcards and Christmas cards are absolutely wonderful. And it'll be fascinating to hear what you and Francesca pull out of the archives this month.**

## (TC: 00:34:27)

**Sian Toogood: Welcome back to our archives segment. It is episode nine, as you know. It is December. I'm Sian-,**

## (TC: 00:34:35)

Francesca Hillier: Nearly Christmas.

## (TC: 00:34:36)

**Sian Toogood: Nearly Christmas. I'm Sian Toogood, one of the producers of this podcast. And once again I'm here with-,**

## (TC: 00:34:45)

Francesca Hillier: Francesca Hillier, who is-, who I am-, who am I? I don't know. (Laughter)

## (TC: 00:34:50)

**Sian Toogood: Who am I? It's so close to Christmas.**

## (TC: 00:34:53)

Francesca Hillier: I'm the museum's Senior Archivist.

## (TC: 00:34:55)

**Sian Toogood: Excellent. And in honour of this Yuletide season, what are we looking at in the archives today?**

## (TC: 00:35:04)

Francesca Hillier: We are looking at the British Museum Christmas card collection.

## (TC: 00:35:08)

**Sian Toogood: Whoop, whoop. Now, I love Christmas.**

## (TC: 00:35:12)

Francesca Hillier: I love Christmas.

## (TC: 00:35:14)

**Sian Toogood: Correct. It's a great time of year. Everyone's happy, everyone's about to sit down and do nothing for two weeks, it's that annual reset button, but tell me about these Christmas cards.**

## (TC: 00:35:25)

Francesca Hillier: So back in the 1920s, the first commercial activity that the museum properly undertook was to produce postcards and Christmas cards. And what they did was produce specimen sets of postcards or Christmas cards. And then you would look at the specimen sets at the postcard stall, which was in the Front Hall in the 1920s. And then you would go to the Director, believe it or not, and say, 'Can I have specimen set number ten? Can I have number five, number six, number seven,' and then you would order them. And then they would be printed for you.

## (TC: 00:36:01)

**Sian Toogood: So, right, a couple of things. The Director of the museum?**

## (TC: 00:36:09)

Francesca Hillier: I assume it didn't go directly to him, but the rule was, you then approached the Director to ask. There was a process for it.

## (TC: 00:36:16)

**Sian Toogood: That is wild.**

## (TC: 00:36:18)

Francesca Hillier: There was a process for it, but it was the Director's office, I assume.

## (TC: 00:36:21)

**Sian Toogood: I mean, 'specimen set' is a horrible term.**

## (TC: 00:36:23)

Francesca Hillier: We have a full collection of all the specimen sets of postcards and Christmas cards.

## (TC: 00:36:28)

**Sian Toogood: Which I have, I guess, one of?**

## (TC: 00:36:30)

Francesca Hillier: We have a volume of the Christmas cards in front of us.

## (TC: 00:36:32)

**Sian Toogood: I mean, as with many things in this archive, it is beautifully bound in-. So what I have in front of me is probably, glory, how would you talk about it?**

## (TC: 00:36:43)

Francesca Hillier: Half A4-sized.

## (TC: 00:36:44)

**Sian Toogood: It's half A4-sized. So yes, A5.**

## (TC: 00:36:46)

Francesca Hillier: A5 that might be-, I was going to say.

## (TC: 00:36:49)

**Sian Toogood: It's about A5, yes. Landscape book. It's about an inch thick. It has a lovely red cover with some gold leaf, embossed writing on it and on the spine, and it says, 'BM Christmas Cards.'**

## (TC: 00:37:08)

Francesca Hillier: Yes.

## (TC: 00:37:09)

**Sian Toogood: And the 'BM' is underlined.**

## (TC: 00:37:10)

Francesca Hillier: Yes.

## (TC: 00:37:12)

**Sian Toogood: And when you open it up you have, on the very first page, a leaflet, a pamphlet.**

## (TC: 00:37:19)

Francesca Hillier: It is.

## (TC: 00:37:19)

**Sian Toogood: In that, kind of, lovely green, 'British Museum Christmas greeting cards, published by the trustees of the British Museum, October,' and this is actually from 1937.**

## (TC: 00:37:26)

Francesca Hillier: And there's a price list.

