

**ROTARY CLUB OF HONOLULU
ZOOM MEETING MINUTES
DATE: SEPTEMBER 7, 2021
PRESIDING: PAST PRESIDENT PAUL SAITO**

CALL TO ORDER

Past President Paul Saito filled in for **President Gwen Yamamoto Lau** who is on vacation. **PP Paul** announced the agenda and participants.

Virtual Meeting Maestro: **Brian Dunkel**

Inspiration by **Bub Wo**:

For our Chinese lesson today,....2021 is the year of the Ox, and a new expression started appearing in many websites around the world: "Niu Zhuan Qian Kun!", which can be translated as "Ox Turns Heaven and Earth".

The first word, "Niu", is the word for Ox....but with a different accent tone, that same word "Niu" means to twist or transform. So, the saying can be translated to mean "the year of the ox will twist the worst into the best".

The sentence is a word play. It comes from the Chinese idiom: Niu Zhuan Qian Kun, which means "to bring about a radical change in the situation and to reverse a bad situation or unfavorable condition to one's advantage". This phrase is also translated as "to turn the tables", because it derived from the ancient Chinese games. The player that is in a disadvantaged and weak position, turns the situation around and wins the game!

So, may the year of the Ox twist the worst of times into the best: Niu Zhuan Qian Kun!

My wish for all of you is that this year of the Ox, 2021, is a reversal and turnaround from our Covid pandemic challenges of last year, and the start of better times ahead. Have a great day, and a much-improved Year of the Ox!!

Thank you.....Xie Xie!!

Lee LaBrash led us in the *Pledge of Allegiance*, followed by singing *God Bless America*, led by **Al Linton**.

Visitors welcomed by **PP Paul**:

From Chicago, Paula Bunn
From England, Kevin Parle
From Kyoto, Mr. Yamanaka

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Amanda Kelly and the U45 Initiative.**
 - This is for members under the age of 45. She acknowledged the growing membership of rising community members and leaders in the Club.
 - **Amanda** has been working with Past Presidents, current **President Gwen**, and **President Elect, Lyla** to think about the Club's legacy; growing membership and recognizing that the younger members have a lot competing for their time yet want to make the most of their experience. Coming up, they will focus on how to active some funds and how to allocate them for the community and give thanks.
 - They want to figure out how we as a club, led by some of the younger members, and send appreciation to the leaders in our community right now – whether hospital staff or educators or other organizations.
 - They will be meeting next week to brainstorm some ideas.
 - In the future they will be seeking volunteers from this group to support them as they give thanks as a Club to our Community Leaders during this time of the ongoing pandemic.
 - Please join! If you know people who fit the U45 criteria who we can bring into our Club, please reach out to **Amanda!**
- **Centennial Park – PP Paul gives update in absence of Bob Sumpf:**
 - Monitor the *Tradewind* and Club website for Park Care workdays!
 - The Park is completed, and groups have been helping to maintain and clean up. While the City is maintaining the park, our club has a committee that puts in the extra effort to go weed and keep the park in the beautiful condition that it is.
 - Watch for opportunities to help maintain the park!

BREAKOUT ROOMS:

This weekend **PP Paul** saw an inspirational moment. He shared about McKenzie Milton, who was a QB at Mililani.

McKenzie chose the University of Central Florida over the University of Hawaii, and everyone was disappointed. However, McKenzie “led a stellar career at the University of Central Florida and led them to an undefeated season and then onto a second undefeated season. On the second to the last game, he was hit by a helmet on his knee and broke his knee in three places.” PP Paul shares his thoughts of, “what an incredible injury! He’s never going to be able to walk!” Everyone including doctors felt the same. Milton didn’t believe that – he believed he would play again and so had numerous operations performed on his knee. Over the last two and a half years, he trained to play college football again!

On Sunday, he joined Florida State University, a Power 5 Conference Football team because he wanted to be the starting quarterback. He didn’t start. They were playing Notre Dame and were down. It wasn’t looking like Milton would get to play, but in the fourth quarter the starting QB lost his helmet, so McKenzie was put in. His first pass was a 22-yard completion, so the coach left him in the game! McKenzie tied the score up which led the teams into overtime! Even though they lost,

everyone in the sports world was amazed at the commitment and recovery that Milton showed.

