

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

**ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM LAUNCHES WORLD'S FIRST EXHIBITION
ON THE HISTORY AND SPREAD OF CHRISTIAN ART IN ASIA**



Clockwise from left: Shrine with a painting of Holy Family with John the Baptist, The Virgin Mary, Candlestick with Christian scenes, Plaque: Virgin and Child crowned by angels, Portrait of Matteo Ricci

Singapore, 24 May 2016 – The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) presents *Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour*, the world's first exhibition on the history and spread of Christian art in Asia. This is also the ACM's inaugural special exhibition after an extensive revamp last year.

Asia has played a significant role in the spread of Christianity since the 7th century and Asian art absorbed influences from many different cultures, including the Middle East, India,

China, Japan, the Philippines, and Southeast Asia. Many of the artists who created Christian images belonged to other faiths, but nonetheless made powerful and beautiful images. Asian art often blends European Christian subjects with local motifs and patterns, or is made in distinctive local materials.

The exhibition looks at art spanning across 800 years from the 13th to the 20th century, with a special focus on the period from 16th to 18th century, where significant trade and missions occurred. Over 150 objects from six countries – Singapore, France, Portugal, Italy, Hong Kong, and the Philippines – and 20 acclaimed institutions and private collections around the world, including the Musée du Louvre, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and Lisbon's National Museum of Ancient Art, will be on display. They will be complemented by objects from ACM's rich collection, including a largest known Sri Lankan ivory sculpture of the Virgin. Many of these objects will be exhibited for the very first time in Singapore.

The exhibition reflects the museum's vision to present a broad perspective of pan-Asian cultures. Director of the ACM, Dr Alan Chong, said: "Christian art in Asia was created by artists of many different faiths: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Confucian, and so on. New motifs and materials were used in these objects, which reflect many heritages. Moreover, many of the images were collected by patrons who were non-Christian. This demonstrates the curiosity and openness evident throughout Asia, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries."

The exhibition is organised in four thematic sections: Early Christian Art in Asia, What makes art made in Asia, Christian, Christian missions to Asia, 16th to 19th centuries (The Indian Subcontinent, China, Japan, Philippines and Southeast Asia) and a case study of Singapore. Visitors will be introduced to artworks that examine the different interpretations and adaptations of the well-established Christian themes by local artists and artisans, who may not be Christians themselves, or were from countries that were predominantly non-Christian such as Syria, India and Iran. An example would be an inlaid metal candlestick made in Syria between 1248 and 1249, which was decorated with both Christian scenes and medieval Islamic art. New Christian motifs were also introduced such as the representation of Christ as a good shepherd by India, which eventually became familiar mainstays in Asian Christian art.

Beyond the design of the objects, the exhibition also demonstrates the knowledge exchange between Asia and the West in terms of art techniques like ivory carving which were then unknown in the West but grew in popularity after, and the use of rare materials found in Asia, including rock crystal, ivory, lacquer, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell and precious stones.

Clement Onn, curator at ACM and of the exhibition, said, “The *Christianity in Asia* exhibition is a celebration of artistic innovation, experimentation and the diversity which emerges from cross-cultural influences. Through the curation of the exhibition, we hope that visitors will not just be exposed to the wide array of Asian Christian art, recognised by its intrinsic quality, originality and aesthetic merit, but also learn that common threads such as religion can also bring people of various cultures and from different countries together.”

Dr Pedro Moura Carvalho, former chief curator of ACM and a curator of the exhibition states, “*Christianity in Asia* shows for the first time how local artists and patrons – Catholics, Hindus, Muslims among others – were inspired by the life of Jesus and other saintly figures to create extraordinary works of art which found no parallel anywhere else. It reveals how the Gospels reached the continent long before the arrival of the Vasco da Gama in India, and how through a combination of royal sponsorship, passionate missionary work, and dazzling splendour, Catholicism spread throughout most of Asia from the 16th century onwards.”

Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue containing original essays on Asian Christian Art by a group of international scholars such as Pedro Moura Carvalho, Ken Parry, Lauren Arnold, and Istvan Peczel. There will also be a robust array of interactive programmes and events, and academic lectures to enrich the exhibition and engage the community.

The exhibition is also made possible by the strong relationships between ACM and many international partners, especially museums, collectors, and institutions around the world who have supported the exhibition. The official airline of the exhibition is Air France-KLM. A spokesperson from Air France-KLM said of its patronage of the exhibition, “Air France-KLM strongly believes that art brings people together. We are honoured to be part of this monumental exhibition that helps connect the dots on the cross-cultural exchanges between Asia and the world and make it accessible to the wider audience.”

Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour exhibition runs from 27 May to 11 September 2016 at the Asian Civilisations Museum. Admission charges apply for this special exhibition.

Annex A: List of lending institutions for the exhibition

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About the Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum is the only museum in region devoted to exploring the artistic heritage of Asia, especially the ancestral cultures of Singaporeans. The museum has launched two new wings with new galleries in late 2015 and early 2016. Founded in 1993, and in its present building by the Singapore River since 2003, the museum's collection grew out of the 19th-century Raffles Museum. The ACM spotlights the long historical connections between the cultures of Asia, and between Asia and the world.

Objects on display tell stories of the trade and the exchange of ideas that were the result of international commerce, as well as the flow of religions and faith through Asia. Singapore's history as a port city that brought people together from all over the world is used as a means of examining the history of Asia. Special exhibitions bring magnificent objects from around the world to our Singapore audience. Programmes like the annual River Nights encourage visitors to connect more closely with culture and the arts. For more information, visit www.acm.org.sg.

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ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

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SINGAPORE'S MUSEUM *of* ASIA

ANNEX A: List of Lending Institutions for the Exhibition

Country	Institutions
France	Musée du Louvre Fondation Custodia/Collection Frits Lugt Bibliothèque nationale de France
Hong Kong	University Museum & Art Gallery, University of Hong Kong
Italy	Fondo per gli Edifici di Culto, Ministero dell'Interno, Rome
Philippines	Intramuros Administration, Manila University of Santo Tomas Museum, Manila Bangko Sentral ng Pilipnas, Manila
Portugal	Private collections Museu de São Roque, Lisbon Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon Fundação Medeiros e Almeida, Lisbon Casa-Museu Dr. Anastácio Gonçalves, Lisbon Fundação Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva – Museu de Artes Decorativas Portuguesas, Lisbon Museu de Évora, Evora Novitiate of the Society of Jesus, Coimbra Museu Abade de Bacal, Bragança
Singapore	Asian Civilisations Museum National Museum of Singapore National Library of Singapore Private collections

ANNEX B: About the Exhibition and Programme Highlights

Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour

圣辉艺彩：亚洲的基督教信仰与艺术交汇

- Exhibition Dates : 27 May to 11 September 2016
- Venue : Asian Civilisations Museum
1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
- Website : www.acm.org.sg
- Enquiries : 6332 7798 / nhb_acm_vs@nhb.gov.sg
- Opening hours : Monday to Sunday: 10am to 7pm (to 9pm on Friday)
- Getting There : By MRT – Raffles Place
By Bus – 75, 100, 107, 130, 131, 167
By Car – Parking is available at Parliament House, Connaught Drive, The Fullerton Hotel, One Fullerton, and Six Battery Road

CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA: EDUCATION & PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Art-beat

Free

Download the ACM app on the App Store or Google Play

Experience art through soundscapes you create, inspired by five hand-picked objects from the *Christianity in Asia* exhibition. Objects come to life through light footsteps in a hall, a distant bell ringing from an old Protestant church, or urgent whispers on a fiery ship. Visitors who have downloaded the ACM app can select and listen to soundscapes while moving through the gallery for a wholly personalized experience.

Seven Wonders of *Christianity in Asia* Activity Booklet

Free with admission to *Christianity in Asia*

Discover the artworks in *Christianity in Asia* through this activity booklet that features seven treasures from seven lands. Complete the trail by collecting rubbings of patterns inspired by

the exhibition. Try out looking activities to experience art through new eyes! Suitable for 8 years old and above.

***Christianity in Asia* Interpretive Space**

Free with admission to *Christianity in Asia*

Look, listen, and touch – engage with art through your senses with hands-on activities at the *Christianity in Asia* interpretive space. Take home a set of seven rubbings inspired by the exhibition. Design a personalised soundscape based on five objects and stories at the Art-beat station. Explore the splendid detail and materials used to make these works of art. Finally, take a moment to rest and reflect – share your thoughts on the wings of an origami dove and add it to our reflection wall.

Lunchtime Concerts at ACM: Musical Meet-up with the Baudoin Bros

27 May 2016, Friday, 12.30pm - 1.30pm

Free admission

The Baudoin Bros, from Gascony, in southwest France, play folk music from their home region. Enjoy French music with a twist at this energetic pop-up performance. You'll also have the opportunity to interact with the duo. Mateu plays violin, tom-tom, and flute. His cousin Roman plays the hurdy-gurdy. The duo explores traditional melodies of Gascony in a modern style. This performance is part of the *Voilà!* festival.