## (TC: 00:37:27)

**Sian Toogood: There is a price list.**

## (TC: 00:37:29)

Francesca Hillier: Is that a price list, or is that just a description of what there is?

## (TC: 00:37:31)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. This is quite nice, actually. 'British Museum Christmas greeting cards, reproductions in colour, sizes 6" by 4.5", with envelopes to match, 3d each.' Now, is '3d' good do we think?**

## (TC: 00:37:48)

Francesca Hillier: I really don't know.

## (TC: 00:37:48)

**Sian Toogood: Reasonable?**

## (TC: 00:37:50)

Francesca Hillier: I don't know. I don't know what the current value would be, and how it corresponds with the Christmas cards that we currently sell.

## (TC: 00:37:58)

**Sian Toogood: I can't imagine that we were trying to make a lot of money off this.**

## (TC: 00:38:02)

Francesca Hillier: Well it was commercial activity. It was the first commercial activity, so, I mean, we had produced guidebooks before this, but that was more to inform, but the idea of those was to recoup costs and possibly make some money, but this was a commercial activity.

## (TC: 00:38:19)

**Sian Toogood: In its own thing, but it's quite interesting the variation, because as part of this pamphlet there is a list of the 25 different greetings cards that you could buy, and the first three are the adoration of the magi, Mary and angels, the visitation, which I assume is a Christian thing, virgin and child with angels, and then we have a Japanese woodcut of moonlight, which is quite a nice thing, yes.**

## (TC: 00:38:50)

Francesca Hillier: It is. You can have a look at it, because it's in that volume.

## (TC: 00:38:54)

**Sian Toogood: Okay, so I'm going to skip past adoration of the magi and Mary.**

## (TC: 00:38:57)

Francesca Hillier: For some reason, when they've been pasted into this book of specimen sets, they've pasted them in with the internal, sort of, side of the card outward facing.

## (TC: 00:39:09)

**Sian Toogood: Maybe to protect them?**

## (TC: 00:39:09)

Francesca Hillier: So if you wanted to see the picture, you need to open it up.

## (TC: 00:39:13)

**Sian Toogood: Which is, sort of, nice in a way.**

## (TC: 00:39:15)

Francesca Hillier: Yes.

## (TC: 00:39:17)

**Sian Toogood: There it is.**

## (TC: 00:39:17)

Francesca Hillier: Isn't that beautiful?

## (TC: 00:39:18)

**Sian Toogood: That is beautiful. So the greeting card itself is, kind of, a creamy colour, in and of itself.**

## (TC: 00:39:28)

Francesca Hillier: Yes.

## (TC: 00:39:29)

**Sian Toogood: And then the print itself is put in its own little border. And this moonlight, the Japanese woodcut, is full colour, and it's actually very-,**

## (TC: 00:39:41)

Francesca Hillier: It's so beautifully done.

## (TC: 00:39:42)

**Sian Toogood: You know, considering this is from, what did I say?**

## (TC: 00:39:45)

Francesca Hillier: 1937, yes.

## (TC: 00:39:45)

**Sian Toogood: 1937, it's very nicely preserved, well done. Props. And it shows a, kind of, scene of people walking (TC 00:40:00) with horses? Donkeys? Laden, a moonlit scene, and then there's a series of large pine trees going off into the distance. And it's not, 'not' Christmassy.**

## (TC: 00:40:18)

Francesca Hillier: No.

## (TC: 00:40:19)

**Sian Toogood: But there's no snow, and there's no, yes-,**

## (TC: 00:40:20)

Francesca Hillier: But I like it, because it's not traditionally Christmassy.

## (TC: 00:40:24)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. I just think it's very interesting.**

## (TC: 00:40:25)

Francesca Hillier: That's quite forward-thinking in the 1930s, I would've thought.

## (TC: 00:40:28)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. And it's, sort of, maybe you don't want to just send stuff to do with Christmas. You know, if you have a friend who isn't Christian, but perhaps you want to send greetings to, that's quite nice.**

## (TC: 00:40:41)

Francesca Hillier: But this is what you would've leafed through.

## (TC: 00:40:43)

**Sian Toogood: This book.**

## (TC: 00:40:43)

Francesca Hillier: This book is what you would've looked at in order to make your selection, what you

wanted to order.

