

**Bamboo Toad Brush Rest**  
**BATEA 334**

Museum founder - Brian McEleney, OBE - was an early collector of bamboo carvings. Do look out for numerous bamboo pieces on display, as you pass through the Museum's eclectic galleries.

One such piece, which really sparked my interest, is the group of '3 Frogs', created in 1623 by a famous bamboo carver of the late Chinese Ming period - Shen Dasheng. He came from a leading family of bamboo carvers.

His piece was intended as a brush-rest, for use in a scholar's studio. It playfully depicts two small frogs clambering on to the back of a larger frog. You may notice one of the smaller frogs is holding a rice spray in its mouth - and looks particularly mischievous! The larger frog has been expertly carved, with its' tongue sticking out. The tongue can be moved up & down, which just adds to the character of this piece! The maker's seal & signature are on the underside.

These 3 frogs always make me smile, whilst appreciating Shen Dasheng's expertise. Records show bamboo began to be used as a carving material as far back as early Chinese civilisation; gaining wider prominence in the 17th Century, yet collecting bamboo became popular mainly from the 1970's (which is when this piece was bought, in Hong Kong). Bamboo was carved using various techniques: hollow stems were made into cylinders for items such as brush pots and incense holders; its gnarly roots were ideal for 'solid' pieces - such as these '3 Frogs'; or stems were surface-carved with intricate designs for items such as wrist- or hand-rests.

These 3 little frogs also appear on the cover of Brian McEleney's biography (available in our shop), which is a perfect introduction to Brain's life-long passion collecting East Asian art.