Today's topic: What incredible, inspiration moments you have experienced over the last few months? And off we went to our rooms!

We returned from our rooms to hear Traditional Afghanistan Music, which complimented our Guest Speaker's presentation.

GUEST SPEAKER – Dr. Leslee Michelsen

Introduction by Maja Grajski

Dr. Leslee Michelsen is the Curator of Collections and Exhibitions at the Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design in Honolulu, where she leads the team responsible for the exhibition, interpretation, research, and conservation of the museum's collection of historic and contemporary arts of the Islamic world.

Her recent work includes co-curated exhibitions with artists Hayv Kahraman, Faig Ahmed, Bahia Shehab, Kevork Mourad, and Kamran Samimi. Upcoming projects include a multisensory, pan-Pacific exhibition on scent in the botanical arts of the Islamic world, as well as co-curated exhibitions with artists Sherin Guirguis, Jordan Nassar, Diana Al Hadid, Lazo Studios, Slavs, and Tatars, and Wardha Shabbir. She is also installing a new gallery on the arts from the Qajar era in Iran.

Leslee earned her Ph. D in Islamic art history and archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania. Previously, she consulted for UNESCO Afghanistan on the curatorial content of the Bamiyan Cultural Center and was the Head of the Curatorial and Research Section at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar (MIA) from 2011-2015. While at MIA, she curated the international exhibitions "Ferozkoh: Tradition and Continuity in Afghan Art" (2013 - Doha, MIA; 2014 - London, Leighton House Museum) and "Marvellous Creatures: Animal Fables in Islamic Art" (2015) and co-wrote the accompanying catalogues.

She has worked with museums, artists, cultural heritage management projects, and archaeological sites in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, India, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, including curating new artworks, advising on the renovation of medieval architecture, and the development and writing of UNESCO World Heritage applications and site management plans. She has lectured in Islamic art history at Dickinson College (PA), the Turquoise Mountain Foundation in Kabul, and the Parsons Paris School of Art + Design.

In April 2021, she was elected to the ICOM-US Board of Directors for a three-year term (2021- 2024). In 2019 and 2020 she was a juror and reader, respectively, for the museums panel for the National Endowment for the Arts grant initiatives. From 2014-2017 she served on the Museums Committee of the College Art Association and has served on the Executive Board Nominating Committee (2015) and the Sevchenko Prize Jury (2016) for the Historians of Islamic Art Association.

Guest Speaker – Dr. Leslee Michelsen

Thank you, Maja, and thank you everyone for inviting me to speak to you today. It is always a real pleasure for me to speak about Afghanistan, a subject that is near and dear to my heart.

I've been asked to speak for 20 minutes, so I have a very structured presentation to show you – and that is for two reasons: 1) I want to focus on the past and the recent present in Afghanistan because I think the future is really difficult to talk about. I think most people who have lived and worked there understand that it's in a great state of flux right now and there are many potential futures for Afghanistan, which I'm happy to discuss with you in the conversation after the presentation.

I want to share with you the work I have done there. Not because I am trying to center myself, but because I want to show you some of the things Afghanistan has and why it is work continuing to care when I think most of us have our emotional bandwidths pretty stretched at this time with all the things happening in the world. I appreciate your indulgence as you allow me to share with you my feelings about Afghanistan.

[Slides shown]

I am an archeologist, an art historian, and I have a background working with Cultural Heritage Management NGOs. It has been my great privilege to be able to work on several of these aspects in Afghanistan. Of course, you know, without me telling you, any one of these subjects could fill an hour, easily. So I am just going to introduce the topic to you briefly. If you have any questions or queries, I'd really be happy to speak with you in the discussion or at any time, whether by email or come to Shangri La and talk story – I'd really love that!