## (TC: 00:40:44)

**Sian Toogood: Okay. I see. That's interesting. We've got a new one, 'With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.' That is a Christian one.**

## (TC: 00:40:54)

Francesca Hillier: There's some beautiful cards. And there are, I think, quite a few that are manuscript related, when the British Library collection was here.

## (TC: 00:41:01)

**Sian Toogood: Yes.**

## (TC: 00:41:01)

Francesca Hillier: But there's lots of beautiful prints and drawings as well. That's beautiful that one. That's a Japanese one as well, isn't it?

## (TC: 00:41:07)

**Sian Toogood: Must be, yes. 'Bird on a Rose Tree Branch', again, not Christmassy. In any way. I mean, this looks like Spring to me.**

## (TC: 00:41:17)

Francesca Hillier: These were based on the museum's collection, so that drawing will be in the museum's collection, in the nature department, yes.

## (TC: 00:41:23)

**Sian Toogood: Of course, yes.**

## (TC: 00:41:25)

Francesca Hillier: That's beautiful.

## (TC: 00:41:26)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. This is 'Greta Bridge'.**

## (TC: 00:41:29)

Francesca Hillier: I got married in Greta Bridge.

## (TC: 00:41:31)

**Sian Toogood: Did you?**

## (TC: 00:41:31)

Francesca Hillier: I did.

## (TC: 00:41:32)

**Sian Toogood: That's, well, you should recognise it then.**

## (TC: 00:41:34)

Francesca Hillier: I do recognise it.

## (TC: 00:41:37)

**Sian Toogood: So this is a watercolour drawing by John Sell Cotman, 1782 to 1842, and it shows a very English scene.**

## (TC: 00:41:47)

Francesca Hillier: Greta Bridge is in County Durham. It's very near to Barnard Castle.

## (TC: 00:41:52)

**Sian Toogood: So, one set of Christmas cards, but we don't just have one, we have all of them.**

## (TC: 00:41:58)

Francesca Hillier: We have lots of specimen sets of postcards and Christmas cards.

## (TC: 00:42:02)

**Sian Toogood: This is, kind of, the birth of commercial activity for the museum.**

## (TC: 00:42:06)

Francesca Hillier: Yes. We have, also, a photograph of the Front Hall of the museum, where the first postcard gallery was, and the shop. Right by the door.

## (TC: 00:42:20)

**Sian Toogood: Yes, get you when you come in, and when you go out.**

## (TC: 00:42:24)

Francesca Hillier: And the photograph dates to 1929, and it's a lovely shop that goes right through to what the former Reading Room door was.

## (TC: 00:42:34)

**Sian Toogood: Oh yes.**

## (TC: 00:42:37)

Francesca Hillier: Obviously now taken up with the Great Court building. Some of the Front Hall was taken up by the building of the Great Court.

## (TC: 00:42:47)

**Sian Toogood: Right, so, Francesca, tell me what other Christmas or holiday related things have you got in the archive?**

## (TC: 00:42:56)

Francesca Hillier: Well we do have quite an extensive photographic archive relating to the museum's interiors, and what I did come across the other day, from the 70s and 80s, a set of photographs from the Front Hall, when we used to have a massive Christmas tree.

## (TC: 00:43:12)

**Sian Toogood: I love a Christmas tree.**

## (TC: 00:43:13)

Francesca Hillier: We haven't had one for the last three or four, maybe five years, as far as I can remember, maybe even longer.

## (TC: 00:43:19)

**Sian Toogood: No, we haven't had one in my time here, so that's at least eight.**

## (TC: 00:43:22)

Francesca Hillier: So I think we should start a campaign right now, to have a lovely Christmas tree back in the Front Hall.

## (TC: 00:43:28)

**Sian Toogood: I 100% agree, but I have a great affection for Christmas trees. Properly decorated, and I have to say, and this is my own personal opinion, I always think the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree is not very well decorated.**

## (TC: 00:43:42)

Francesca Hillier: Well, something simple, even if you just put lots of lights on it.

## (TC: 00:43:46)

**Sian Toogood: I 100% agree.**

## (TC: 00:43:48)

Francesca Hillier: Let's start a campaign.

