



Kalpataru: The Wishing Tree at the V&A

10 November 2015 – 6 January 2016

With thanks to Peter Louis and Chandru Ramchandani

#vamIndiaFestival

The V&A today unveils a festive light installation in the Grand Entrance of the Museum, created by Delhi-based designers Sarthak and Sahil as part of the V&A India Festival. Named after a wish-fulfilling divine tree in Hindu mythology, the installation celebrates the concepts and customs associated with the ancient Hindu festival of Diwali, or ‘the festival of lights’.

Kalpataru: The Wishing Tree is made up of an ensemble of free-standing structures in the form of classic Indian motifs such as the lotus petal and the ‘ambi’ or paisley. The metal frames have been handcrafted from brass sheets by a team of expert silversmiths and enhanced with a hand beaten texture popularly seen in traditional utensils used in Indian kitchens. The tallest central motif of the installation reaches three-and-a-half metres high. Each element is fitted with a vibrant mural motif, hand-painted by artists from the southern state of Kerala in their distinctive mural-painting style. The entire structure is illuminated from below to reveal the intricate patterns of symbolic fruits and leaves.

The concepts of nature and culture represented by the mythical ‘tree of life’ are a reflection on some of the customs observed during traditional Diwali celebrations. The tradition of decorating and worshipping the ‘Tulsi’, or holy basil, is a common practice in some Indian homes during the five days of Diwali, which the designers see as a modern-day interpretation of the Kalpataru. They intend the light installation to not only celebrate illumination in its literal sense but also as a metaphor for the celebration of hope, prosperity and ecology.

Sarthak and Sahil formed their Delhi-based design studio in 2009 and since then have worked across many areas of design, from furniture and lifestyle products, to graphics, lighting, interiors and installations. They said: *“To us, the V&A is a treasure trove of meaningful objects that narrate varied human customs and traditions over time. For this festive installation we wanted to design something that encapsulates both diverse cultural symbolism and contemporary customs, embodying the metaphorical tree with the spirit of both Diwali and Christmas celebrations which everyone can enjoy”*.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

The India Festival marks the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Museum's Nehru Gallery, which displays some of the most important objects from the V&A's South Asian art collection produced between the 16th and 19th centuries. The V&A has one of the greatest collections of South Asian art in the world, and is particularly renowned for its Mughal court arts, textiles, paintings and sculpture. It is also 25 years since the launch of the Nehru Trust for the Indian Collections (NTICVA), which encourages the study, preservation and display of India's art and cultural heritage.

For further PRESS information please contact Nina Sandhaus in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2502 or email n.sandhaus@vam.ac.uk

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