Afghanistan straddles the line between central and south Asia. Neighbors are Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and China. It is a very rugged and mountainous country with the mighty hills of the Himalayas bifurcating the country. This geography has resulted in very isolated pockets geographically. Geography is replicated in society, so that has resulted in people with very discreet ethnographic, linguistic and cultural units, unique to the geographic areas of Afghanistan. That helps create a deep tribal culture. People from this place do not refer to themselves as Afghans. They refer to themselves in terms of Tajiks, Hazaras, or Pashtuns – identifying with tribal identifications, which are strong.

Leslee showed us a slide with sites circled where she has worked: Herat, Jam, Balkh, Bamiyan, and Kabul. Further slides showed the different archeological excavations at Jam and Bala Hissar. [Folks, you really missed out on some interesting slides of the digs and finds.]

I first began working in Afghanistan in 2005 as a graduate student, doing archeology research in Jam. Over the years, I have worked on many projects in Herat, and Balkh, just outside of Mazahri Sharif, and most recently in Bamiyan and Kabul. I have not been in Afghanistan since 2016. I want to be clear about that. It has been five years since I've been able to visit Afghanistan; right before I began working at Shangri La. I hold hope in my heart that I will be able to get back there one day.

Jam: The excavations at Jam, which are UNESCO World Heritage site, were begun in 2005 as floodwaters from the Hari-rud River threatened to topple the Minaret (tower structure). Access to this site is extremely laborious and difficult. It's a very steep valley; it's very isolated, and of course the security situation there has never been great. There is a lack of bridges, so people, objects, and everything is ferried over the river. However, this has not stopped serious looting from taking place. Many areas have been illegally excavated.

Jam is famous for its beautifully decorated Minaret. For many years, this was thought to be an isolated monument. But our work showed that instead, Jam was a thriving large town or small city, built up against the steep hillsides. The Minaret was part of a very sophisticated urban center which we believe marked the site of the ancient city of Firuzkuh, the lost capital city of the Ghurid dynasty that reigned in the 11th and 12th century and was the first native Afghan dynasty to rule in the Islamic period.

Other finds were pottery and herringbone brick floors, fragments of wall paintings – all indicating the wealth and cosmopolitanism of the multiethnic, multi-religious site, indicated by gravestones in numerous languages, including Hebrew. We were able to document the site and provide information to UNESCO, as well as the Afghan Ministry of Culture, to expand their protection of the site and to argue for the shoring up of flood protection walls against the Hari-rud.

Archeological investigation is not only needed in most remote areas of Afghanistan but in the very center.

Bala Hissar, Kabul: Is an ancient fort that has been rebuilt many times over the centuries and has often been used as a military outpost by waves and waves of people from the Afghan dynasties, the Mughals, the British during the Great Game, the Soviets during their invasion, the United States, and our allies recently, and of course by the Mujahideen and the Taliban. It is an excellent look out spot over Kabul and has always been used as a weapons store.

Due to significant damage from this military use, my team was asked to do a rescue project there in 2007. We always work with Afghan archeologists, and we completed a survey within this steep intermural landscape. We were able to present a ceramic corpus providing very useful information for other excavations that have taken place in Afghanistan and to give it to the National Museum in Kabul.

At both Jam and Bala Hissar, we were able to excavate, register, catalogue, photograph, and when possible, conserve all the finds and remove them to national museums for safekeeping.

National Museum in Kabul: It has suffered greatly over the past decades. Sharing a quotation with you from a real mentor for me, a wonderful human being – his name is Dr. Omar Khan Masoudi who was the director for the National Museum in Kabul for decades. He only retired a few years ago. He quotes, “In 1978, when the April evolution occurred in Afghanistan, people struggled against the forces occupying the country. All though Kabul was secure, the fighting severely damaged historic sites and monuments, as well as provincial museums. In 1992, with the outbreak of civil war, the National Museum was damaged severely. I remember the day on May 12, 1993, when rocket attacks sparked a fire here and burned a number of artifacts and showcases. Until November 1994, most objects, around 70% were looted from the museum – that is more than 70,000 artworks. They were of course, the most beautiful and precious ones. In 1995, after the Taliban occupied Kabul, they began to invade the museum and destroyed the artifacts of human figures, destroying more than 2,700 objects that had survived the rocket attack and the looting. In 2002, when the new government came, more than 100 scholars came to the museum and were shocked by how badly it was damaged. There was no roof. There were no windows. Over 75% of the objects were destroyed or missing. Storage was in very bad condition. But, in 1989, we had foreseen as a staff that the communist party would withdraw and the Mujahideen would take over. So we had decided to shift the most precious and important pieces from the museum and hide them in two places. We shared this idea with the Minister of Culture. We chose the Presidential Palace and the National Bank, as they were safe, even from rocket attacks. We shifted the Bactrian gold and other objects – 22,000 objects in all – and after we hid them, we melted down the keys to the vaults so no one could think of opening the vaults before Afghanistan was safe.”

