

ABOUT THE ART

Islamic Art

Gallery 2

ACKLAND

QUESTIONS?

Contact us at acklandlearn@unc.edu

ACKLAND ART MUSEUM

The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
101 S. Columbia Street
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Phone: 919-966-5736

MUSEUM HOURS

Wed - Sat 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sun 1 - 5 p.m.
Closed Mondays & Tuesdays.
Closed July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve,
Christmas Day, & New Year's Day.

About About the Art

The Ackland's *About the Art* guides offer information about every work of art from the Museum's collection that is on view in galleries 2, 3, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. All of these galleries are marked on the Gallery Map available at the desk in the Lobby. In the bottom right corner of the label beside each object, there is an open book symbol with a number. You can find the same symbol and number on the top of the corresponding page in *About the Art*.

Within each entry, you can find the following information:

- At the top of the page, you'll see a thumbnail image, the title of the object, who made it and with what materials, and where and when it was made
- Next, you'll see bullet points with information or observations about the object (more or fewer, depending on how much we know about the object so far). There is no standard formula for what kinds of information appears, but you will often find comments on historical context, style, and materials.
- In keeping with the Ackland's tagline, "Look Close, Think Far," the first bullet point will often highlight something visible in the work of art itself.
- You will find names, phrases, and concepts that could be good internet search terms for those who want to learn more
- When specialized terms are used, you'll see a definition, helpful contextual information, or language suitable for an internet search.
- Whenever we know the artist's name, there will be some details about the artist's life, often under the heading "About the Artist," but sometimes as one of the bullet points.

For those visitors who want to engage further with an object, we also suggest other resources to investigate on our website: ackland.org/education/learning-resources.

The authors of *About the Art* include Ackland curators and educators who use a variety of sources. They consult museum records, art historical research, comments from outside specialists, and more.

About Galleries 2a and 2b: Sculpture from Asia and Islamic Art

These two galleries display selections of the Museum's collection of Asian sculpture and our growing collection of art from Islamic traditions. These works in stone, wood, metal, and ivory range in date from the second century to about 1900. In various ways, they relate closely to the beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam — faith traditions that emerged in places across Asia and are currently practiced throughout the world.



Unidentified artist
Syrian, Fatimid period

Bowl, c. 1100

stonepaste, with luster decoration over
opaque white glaze

Charles and Isabel Eaton Trust, 2021.43.2

About the Art

- The making of this earthenware bowl tells the story of early lusterware from the Fatimid Kingdom of Egypt and Syria during the tenth to the twelfth centuries. Lusterware was first invented in Iraq during the earlier Abbasid period of the ninth century. It was kept as a secret technology and passed to the Fatimids, perhaps when Abbasid potters traveled to the next viable court.
- This vessel is from a site excavated in Syria.
- After being shaped, the bowl was covered in a tin-opacified lead glaze to make it white in color when fired.
- In a second stage, gold suspended in a medium was painted over the white and fired a second time in an oxygen-reducing kiln. This caused the gold to chemically bond with the first glaze.
- A luster bird decorates this deep bowl. It is pictured in profile, looking lively, as we can tell through its alert eye and partially outstretched wings.
- At the Fatimid court high-level ministers and accomplished men were presented precious garments with armbands, called *tiraz*, sewn in. They typically were made up of sayings conveying good wishes for health, long life, wealth, etc. This lucky bird not only appears to have armbands on his wings, but also on his tail and neck. The writing in these bands is pseudo-Arabic, so it cannot be read.
- Scrolling palmettes and split palmette surround the bird, illustrating the principle of *horror vacui*, Latin for “fear of empty space” that one finds so often in Islamic art.
- After the Fatimid period, the technique for making lusterware traveled to the Seljuk court in Persia, remaining secret. There are two examples of Persian luster on the opposite side of this gallery. One depicts human figures – musicians playing – in a manner much more detailed than this bird, and on a more finely-potted bowl, which shows the further development of later lusterware.

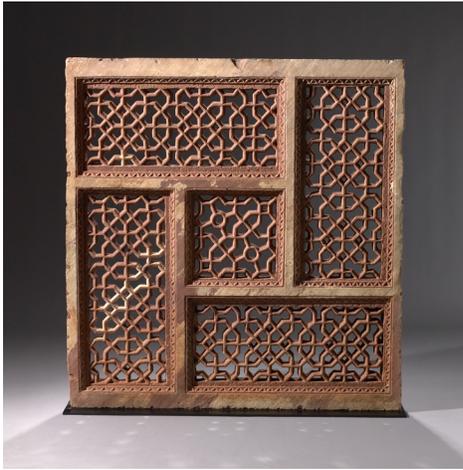


Unidentified artist
Iranian, Safavid dynasty (1501 – 1722)
Mounted Standard (Alam), 16th century
steel

Gift of the William E. Shipp Estate, by exchange, 2019.31.2

About the Art

- This teardrop-shaped, cut-steel object made of two panels riveted together with steel bars was once half of the main decorative element of an *alam*, an ornamental standard. It was carried on the battlefield and in processions of mourners on Ashura, the Shi'a holiday commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain in the battle of Karbala, on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim calendar. The *alam* was believed to have protective talismanic power.
- Complete, this tour-de-force example of skill in metalwork would have included another pair of similar drop-shaped panels so that each panel pointed towards one of the four compass points.
- The finely cut calligraphy around the outline says, down the right side, "Indeed, we sent the Qur'an down during the Night of Decree" (Surah al-Qadr (97), verse 2) and up the left side, in reverse, "The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months" (Surah al-Qadr (7), verse 3).



