

ABOUT THE ART

Islamic Art from the
Mosque

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 Gallery 2a: Islamic Art from the Mosque

These two galleries display selections of the Museum's growing collection of art from Islamic traditions. Artworks in stone, ceramic, metal, glass, paper, and textile range in date from the tenth century to about 1900. In various ways the works in Gallery 2a relate closely to the beliefs and practices of Islam from a number of countries. Examples of secular stone carving and ceramics are in Gallery 2b. Notice that there *are* people and animals in these non-religious artworks.



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. Fritware is a type of ceramic that produces a light colored surface that works well as a background to bright colors like these.
- 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 other religious space.
- Most production of 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 primarily on Imperial projects at the time.



Unidentified artist
Indian, Golconda, Andhra Pradesh
Mosque Lintel with Calligraphy, 1570
black basalt
Ackland Fund, 97.14.2

About the Art

- The burnished surface of this delicately carved black basalt lintel of a *mihrab* (niche that points to Mecca) displays calligraphic inscriptions in both Arabic and Persian, written in a type of script called *thuluth*.
- The Persian inscription on the outer register provides information about the patron, the notable court poet Mulla Khayali, the mosque's date of completion (1570), and the current ruler, Ibrahim Quli Qutb Shah (reigned 1550–80).
- The Arabic inscription on the inner register repeats a popular notion from the hadiths, or the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, that underscores the significance of daily prayer as one of the pillars of Islam.
- Black basalt inscriptions were characteristic of the Deccan sultanates of the area around Hyderabad and Golconda. Panels with thuluth inscriptions were common in Qutb Shahi architecture and are abundant in Mulla Khayali's mosque. Black basalt columns were also used in Hindu temples in the region.



Unidentified artist

Syrian

Mosque Lamp, 15th century

glass, polychrome enamel, and gold

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund,

97.13

About the Art

- The tall and elongated inscriptions on the neck and body, written in *thuluth* script, feature only one word: *al-'alim* (the wise), which represents God's omniscience, total comprehension, and complete intuition.
- In a mosque interior, a lamp like this could be suspended from the ceiling with chains that attached to the six small handles visible on its exterior. The shining light from oil and a floating wick would have created the appearance of divine illumination.
- Judging by its size, quality, and inscriptions, this lamp was likely produced for the commercial rather than courtly market. The circular and oval blazons on the neck and the lower portion of the body, for example, appear hastily executed. They contain a horizontal bar of pseudo text and a flourish-like symbol, elements that were likely meant to imitate the appearance of lamps made for courtly patrons.



Unidentified artist
Southwestern Iranian, Fars
Candlestick Base, 14th century
metal
Gift of the William E. Shipp Estate, by
exchange, 2019.31.1

About the Art

- This object was part of a candlestick created for use in a mosque.
- Medieval Muslim metalwork is known for exquisite finesse of design and execution. This candlestick base features an arresting passage of thick flowing calligraphy atop delicate decorative work that encircles the entire object.
- The inscription is written in the loose-jointed *thuluth* script, which has a low center of gravity and features soaring uprights all across a measured, but exuberant pattern of repeating circular vine scrolls. The surface retains bits of the silver inlay that originally filled all interstices. They are visible in some places in the vegetal pattern behind the letters.
- The inscription indicates that it was made for the use of a wealthy private patron in Fars in northeastern Iran. It says, "Redeemer, exalted of the world, the just, the conquering, the victorious, glory to our lord the king, the most mighty Sultan."



Ibrahim Jakeri Al-Masri, North African (Algiers), active in mid-18th century (calligrapher)

Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Jazuli, Moroccan, c. 1404 – 1465 (author)

Page Opening with the Great Mosque of Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, from the *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, 1769

gold leaf, ink, and watercolor on paper, with leather binding

Ackland Fund, selected by The Ackland Associates, 96.4.2

About the Art

- These views of the two holiest sites in Islam combine the realism of perspective and an aerial viewpoint with the unreality of expansive areas of gold, signs of the sacred character of the sites.
- The mosque surrounding the Kaaba in Mecca is shown on the right, the Prophet Mohammad's tomb and mosque in Medina on the left. Both are in present-day Saudi Arabia.
- The Kaaba, a stone, marble, and limestone "cube," provides the direction for daily prayers for all Muslims and is the focus of pilgrimage. The Prophet's Mosque in Medina is the resting place of Mohammed.
- Buildings associated with Mohammed are appropriate subject for illustrations in this book, a popular and much copied early fifteenth century collection of prayers for God to bestow blessings on the prophet.
- It is not certain that the artist of these depictions was also the calligrapher, about whom we know only the name as recorded in the colophon of the book.



Ahmed, Turkish, active early 18th century
(calligrapher)

Abdullah ibn Mostafa, Turkish, active early
18th century (illuminator)

**Page Opening from an Illuminated Qur'an,
1707**

ink, gold, and opaque watercolor on paper
with leather binding

Gift of Dorothy and S. K. Heninger, Jr., 96.12

About the Art

- This page opening shows the first two pages of a Qur'an, the Muslim scripture considered by believers to be Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel in the seventh century.
- The symmetrical ornament combines geometric forms, extensive use of gold, and proliferating floral decoration, lavishly framing and glorifying the elegant lines of text.
- Compared with other styles of Arabic scripts, the one used here is known for its legibility, through the use of smaller, more rounded characters with diagonal thrusts.
- The text on the right, from the Qur'an's opening *sura* (or chapter), is a prayer recited by Muslims in their daily rituals. It starts "In the name of Allah, most benevolent, ever merciful. All praise be to Allah Lord of all worlds." The text on the left, from another *sura*, is about the Qur'an itself and starts: "This is the book free of doubt and involution, a guidance for those who preserve themselves from evil and follow the straight path."
- The illuminator signed his name and the year 1119, which is 1707 in the Gregorian calendar. Nothing else is known about him.



Unidentified artist

Indian, Swiss

Watch and Compass, late 19th century

brass, enamel, silver overlay, and glass

Ackland Fund, selected by The Ackland Associates,
96.3.2

About the Art

- On the face of this watch, an inscription in Urdu indicates that it was made in Switzerland; another gives the name of its original owner: Sheikh Hadji Rahim Bakhsh, a Shi'ite gem merchant from Ludhiana, a market town in the Punjab. The star and crescent on the face may be a trademark of the Indian workshop where the decorations in calligraphy were inscribed.
- Additional inscriptions on the watch — invocations and prayers — are in Arabic. Since this object is both a watch and a compass (in the stem), it could indicate both the time (dawn, midday, later afternoon, sunset, and evening) and the direction (toward Mecca) for a Muslim prayer.
- The watch's case is decorated with four concentric bands of blue, green, red, and white enamel that form a star in the center.