## (TC: 00:43:51)

**Sian Toogood: So those avid listeners to the museum podcast will have heard me, in fact, talking about the British Museum shop online, and at the British Museum shop online, you can find a wide array of Christmas cards, postcards, even some of the Japanese prints, potentially, that I have talked about. Certainly Japanese prints, copies thereof. So if you would like to emulate a Christmas card from 1937, supplied by the British Museum, you should probably go and check out their wares. If you happen to be in London over the Christmas period, do come along. We're free, and open to all, and a very merry Christmas.**

## (TC: 00:44:33)

Francesca Hillier: Merry Christmas.

## (TC: 00:44:34)

**Sian Toogood: Happy holidays. So, Sushma, we're coming to the end of the episode, but you've been off, you've been on leave for, like, three weeks.**

## (TC: 00:44:45)

**Sushma Jansari: I have been on leave.**

## (TC: 00:44:45)

**Sian Toogood: Just been gallivanting. So I assume you've been listening to lots of podcasts.**

## (TC: 00:44:51)

**Sushma Jansari: You know, actually I have. I'm a huge fan of podcasts, which is partly why, I guess, I'm on this podcast.**

## (TC: 00:44:57)

**Sian Toogood: Why, because I made you? But, yes.**

## (TC: 00:44:58)

**Sushma Jansari: Well, apart from that, some coercion from you and Hugo but, you know, we'll gloss over that.**

## (TC: 00:45:04)

**Sian Toogood: Friendly coercion. Friendly coercion.**

## (TC: 00:45:05)

**Sushma Jansari: Oh no, it was very friendly, it was done with a smile.**

## (TC: 00:45:08)

**Sian Toogood: And a cup of tea.**

## (TC: 00:45:09)

**Sushma Jansari: And a cup of tea. (Laughter) Don't worry, it's all good.**

## (TC: 00:45:13)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. Tea and bribery, that's how I do business in this museum.**

## (TC: 00:45:17)

**Sushma Jansari: I think the tea, chocolates and bribery will get you very far.**

## (TC: 00:45:20)

**Sian Toogood: Okay, I'll remember the chocolate next time.**

## (TC: 00:45:20)

**Sushma Jansari: With me, anyway. Yes, absolutely, I mean, there are a couple of which I really do love. In terms of museum focused ones, apart from this one of course, I really love the Art Fund's 'Meet Me At The Museum'.**

## (TC: 00:45:33)

**Sian Toogood: Yes.**

## (TC: 00:45:34)

**Sushma Jansari: The idea of people meeting up and having chats as they're walking through museums, about life, about art, about objects, about any stories that they want to discuss, and for me, that really encapsulates the joy of museums, or even the difficulty of museums. It's a place that, you know, you should be able to have conversations. It's not, for me, a place of absolute silence.**

**And, you know, when you have people going, 'Shush, shush,' or giving you dirty looks because your child is running around and having a wonderful time, or you're talking to somebody about something that's really important to you, I just think, 'You know what, that's for somewhere else.'**

## (TC: 00:46:12)

**Sian Toogood: And I think it's, like, people do think of museums as these sacred spaces where you're supposed to be very respectful. And I think, yes, you have to be respectful of the objects in your care. These are spaces for people to engage with objects, in the way that they want to, because these are public spaces, they're for everyone, so as long as your enjoyment isn't getting in the way of someone else's enjoyment, then go to town. Have a conversation, be loud, laugh, and be joyful, because that's what these spaces are for.**

## (TC: 00:46:42)

**Sushma Jansari: I completely agree, and it's wonderful seeing some of the work that some of our colleagues are doing, Catherine and Kate who work with, for example, a programme that does Little Feet, you know, it's about bringing children into those galleries, and really looking at objects, and dancing, and counting, and playing. And, you know, there is so much joy to be found in that, and I really admire their work.**

## (TC: 00:47:04)

**Sian Toogood: Yes, and I think bringing children into these spaces, and giving them that ownership, means that you have a lifelong relationship with the museum. And I think that's really important, because so many people look at the building, or listen to the name, and think, 'That's not for me,' you know, 'I'm not smart enough,' or, 'I'm not posh enough,' or, 'I'm not whatever enough to come in through the door and feel that sense of ownership,' but we are owned by everyone. And I think that's true of every museum, world-round, is that there should be, you know, spaces for everyone to enjoy them in the way that they think is appropriate for them.**