Unidentified artist
Mughal, Jahangir reign (1605 – 1627)
Perforated Screen, 1605–27
sandstone
Special Acquisition Fund, 2019.16.3

About the Art

- Mughal Indian windows in all types of buildings were filled with carved stone *jalis*, perforated screens that allowed for ventilation and control of the light, heat, and glare of the sun. Most importantly, due to the depth and complexity of the pattern carved into the stone, they could be seen through only from the inside, ensuring privacy from the world outside.
- Jalis differ greatly in format – some vertical, others horizontal, and others square. Some of their designs are floral, and some are geometric and curvilinear, as in this case.
- The design here is especially complex, featuring rectangles rotating around a central square with two circles organizing the pattern. The square format of this jali reinforces the power of its geometry.



Unidentified artist
Iranian, Seljuk period
Bowl, early 13th century
stonepaste, with luster decoration over
opaque white glaze
Gift of the SK Heninger, Jr. Fund for Islamic
Art, 2021.43.1

About the Art

- Two Persian musicians, one on the right playing a harp, one on the left playing a tambourine, face each other in the interior of this gold-colored luster bowl. We can tell they are outside by the “checkboard” cypress tree between them, and a decorated, fringed parasol partially visible over their heads.
- These individuals of indeterminate gender are wearing robes of elaborate textiles with a design consisting mainly of roundels, or circles, filled with a double palmette leaf. This pattern is also present on the lower side of the bowl, underneath the cypress tree, and on the parasol.
- The secret recipe for making luxurious lusterware had been passed to Kashan potters from Egypt just a decade or two before this pot was created. It illustrates all the traits of good lusterware: a finely potted body covered with tin-opacified lead glaze to create a white surface on which the potter paints with a metallic glaze that is fixed to the white surface in a second firing.
- The all-over design of the piece, including a row of stylized kufic and another of cursive script circling the interior rim is an example of *horror vacui* (vac-queue-e), a Latin term meaning “fear of empty space.” *Horror vacui* is a hallmark of Islamic art.
- The bulbous profile of this bowl is somewhat unusual, and a less dense design — seemingly dashed off compared to the finish of the interior — follows the contour around. Closer to the high, unglazed foot, are a pair of continuous lines that ironically look modern.



Unidentified artist
Iranian, Seljuk period

Jug, 13th century

Kashan ware: stonepaste, with cobalt, turquoise and
luster decoration over white glaze

Gift of the SK Heninger, Jr. Fund for Islamic Art,
2021.46

About the Art

- This diminutive Persian lusterware ceramic jug dates from 1350 (?) and mimics a metalwork form.
- Though small, it packs a punch! Cobalt blue and turquoise glazes have been added to the characteristic golden-shaded luster of this period. Vertical, rounded ribs down the sides of the vessel are accented in one of the alternating colors. Pseudo-Arabic script further articulates the luster-painted ribs.
- The spout has a distinctive geometric shape that complements the round shape of the body.
- Comparing this little jug with the slightly earlier Persian lusterware bowl beside it, one can see how luster technology in Persia advanced through adding additional colors. However, the decoration of the jug is not as finely rendered as the bowl's carefully drawn musicians in their fine robes surrounded by "checkerboard" cypress trees.



Unidentified artist
Turkish, Ottoman period

Dish, c. 1570

Iznik ware: stonepaste, with polychrome
underglaze painting

Gift of the William E. Shipp Estate, by
exchange, 2019.49

About the Art

- The free-flowing and lively design of various flowers, including tulips, carnations, hyacinths and others emerging from a single tuft is characteristic of Iznik wares of this period. Amusingly, one carnation pierces a tulip flower.
- Iznik ware, named after the town of Iznik in Anatolia in present day Turkey, where it was made, is a decorated ceramic that was produced from the last quarter of the fifteenth century until the end of the seventeenth century.
- The rim, with its stylized blue “wave-and-rock” design, is evidence of the exchange with Chinese ceramics and motifs.



Unidentified artist
Turkish, Ottoman period
Border Tile with Çintamani Design,
c. 1560-70
Iznik ware: stonepaste, with
polychrome underglaze painting
SK Heninger, Jr. Fund for Islamic
Art in honor of Kitty Bergel and The
William A. Whitaker Foundation Art
Fund, 2022.33

About the Art

- This large, striking fritware tile is painted in cobalt blue, turquoise, black and sealing-wax red covered in a transparent glaze.
- Achieving the vibrant red was one of the signature accomplishments of potters in the Ottoman empire in sixteenth century Turkey.
- The shape and long edges of this tile indicate it was part of the border of a large-scale tile ensemble on the walls of a mosque or palace.
- Most production of this Iznik ware, named for the site in Turkey once believed to be the primary place of manufacture, was intended for architectural uses, rather than for the household items better known in the West.
- Its vibrant and dynamic decorative pattern includes elements that sometimes go by the nicknames “leopard spots” and “tiger stripes.”
- The nested circles are a very common motif in Ottoman decoration. They originated in Buddhist iconography and are also called *çintamani*, a Sanskrit word meaning “auspicious jewel.” The pairs of wavy white shapes, often associated with *çintamanis*, are sometimes termed “Buddha lips”.
- The circles create multiple crescent shapes, a central Ottoman symbol featured at the time primarily on Imperial projects.
- Exemplifying the spectrum of motifs in Iznik ceramics, this tile is a wonderful complement to the contemporaneous plate shown above it. The abstract decorative pattern contrasts strongly to the readily identifiable flowers and plants set within the “rock and wave” pattern — a motif imported from China.