

News Release

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Communications Department
1000 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10028-0198
tel (212) 570-3951 fax (212) 472-2764
communications@metmuseum.org

For Immediate Release

Contact:
Elyse Topalian
Egle Zygas

The Making of a Collection: Islamic Art at the Metropolitan

Exhibition Dates: November 1, 2011-February 5, 2012
Exhibition Location: The Hagop Kevorkian Fund Special Exhibitions Gallery
Press Preview: Monday, October 24, 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Due to the generosity of collectors who have supported the Museum with outstanding gifts and donations, The Metropolitan Museum of Art now houses one of the largest and most comprehensive collections anywhere of the art of the Islamic world. Opening November 1, the exhibition *The Making of a Collection: Islamic Art at the Metropolitan* will highlight the 10 major donor-collectors whose gifts form the core of the collection of the Museum's Department of Islamic Art. *The Making of a Collection* is the inaugural exhibition within The Hagop Kevorkian Fund Special Exhibitions Gallery in the New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia.

From the last quarter of the 19th century to the early 1930s, objects from the Islamic world were introduced to the American market as exotic treasures, and gradually gained public recognition. The exhibition, which is organized chronologically, begins with these first decades of Islamic art collecting in America, when as much as half of the department's collection was established. During that

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period, interest in travel to the Middle East caught on in America; governments from the Near East erected pavilions at international expositions, where imported objects and parts of buildings were shown and afterwards sold to Americans; and Oriental art dealers played an important role as taste-makers for Islamic art. In the years that followed, the collection continued to grow and, as in the past, generous donors continued to support the Metropolitan Museum. Today the collection of the Department of Islamic Art comprises approximately 12,000 objects of which 1,200 will be on display in the new galleries.

The silversmith **Edward C. Moore** (1827–1891)—a pioneer collector of Islamic art in America—bequeathed to the Metropolitan more than 2,000 objects, 400 of which were from the Islamic world. He had amassed this extensive collection as a source of inspiration for his own work and that of his designers. The collection is particularly strong in ceramics, glass, and inlaid medieval metalwork created in Egypt, Syria, and Iran. Numerous vessels from the 18th and 19th centuries show that Moore was particularly attracted by designs that were in vogue in the modern and contemporary Orient. Among the works he bequeathed to the Museum is a massive, intricately ornamented brass candlestick from the second half of the 14th century. Although it was originally inlaid with silver—much of which has worn away—the candlestick retains ornate engravings of a seated figure, inscription, and flowers.

Over the last two decades of his life, the noted American financier and philanthropist **J. Pierpont Morgan** (1837–1913) spent more than two-thirds of his vast estate (about \$900 million today) building up a massive and encyclopedic art collection that included many works of Islamic art. At his death, his son J. P. Morgan Jr. donated large parts of the collection to the Met. Among the Islamic

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objects are numerous Ottoman tile panels, carpets, and enameled glass of high quality and in excellent condition. The Morgan gift included eight mosque lamps. One of them, a delicate, enameled and gilded example made around 1340, in Syria—beautifully decorated with floral ornamentation and calligraphy—bears the name of the Mamluk Sultan Al-Malik Al-Nasir.

James F. Ballard (1851–1931), one of the first American carpet collectors of renown, donated 126 rugs to the Museum in 1922. This one gift constitutes almost a quarter of the Museum’s present collection of Islamic carpets, one of the largest and finest in the world. In pristine condition, the carpets collected by Ballard are distinguished by their vivid colors and bold, eye-catching geometric compositions. A mid- to late-19th-century tribal “Karachov” Kazak carpet from this collection achieves a dazzling effect despite the limited palette of several shades of red and a highly saturated medium-to-dark blue, along with white, ivory, brown, and black.

A lover of literature, **Alexander Smith Cochran** (1874–1929) was particularly fond of Persian manuscripts, a rather uncommon interest for his time. In 1913, he donated to the Museum 24 mainly Persian manuscripts, 30 single-leaf paintings, and one bookbinding. The Museum’s formerly minimal collection of Persian codices was suddenly enriched with examples of various periods, which are handsomely illuminated or adorned with beautiful paintings. The intense blue, red, and gold design on the embossed 16th-century leather binding of the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizami calls to mind the pattern of a beautiful Persian carpet.

The second important source after Ballard for the Met’s universally famous carpet collection is the gift by **Joseph V. McMullan** (1896–1973) of approximately 120

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carpets and textiles that entered the museum in 1973. Although his collection represented 400 years of production, McMullan favored Turkish and vigorous peasant and nomad carpets, rather than the court types sought by most collectors. The appeal of these rugs is apparent in one 19th-century tribal rug from his collection, in which a simple medallion pattern—though repeated 15 times—almost never appears the same way twice.

