

For Immediate Release

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WHEN GOLD BLOSSOMS: INDIAN JEWELRY FROM THE SUSAN L. BENINGSON COLLECTION
TOURING FOUR AMERICAN CITIES



New York, NY (January 22, 2008) – The American Federation of Arts (AFA) and the Asia Society and Museum, New York, are pleased to announce the four-venue tour of *When Gold Blossoms: Indian Jewelry from the Susan L. Beningson Collection*. The exhibition showcases more than 150 spectacular pieces of Indian jewelry selected from the Susan L. Beningson Collection by Guest Curator Molly Emma Aitken, an independent scholar and curator.

Primarily from South India and dating mainly from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, the selection includes intricate rings, anklets, earrings, necklaces, hair pendants, ivory combs, and jeweled crowns—a dazzling array of exquisite objects of adornment that reveal complex signals of communication and beliefs.

First presented at the Asia Society, *When Gold Blossoms* is currently on view at the Dallas Museum of Art. The exhibition will subsequently be traveling to the Phoenix Art Museum, the Figge Art Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg (see tour schedule for details).



AFA Director Julia Brown remarked, “We are delighted to work with the Asia Society on the presentation of this exhibition of beautiful works of Indian jewelry and are privileged to be able to bring these stunning pieces from Susan Beningson’s collection to a wider national audience.”

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Gold Chettiar “tali”
Tamil Nadu; 19th century
74 cm (length)
Susan L. Beningson Collection 057.1 14

Gold pendant for a deity, set with rubies and emeralds, some of them engraved, and diamonds
South India; 18th–early 19th century
10.5 x 11.75 cm
Susan L. Beningson Collection 057.24



Traditionally, jewelry in India has been worn and valued for both its ornamental and symbolic qualities. Replete with meaning, jewelry could reveal the wearer's regional origins, beliefs, marital status, wealth, and social position. *When Gold Blossoms* not only celebrates the beauty and awe-inspiring craftsmanship of Indian jewelry but also examines how it was worn to communicate identity in social and religious contexts.

The title of the exhibition takes its name from the many jewelry pieces that reproduce the form of berries, seeds, buds, or flowers and also alludes to the preference for gold in South Indian jewelry, as opposed to the North Indian preference for precious and semiprecious stones. From ear studs in the shape of lotuses to armbands formed in the shape of weaving leaves and petals, organic forms from nature were considered particularly auspicious and were believed to promote fertility and also express a woman's procreative powers. Chains, linked beads, and scrolling ornaments suggest growth through repetition and, by extension, life and prosperity.



The significance of the materials chosen for these pieces extends beyond their beauty: gold was thought to have the power to purify those it touched, and gems the power to focus planetary influences, benefiting those who wore them. While the majority of the pieces included in the exhibition were intended to be worn in daily life, others were dedicated to deities and meant to convey the devotion of their worshippers. In Indian tradition, deities most often appear extensively bejeweled; religious practices have for millennia included the gift of gold and jewels to the gods.



Hindu jewelry abounds with images of gods, goddesses, and mythical beings and is an important private means by which devotees keep their deities close to the heart. Adornment is also part of the act of worship, performed along with feeding, bathing, and entertaining a deity. Priests clothe, crown, and adorn icons according to the time of day and season, and jewelry is intrinsic to a deity, an expression of greatness.

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Ivory and gold comb with ruby knob
Karnataka; late 18th century
10.5 x 7 cm
Susan L. Beningson Collection
057.155

Gold bracelet with enamel work, set with rubies diamonds, and pearls
South India; late 18th century
7 cm diameter
Susan L. Beningson Collection
057.129

Pair of gold ear covers (karnapatras), set with rubies and emeralds
Orissa; late 17th or early 18th century
7.4 x 5.4 cm
Susan L. Beningson Collection
057.30

In her essay published in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Dr. Aitken explains, “Described in early poetry and medieval histories, nineteenth-century diaries, and contemporary websites, Indian experiences of jewelry go far beyond the search for beauty and the desire to display—or invest—wealth. Lived in, Indian jewelry is far more than it appears.”



Tour Schedule:

Dallas Museum of Art Dallas, Texas	November 18, 2007–January 27, 2008
Phoenix Art Museum Phoenix, Arizona	February 16–May 11, 2008
Figge Art Museum Davenport, Iowa	May 31–August 24, 2008
Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg, Florida	September 13–December 28, 2008
Asia Society, Hong Kong (Tentative)	February 12–May 10, 2009

The exhibition is organized by the Asia Society and Museum, New York. The national tour of the exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and made possible, in part, by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, with additional support from the Philip and Janice Levin Foundation Fund for Collection-Based Exhibitions at the American Federation of Arts.

Publication:

A 142-page, fully illustrated catalogue published by the Asia Society and Philip Wilson Publishers accompanies the exhibition and includes an essay by Guest Curator Molly Emma Aitken.

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Gold cobra-head braid ornament (nagar) set with rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and pearls
South India; 18th century
5 x 5 cm
Susan L. Beningson Collection 057.47

American Federation of Arts:

The AFA is a nonprofit institution that organizes art exhibitions for presentation in museums around the world, publishes exhibition catalogues, and develops education programs. For more information on the AFA, please visit www.afaweb.org.

The Asia Society and Museum, New York:

The Asia Society is the leading global organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of Asia and the United States. They seek to enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of policy, business, education, arts, and culture.

Press Info:

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