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The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Finest Examples of Indian Court Painting on View with the Opening of *From the Land of the Taj Mahal: Paintings for India's Mughal Emperors*

April 4 Will Feature Music and Dance from Area Indian and Pakistani Communities

Kansas City, MO., March 6, 2009—Visitors to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art will have a rare opportunity to view some of the finest examples of Indian court painting when *From the Land of the Taj Mahal: Paintings for India's Mughal Emperors in the Chester Beatty Library* opens March 21, 2009. The highly detailed and sumptuous works of art were commissioned by two of India's most powerful leaders during the 17th century when much of modern India and Pakistan was ruled by a single Islamic empire. The exhibition closes June 14.

Programming scheduled includes a Saturday, April 4, afternoon of music and dance presented by members of the area's Indian and Pakistani communities. Entrance to the exhibition will be free that day.

The paintings in the exhibition are on loan from the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and previously were rarely on view and open only to acknowledged scholars in the field.

“Imagine if you had the chance to see the most rare, beautiful, illustrated manuscripts collected by



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the popes in the Vatican. That is what you have here, only from the private collections of the Mughal emperors of India,” said Brian Hogarth, Director, Educational Affairs at the Nelson-Atkins. “The paintings and calligraphies in the exhibition are extremely beautiful to look at, being highly detailed and rich in colors.”

Mughal is derived from “Mongol” because the Mughals traced their heritage back to both the great Mongol leader Genghis Khan and to Timur, or Tamburlaine the Great. The first Mughal reign began in 1526. The paintings in the exhibition are from the reign of Jahangir (1605-1627) and Shah Jahan (1627-1658), who is most famous as commissioning the construction of the Taj Mahal.

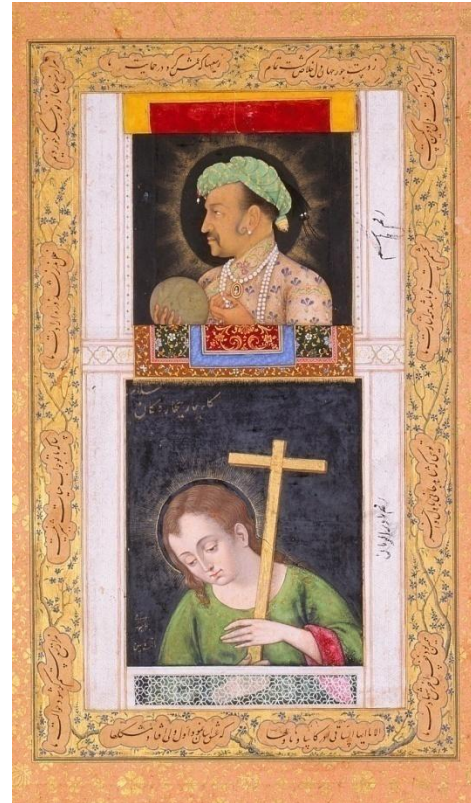
Indian painting before the Mughals consisted almost entirely of religious subject matter. But the Mughals took a keen interest in what they saw around them. Images reflect the life and times of the Mughal courts. They include portraits of the emperors, courtiers, holy men, important historical events, animals and hunting scenes. Many figures wear sumptuous textiles and are adorned with elegant jewels. The scenes provide a window into the world view of these reigns.

At the Nelson-Atkins, the exhibition is divided into thematic sections that illustrate the royal family, the arts of literature and religion, recordings of history and the natural world, life in court and depictions of loyalty and service to the emperor.

Another section deals with the acceptance of other faiths during these emperor’s reigns.

“The Mughals were members of the Sunni order of Islam, but they found themselves ruling over a diverse population of mainly Hindus and followers of other faiths. The works in this grouping demonstrate how they encouraged tolerance, their role as patrons of the Chishti Sufi order, and their fascination with Christian imagery derived from European prints. Works include images of Mary, a Jesuit priest and other Christian figures as well as depictions of Hindu and Sufi mystics. A key work includes a portrait of Jahangir with Jesus,” Hogarth said.

The unique style of the paintings incorporate a blending of ideas from Persian art, Indian painting styles and subject matter, as well as influences from western art, such as shading and perspective.



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“These are exquisite, highly detailed works of art. We’ll be providing magnifying glasses so that visitors can see the brilliant colors and find details,” Hogarth said.

