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SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART LAUNCHES TOUR OF ITS WORLD-CLASS COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS FROM INDIA

Domains of Wonder: Selected Masterworks of Indian Painting

October 22, 2005–January 22, 2006

SAN DIEGO—The San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA) announces the launch of an internationally touring exhibition featuring 125 of the finest examples from its extensive collection of paintings from India. Titled *Domains of Wonder: Selected Masterworks of Indian Painting*, the exhibition opens at SDMA in fall 2005 before traveling to both national and international venues, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in fall 2006 (additional venues pending). *Domains of Wonder* is accompanied by a 304-page scholarly catalogue written by the exhibition's co-curators Dr. B.N. Goswamy and Dr. Caron Smith.

With more than 1,450 examples, the San Diego Museum of Art's Edwin Binney 3rd Collection is renowned worldwide as one of the largest and most important concentrations of South Asian painting outside of India. Organized by the San Diego Museum of Art, *Domains of Wonder* will be the first exhibition to fully survey the richness and depth of this remarkable collection by presenting 123 paintings and 2 bound manuscripts, ranging in date from the 14th through early 20th centuries.

Dr. Binney devoted more than 20 years of his life to amassing this truly encyclopedic collection, selecting works of the highest quality and greatest importance. The comprehensive nature of this collection is unique in its ability to provide a complete overview of Indian court painting with examples representing the best of each school. Dr. Goswamy, a noted Indian scholar, and Dr. Smith, formerly SDMA's curator of Asian art, have drawn from the collection's vast treasures to present in *Domains of Wonder* one of the best surveys of Indian painting possible from any single collection in the world. Dr. Sonya Quintanilla, SDMA's current curator of Asian art and an expert in the field of South Asian art, is overseeing the project's fruition and coordinating the exhibition's tour and two symposia.

"The San Diego Museum of Art is excited and privileged to share this inspiring collection of Indian painting with the world," says SDMA's executive director, Derrick R. Cartwright. "It has been a distinct pleasure to work with my admired colleagues Dr. Goswamy and Dr. Smith to organize such a

landmark exhibition in the history of our Binney Collection. I am certain that this meticulously designed presentation of the collection's greatest works will impress all who visit it. The wonder of Indian painting is widely acknowledged, and we believe the collection that Edwin Binney formed is truly extraordinary."

The Binney Collection

In 1990 the San Diego Museum of Art became home to one of the world's finest collections of South Asian art when 1,453 works left to the Museum as a bequest by the late Edwin Binney 3rd (1925–1986), heir to the Crayola fortune, officially became part of SDMA's permanent collection. The works in the collection range in date from the 6th through 20th centuries, with the strength of the collection in paintings from India from the 15th through 19th centuries. Edwin Binney 3rd served on SDMA's Board of Trustees from 1977 to 1979 and from 1983 to 1986, maintaining an office (affectionately known as "Binney's Basement Baghdad") in the Museum's library. Over the course of 28 years, beginning in 1958 while at Harvard University and continuing after his move to San Diego until his death in 1986, Edwin Binney 3rd worked at fulfilling his ambition to build one of the most complete collections of South Asian paintings in the world.

The only other time a large selection of works from the Binney Collection has ever toured was from 1999 to 2003 when the exhibition *Power and Desire: South Asian Paintings from the San Diego Museum of Art, Edwin Binney 3rd Collection* traveled to New York, Hong Kong, Nice, Geneva, and Vancouver. The 70 works in this thematic exhibition explored the dynamics of relationships between rulers and subjects, lovers and their beloved, and gods and humans. Selections from the Binney Collection have also been seen at the San Diego Museum of Art as part of a regularly rotating series of highly focused displays of 15 to 20 objects in a small upstairs gallery, which first opened in 2001.

Exhibition Sections

Domains of Wonder is divided into eight sections. As explained by Dr. Goswamy in the exhibition catalogue, "What binds, even if loosely, the works within each section is the dominant quality, or spirit, that we perceive as having informed the work of a given style or school." The sections are

I. Terse Assertions (western and eastern India, 14th–19th century)

This section primarily consists of examples of illuminations of traditional, indigenous religious texts in which very stylized shorthand visuals tell the story.

II. Rooted in the Earth (western, central, and northern India, 16th–17th century)

These pictures represent moments of transition, as artists began to innovate and break from centuries' old traditions in ways that would shape the future development of Indian painting.

III. Devotion, Passion, and Heroism (Rajasthan, 17th–19th century)

Paintings in this section are from the numerous Rajput courts that controlled regions of Rajasthan under the Mughal emperor. They reflect each court's incorporation of Mughal styles to greater or lesser extents as they were applied to predominantly Hindu subject matter.

IV. Engaging with the Visible World (Mughal paintings, 16th–mid-18th century)

This section presents in chronological order paintings from the imperial Mughal courts. This most celebrated form of Indian painting was a product of Indian painters who were trained by Persian artists under the close direction of imperial patronage.

V. Sultans and Mystics (Deccan in southwestern India, 16th–late-18th century)

These paintings were made in the Deccan, a region controlled by sultans subject to the Mughal emperors, which maintained strong links with Persian visual traditions. The mystical Sufi branch of Islam, prominent in the region, lends the defining dreamlike character to these works.

VI. Clarity of Vision (Pahari Hill region, Punjab, 17th–mid-18th century)

These works, created in various styles, originated in the foothills of the Himalayas and are typified by a clear and direct presentation of traditional Indian themes. Pahari painting was among the first schools to be studied and published by Western scholars.

VII. Different Strands (all regions of India, 17th–19th century)

Outside the mainstreams of Indian painting, significant local styles arose to meet local needs. Different strands—Sikh painting and paintings from regions far from Mughal influence—are brought together in this section.

VIII. Changing Tastes (all regions of India, 18th–19th century)

The pictures in this section identify some of the changes brought on by European influences, particularly the British. Artists are seen adapting to the realities of their time, painting in the service of scientific inquiry and documentation and executing portraits in their studios.

Catalogue

The accompanying 304-page catalogue, distributed by the University of Washington Press, reproduces every work in the exhibition in full-page, full-color illustrations. The catalogue entries, written by Dr. B.N. Goswamy, evocatively bring to life the content and context of each picture. A three-part introduction, also written by Dr. Goswamy, discusses aspects of the unique culture from which these paintings emerged. The eight succeeding chapters outline each section of the exhibition and include rare and little-known passages in the history of Indian painting as well as translations of inscriptions and excerpts from primary sources. Publishing many of these important works for the very first time, this

book serves as an accessible introduction for non-specialists as well as a useful reference for scholars and students. The catalogue will be issued in soft cover (\$40) and hardbound (\$75) editions.

Symposium

In conjunction with the opening of *Domains of Wonder*, the San Diego Museum of Art will be hosting two symposia. The first is a half-day event on Thursday, October 20, titled “Paper, Palm, and Pigment: Materials and Techniques of Indian Painting,” which focuses on conservation issues in Indian painting. It is free and open to the public. The other is the American Council for South Asian Art’s 12th biannual symposium from October 21 through 23 (sessions and prices are TBA).

Credit Line

Domains of Wonder: Selected Masterworks of Indian Painting is organized by the San Diego Museum of Art.

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Museum Information

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The historic San Diego Museum of Art provides a rich and diverse cultural experience for more than 400,000 annual visitors. Located in the heart of beautiful Balboa Park, the Museum’s nationally renowned collections include Spanish and Italian old masters, South Asian paintings, and 19th- and 20th-century American paintings and sculptures. In addition, the Museum regularly features major exhibitions of art from around the world, as well as an extensive year-round schedule of supporting cultural and educational programs.

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