Two generations of the Havemeyer family figure prominently among major donors to the Metropolitan. Among the approximately 5,000 works of art that **Henry Osborne Havemeyer** (1847–1907), his wife **Louisine** (1855–1929), and their son **Horace** (1886–1956) gave to the Museum, 150 are Islamic. The Havemeyers were early collectors of Impressionist paintings, as well as Chinese and Japanese metalwork and ceramics. Their interest in Islamic art may be due to Edward C. Moore, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and landscape artist Samuel Colman—orientalist designers who worked for them. The Havemeyers' strong collection of ceramics from Raqqa in Syria and Kashan in Iran was mainly built upon the advice of Dikran Kelekian, a dealer, consultant, and friend. A pair of 13th-century molded and luster-painted tile panels that they collected features dramatic calligraphy in an intense blue color against a shimmery copper-colored background.

The ardent painter, sculptor, and antique collector **Cora Timken Burnett** (1872–1956) was particularly attracted to art from Persia, India, and China, which she bought from dealers including her close friend Hagop Kevorkian, or on her travels. Her bequest to the Met in 1956 included a selection of Indian sculptures, her entire collection of Persian miniatures, and other Persian objects. The illustration on a rare 14th-century manuscript page that she collected features two beautifully rendered horses and nine warriors within a space that measures approximately 4

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inches high by 9 inches wide. The tips of several helmets extend beyond the frame, and lend an enhanced sense of realism to the drawing. Six columns of expertly written text fill the remainder of the 14- by 11-inch page, a folio from the Injuid *Shahnama*.

Arthur A. Houghton Jr. (1906–1990) was a member of more than 100 organizations dedicated to art, culture, and education. A member of the Museum’s Board of Trustees from 1952 to 1974, he served as its President (1964– 1969) and its Chairman (1969– 1972). In 1970, the year of the Museum’s centennial, he donated 76 folios of the famous *Shahnama* (“Book of Kings”) of Shah Tahmasp, created around 1525, arguably the most luxuriously illustrated version of the epic ever produced in the history of Persian painting. Each illustration is a masterpiece in miniature: human beings, animals, and a profusion of trees and plants are shown in the most skillfully rendered settings, which range from palatial interiors to fantastic landscapes.

Marshall and Marilyn Wolf (b. 1935 and 1938) have collected Islamic carpets and textiles since the 1960s, and Turkmen jewelry since the 1990s. In addition, they have sponsored research projects and publications at the Metropolitan. Among their gifts are splendid textiles including a rug, and a collection of nearly 300 examples of Turkmen jewelry. They exemplify the continuing generosity of collectors who play a vital role in maintaining the preeminence of the Museum’s collections. A particularly dramatic work among their gifts is a large, heart-shaped, pectoral ornament, measuring 12 inches long by 7 inches across, that is decorated on both sides and features stamped bead and whirl decorations and table-cut cabochon carnelians and turquoises.

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The Armenian archaeologist, connoisseur of art, and collector **Hagop Kevorkian** (1872–1962) was a key intermediary between Middle Eastern governments, clients, and museums. He introduced to the market objects imported from Turkey and other countries, as well as ceramics he excavated in Iran (Sultanabad and Rayy). In 1951 he created **The Kevorkian Foundation**, which became an important source of support for the Islamic Art Department, funding fellowships, scholarly positions, publications, and acquisitions of works of art. The Foundation made possible the 1976 installation of the Damascus Room and the establishment of the eponymous gallery for special exhibitions in which this display is currently on view. Among the works on view in honor of his generosity to the Metropolitan Museum is an elegant 17th-century illuminated rosette, primarily in shades of blue and gold, a gift from his private collection.

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October 24, 2011

VISITOR INFORMATION

Hours

Fridays and Saturdays	9:30 a.m.–9:00 p.m.
Sundays, Tuesdays–Thursdays	9:30 a.m. –5:30 p.m.
Met Holiday Mondays in the Main Building: <u>December 26, 2011;</u> <u>January 2, January 16, February 20, April 9, and May 28, 2012</u>	9:30 a.m. –5:30 p.m.
All other Mondays closed; Jan. 1, Thanksgiving, and Dec. 25 closed	

Recommended Admission (Includes Main Building and The Cloisters Museum and Gardens on the Same Day)

Adults \$25.00, seniors (65 and over) \$17.00, students \$12.00
Members and children under 12 accompanied by adult free
Express admission may be purchased in advance at www.metmuseum.org/visit
For More Information (212) 535-7710; www.metmuseum.org

No extra charge for any exhibition.