The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents: Art and Stories from Mughal India
Centennial exhibition celebrates landmark acquisition of Benkaim collection of imperial Mughal paintings

Cleveland, OH (July 29, 2016) Art and Stories from Mughal India presents the story of the Mughals—and stories for the Mughals—in 100 exquisite paintings from the 1500s to 1800s. The exhibition and accompanying Mughal painting collection catalogue celebrate the Cleveland Museum of Art’s centennial with works drawn from the 2013 landmark acquisition of the Catherine Glynn Benkaim and Ralph Benkaim Collection of Deccan and Mughal paintings, many exhibited and published for the first time. Complementing the paintings are 39 objects including costume, textiles, jewelry, arms and armor, architectural elements and decorative arts, some on loan from other prominent institutions, such as the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, the Brooklyn Museum and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University. These objects resonate with details in the paintings and bring the sumptuous material culture of the Mughal world to life. Art and Stories from Mughal India is on view in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Hall from July 31, 2016 through October 23, 2016, and is free to the public in celebration of the museum’s centennial year.

“The Cleveland Museum of Art has long boasted a particularly fine holding of Indian art, and with the acquisition of the Benkaim collection of Mughal paintings, we are now fortunate to have an extraordinary representation of one of its most celebrated artistic traditions,” said William M. Griswold, Director. “This exhibition—beautifully curated and magnificently installed—vividly evokes the richness and cosmopolitanism of one of the world’s great empires.”

The Mughal Empire existed for more than 300 years, from 1526 until the advent of British colonial rule in 1858. It encompassed territory that included vast portions of the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan. The Mughal rulers were Central Asian Muslims who assimilated many religious faiths under their administration. Famed for its distinctive architecture, including the Taj Mahal, the Mughal Empire is also renowned for its colorful and engaging paintings, many taking the form of scenes from narrative tales.

Art and Stories from Mughal India is organized into eight sections based on the Persian idea of the nama. Nama may be translated as any of a number of English words, among them: book, tale, adventure, story, account, life and memoir. Paintings were integral to the production of namas in book form for royal collections in Mughal India. Art and Stories from Mughal India sets the paintings, now long separated from their bound volumes, into their nama contexts. Four of the exhibition’s sections focus on a specific nama: a fable, a sacred biography, an epic, and a mystic romance. Many of the paintings, long celebrated for their vivid color, startling detail and alluring sense of realism, are displayed double-sided to show complete folios from albums and manuscripts, a constant reminder of their original status as part of a larger book or series.
“The paintings are products of a powerful, multiethnic dynasty of rulers who valued art and literature as essential elements of court life,” said Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, the George P. Bickford Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art. “They were made to inspire awe and delight, and this exhibition aims to do the same by making them accessible to audiences today.”

Sumptuously designed to evoke the spaces of Mughal palace interiors and verandas where paintings were kept and viewed, the exhibition opens with a 25-foot-long 16th-century floral arabesque carpet, rarely seen because of its scale. The first two galleries are devoted to Mughal paintings made for Akbar, the third Mughal emperor (r. 1556–1605), who saw to it that his copies of fables, adventures and histories were accompanied by ample numbers of paintings. On view are some of the earliest works from Akbar’s reign by celebrated artists, such as Basavana (Basawan) and Dasavanta (Daswanth), from the *Tuti-nama* (Tales of a Parrot), and the culminating scene from the *Hamza-nama* (Adventures of Hamza), 70 cm in height, one of the few surviving pages from this massive 1,400-folio project in which the Mughal style became thoroughly synthesized.

The next two galleries explore the relationship between Akbar and his oldest son, Salim, whose birth in 1569 was cause for great celebration. By 1600, Salim was ready to lead the empire and mutinously set up his own court where he brought paintings, artists and manuscripts from Akbar’s palace and commissioned new works, such as the illustrated *Mir’at al-quds* (Mirror of Holiness), a biography of Jesus written in Persian by a Spanish Jesuit priest at the Mughal court, completed in 1602. Like the *Tuti-nama* (Tales of a Parrot), the *Mir’at al-quds* manuscript is remarkable not only for its historical importance and artistic beauty, but because it survives nearly intact, though unbound, with few missing pages. Both manuscripts, crucial for the study of Mughal painting, are kept in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and most of their folios have never before been shown.

