



EMORY

MICHAEL C.
CARLOS
MUSEUM

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**CARLOS MUSEUM PRESENTS *WHEN GOLD BLOSSOMS:
INDIAN JEWELRY FROM THE SUSAN L. BENINGSON COLLECTION***

ATLANTA, GA (March 2, 2010)— The Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University is pleased to present the splendor of Indian art and culture from March 20 through July 11, 2010. Special exhibition *When Gold Blossoms: Indian Jewelry from the Susan L. Beningson Collection* celebrates the beauty and technical craftsmanship of Indian jewelry with more than 150 pieces spanning 2,000 years.



Primarily from South India, the selection includes intricate rings, anklets, earrings, necklaces, hair pendants, ivory combs, and jeweled crowns—a dazzling array of exquisite objects of adornment that reveal complex communication functions as well as cultural, spiritual, and social beliefs. Carlos Museum Director, Bonnie Speed, comments, “We are privileged to bring these exquisite cultural treasures to Atlanta. More than stunning works of art, these objects speak to a rich and vibrant cultural heritage. We thank our many partners for supporting this incredible exhibition and we look forward to our continued collaboration.” *When Gold Blossoms: Indian Jewelry from the Susan L. Beningson Collection* was organized by the Asia Society, New York. Support

for the exhibition in Atlanta was made possible by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, the Emory University Strategic Initiative in Religion and the Arts, and India-Atlanta Community Partners.

Traditionally, jewelry in India has been worn and valued for both its ornamental and symbolic qualities. Replete with meaning, jewelry could reveal the wearer’s regional origins, beliefs, marital status, wealth, and social position. *When Gold Blossoms* not only celebrates the beauty and awe-inspiring craftsmanship of Indian jewelry but also examines how it was worn to communicate identity in social and religious contexts.

The title of the exhibition takes its name from the many jewelry pieces that reproduce the form of berries, seeds, buds, or flowers and also alludes to the preference for gold in South Indian jewelry, as opposed to the North Indian preference for precious and semiprecious stones. From ear studs in the shape of lotuses to armbands formed in the shape of weaving leaves and petals, organic forms from nature were considered particularly auspicious and were believed to promote fertility and also express a woman’s procreative powers. Chains, linked beads, and scrolling ornaments suggest growth through repetition and, by extension, life and prosperity.



The significance of the materials chosen for these pieces extends beyond their beauty: gold was thought to have the power to purify those it touched, and gems the power to focus planetary influences, benefiting those who wore them. While the majority of the pieces included in the exhibition were intended to be worn in daily life, others were dedicated to deities and meant to convey the devotion of their worshipers. In Indian tradition, deities most often appear extensively bejeweled; religious practices have for millennia included the gift of gold and jewels to the gods.

*Left: Gold Chettiar tali, Tamil Nadu, India; 19th century, Susan L. Beningson Collection
Photo: Benjamin Harris B.S.K.*

*Right: Ivory and gold comb with ruby knob, Karnataka, India; late 18th century, Susan L. Beningson Collection
Photo: Benjamin Harris B.S.K.*

Hindu jewelry abounds with images of gods, goddesses, and mythical beings and is an important private means by which devotees keep their deities close to the heart. Adornment is also part of the act of worship, performed along with feeding, bathing, and entertaining a deity. Priests clothe, crown, and adorn icons according to the time of day and season, and jewelry is intrinsic to a deity, an expression of greatness.

Joyce Flueckiger, faculty consultant to the exhibition and professor in Emory's Department of Religion with a focus in performance studies and anthropology of religion, notes: "While the exhibit visually displays the jewelry as art, it's important to remember that many of the pieces are or have been used in everyday adornment, adornment that reflects the identity of and gives auspiciousness to its wearer. Adornment is also a mode of communication between those adorned and beholders of that adornment."

The Carlos Museum has developed a series of public educational programs to accompany the exhibition, including symposia and lectures focused on the themes of the exhibition, workshops for teachers and families, films, and performances. Tours and workshops for local school districts are provided in order to serve world history and world religions curricula.

Visitors to this special exhibition will be able to experience many of the rich resources of Emory's faculty. Events in collaboration with the Department of Religion will support a greater understanding of the religious and social aspects of Indian jewelry—from the sacredness of adorning the body to imagery describing the adornment of deities of the Hindu pantheon. Through performance, Emory Dance Department artist affiliate and renowned Kuchipudi dancer Sasikala Penumarthi will explore the movement and sound inherent in much Indian jewelry. In a poetry and literature reading focused on adornment, members of the Emory faculty will introduce the riches of Indian literature, from the ancient Sanskrit *Bhagavad Gita* to modern classics by Salman Rushdie and others. Professor Laurie Patton will give a lecture called "Jewels of Authority: Adornment in Classical India" and Joyce Flueckiger will speak on the everyday uses and significance of the gold wedding pendant. A spring break art week will provide opportunities for children in the Atlanta area to explore a variety of aspects of Indian culture, from adorning the body with printed textiles, henna decoration, and jewelry to savoring the sweetness and spice of Indian cooking.



About the Michael C. Carlos Museum

The Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University collects, preserves, exhibits, and interprets art and artifacts from antiquity to the present in order to provide unique opportunities for education and enrichment in the community, and to promote interdisciplinary teaching and research at Emory University. The Carlos Museum has grown to become one of the Southeast's premier museums with major collections of Greek and Roman, Ancient Egyptian, Near Eastern, Nubian, Ancient American, African, and Asian art, as well as a collection of works on paper from the Renaissance to the present.

Location: 571 South Kilgo Circle, Atlanta, Georgia 30322, U.S.A. **Telephone:** 404-727-4282 **Fax:** 404-727-4292
Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Sunday 12 noon - 4 p.m. (Closed on Mondays and university holidays) **Admission:** \$8. Free for Carlos Museum members and Emory University faculty, students, and staff. **Students, seniors, and children ages 6—17:** \$6 (Children ages 5 and under: Free). **Public Tours:** Advanced booking required for weekday or weekend groups of ten or more. For reservations call 404-727-0519. Docent-led tours of the Museum depart from the Rotunda on Level One every Sunday at 2:30 p.m. during the Emory academic year (call 404-727-4282 to confirm).

Gold cobra-head braid ornament (nagar) set with rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and pearls, South India; 18th century
Susan L. Beningson Collection
Photo: Benjamin Harris B.S.K.

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