Also stored at the museum were archeological artifacts from Kandahar that had been excavated in the 1970s by a British team, who literally were fleeing Kabul as the Soviets, invaded. With no time to do anything else, they stuffed all of their finds into Diplomatic postal bags and left them at the British Embassy. They remained there until 2003 when the British Embassy returned them to the National Museum, still in their sacks. Our team eventually catalogued all of these finds.

The National Museum has received a great deal of National attention and aide in the form of funds, as well as training. But it is becoming overwhelmed by the amount of material being sent to it for safekeeping from provincial museums, as well as materials found in current archeological digs.

You may know the famous site of Mes Aynak. It is a copper mine, and it is a Buddhist monastery of incredible international importance. It has been excavated up to the present day, in Logar Province, just outside of Kabul.

There are many NGOs, obviously working in Afghanistan. I worked in Turquoise Mountain in 2006-2007, then later in 2013. In the early years I taught Islamic art history to students at their art school. I helped curate national exhibitions and competitions of calligraphy; and I consulted on the restoration of medieval architecture. We worked together to restore traditional crafts knowledge, which was in danger of being lost, as older teachers and masters and crafts people passed away; and more commonly, those who left the trade due to economic necessity. Turquoise Mountain has been an incredible success in Afghanistan. They also renovated an entire section of Kabul called Murad Khani.

The Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture is singular. It produces hundreds of students who are experts in miniature painting, in woodwork, in jewelry making, in calligraphy; and it helps them to set up businesses; promotes and connects them with purchasers in the rest of the world. It understands that without a market, the crafts will not survive.

Turquoise Mountain also runs a medical clinic and an elementary school in Murad Khani. It's incredibly interwoven with the fabric of life in Afghanistan. In addition to all of those amazingly good works, they have replicated this in other countries. They currently also work in Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, and in Jordan.

We have been focusing on what has been saved, but we also need to touch on what has been, and continues to be, lost. Art and Archeology are the third most illegally trafficked category in the world after people and weapons. The antiquities trade is larger than the drug trade, in scale.

Afghanistan, like many source nations, is desperately poor on a global level, which makes its cultural riches all the more difficult to protect. Despite conventions and laws to the contrary, a veritable river of antiquities continues to flow out of the country ending up at prestigious auction houses, public and private collections, and even on sites like eBay.

[Picture of a dish was shown] This dish is in a private collection in the Persian Gulf. It is nearly complete. It is an incredibly unusual type of pottery from the Ghurid period, so the same time as the Minaret of Jam that we looked at – the 11th and 12th century. In all my years of research in Medieval-Central Asian pottery, I have only ever seen two fragments of such. Yet here is a full vessel, whose find spot is unknown, therefore it is effectively useless from an archeological perspective. Its owner keeps it in a cardboard box in a room filled to the ceiling with other cardboard boxes containing gold **Fatma** jewelry, rare medieval manuscripts from South Asia, and Bronze Age statuettes. I photographed and catalogued as much as I could. I advised him on conservation methods. I urged him to repatriate what was obviously stolen or bought on the black market. I do not know if he complied.

