

MEDIA RELEASE

Asian Beauties Grace New Exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore

The museum's new exhibition 'Beauty in Asia: 200 BCE to Today' celebrates all things beautiful across Asian cultures from 3 May to 23 September 2007

[2 May 2007, SINGAPORE] From tomorrow, expect a feast of eye candy and food for thought at the Asian Civilisations Museum's (ACM) new *exhibition **Beauty in Asia: 200 BCE to Today***. The exhibition, which will be on show from **3 May to 23 September 2007**, is a celebration of all things beautiful across Asian cultures, ancient and contemporary. Curated by the ACM, the exhibition has a pan-Asian focus, featuring over 300 artefacts, including sculptures, paintings and jewellery from Southeast Asia, South Asia, China and West Asia. The exhibition will include an examination of several key themes – Ideals of Beauty, the Quest for and Celebration of Beauty, and what can be considered to be Spiritual Beauty.

For the first time, the museum has incorporated contemporary artworks into the exhibition, to show the contrast between ancient and contemporary concepts of beauty. The contemporary works include a life-sized nude figure by Chinese sculptor Cai Zhisong, a lithograph by local lensman Russel Wong and a painting of Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai by Indian artist Ratan Parimoo.

"Beauty is a universal concept which resonates with almost anyone, across time and cultures. Through this exhibition, we hope to introduce visitors to the thinking behind beauty as defined in different Asia cultures; how these values and philosophies have influenced the objects and artworks that were made, and what people go through in order to be seen as beautiful. The understanding of what is beautiful is constantly evolving, and we hope that the visitor will be challenged to

find his own definition of beauty after seeing the exhibition,” said Dr Kenson Kwok, Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

In line with ACM’s focus on Asian cultures, *Beauty in Asia* is the museum’s third special exhibition with a pan-Asian focus. For the exhibition, the museum has drawn from its own collections as well as a large number of local and overseas lenders.

“Exhibitions such as *Beauty in Asia* allow us to showcase our own collection, and give our visitors an opportunity to see what is not usually on display. However our own collection was not comprehensive enough to provide all the exhibits, so we also had to borrow widely to fill the gaps in the exhibition. We are also pleased to include some of the ACM’s exciting new acquisitions in this exhibition,” said Dr Gauri Parimoo Krishnan, Senior Curator at the Asian Civilisations Museum, and lead curator for *Beauty in Asia*.

While many classical Asian and western cultures shared common ideals of symmetry, balance and harmony, these ideals have changed over time. Through archetypal representations of male and female beauty in Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Khmer arts, visitors will learn how early Asian civilisations saw ideal beauty as expressed in the human form.

A key exhibit in the section on Ideal Beauty is a bronze sculpture of the Hindu Goddess Uma Parameshvari from the Chola period (11th century) in southern India. This exceptional bronze shows a slender, voluptuous goddess of exquisite beauty and delicate proportions, wearing a beautifully detailed costume and jewellery. In contrast, a rare late 19th to early 20th century female ancestor figure from the remote island of Flores in Indonesia, reflects the bold and abstract aesthetics of tribal cultures. A figure like this would have represented an ancestor spirit and apart from being carefully made to look beautiful, would also have been deeply venerated as a symbol of energy and power.

Adornment of the body is explored under the theme of *Quest for Beauty*. Included in this section are displays of jewellery, headdresses, textiles, as well as objects used for grooming. Ancient and modern means of beautifying oneself are also juxtaposed, such as foot binding in traditional China and plastic surgery in our present era.

Throughout the ages, man has rewarded beauty in various ways. This is elaborated in the section covering *Celebration of Beauty*. From the heavenly *apsaras* depicted in Indian mythology to the modern day beauty pageant contestant, the most beautiful men and women are constantly celebrated for their beauty. Displayed in this section are splendid implements and objects that would have been befitting of the user's status.

The section on *Spiritual Beauty* focuses on the inner beauty of the soul. In contrast with physical beauty, the beauty of the soul does not require the physical form to be beautiful. Inner or spiritual beauty is considered more enduring and more desirable than physical beauty. Hence, physically ugly characters such as *yakshas* or nature spirits and dwarfish clown servants are regarded as embodiments of wisdom and truth in Asian cultures. For the Chinese, virtue is valued above physical beauty. In Tantric ritual and art, beauty is perceived at many levels, from the level of physical form to the level of formlessness.

The exhibition concludes with an educational display with a computer interactive which invites the visitor to put together different facial features to form the most beautiful face. Weekly updates on the most popular choice will be provided on the museum's website www.acm.org.sg, and will provide an interesting insight into definitions of beauty in today's society. Public programmes organised in conjunction with the exhibition include screenings, lectures and dialogue sessions which examine the portrayal of beauty in film and art.

“Through this exhibition and its programmes, we hope that visitors will learn and appreciate what is beautiful in Asian cultures, and in the world around them. Whether it is a piece of art, costume or jewellery, we hope they can sense through these objects that beauty is not found merely in the physical but is also mental and spiritual,” said Dr Krishnan.

Beauty in Asia: 200 BCE to Today will be on show at the Asian Civilisations Museum from 3 May to 23 September 2007.

Beauty in Asia: 200 BCE to Today – List of Lenders

The Asian Civilisations Museum would like to thank:

Institutional Lenders

Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

National Museum, New Delhi

Singapore Art Museum

Singapore Tyler Print Institute

Private Lenders

Ajay and Suman Aggarwal

Benkaim Family Collection

Jeremy Caddy

Dr and Mrs James Khoo

Peng Loh

T K Quek

Digna Cruzem Ryan

Mr and Mrs Paul Supramaniam

Bobby and Nicky Yeo

Anonymous Lenders

Admission Charges for**Beauty in Asia: 200 BCE to Today (3 May to 23 September 2007)**

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| Adult | : \$8 |
| Concession | : \$4 (Full-time students and age 60 years and above) |
| Family Package | : \$20 for maximum of 5 persons |

- Free for children under 6 years old and below and NHB Season Pass Holders.
- Discounted admission on Fridays, 7pm – 9pm.

About the Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum's mission is to explore and present the cultures and civilisations of Asia, so as to promote awareness and appreciation of the ancestral cultures of Singaporeans and their links to Southeast Asia and the World. The Asian Civilisations Museum first began its operations at Armenian Street in 1997, which closed at end-2005, and will re-open in 2008 as a brand new Peranakan attraction. ACM's new flagship at the historic Empress Place Building opened on 2 March 2003.

For more information and pictures, please contact:

Jennifer Quong
Executive
Marketing & Corporate Communications
Tel: +65 6332 7991
Mobile: +65 9231 6130
Fax: +65 6883 0732
Email: jennifer_quong@nhb.gov.sg
www.acm.org.sg

Address

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Museum Front Desk: (65) 6332 7798
Public Programmes Hotline: (65) 6332 3284

Opening Hours

Mondays : 1pm – 7pm
Tuesdays – Sundays : 9am – 7pm (to 9pm on Fridays)