## (TC: 00:47:42)

**Sushma Jansari: I completely agree.**

## (TC: 00:47:44)

**Sian Toogood: I thought you might.**

## (TC: 00:47:46)

**Sushma Jansari: Strangely enough. And I think, on another note, I mean, listeners will not be surprised by my absolute love of all things horror.**

## (TC: 00:47:55)

**Sian Toogood: No, what?**

## (TC: 00:47:56)

**Sushma Jansari: I know, I know, everyone's shocked, but the Sublime Horror podcast is one that I really enjoy as well, especially just on the back of the London Horror Festival, which was in October, so I've been enjoying those. And, because also it's all about being light-hearted as well, Romesh Ranganathan's 'Hip Hop Saved My Life' always brings me joy on my commute. I love that one.**

## (TC: 00:48:17)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. Except for the embarrassing times when you laugh out loud.**

## (TC: 00:48:20)

**Sushma Jansari: And they are slightly embarrassing, but, you know, I know my group on the Tube, we all get on at the same time, so I'm sure they understand.**

## (TC: 00:48:30)

**Sian Toogood: The kindness of strangers, that's a fact.**

## (TC: 00:48:32)

**Sushma Jansari: Absolutely. How about you, what kind of things do you like listening to?**

## (TC: 00:48:33)

**Sian Toogood: I mean, well, I was going to say, we can't really have this conversation without talking about our sister podcast, the Membercast.**

## (TC: 00:48:41)

**Sushma Jansari: Of course.**

## (TC: 00:48:42)

**Sian Toogood: Which, while it is run by the membership department of the British Museum, is not only for members, and is available to everyone. And it's run expertly by Iszi Lawrence, who is incredibly funny, and so I would highly recommend, if you are enjoying this aspect of British Museum podcasting, to check that out. And I have recent found an amazing new podcast, hosted by Sushma, and produced by Sushma, called 'The Wonder House', and I just think it's so wonderful, and I would highly recommend everyone listening to it.**

## (TC: 00:49:20)

**Sushma Jansari: That is so kind. It's, sort of, a labour of love, and it's about sharing knowledge. I have discussions with people who work in museums, and I think the key point is that we're all learning, and we're learning together, we're sharing knowledge. And it was like Tim said in our conversation, it's difficult to be a curator if you don't acknowledge that you do not know everything, because, my goodness, you are learning something new every single day. And that's just about the collections you look after, never mind the rest of the knowledge that's being constantly generated by other colleagues at other institutions. And also it's exciting. It's really hard work, often. (TC 00:50:00) And, you know, there's quite a lot of emotional labour that goes into it as well, but there's quite a lot of joy to be found in that work as well, and the podcast I've been working on is something that I hope we can share. Bravery is not a given, but joy almost is, you know, that is an integral part of why many of us work in museums.**

## (TC: 00:50:24)

**Sian Toogood: And, as you say often in your podcast, 'Failure is normal.'**

## (TC: 00:50:28)

**Sushma Jansari: It absolutely is, and it's genuinely what you learn from it that counts. You know, how do you develop your practice and your knowledge on the basis of that?**

## (TC: 00:50:37)

**Sian Toogood: So, merry Christmas everyone, or season's greetings, or happy holidays. Hopefully you'll all have a lovely time, and we've given you some amazing new podcasts to check out in your journeys over the next month or so. Do talk to us on Twitter, and rate and review, click subscribe.**

## (TC: 00:51:01)

**Sushma Jansari: You'll hear from us in the new year.**

## (TC: 00:51:04)

**Sian Toogood: Literally, on New Year's Day is the next episode.**

## (TC: 00:51:07)

**Sushma Jansari: How fabulous.**

## (TC: 00:51:08)

**Sian Toogood: Yes.**

## (TC: 00:51:08)

**Sushma Jansari: So you'll hear from us on New Year's Day.**

## (TC: 00:51:10)

**Sian Toogood: Yes. And don't forget to use your promo code.**

## (TC: 00:51:14)

**Sushma Jansari: Everyone loves a discount.**