

News Release

Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection

Sponsored by Wartski

Part of the V&A India Festival

21 November 2015 – 28 March 2016

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The earliest known example of Mughal jade; spectacularly large spinels inscribed with the names of emperors from the Mughal treasuries; a jewelled gold tiger's head finial from the throne of the famed Tipu Sultan of Mysore and a dazzling brooch inspired by Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* made in Paris in 1910 are among the treasures on public display for the first time in the UK, as part of the V&A's new exhibition *Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection*.

The exhibition presents around 100 spectacular objects belonging to or inspired by the jewellery traditions of the Indian subcontinent, drawn from a single private collection, alongside three important loans from the Royal Collection generously lent by Her Majesty The Queen. The exhibition showcases magnificent precious stones evoking the royal treasuries of India, particularly that of the Mughal emperors in the 17th century, as well as exquisite objects used in court ceremonies. It reveals the influence of India on jewellery made by leading European houses in the early 20th century and displays contemporary pieces with an Indian theme made by modern masters.

Highlights include magnificent unmounted precious stones including a Golconda diamond given in 1767 to Queen Charlotte by the Nawab of Arcot in South India, and Mughal jades, notably a jade-hilted dagger that belonged to the 17th-century emperor Shah Jahan who built the Taj Mahal. Other precious objects include pieces from the collections of the Nizams of Hyderabad; renowned jewels from the early 20th century by Cartier, including those made especially for the Paris 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, the exhibition that gave Art Deco its name; as well as traditional Indian jewels refashioned in the 1930s into European avant-garde styles by the elegant Europhile, Yeshwant Rao Holkar II, Maharaja of Indore, who was a close friend of the surrealist photographer Man Ray. There are also contemporary pieces made by JAR of Paris and Bhagat of Mumbai which combine Mughal inspiration and Art Deco influences.

The objects are drawn from the Al Thani collection which is notable for the quality and size of its precious stones, both unmounted and set in jewellery. These reflect India's position over many centuries as an international market for precious stones, including diamonds from its famous Golconda mines, emeralds from South America, rubies from Burma, spinels from central Asia and sapphires from Sri Lanka. The Mughal emperors and their successors used objects made of luxury materials in their courts, and the exhibition highlights the sophisticated techniques used by goldsmiths in the Indian subcontinent to make them.

The three major loans from the Royal Collection, lent by Her Majesty The Queen, are a jewelled bird from the gold canopy of Tipu Sultan's throne, the 'Timur Ruby' and the Nabha spinel.

Martin Roth, Director of the V&A said: *"This is a fascinating insight into a great private collection that includes extraordinary precious stones, both unmounted and set into jewels. The exquisite quality and craftsmanship of many fine pieces from and inspired by India complement the V&A's own South Asian and jewellery collections. The exhibition is a spectacular element of the Museum-wide India Festival this autumn."*

Sheikh Hamad Bin Abdullah Al Thani said: *"The jewelled arts of India have fascinated me from an early age and I have been fortunate to be able to assemble a meaningful collection that spans from the Mughal period to the present day."*

Nicholas Snowman, Chairman of Wartski said: *"We are delighted to be sponsoring this magnificent exhibition at the V&A in this, the 150th year of the foundation of our company. Wartski and the V&A have a long history of shared scholarship, loans and gifts. This happy association was cemented at the 'Fabergé' exhibition curated by my father, the firm's chairman, Kenneth Snowman in 1977. Family connections with the V&A continued in 1988 when my wife, Margo Rouard-Snowman, co-curated 'Avant Première' and in 2002, when Geoffrey Munn, our Managing Director, presented the exhibition 'Tiaras'."*

The exhibition is arranged in sections exploring different elements of evolving styles and techniques. *The Treasury* evokes the royal storehouses of the Mughal emperors in the late 16th- and early 17th-century, which held precious stones of spectacular size. *The Court* showcases objects owned by famous rulers such as Shah Jahan, whose architectural commissions in the 17th century introduced a new decorative style which still influences Indian craftsmen to the present day. It also includes objects that would have been used in court ceremonies.

