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Surprising California Connections in Centuries of Sikh Artistry at Asian Art Museum of San Francisco



San Francisco, February 3 — A gracious conversation, a scholarly sermon, a lively portrait rendered in jewel-tone watercolors from centuries past: the enduring milestones of learning and tolerance. From March 10 to June 25, 2017, the Asian Art Museum presents *Saints and Kings: Arts, Culture, and Legacy of the Sikhs*, a treasure box of thirty rare paintings, military artifacts, textiles, photographs and more that together reveal the multi-faceted history — and surprising California connections — of this vibrant South Asian community.

Drawn from the Asian Art Museum's Sikh art collection, the largest in the United States, these carefully selected artworks shed light on the religious philosophy and cultural identity of the Sikhs. The spirit of this distinct community derives from the teachings of saint Guru Nanak (1469–1539) and his successors, as well as the historical memory of India's Sikh kingdoms established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the 1800s.

Highlights include an 11-foot-long battle standard from the 1830-40s, displayed for the first time in over a decade, as well as intriguing lithographs of the celebrated court of Ranjit Singh, as recorded by British traveler Emily Eden during this same period. In addition, painted and photographed portraits from the turn of the last century reflect a perceptive combination of history and modernity as the Sikh rulers sought to safeguard their ideals in a changing, globalized world.

"*Saints and Kings* is a timely opportunity to share the pluralistic values of the Sikhs as communicated through their artistic traditions — traditions that are often unfamiliar to American audiences," says exhibition organizer Qamar Adamjee, the museum's associate curator of South Asian and Islamic art. "The culture is rich with customs

Guru Nanak and the holy man Sant Ren, from a manuscript of the *Janam Sakhi* (Life Stories), 1800–1900. India or Pakistan; Punjab region. Opaque watercolors on paper. *Asian Art Museum, Gift of the Kapany Collection*, 1998.58.4. Photograph © Asian Art Museum.

centered on the charismatic teachings of a Guru who preached equality, and these expressions of inclusion and self-respect are more relevant than ever.”

The exhibition also draws attention to the community's special relation to the West Coast. Sikhs were among the first Indian immigrants to North America, arriving in California by the thousands in the early 1900s: a unique history recently honored as part of the official state school curriculum. As integral members of their local communities — initially as experienced farmers and today as leaders in technology and business sectors — *Saints and Kings* also tells a story that is deeply woven into the Bay Area's diverse social and immigrant legacy.

About the Asian Art Museum

The Asian Art Museum–Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture is one of San Francisco's premier arts institutions and home to a world-renowned collection of more than 18,000 Asian art treasures from throughout Asia spanning 6,000 years of history. Through rich art experiences, centered on historic and contemporary artworks, the Asian Art Museum unlocks the past for visitors, bringing it to life while serving as a catalyst for new art, new creativity and new thinking.

Information: 415.581.3500 or www.asianart.org

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Hours: The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 AM to 5 PM. Hours are extended on Thursdays until 9 PM through September. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

General Admission: FREE for museum members, \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors (65+), college students with ID, and youth (13–17). FREE for children under 12 and SFUSD students with ID. General admission is FREE to all on Target First Free Sundays (the first Sunday of every month). On Thursday evenings, Feb.23 - Sep.28, 2017, 5-9 PM, \$10 general admission.

Access: The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access: 415.581.3598; TDD: 415.861.2035.

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