International exhibitions can also help shed light on rich cultural and artistic heritage of Afghanistan. The Ferozkoh exhibition was a partnership I did in concert with the students and teachers at Turquoise Mountain. I curated this in Qatar in

2013 and in the UK in 2014. Contemporary crafts people responded to artworks of the past by creating artworks inspired by them. I then displayed the art in pairs – one historic and one contemporary object, each in conversation with the other. This exhibition later traveled to the UK where dignitaries, including Prince Charles and Boris Johnson, visited some of the pairs of artworks. I say this to underline that political and social spotlight on artwork result in Press; they result in greater attention and ultimately, they provide the potential for greater protection.

I also worked on the curatorial content for the Bamiyan Cultural Center, undertaken in partnership with UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture of Afghanistan. Bamiyan is probably most famous to you for the two Buddha's that were there until 2001 when they were blown up by the Taliban. This Cultural Center was to have been the first such civic space – an important cultural center in Bamiyan - with galleries and exhibitions, as well as facilities for lectures and events. The planning and building stages were slowed by the Global Pandemic, but the plans have come to fruition! The center is finished as of three weeks ago! The future of this center, the future of anything in Afghanistan, is obviously quite tenuous.

Leslee's friend, Mohammad Fahim Rahimi, current Director of the Center issued the following statement, which she gave us time to read.

As you know the Kabul city in the past two weeks witnessed the power of transition from the previous government to the I.E. In the course of this transition, there were high risk of looting and destruction of the National Museum of Afghanistan collection, from those criminal groups that seized the opportunity and started looting of public and private properties, especially in the first few days. Luckily, with a very good management we were able to protect the National Museum of Afghanistan collection, equipment and personal.

Currently, the I.E. personal from the 6yh district have been tasked to protect the National Museum of Afghanistan and the threat of looting and destruction has reduced.

We are committed to the preservation of the National Museum of Afghanistan collection and cultural heritage of the country as per our capacity. Meanwhile, I would like to thank those individuals and institutions (Friends of National Museum) that offered their support and contributed in protection of this museum collection within their capacities.

For ensuring the safety of the National Museum collection, this museum will remain closed for a few days and after we resumed our activities, we will let you now.

Mohammad Fahim Rahimi

August 31st 2021

Leslee clarified that "I.E." is the Islamic Emirate, which is the name the Taliban have chosen. Leslee hopes that we can read between the lines of the statement to see the "courage and determination of the director and his staff" to "safeguard their heritage in the face of enormous pressure and threats." She asks us to "keep Afghanistan in [our] thoughts and hearts." She further reminds us that they are still just beginning and in need of help, encouraging us to donate what we can to help. You can reach out at TurquoiseMountain.org. "People are the most important, but culture is also vital." She

then showed us a slide of a stone that reads, 'A nation stays alive when it's culture stays alive.' Al-Masudi would say this often. He and his family were safely evacuated and are in Qatar "awaiting resettlement."

Culture is also vital. I say this because I have sat in the tents of desperately poor refugees outside of Afghanistan, where I have been treated as a guest and given tea from the family's meager resources. And each time as I sat in these tents, my hosts have inquired about my work. They have shared family stories about their connections to craft making. They have shown me objects connected to their material and cultural heritage. They have shown me and shared with me their memories of sites and places now long gone or looted. I have often felt very small in Afghanistan, traveling as I do with friends who are doing true lifesaving work with organizations such as Doctors Without Borders or UNICEF. I used to think, 'Why am I here?' serving an archeological site or cataloguing pottery. But in the end, it's not my heritage. I am a guest. I have seen over and over that culture is important to the people of Afghanistan – it is vital. It is arrogant of me to say or decide it is not.

A very dear friend of mine, with whom I worked for several years at Turquoise Mountain, and who, right now, is trying to cross the border into Tajikistan with his wife and their two infant daughters; he told me once, "yes, okay. We don't save lives, Leslee, but our work makes life worth living."

That is a powerful statement to end on. She thanked us for our time. We so appreciate her sharing her experience and insight to real world situation that has been ongoing for so long. The floor was then opened for some Q&A.

Q&A with Leslee:

Elleen & Len: I [Len] was there in the early 70s when statues were still there. I was quite distraught when I saw the pictures of the destroyed. Do you think there is going to be a change in the attitude of the Taliban to destroy all pre-Islamic arts in Afghanistan which they have seem hell-bent on doing?

