

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chazen Presents an Exhibition of Indian Silver Made for the British Empire

Madison, Wisconsin—The Chazen Museum of Art presents *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj*, a selection of expertly decorated silverware produced by craftsmen from different regions of India during the Raj (British colonial rule between 1858 and 1947). The work, never before exhibited, is on view July 25 through October 4, 2009. Admission is free.

Delight in Design includes more than 150 pieces of silverware that reflect a remarkable array of tastes. Indian silversmiths created the work for European customers and catered to colonial tastes and demand. The forms, such as tea services, bowls, claret jugs, goblets, and beer mugs, were not historically used in Indian culture. Yet the design—a word used at the time to indicate pattern, figuration, and all manner of embellishment—displayed an innate Indian fondness for decoration. The ornate surfaces displayed “native” skills, motifs, and design.

The exhibition is organized to highlight the distinctive regional styles that emerged across India during British rule. Kutch silversmiths often created heavily embossed work that incorporated animal forms—a twisted snake for a handle, an elephant head as a spout. Madras artisans decorated their work with images of gods, or Swamis, carried in procession accompanied by music and dance; this ware is called Swami silver (“god silver”). Calcutta pieces are embellished with rural scenes, such as men and women carrying water, husking grain, or plowing fields against a backdrop of palm trees and village huts.

The finest examples of Raj silver appear to have been created between 1860 and 1920. Much of it was ordered by the British stationed in India from the catalogs of local firms like P. Orr & Sons, in Madras, or from workshop drawings like those from Oomersee Mawjee and Sons, in Kutch (some of these drawings are included in the exhibition). Inscriptions engraved on silverware indicate that such objects were gifts for christenings and weddings, trophies for winners of polo and other sporting events, and mementos presented upon retirement from service. Even larger quantities of silver were imported into Britain and Europe.

A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue will be available for purchase in the Museum Shop.

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Exhibition-Related Programming

Lecture and Reception, Friday, September 11

- 5:30 p.m. “Whose Taste? Indian Silver for the Raj,” lecture by Vidya Dehejia, exhibition curator and the Barbara Stoler Miller Professor of Indian and South Asian Art, Columbia University. *Dehejia will discuss the remarkable amalgam of taste seen in the richly ornamented silverware made during the British Raj, when Indian craftsmen satisfied demand for European form but embellished the pieces with “native” patterns.*
- 6:30–8 p.m. Reception with music by carnatic classical saxophonist Sumanth Swaminathan and Indian classical vocalist Vanitha Suresh. Refreshments and a cash bar. Tea provided by Dobrá Tea.

Artist demonstrations: Metalsmithing techniques

- Saturdays, September 12, 19, 26, and October 3, 1–3 pm
- Sundays, September 13, 20, 27, and October 4, 2:30–4:30 pm

UW Cinematheque films, 7:30 pm, 4070 Vilas Hall. www.cinema.wisc.edu

- Saturday, September 12: *Shatranj Ke Khiladi (The Chess Players)*, 1977, directed by Satyajit Ray, 113 min., in Urdu with English subtitles. *In 1856, British East India Company officials move to annex the wealthy kingdom of Awadh. Ignoring warnings of impending danger, the ruler and local landlords indulge their obsession with chess. The game becomes a political metaphor as the British maneuver to capture Awadh’s king.*
- Friday, September 18: *Lagaan*, 2001, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, 224 min., in Hindi with English subtitles. *The people of a small village in colonial India (1893) hope that they will be excused from paying lagaan, the crippling land tax imposed by the British. Their fate is tied to winning a match of cricket, a game they don’t know.*

Works from the collection of Paul F. Walter form the basis of *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj*. The exhibition and tour are organized by the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University. Generous local support for this exhibition has been provided by the Chazen Museum of Art Council, Madison Arts Commission with additional funds from the Wisconsin Arts Board, Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts, Brittingham Fund, and Hilldale Fund.

Digital images of exhibitions can be found at http://www.chazen.wisc.edu/pr_pictures.asp

Contact:

Susan Day, Editor, (608) 263-2068, sday@chazen.wisc.edu

Mary Carr Lee, Asst. Dir. for External Affairs, (608) 263-2495, mcarrlee@chazen.wisc.edu

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The Chazen Museum of Art is open Tuesdays–Fridays 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays 11 a.m.–5 p.m. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. Museum Shop summer hours are 11–4 Tues.–Sun. The museum is located at 800 University Avenue on the campus of the UW–Madison and is accessible to wheelchairs from the north entrance (best reached from Park Street). Parking is available at the city of Madison’s Lake Street and Frances Street ramps. Evening and weekend parking is also available under Grainger Hall with entrance on Brooks Street between University Avenue and Johnson streets. The Chazen will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, (608) 263-4421 (voice). Information is also available by visiting our Web site at www.chazen.wisc.edu.