The story of the Mughals continues with works made for and collected by Emperor Jahangir—the name Prince Salim took after the death of Akbar in 1605—as well as his son Shah Jahan (r. 1627–58) and grandson Alamgir (r. 1658–1707). This period spanning the 17th century saw the production of some of the most exquisite paintings and objects ever made for the Mughals. Textiles, courtly arms, garments, jades, marble architectural elements and porcelains bring to life the painted depictions of the Mughal court’s refined splendor at the height of its wealth.

Concluding the exhibition is a large, dramatic gallery, painted black in keeping with depictions of the interiors of 18th-century Mughal palaces, with paintings framed in gold, hookah bowls, jewels, a *vina*, lush textiles and a shimmering *millefleurs* carpet. The assemblage celebrates the joy in Mughal art of the mid-1700s. The scenes predominantly take place in the world of women and the harem, where the emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–48), who was largely responsible for the reinvigoration of imperial Mughal painting, grew up, sheltered by his powerful mother from the murderous intrigues that wracked the court after the death of Alamgir in 1707.

Throughout the exhibition viewers will note the international character of Mughal art and culture. Flourishing during the Age of Expansion between the 1500s and 1700s, Mughal India was the source for goods and natural resources coveted throughout the Western world, and visitors to the exhibition will encounter the origins of familiar aspects of current daily life in the works of art on view.
The marble terrace of an imperial Mughal palace is the setting for a beautiful dream. By moonlight and candlelight, surrounded by luxurious textiles, an Egyptian lady sleeps and dreams of Joseph, known as a prophet in Islamic, Christian and Jewish traditions. Joseph, the man of her dreams, is dressed like a Mughal prince. Angels shower radiance from heaven on him. In the multicultural and multiethnic Mughal court, Indian artists created unique interpretations of scenes from the Persian romance of Joseph and Zulaykha.
Emperor Muhammad Shah, who reigned from 1719 to 1748, was known as “Rangila,” which means “the Colorful.” The innovative use of a black background sharply sets off the chartreuse green of his royal garments and the pearls of his adornments and bolster. On his left thumb he wears an archer’s ring, and a stabbing dagger is tucked into his bejeweled belt. Even his trained hunting falcon has a ruby necklace.

In this formal posthumous portrait, the master artist conveys a heightened realism that emerges effortlessly from elegant contour lines and bold use of color. The work was part of an album of paintings collected in India before 1811 by a Scottish politician who worked for the British East India Company.
In Mughal architecture, marble was used to designate a holy or royal space. Many paintings depict a marble railing demarcating the space where the emperor sits. This example has been carved with delicate floral and vegetal imagery interlaced in geometric patterns. The Mughals appreciated the elegant shadows formed by light passing through the openwork carvings.

The imagery draws both on Islamic notions of flowering plants in paradise and on the divine order underlying nature. In addition, it includes the deeply rooted pan-Indian use of flowers to denote purifying waters on railings that separate sanctified spaces from the everyday world.

Nestled in the multicolored rocks are the reunited lovers Layla and Majnun, forced by society to remain separated for years. Majnun’s name means “madman,” since the separation drove him past the brink of sanity. Exiling himself to the wilderness, he became emaciated. When Layla found him after a prophetic dream, the wild animals gathered around, drawn to the purity and depth of their love.

This story was told by an Indian author, who wrote his version of an ancient Bedouin tale that originated among nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula.