Leslee: I don't think there is going to be a change. I've had to negotiate with the Taliban on several occasions, because despite what we think in the West, they never went away. They have always controlled the very rural areas of Afghanistan. When you are going to be undertaking archeological work, you have to negotiate with all stakeholders in the landscape, and the Taliban are a stakeholder in many of these places. So, I've had several conversations – I don't want to make myself seem more important than I am – I am on the peripheral of these conversations, but I have been present when negotiating with the Taliban for access to these sites. No, there is no interest in the pre-Islamic sites of Afghanistan except in terms of the ability to command International attention and the ability to make money. Antiquity sales are fuels and funds. Agencies and organizations such as the Taliban, and I would urge you to remember that anytime you see something that is for sale in an antique store or online, in anyway, people are indirectly funding terrorists by buying these antiquities. No, unfortunately, I don't think anything will change.

Eileen: The artifacts that were stored and hidden in the Palace and in the Bank, what has happened to them? And are there other places of hiding that people have, that you may not know about but that they are being hidden, did they have enough time to do so before the fall?

Leslee: The Bactium gold has been on long-term exhibition outside of Afghanistan, for 10 years, moving from country to country. I don't know where it is right now. I need to look up and see where it is. I don't believe it has been returned to Afghanistan. In terms of where things are hidden now, that's not my call, but I will say that all the colleagues that I have in Afghanistan are much savvier about the situation than I am. Afghanistan has been through waves and waves of destruction, and if anyone can ensure that some of the cultural heritage survives, I'm sure it's my very knowledgeable friends who are there and are in charge of agencies and organizations.

Kevin: Leslee, thank you for a beautiful and humble and touching presentation. I am very, very impressed. I work in the Financial Services Sector and money laundering and pouching officer for almost a decade. One of the types of money laundering that occurs is around arts, artifacts, and antiquities because it's easy to convert the proceeds of crime into those artifacts and then transfer the wealth to another person. I was wondering do you have any thoughts, any feelings on how the sector should be regulated to try and prevent the theft of these important antiquities?

Leslee: I have lots of thoughts! There are laws in place that are not enforced and it's not about the law really, it's about ethics. There is no shame for people who are buying these works. You buy something with a really big price tag and people think it's okay - I didn't get it on eBay, I got it from Christie's - does that make it better? We must require provenance information - where were the works acquired, how where they acquired, when were they acquired, and does it fit international norms? Ask museums to document and to justify how it came into their collection, especially public collections. Until people actually demand that kind of recording and justification on the part of any kind of cultural heritage organization, museum, galleries, etc., people just get away with not sharing it. Wealthy donors will effectively launder their collection by having them exhibited in prestigious institutions, and then all of a sudden, it's fine because it's exhibited and catalogued so they think it's fine. People need to be much more aware of this and call people to account, and demand that provenance information be shared, and shame museums into sharing this because I think this is the only way it's going to actually happen quite frankly. Because the people that buy this artwork, if you can afford to drop \$4.5 Million dollars on a ceramic bowl, you are not going to listen to what I think about ethics.

Terry George: Thank you so much for your presentation. I had a question about the smaller artifacts at the National Museum. Have any of those been recorded digitally in some way so if anything happened, we would still have the ability to see, understand, and study them?

Leslee: Yes, is the short answer, happily! All the work that many, many colleagues and I had been working on was to catalogue what remained of the collection and what was being brought into the collection of the National Museum from the other Provincial museums and archeological sites so this wouldn't happen again. The digitization of that has been led by the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago for the past several years, and if funded by the US State Department. As of right now Islamic Emirate has posted guards outside the

International Museum of Kabul. They have not entered, and they have indicated to Fahim that they are there to protect the museum from looting.

Reese: Thank you for this opportunity to talk with a learned person. I'm curious, we hear about tribalism, tribalism, regionalism, regionalism, and yet the Taliban have broken the code! They are every place. They are in charge – they were before and now they are gain, so is there no other unifying force in the country? How the hell have the Taliban been able to do it?

