

Indianapolis Museum of Art to host *Power and Glory: Court Arts of China's Ming Dynasty*

A rare collaboration between three of China's most prominent museums brings the first exhibition of Ming dynasty court arts to the United States.

Indianapolis, October 23, 2008—The Indianapolis Museum of Art will host *Power and Glory: Court Arts of China's Ming Dynasty*, the first exhibition in the United States to focus on the full range of art from China's Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the exhibition marks the first collaboration with three of China's most prestigious institutions—The Palace Museum (Forbidden City) in Beijing, the Nanjing Municipal Museum and the Shanghai Museum. Precious Ming artworks from these museums will be featured along with some of the finest items owned by the Asian Art Museum. *Power and Glory* opens at the IMA on October 26, 2008 and closes January 11, 2009.

For centuries, the Ming dynasty has been associated with the blue and white ceramics that became famous throughout the Middle East and Europe, and Ming porcelain vases have been regarded as the epitome of priceless beauty. However, the Ming dynasty excelled in many other materials including amber, rhinoceros horns, jade and textiles. This groundbreaking exhibition explores the grandeur and opulence of one of the most important dynasties in Chinese history, renowned for its refined aesthetic and standards of perfection. More than 240 objects—porcelain, paintings, textiles, lacquer, jade, precious metals and other rare materials—are fashioned into a wide variety of objects from architectural elements to jeweled hair ornaments. Many are on view for the first time outside of China.

“In one year, the IMA has hosted traveling exhibitions featuring some of the finest examples of creativity from the most powerful and notable empires of all time—Rome, Egypt and now China,” said Maxwell L. Anderson, the Melvin & Bren Simon Director and CEO of the IMA. “The objects in *Power and Glory* tell the story of a fascinating dynasty from China's past and how it contributed to the China we know today. It's the perfect complement to the IMA's significant holdings of Asian art.”

In addition to the exhibition, the IMA will have many Ming dynasty objects from its own collection on view so that visitors can compare treasures from the IMA with objects from China. For example, the IMA's painting called *White Tribute Horse* is likely by Hu Cong, the artist who painted *Two Horses under a willow and plum tree* from The Palace Museum, which is on view in the exhibition.

The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

Ming—which means “bright” in Chinese—was an appropriate name for a dynasty whose 276-year reign was marked by stability, economic strength and a dramatic flourishing of the arts. When the third Ming emperor (the Yongle emperor, reigned 1403-24) transferred the capital from Nanjing to Beijing, the Forbidden City in Beijing became an international landmark. By the end of the dynasty, Beijing supported a population of more than one million people. The Forbidden City along with the outlying region that supported it made Beijing “a service and supply center that was undoubtedly the largest of its kind in the world at that time,” according to the late Chinese historian Ray Huang.

As China's last native-ruled dynasty, the Ming dynasty is revered as a pinnacle of cultural achievement. Imperially supervised workshops and kilns followed strict guidelines for the creation of goods for use at court. Under the rigorous guidelines set forth by the court-based Bureau of Design, Ming porcelains and other materials such as lacquer, metalwork and textiles became world-renowned for their quality.

Exhibition Overview

Power and Glory will explore many themes related to different aspects of Ming court life and some of the people who made the dynasty so brilliant. The economic well-being of the dynasty was great, and a reliable and vast transportation infrastructure allowed objects to be shipped with ease. Therefore, members of the Ming dynasty could indulge themselves by acquiring fine objects to flaunt their wealth. The items in the exhibition can be viewed not only as art, but also as objects that illustrate the richness, power and glory of the culture, as well as such themes as government and hierarchies; entertainment and hobbies; daily life; architecture and court environments; technology and innovation; religion and beliefs; and education and tradition. Highlights include:

- A crown ornament recently excavated from the tomb of Lady Chen (1589-1647) consists of two gold dragons, which emerge from gold clouds inlaid with rubies, that surround a heart-shaped amber. The shape of the amber suggests royalty and its red color is the symbolic color of the Ming dynasty. This amber piece has never before been outside of China.
- A long hand scroll painting by the court artist Du Jin (1465-1509) depicts court ladies in palaces and gardens engaged in all sorts of activities. This and the other paintings by Du Jin from the Shanghai Museum are complemented in the IMA's Asian gallery by a work from the group of Chinese paintings acquired by the IMA in 2004—an impressive hanging scroll by Du Jin of a female immortal that has never been exhibited in Indianapolis.
- A crimson-colored amber cup in the shape of a lotus leaf has a handle in the form of a swimming fisherman who pulls the cup in one hand and grasps a fish in the other. More than five inches in length, this is the largest piece of amber discovered in a Ming tomb, and considering that during the early 1600s amber was five times more expensive than gold, it also reflects the wealth that many courtiers obtained.
- A mallet and floorboard section on view in the exhibition was excavated from the shipyards outside of Nanjing that built the incredible fleet for the famous voyages of Zheng He (1371-1433). Zheng's fleet was the largest in the world, unequaled for 500 years, and had nine-masted ships that were more than 450 feet in length and could carry 1,000 men.
- Porcelains and silk textiles, prized at their time by people all over the world, illustrate the high quality that was achieved with mass-production techniques developed during the Ming dynasty.
- A gun with an inscription that notes it was made in 1377 in a foundry, in the hometown of the first Ming emperor, is on view in the exhibition. The gun was

likely used for assaults and indicates the high level of technology realized in China during the early Ming dynasty, unmatched anywhere else in the world.

Exhibition Organization

This exhibition was organized by the Asian Art Museum in collaboration with the Palace Museum, the Nanjing Municipal Museum and the Shanghai Museum. *Power and Glory* was developed by a grant from the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, a Hong Kong-based philanthropic organization with a mission to foster and support Chinese arts and culture, in particular cross-cultural understanding between China and the world. Additional funding is provided by the Henry Luce Foundation, the Starr Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. *Power and Glory* was recently on view at the Asian Art Museum from June 27 to September 21, 2008. The exhibition will travel to the St. Louis Art Museum (February 22 to May 17, 2009).

This exhibition was organized and curated by Li He, Associate Curator of Chinese Art, and Michael Knight, Senior Curator of Chinese Art and Deputy Director of Strategic Programs and Partnerships at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

Exhibition admission

\$12 Adults; \$6 Children (ages 7-17) & College Students with valid ID card; \$10 Seniors (65 +); \$10 for groups of 10 or more; free for IMA members and children 6 and under.

Publication

Power and Glory: Courts Arts from China's Ming Dynasty, published by the Asian Art Museum and edited by He Li and Michael Knight, includes essays about Ming dynasty art as well as detailed entries for each of the objects in the exhibition.

IMA Information

The Indianapolis Museum of Art connects visitors to an expansive view of creativity through its collection of more than 54,000 works of art that span 5,000 years of history from across the world's continents. Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, the IMA is among the 10 largest encyclopedic art museums in the United States, and it features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European and contemporary art, as well as a newly established collection of design arts. The collections include paintings, sculpture, furniture and design objects, prints, drawings and photographs, as well as textiles and costumes.

Through its new articulation of the interconnectedness of art, design and nature, the IMA welcomes its visitors to experiences at the Museum, in 100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park, which will be the largest contemporary art park in the United States when it opens in 2009, and at Oldfields–Lilly House & Gardens, an historic Country Place Era estate on the IMA's grounds.

The IMA completed a \$74 million expansion project in May 2005. The construction added 164,000 square feet to the Museum and includes renovation of 90,000 square feet of existing space. In order to present major exhibitions of its own and to accommodate major traveling exhibitions, the expanded Museum was outfitted with new 10,000-plus-square-foot Clowes Special Exhibition Gallery on the Museum's first level. In November 2008, the IMA will open the renovated 600-seat Tobias Theater. Nicknamed, "The Toby," the theater is a venue for talks, performances and films.

Located at 4000 Michigan Road, the IMA and Lilly House are open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The IMA is closed Mondays and Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days. For more information, call 317-923-1331 or visit www.imamuseum.org.

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