Kimberly Masteller, the newly arrived Jeanne McCray Beals Curator of South and Southeast Asia Art, noted that the albums are particularly valuable because they are the closest reflection of their patron’s actual taste and interests, “just like your own photo albums reveal a great deal about you and your interests. The albums are small, intimate and intended for private viewing by only a handful of people. It is humbling to think about the special company you are in when you stand before these precious little paintings.”

Programming associated with the exhibition includes:

March 26, Thursday, Opening Lecture. 7–8 p.m., Atkins Auditorium

The Emperor’s Pictures: Paintings for the Grand Mogul: Milo Beach, Director, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, retired, will relate the paintings to the times in which they were produced.

April 4, Saturday, *Celebrate Mughal India with Music, Song and Dance*

Kansas City’s Indian and Pakistani communities will provide demonstrations and performances of South Asian music and dance made possible through partnerships between the India Association of Kansas City, the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center, the American Pakistani community and the Museum. **Admission to the exhibition is free all day.**

11 a.m.–2 p.m., Rozzelle Court Restaurant: Indian-themed fare available.

1–1:20 p.m., Bloch Lobby: Raja Govindarajan plays the harmonium and sings, accompanied by Amitabh Chowdhury on the *tabla*.

1:30–2:45 p.m., Atkins Auditorium: Kansas City’s Indian and Pakistani communities present musical performances featuring Mughal-era court dances and traditional song.

2:45–3:45 p.m., Bloch Lobby: Complimentary traditional Indian finger food & masala chai samples. Music and cultural dances performed including folk, Bollywood & Bhangra dance.

April 30, Thursday, Lecture and Demonstration. 6:30 p.m., Atkins Auditorium and Ford Learning Center

Taj Mahal: Mughal Art and its Living Legacy: Curator Kimberly Masteller discusses the roots and influences of Mughal architecture and painting. Noted painter Sehr Jalal will provide a live demonstration of contemporary Indian miniature painting with a reception in the Ford Learning Center.

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May 17, Sunday. Film. 1–5 p.m., Atkins Auditorium

Jodhaa Akbar. A classic Bollywood epic about the Mughals, in Hindi/Urdu with English subtitles.

May 31, Sunday. Gallery Walk, 1:30 p.m.

Two Views: Paintings for India's Mughal Emperors: Curator Kimberly Masteller and Michael Bednar, Assistant Professor of History, the University of Missouri, will share their expertise. Meet at the exhibition entrance. Exhibition ticket required.

Tickets to all events, except those of April 4, are required, but are free and can be obtained through nelson-atkins.org or by calling 816.751.1ART (1278).

This exhibition is organized and circulated by Art Services International, Alexandria, Virginia. The original exhibition title and catalog title is *Muraqqa': Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin*. Support for the national tour and catalogue has been provided by The Annenberg Foundation, Culture Ireland, The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, and an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

In Kansas City, this exhibition is supported in part by the Francis Family Foundation and the Campbell-Calvin Fund and the Elizabeth C. Bonner Charitable Trust for exhibitions. Midwest Airlines is the official airline sponsor.

His Excellency Michael Collins, Ambassador of Ireland to the United States of America, is Honorary Patron of the exhibition.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of America's finest encyclopedic art museums. The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access and insight into its renowned collection of more than 33,500 art objects and is best known for its Asian art, European and American paintings and modern sculpture. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the Museum is a key educational resource for the region and a national model for arts education.

The institution-wide transformation of the Nelson-Atkins, including the 165,000-square-foot Bloch Building and renovation of the original 1933 Nelson-Atkins Building, continues with renovations to the American, American Indian and Ancient galleries.

The Nelson-Atkins is located at 45th and Oak Streets, Kansas City, MO. Hours are Wednesday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; Thursday/Friday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, Noon–5 p.m.

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Admission to the Museum is free to everyone. For Museum information, phone 816.751.1ART (1278) or visit nelson-atkins.org.

For media interested in receiving further information, please contact:

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First image: *Khan Dawran in a White and Gold Jama and Turban, Leaning on a Staff*, ca. 1650, by Hashim.

Second image: *Jahangir and Jesus*. *Jahangir* by Hashim c. 1615-1620. *Jesus* by Abu'l-Hasan, c. 1610-1620.

Note: additional images available upon request.

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