Leslee: That is a very complicated question and is best left to political experts. I will tell you that the Taliban are primarily Pashtun, that is their tribal identity, mostly. The vast majority of the Taliban are Pashtun. The vast majority of Pashtun people are not Taliban to be clear. There are many reasons for the speed at which this has happened. Corruption is endemic in Afghanistan and everything that has been reported to you in terms of number of soldiers and equipment and that kind of stuff, I can guarantee to you that was false information. There were never nearly as many people in the Afghan army that we were told there were and that they were under supplied. And quite frankly, if I was a starving soldier who hadn't been fed in a week and you came and surrounded my area and said you would let me live and walk away from there if I left my weapon, I don't think there is any shame in making that choice. I understand why quite a few people made that choice. The only thing that makes me very upset is that Afghanistan has been portrayed as a nation of cowards who didn't fight and that is an extremely simplistic and reductive and really insulting view of Afghanistan. They have suffered for a very long time and made very judicious choices based on the long game and immediate survival. I think none of us can blame them for it. It is very complicated in Afghanistan. It's a traumatized country, a desperately poor country, and under resourced, and it is also, unfortunately led by a very corrupt government that was never a recipe for success. In these many pukas, you find groups that take advantage, such as the Taliban. The Taliban will find it almost impossible to govern Afghanistan because for 20 years there has been so many strides in education of men and women. There have been civic infrastructure projects and the people have had a taste of a different life. The Taliban will find Afghanistan of 2021 very different from Afghanistan of 2000.

Mike Latham: Leslee thank you so much for this presentation. It has been really wonderful. Can you say a few words about your plans for Shangri La and where things are going this Fall?

Leslee: Thank you so much! I am really grateful to be able to end on a happy note because I'm really trying to keep it together; this is obviously very personal for me, so thank you! I just opened with my colleagues at our weekly staff meeting; I just showed them a new gallery that I finally finished with my team. It is a gallery of arts from the Asghar Empire, the 17th to the early 20th century. One of the highlights of the gallery is a rug. We have two rugs from the Asghar period. One is so large it doesn't fit and the other is not in good condition. So, in 2019, I reached out to Turquoise Mountain and asked if they could weave me a carpet for the gallery at Shangri La. They said sure! I sent them a photograph of the two rugs in our collection and they took the motifs from our rugs and created a brand-new rug and wove it for us in Afghanistan in 2019. It arrived just before the pandemic! So today, just right now, I was able to unveil for my colleagues, this gallery, the center of which is this incredible rug, which was woven for us in Afghanistan. It was very hopeful, and it

made me feel really good about that. Shangri La, as you may know, is the *only* museum completely dedicated Islamic Art in the United States, believe it or not. I argue vehemently that we have a moral obligation to continue Doris' very singular work in that she commissioned works from contemporary crafts people her whole life. She didn't buy at auction or go into a shop and pick things up or buy from dealers. She would buy things from contemporary crafts people consistently and that is very unusual compared to the way her peers were buying and engaging with the visual material culture of the Islamic World. So doing things like this, commissioning things from contemporary craftspeople, working with contemporary artists, this is something we are continuing to do at Shangri La. I want to expand it even more. Shangri La, from Thursday, will be open, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday for two tours a day, 10 people at a time, as a self-guided experience. So, if you have ever been to Shangri La, you have not seen it like this. It is now a much more museum-ified space in which you can guide yourself using didactics, using our website, and using a brochure that we have for you. If anyone would like to find out more information, go to the HOMA website. As I mentioned before the meeting, I am happy to speak to my colleague to see if there is a way we may be able to offer a tour for the Rotary Club members to come and experience Shangri La.

Go check out the Shangri La website for upcoming events!

<https://www.shangrilahawaii.org/>

CLOSING

Past President Paul: He thanked Leslee and expressed our looking forward to seeing her at Shangri La. Next week, guest speaker is **Colleen Hanabusa**, former U.S. Representative and state Senator, and new chairwoman of the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation (HART) board of directors.

Brian takes us out with the *Hawaii Aloha* music video.

Past President Paul rang the bell at 1:00pm. Meeting adjourned.

Humble Scribe,

Lee LaBrash