**Exhibition App**

To complement *Art and Stories from Mughal India*, the Cleveland Museum of Art has developed a free, innovative *CMA Mughal* exhibition app, in which the exhibition’s curator, Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, relates stories and describes paintings. The app includes hyperlinks to an audio glossary of names and terms, and 100 tweetable facts illustrated with a related detail image from the 100 paintings on view. *CMA Mughal*—available now for download from the iTunes Store for Apple devices running iOS9 and above—is the first in a series of exhibition apps that will be available for use after the exhibition ends.
**Exhibition Catalogue**


The paintings are discussed in a series of essays, each governed by a narrative that underscores their primarily literary and historical purposes. The contributors approach their material from distinct viewpoints and disciplines, while tying together the paintings in engaging narratives that provide fresh perspectives on the history of Mughal painting. The essays are authored by Marcus Fraser, a specialist in Islamic art; Mohsen Ashtiany, a distinguished scholar of Persian literature; Catherine Glynn, a renowned collector and art historian; Pedro Moura Carvalho, a museum curator and administrator from Portugal who specializes in the art and history of the Jesuits in Mughal India; Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, the Cleveland Museum of Art’s George P. Bickford Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art; and Ruby Lal, a social historian of Mughal India.

Following the essays is a complete catalogue of the 95 Mughal and Deccan paintings from the Catherine Glynn Benkaim and Ralph Benkaim Collection, memorializing the whole and providing a record of one of the most important groupings of such works.

**Programming**

**TOURS**

**Exhibition Tours**
August 9–October 9
Tuesdays at 11:00, Thursdays and Sundays at 2:00. Free; tour ticket required.
Meet at the atrium desk. Limit 25.

**TALKS**
Select lectures and talks are ticketed. Reserve by calling 216-421-7350 or online at clevelandart.org.

**Curator Chats**
Tuesdays, 12:00. Meet in the exhibition.
Starting August 2, join curator of Indian and Southeast Asian art Sonya Rhie Quintanilla for a discussion of works from the exhibition. Each week, explore a new theme or story in a short, informal presentation and conversation.

August 2: *Akbar the Great, the Man Who Created the Style*
August 9: *Games and Competition in Mughal Paintings*
August 16: *Healing Powers and Mughal Art*
August 23: *Gesture of Amazement: Indexing the Unbelievable*
August 30: *Wine, Women and Song: Entertainment at the Mughal Court*
September 6: *Mughals and the Europeans: Make Money and Save Souls*
September 13: *Mughal Fashion and Textiles*
September 20: *Mughal Architecture: Palaces, Pavilions, and Tombs*
September 27: *Flora, Fauna, and Food in Mughal India*, with special guest Douglas Katz, CEO and chef, Fire Spice Company
October 4: *Tales for Kings and Queens*
October 11: *Omens and Astrology*
October 18: *Popular Demand*

**Nur Jahan, the Great Mughal: The Story of an Uncrowned Empress**
Wednesday, September 14, 6:00
Free; reservations recommended. Meet in the exhibition.
Nur Jahan, “Light of the World,” was the only woman ruler in the long dynasty of India’s great Mughals. She governed India with her husband, the emperor Jahangir, from 1614 to 1627. Ruby Lal, professor of South Asian Studies at Emory University, discusses how the empress’s extraordinary strengths, the emperor’s lamentable weaknesses, and the twists and turns of 17th-century politics combined to defy a time and a culture that ought to have made the reign of Nur Jahan impossible.

**Kathak Dance in the Mughal Court**
Wednesday, September 28, 7:00
Free; reservations recommended. Meet in the exhibition.
An ancient classical Indian dance form originating from Hindu storytelling traditions, kathak became a celebrated form of entertainment in the Mughal courts. Discover kathak’s rich history and its transformation under Mughal patronage with a lecture, tour and demonstrations by Sujata Lakhe and other students from Cleveland’s own Anga Kala Kathak Academy and exhibition curator Sonya Rhie Quintanilla.

**FIRST ANNUAL DISTINGUISHED LECTURE IN INDIAN ART**
**Basavana: The Artist of Unique Excellence**
Saturday, October 15, 2:00
Gartner Auditorium
Free; reservations required. Registration opens August 1.
In the sprawling painting atelier of the Mughal emperor Akbar between 1560 and 1605, no one enjoyed more prestige and influence than the Indian artist Basavana. Akbar’s biographer Abu’l Fazl wrote of him, “In designing, coloring, portrait painting and other aspects of this art, Basavana has come to be uniquely excellent.” In this lavishly illustrated presentation, Asok Kumar Das examines the oeuvre of this great painter to identify the qualities of uniqueness and excellence that contributed to the very establishment of the imperial Mughal painting style. Das is director emeritus of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur and former deputy keeper at the Indian Museum Kolkata.

