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## NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ANNOUNCES EXHIBITION OF RENOWNED COLLECTION OF ISLAMIC ART

JULY 18, 2004 THROUGH FEBRUARY 6, 2005



### ***Ewer (Turkey (Ottoman)), c. 1530-1550***

hammered and chased gilt silver with enameled plaques, 27 x 16.5 cm (10 5/8 x 6 1/2)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Washington, DC -- A touring exhibition of more than 100 works from one of the most renowned Islamic art collections in the world premieres at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from July 18, 2004, through February 6, 2005. Selected from a superb

collection of more than 10,000 objects, **Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Victoria and Albert Museum** will convey the richness of the Islamic art of the Middle East on a scale and at a level of quality hard to find in any collection outside the region.

Organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the exhibition is taking place while a new gallery for art of the Islamic Middle East is under development at the V&A. The exhibition will also travel to the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas (April 3-September 4, 2005); the Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (October 22-December 11, 2005); and the Millennium Galleries, Sheffield, England (January 14-April 16, 2006).

### **EXHIBITION SUPPORT**

The exhibition at the National Gallery of Art has been made possible by the generosity of H.R.H. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States.

The international tour of this exhibition has been made possible by the generosity of Mr. Mohammed Jameel, president of the Abdul Latif Jameel Group, the benefactor of the V&A's Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art, which is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Abdul Latif Jameel, the late founder of the Abdul Latif Jameel Group, and his wife Nafisa.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, stated: "This exhibition of outstanding examples of Islamic art is part of the Gallery's long history of presenting art from other nations and non-Western cultures. We are grateful to Ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar bin Sultan and Mohammed Jameel, the president of the Abdul Latif Jameel Group, for their generous support, and to the V&A for their collaboration in bringing these outstanding works of art from a broad and complex culture to new audiences."

Ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar bin Sultan stated: "Now, more than ever, we need to work to build bridges of understanding between our societies and cultures. This important collection of Islamic art provides a historical perspective and

cultural context for one of the world's greatest religions. I am pleased to sponsor this exhibition at the National Gallery of Art."

Mr. Mohammed Jameel, President of the Abdul Latif Jameel Group, stated: "I am delighted that this exhibition of the V&A's great Islamic treasures will be on display at the National Gallery of Art in Washington before returning to the new Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the V&A. Our family has a keen interest in world cultures and in promoting understanding among them, and a commitment to increasing the understanding of the Islamic world. It gives us great pleasure to be able to help these two great museums mount this exhibition."

Mark Jones, director of the V&A, stated: "This is a wonderful opportunity to share our superb Islamic collection and increase awareness of Islam's rich cultural heritage."

## **THE EXHIBITION**

**Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Victoria and Albert Museum** includes examples of the full range of the decorative arts--ceramics, textiles, carpets, metalwork, glass, woodwork, and more. The exhibition treats the Islamic art of the Middle East as the product of a culture in which not everyone was Muslim but in which Islam played a dominant role. The show is organized thematically as follows:

**The Written Word:** Considered the noblest and most distinctive form of Islamic art because of its association with the Qur'an, beautiful calligraphic writing pervades Islamic art. The exhibition features calligraphy from the 10th to the 18th century, including an illuminated Qur'an from the 17th century and a 14th-century tilework frieze of calligraphy from Central Asia.

**Courts and Courtiers:** This section displays decorative objects made for the secular realm of the ruling elite. Two royal courts that flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries are featured—the court of the Ottoman dynasty that ruled from Istanbul, and the Safavid dynasty in Iran. A large ivory casket with engraved silver mounts, Persian bowls, and a tile picture of picnic scenes in a garden demonstrate varying uses of figurative art; a large enameled tile chimneypiece is an outstanding example of decorative ceramics created

for Ottoman rulers.

**Mosques, Shrines, and Churches:** Featured next are works created for religious establishments, including the dramatic heart of the exhibition, the 20-foot-high pulpit (minbar) of Sultan Qa'itbay made for a mosque in Cairo in the 15th century. The section also includes works produced by Islamic artists for Christian churches, such as a Turkish dish with a polychrome design of the archangel Michael, reflecting the religious tolerance that has characterized Islamic culture from its beginnings in the seventh century.

**Artistic Exchange:** The final section includes works of Islamic, European, and Chinese manufacture. As the textiles and ivories demonstrate, the wealth of interaction between the Islamic Middle East and Europe was such that some works of art cannot be easily assigned to one culture. The flow of high-fired ceramics from China changed the techniques of Middle Eastern potters; other Middle Eastern traditions such as tin glaze and lustre were transmitted to Europe, giving rise, for example, to the Italian tin-glazed pottery of the 16th century known as majolica. This section includes objects that represent this exchange, such as the gilded and enameled glass goblet known as the "Luck of Edenhall," which was produced in Egypt or Syria in the 13th century but spent most of its subsequent history in Europe.

## **ISLAMIC ART AND THE V&A**

Islamic art was held in high esteem by 19th-century Europeans with an interest in art and design. This group included the creators of a new type of museum dedicated to the applied or decorative arts, of which the V&A was the first major example. Created as a result of the enormous success of the Great Exhibition of London in 1851, a "Museum of Manufactures" was established with exhibits used as a means of teaching good design. From the outset these exhibits included non-Western as well as European art and manufactures. This museum grew and evolved into the South Kensington Museum, which was renamed The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 1899, in honor of the Queen and her husband, Prince Albert.

Important historical examples of Islamic art, such as the magnificent tray of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Mansur and Sultan Qa'itbay's basin, were acquired by the museum for aesthetic reasons: they were admired for their harmony of ornament and form and their flat, nonillusionistic use of pattern. Many of the items acquired were bought from the series of international exhibitions held in London and Paris between 1862 and 1900, which included displays of Islamic art. From the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1867, for example, the museum bought the Egyptian collection of Dr. Meymar, which included the monumental 15th-century minbar of Sultan Qa'itbay. Other objects were acquired from dealers and private collectors, both in London and abroad. The collections have inspired generations of British designers, from William Morris to the designers of the present day, and have helped shape and inform British design.

The V&A's collection of Islamic art of the Middle East will have a new home opening in 2006, thanks to a substantial donation by Hartwell plc, part of the Abdul Latif Jameel Group. The new V&A gallery, to be named The Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art, will tell the story of how Islamic art developed from the great days of the Islamic caliphate in the eighth and ninth centuries AD.

## **CURATOR AND RELATED PUBLICATION**

Tim Stanley, Senior Curator for the Middle East at the Victoria and Albert Museum, is exhibition curator and the principal author of the book that accompanies the exhibition, **Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Victoria and Albert Museum**. Published by the Victoria and Albert Museum and distributed in the U.S. by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., the book will be available in the Gallery Shops, from the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) (<http://www.nga.gov/home.htm>), or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 (144 pages, 210 color plates).

National Gallery of Art programs related to the exhibition will be announced at a later date.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>).

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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