

Press Release for Immediate Release

Precious and Rare: Islamic Metalwork from The Courtauld
September 2019 to January 2021



Bag, Mosul, Northern Iraq, 1300-1330, Brass, inlaid with gold and silver, 15.2 x 22 x 13.5 cm

- The Courtauld Gallery to embark on a tour of its exceptional Islamic metalwork around four UK museums and galleries
- The ten highlights from The Courtauld Gallery's collection, ranging in date from the 13th to the 16th centuries, will offer museums around the country the opportunity to study and share these beautiful examples of this intricate craft with local audiences
- Museums and galleries selected by panel of experts are the Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro; Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford; the Holburne Museum, Bath and the History of Science Museum, Oxford
- This tour is supported by Art Fund and in partnership with the Specialist Subject Network for Islamic Art and Material Culture
- The collection will tour while The Courtauld Gallery is temporarily closed during a major transformational project known as Courtauld Connects, which will improve accessibility to the gallery and its collection in the future

The Courtauld Gallery is pleased to announce a touring exhibition of ten remarkable pieces of Islamic metalwork dating from the 13th to the 16th centuries. The objects include some of the finest examples of this intricate craft from modern-day Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt and Turkey, and will travel to four venues in the UK from September 2019 to January 2021. The Courtauld Gallery's temporary closure during a major restoration project known as Courtauld Connects has created the opportunity for the gallery to share these stunning and precious pieces from its collection with museums around the country. The tour complements major loans that the gallery makes through its Regional Partnership Programme.

The Courtauld Gallery's small but renowned collection of Islamic metalwork was formed by one of the great Victorian art collectors, Thomas Gambier Parry (1816- 1888), to complement his acquisitions of precious medieval and early Renaissance paintings and decorative arts, with which they are normally displayed. Many of the best pieces in the collection have been on permanent display in The Courtauld Gallery since their bequest in 1966, and only a few pieces have ever been on loan before. The

metalwork has been cleaned and conserved for the first time since the bequest was made, over fifty years ago. The most spectacular piece in the collection is the Courtauld Bag, made in Mosul, present-day northern Iraq, for a noble lady of the Persian-Mongol court, around 1300 - 1330. It is recognised as one of the finest pieces of Islamic inlaid metalwork in existence, and is the only surviving object of its kind.

The works start their tour at the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro in autumn 2019, travelling to Cartwright Hall Art Gallery in Bradford in early 2020. In the summer of 2020, they will be displayed as part of a small, stand-alone exhibition at the Holburne Museum in Bath. The tour will end at the History of Science Museum in Oxford, where the objects will be part of a loan exhibition showing the shared decorative language used on scientific instruments made in the Middle East during the same period.

This important and little-known area of The Courtauld Gallery's collection offers an opportunity for visitors around the country to learn more about a fascinating area of the arts of Islam. Dr. Sussan Babaie, Iranian-American art historian at The Courtauld Institute of Art, best known for her extensive research on Persian and Islamic art and architecture of the early modern period will be giving a talk at each of the partner venues.

Led by Dr. Alexandra Gerstein, The Courtauld Gallery's curator of sculpture and decorative arts, the touring project will allow museum partners the opportunity to both study and showcase the stories behind these rare works. Dr. Alexandra Gerstein: "We are thrilled to partner with such a range of notable organisations and delighted to provide an opportunity for communities across the country to experience and enjoy some of the most treasured art works from The Courtauld Gallery." An additional selection of Islamic metalwork from The Courtauld is on display at The National Gallery, along with other decorative arts and paintings.

Tour Dates:

Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro

27 September 2019 - 12 January 2019

Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford

18 January - 10 May 2020

The Holburne Museum, Bath

20 May – 6 September 2020

The History of Science Museum, Oxford

11 September 2020 – 3 January 2021

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Notes to Editors

The project is led by The Courtauld Gallery's Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, Alexandra Gerstein, alongside Amy Graves, Assistant Registrar. Additionally, Janet O'Brien, a PhD Candidate at The Courtauld Institute of Art, has drafted research reports on the objects on loan in support of the tour.

The project's tour venues were selected by Alexandra Gerstein, Rebecca Bridgman, Curator of Islamic and South Asian Arts at Birmingham Museums Trust, and Mariam Rosser-Owen, Curator of the Middle Eastern Section, Asian Department, Victoria & Albert Museum.

The Courtauld Gallery's Tour of Islamic Metalwork is organised in collaboration with the Subject Specialist Network (SSN) in Islamic Art and Material Culture at Birmingham Museums Trust and is supported by Art Fund.

Other masterpieces from The Courtauld can be seen at The National Gallery, London, where they are displayed alongside the permanent collection, until April 2020. In addition, The *Masterpieces of Impressionism: The Courtauld Collection*, a major touring exhibition of 60 works will travel to Japan as part of The British Council's UK in Japan 2019-20 season. The exhibition *The Courtauld Collection: A Vision For Impressionism* at Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, which ran from 20 February to 17 June 2019, attracted over 480,000 visitors.

About Courtauld Connects

Courtauld Connects is the ambitious transformation project that will make The Courtauld's world-class artworks, research and teaching accessible to more people – both in the UK and internationally. For the first time, the project will physically connect the Gallery and the Institute, providing students and academic staff with unprecedented access to collections and exhibitions, whilst also giving the public greater insight into outstanding teaching and research throughout the time of the Gallery's temporary closure.

Find out more about Courtauld Connects at <https://connects.courtauld.ac.uk/>

In partnership with Specialist Network for Islamic Art and Material Culture

The SSN for Islamic Art and Material Culture (hereafter SSN IAMC), hosted by Birmingham Museums Trust, is a national organisation for museum professionals. It shares ideas, knowledge and best practice in historic museum collections from regions where Islam was, or is the dominant religion, and in art and artefacts from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries influenced by or associated with those regions. Its mission is to build confidence amongst museum staff across the country through specialist support packages and programmes of professional skills development in collections and engagement. The organisation's vision is to help museum staff to unlock the potential of collections, providing a mechanism through which audiences that are reflective of the diversity of contemporary England can be engaged and grown.

<http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/iamcssn/index.php/en/>

Supported by Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. It also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, and

makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 151,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant-giving, Art Fund's support for museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by Tate St Ives in 2018) and a range of digital platforms. Find out more about Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org

About Birmingham Museums Trust

Birmingham Museums Trust is an independent charity that manages the city's museum collection and venues on behalf of Birmingham City Council. It uses the collection of around 1,000,000 objects to provide a wide range of arts, cultural and historical experiences, events and activities that deliver accessible learning, creativity and enjoyment for citizens and visitors to the city.

The collection is one of the three great civic collections of the UK, reflecting the city's historic and continuing position as a major international centre for manufacturing, commerce, education and culture. Most areas of the collection are designated as being of national importance, including the finest public collection of Pre-Raphaelite art in the world.

Attracting over one million visits a year, the Trust's venues include Aston Hall, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Blakesley Hall, Museum Collection Centre, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Sarehole Mill, Soho House, Thinktank and Weoley Castle. birminghammuseums.org.uk

With thanks to our partners:



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