

The David Collection in Copenhagen

The David Collection was founded in 1945 by C. L. David as a private museum in his townhouse in the center of Copenhagen, Denmark.

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C. L. DAVID (1878-1960), A PROMINENT ATTORNEY, had begun to collect Danish early modern art and European 18th-century fine and decorative art in the 1910s. In this last field, he was aided by directors from the Danish Museum of Art and Design, who gradually also guided him to another field that had previously attracted little interest in Denmark: Islamic art. Since David had especially devoted himself to European porcelain and faience, it was natural for him to first and foremost emphasize ceramics in his acquisitions in the Islamic sphere, made mainly from art dealers in Paris and through Middle Eastern channels. The Islamic part of David's collection was, however, still rather modest at the time of his death in 1960.

A bachelor and childless, C. L. David left his townhouse and works of art to a private foundation, along with financial means that made it possible to expand his collections. Unlike many other private collectors, David had been quite open to the idea of developing the museum that he had founded. From the 1970s, a decision was consequently made to place increasing emphasis on expanding the Islamic holdings. The Islamic Collection has grown to become not only the museum's most important, with over 4,000 objects, but also Scandinavia's most significant in its field. Today it is considered among the ten most important Islamic collections in the Western world. In 2003, the museum began publishing the English-language *Journal of the David Collection*, which deals solely with Islamic art and uses the museum's own holdings as its point of departure.

Following the museum's refurbishment and reinstallation of the collections in 2009, the Islamic Collection is now presented in a new, contemporary setting, enhanced by digital and other modern techniques used to elucidate the objects on display. The other collections were also reinstalled. Chinoiserie plays a central role in the Collection of European 18th-Century Art, among other things in its holdings of fine, early porcelain from Meissen and various French manufactories, and in pieces made in the Far East for a European clientele. This is a theme that is also linked with the Islamic Collection.

The Islamic Collection

The Islamic Collection has been built up in keeping with the classical pattern for Western collections of this kind. It embodies works of art from Spain in the west to India in the east, but not works from Sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia. In addition, there is a small group of objects made by Muslims in China or for local Muslim communities. Chronologically, the collection ranges from works dating to shortly after the advent of Islam to the middle of the 19th century. Within this geographic and chronological span, the collection reveals both the many artistic links and the various culturally and ethnically conditioned differences that characterize works of art from the enormous area where Islam has been the dominant religion. The collection encompasses all types of materials. Since objects that are sensitive to light – textiles, miniature paintings, and calligraphic leaves – are displayed together with those made of sturdier materials, the lighting is subdued throughout the exhibition area. The museum holds numerous masterpieces, such as

a Spanish Umayyad ivory casket from c. 970 and a Fatimid rock-crystal ewer from around the year 1000. Among the internationally most important groups is early Iranian and Iraqi glass from the 9th-10th century. The fine holdings of ceramics from Iran and Syria from the 12th and 13th centuries include significant works acquired during the founder's own lifetime.

As the small rooms of 19th-century buildings such as C. L. David's home, now home to the museum, make it impossible to exhibit large objects such as carpets, a decision was made at an early stage not to collect this characteristic type of Islamic art. The museum consequently has only a modest collection of carpets, and they are either of small size or are fragments of larger carpets. It has, however, been possible to build up a fine collection of woven textiles, including a unique Il-Khanid group from the 13th-14th century. Il-Khanid art is rich in Far Eastern motifs such as the phoenix and peony, combined in eclectic fashion with other elements that are more typically Islamic. But the advanced technique used in making these Il-Khanid textiles also often bears witness to very direct ties to China. In many cases, it is probable that the museum's textiles were made in China or by weavers of Chinese descent who had been taken prisoner by the Mongol world conquerors.

India

Although the Islamic armies had already reached the Indian subcontinent at the beginning of the 8th century, the earliest works of art in the David Collection with links to Indian culture were made in Afghanistan in the 11th-12th century under the Ghaznavids and Ghurids. Indian art does, however, play a significant role in the Islamic Collection. Examples of printed fabrics and woven textiles, *bidri* ware, and bronzes both large and small come from the early Islamic and Deccan sultanates. From the heyday of the Mughal Empire, the David Collection has a number of fine miniature paintings from Akbar's reign, objects of rock crystal, rare items in painted glass, and several refined works of art with mother-of-pearl inlays from Gujarat. The many pieces of jewelry encrusted with precious stones, enamel work, and miniatures are testimony that the decline of the Mughal court was countered by an artistic flowering at the courts in cities such as Jaipur, Lucknow, and Bundi. Work by Company school painters is also represented. As in the rest of the Islamic Collection, these works of art are accompanied by coins, which provide very concrete historical and artistic testimony to a highly developed Islamic culture.

The Islamic Collection moreover features a number of special galleries. The miniature gallery's cabinets with drawers enable the visitor to make a closer study of a large selection of Indian miniature paintings. This is also where a few of the one hundred Rajput paintings that were originally collected by the Danish anthropologist Werner Jakobsen (1912-1979) are to be found. Although Rajput painting is peripheral in an Islamic context, it was natural in Denmark for this group to find its final home in the David Collection.

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Top left: The gallery devoted to Mughal India.

Top right: Miniature from a copy of the *Ramayana*. 'Sita Shies Away from Hanuman, Believing He is Ravana in Disguise'. Northern India; 1594. Leaf: 37.8 x 25.6 cm. Inv. no. 68/1998. The Mughal emperor Akbar was known for his tolerance and curiosity about other religions. He had holy Hindu scriptures translated into Persian, and in 1594 presented his mother with the magnificent copy of the *Ramayana* from which this miniature comes.

Inset above: Dish of colorless glass, decorated with enamel and gilded. Northern India; c. 1700. Diam: 28.4 cm. Inv. no. 37/1999. The flowers on the dish were contoured on the inside with gold and filled in with red and yellow enamel, while the outside was painted solely in yellow. This produces a kind of three-dimensional effect that is characteristic of much of painted Mughal glass art.

Right: Left half of a lampas-woven textile, silk and gilded paper. China or the eastern Islamic area; first half of 14th century. 228 x 63.5 cm. Inv. no. 40/1997. The use of paper rather than animal substrate for the 'gold thread' indicates that the textile was woven in the eastern part of the Mongol empire. Together with a number of other lengths of cloth that are found today in the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar, this piece originally made up part of the walls of a tent or canopy.

Bottom right: Dagger with gilded bronze hilt, set with rubies. India, Vijayanagar or Deccan; mid-16th century. L: 42 cm. Inv. no. 36/1997. The hilt's masterful composition of various animals engaged in battle was clearly influenced by Hindu art. Sultan Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur (1558-1579) was depicted several times in contemporary miniatures with a dagger similar to this one. It is uncertain whether the dagger was made in the Deccan or was taken as booty from Vijayanagar, which the leading Deccan sultans conquered in the battle of Talikota in 1565.