This lecture is made possible by the Dr. Ranajit K. Datta in Memory of Kiran P. and S. C. Datta Endowment Fund.

**FILM**
**Jodhaa Akbar**
Sunday, August 21, 1:00
Morley Lecture Hall
Special admission $12; CMA members, seniors 65 & over, students $9; no vouchers or passes.
Directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. With Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai. “Bollywood in rousing form” is how the *Time Out Film Guide* describes this lavish, colorful musical epic from the director of the Oscar-
nominated Lagaan. Set during the 16th century, the film tells of a Rajput princess who resents that her marriage to a Mughal emperor is merely one of political expedience.

PERFORMING ARTS

Vijay Iyer with International Contemporary Ensemble

Radhe, Radhe: Rites of Holi
Wednesday, October 19, 7:30
Gartner Auditorium
$53–$69, CMA members $48–$62
A 2013 MacArthur fellow, pianist and composer Vijay Iyer regularly tops critics’ lists and fan polls. 

Radhe, Radhe: Rites of Holi is Iyer’s collaboration with the filmmaker Prashant Bhargava: a ravishing, impressionistic nod to Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring filmed in northern India and performed by Iyer with the International Contemporary Ensemble, an adventurous new music group dedicated to reshaping the way music is created and experienced.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Second Sunday: Artful Tales of India
Sunday, August 14, 11:00–4:00
Free; no reservations required
Bring your family on the second Sunday of every month for a variety of family-friendly activities including art making, Art Stories, Art Cart, scavenger hunts and more—no two Sundays are the same! In August, explore the minute perfection of Mughal book arts while making your own tiny masterpieces, and enjoy a performance of Indian dance.

Yoga at the Museum
Saturday, August 20, 11:00
North Court Lobby
$20, CMA members $15
Offered monthly, Yoga at the Museum pairs a tour of the galleries by museum staff and a yoga class in the atrium led by instructors from the Atma Center. In August, get inspired with a visit to the exhibition and poses from the stories on view. Please bring your own mat.

Art and Fiction Book Club
Three Thursdays, August 18, 25, and September 1, 1:30–2:45
$45, CMA members $35
Meeting quarterly, the Art and Fiction Book Club explores each reading selection through lectures, gallery talks and a discussion group led by educators, curators and experts. In August, discover the epic love story of Layla and Majnun.

MIX: Mughal
Friday, September 9, 5:00–10:00
$8/$10 at the door, CMA members free
Enjoy the last days of summer! Check out the centennial exhibition Art and Stories from Mughal India to see epic poems, myths and romances painted in colorful detail. Plus, enjoy talks in the exhibition by curator Sonya Quintanilla, a pop-up restaurant featuring Indian-inspired dishes, and music, drinks and dancing outside on the museum’s south lawn. MIX is an 18-and-over event.

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Centennial Celebration

One hundred years ago the Cleveland Museum of Art opened its doors to the public. In 2016 the museum invites all audiences to celebrate its 100th anniversary, honoring the past and looking ahead to the future. Program highlights include special centennial exhibitions representing the creative genius of four continents, spanning ancient to contemporary art, as well as the presentation of extraordinary individual works of art on loan from top-tier institutions all over the world, and once-in-a-lifetime events and community programs. For more information about centennial year events, visit clevelandart.org/centennial.

About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes almost 45,000 objects and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship, performing arts and art education and recently completed an ambitious, multiphase renovation and expansion project across its campus. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the dynamic University Circle neighborhood.

The Cleveland Museum of Art is supported by a broad range of individuals, foundations and businesses in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio. The museum is generously funded by Cuyahoga County residents through Cuyahoga Arts and Culture. Additional support comes from the Ohio Arts Council, which helps fund the museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. In 2014, the museum was awarded a top four-star rating by Charity Navigator, the nation’s most-utilized independent evaluator of charities and nonprofits. For more information about the museum, its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit clevelandart.org.

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