A section devoted to *Kundan and Enamel* explores the quality and appeal of the vivid colours of two fundamental Indian jewellery techniques. Kundan, meaning 'pure gold', is the uniquely Indian style of setting precious stones in gold ornaments. From Mughal times, enamelling was used, usually hidden from view on the back of ornaments set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and other precious stones. Newly commissioned films show both techniques which are still characteristic of traditional Indian jewellery today.

The Age of Transition demonstrates the gradual influence of the West on Indian jewellery in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, particularly in Hyderabad under the Nizams. Open settings allowed light to shine through cut diamonds and emeralds, and European conventions appeared in traditional jewellery, such as a diamond-set platinum hair ornament designed to cover the long hair plait worn by many Indian women.

Modernity introduces the transforming influence of India on jewellery design in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. The house of Cartier, and individuals such as the Parisian designer Paul Iribe,

reinterpreted traditional Indian forms in Art Deco style, and set Indian-cut emeralds next to sapphires in a startling new colour combination. The final section *Contemporary Masters* highlights the continuing influence of traditional Indian jewellery reinterpreted in completely modern idioms. The work of Paris-based JAR echoes Mughal architectural features, while Bhagat of Mumbai selects old-cut diamonds or sapphires as the centrepiece of new designs which often show the influence of Art Deco inspired by India.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- Admission £10 (concessions available). V&A Members go free. Advance booking is advised – this can be done in person at the V&A; online at vam.ac.uk/bejewelledtreasures; or by calling 0800 912 6961 (booking fee applies)
- The exhibition is curated by Susan Stronge, Senior Curator, Asia Department, V&A
- The exhibition is drawn from the Al Thani Collection – the private collection formed by Sheikh Hamad Bin Abdullah Al Thani, with the exception of three items from the Royal Collection, loaned by Her Majesty The Queen
- The Royal Collection, one of the world's greatest art collections, is held in trust by The Queen for her successors and the nation. The Collection is administered by the Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity. The aims of the Trust are the care and conservation of the Royal Collection and the promotion of public access and enjoyment through exhibitions, publications, loans and educational activities www.royalcollection.com
- The Parasol Foundation Trust is currently supporting a project to digitise the V&A's Indian hardstones collection. The collection, containing approximately 500 hardstones, is one of the most extensive in the world
- The exhibition is part of V&A India Festival, a series of exhibitions, activities and events in Autumn 2015 to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Nehru Gallery of Indian Art at the V&A
- The accompanying hardback publication *Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection* by Susan Stronge (V&A, £25) is available now

Corporate support for the V&A is more vital than ever. Please help us by acknowledging the exhibition sponsors Wartski.

About Wartski

Founded 150 years ago in North Wales, Wartski is celebrating its anniversary by sponsoring this major exhibition of jewellery. Wartski is a family business specialising in goldsmiths' work, antique jewellery, Russian works of art and especially that of Carl Fabergé. Over the years the firm has sold many outstanding masterpieces including thirteen of Fabergé's Imperial Easter Eggs. Its customers have included six generations of the British Royal family as well as celebrated artists, musicians, actors and museum curators throughout the world. From the early 1950's, the firm's late chairman Kenneth Snowman published a number of scholarly books, elevating the business to a new level of excellence at which expertise and research were not by-products of the trade, but primary objectives in their own right. *Wartski – The First 150 Years* by Geoffrey Munn,

published by ACC, is now available in the V&A shop, the Antique Collectors' Club website and other reputable booksellers. For press information, please contact Silke Lohmann on +44 (0) 7932 618754 or silke@exclamationpr.co.uk
www.wartski.com

Exhibition Publication and V&A Shop

To accompany the exhibition, the V&A is publishing *Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection* by Susan Stronge (£25, hardback). A range of products inspired by the exhibition will be available from the V&A Shop in store and online at www.vandashop.com. For PRESS information, contact Emily Crutcher on 020 7942 2985 or e.crutcher@vam.ac.uk

For further PRESS information about the exhibition, please contact Laura Mitchell or Nina Sandhaus in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2503 / 2502 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk / n.sandhaus@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>

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