Lecture

The Opening of the Islamic Art Department in the Louvre: A New Vision of Universal Culture

Dr Yannick Lintz, Director of Islamic Art Department, Louvre Museum

27 May 2016, Friday, 3.30pm - 5pm

Ngee Ann Auditorium, Asian Civilisations Museum

The Louvre is known as the world's first public museum. Opened in 1793, it was the model for the so-called universal culture museum, based on Classical Greek and Roman art and European art history. This lecture will deliberate on the new challenges the museum faced in

including Islamic art and culture within the Western framework of a universal culture museum.

Exhibition Catalogue Launch and Lecture

Christianity as an Asian court religion

Alan Chong, Director of Asian Civilisations Museum

2 June 2016, Thursday, 7pm - 8.30pm

Although no royal court in Asia converted to Christianity, the religion played a prominent role in many of them, and Christian art was appreciated by many rulers.

Lecture

By Land and By Sea: Early Christians in Asia

Dr Ken Parry

22 June 2016, Wednesday, 7pm - 8.30pm

Ngee Ann Auditorium, Asian Civilisations Museum

Lecture

Tenshō: Keichō. Japan and Europe – Mutual Fascination

Clement Onn, curator at Asian Civilisations Museum and of Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour

7 July 2016, Thursday, 7pm – 8.30pm

Ngee Ann Auditorium, Asian Civilisations Museum

Lecture

Christianity in Japan

Fr Renzo De Luca SJ

16 July 2016, Saturday, 2.30pm – 4pm

Ngee Ann Auditorium, Asian Civilisations Museum

Lecture

Catholic Missions in Southeast Asia

Professor Bruce Lockhart

19 August 2016, Friday, 7pm – 8.30pm

Ngee Ann Auditorium, Asian Civilisations Museum

Lecture

The Sacred and the Commercial: Christian Arts from Asia for Europe and the Americas

William Sargent

1 September 2016, Friday, 7pm – 8.30pm

Ngee Ann Auditorium, Asian Civilisations Museum

Afterhours@ACM

Christianity in Asia Special Exhibition and Chateauneuf-du-Pape Top Picks

15 June 2016, Wednesday, 7pm - 10pm

For tickets and enquiries, call 6332 7798 or email nhb_acm_prog@nhb.gov.sg

Our curators lead tours of the new special exhibition, *Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour*. Marvel at exquisite objects from our national collection as well as stunning works on loan from internationally acclaimed museums. Then savour gloriously rich red wines of elegance and finesse from Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the famed region entwined with papal history and power.

Curator Tours

24 June 2016, 15 July 2016, 26 August 2016, 9 September 2016

7.30pm - 8.30pm

\$25

Minimum of 15 people to proceed and maximum of 25 people in a tour

Exhibition curator Clement Onn shares his insights into the motivations, forces, and cross-cultural exchanges that shaped the development of Christian art across Asia in this unique exploration of the intersection of splendour, beauty, and faith.

Walking Tours

Saturdays from June to August

\$5 per pax (\$3 for senior citizens / students)

For tickets and enquiries, call 6332 7798 or email nhb_acm_prog@nhb.gov.sg

Learn about Christian art and architecture in the city on walking tours of Singapore's historic buildings! Visit the Tamil Church and Malay Chapel at Rochor; explore stories behind beautiful stained-glass windows. These tours highlight the history that shaped Singapore's churches and monuments.

Tour participants can enjoy discounted entry to the *Christianity in Asia* exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Drop-in Drawing

Fridays, July & August, 7pm - 9pm

Free admission

Doodle, sketch, and create your own masterpiece. Drop in and draw in this programme for all levels. Bring your ideas, materials provided.

Drawing Workshops

Fridays, 29 July 2016, 26 August 2016, 9 September 2016

For tickets and enquiries, call 6332 7798 or email nhb_acm_prog@nhb.gov.sg

Drawing inspiration from selected objects in the *Christianity in Asia* exhibition, participants will bring their ideas to life using just a pencil and paper. Materials provided. Suitable for 16 years old and above.

The Time Traveller

Saturdays & Sundays, 30 & 31 July 2016, 27 & 28 August 2016, 10 & 11 September 2016

For tickets and enquiries, call 6332 7798 or email nhb_acm_prog@nhb.gov.sg

Cross strange lands and meet colourful characters in an art adventure across Asia. In this interactive, dramatized journey, participants will experience the stories and join in activities based on a selection of objects from the *Christianity in Asia* exhibition.

Love, Light, Living Festival

Saturday and Sunday, 3 & 4 September 2016

1pm - 5pm

Free admission

Celebrate September with a feast for your senses! Immerse yourself in the colour, sounds, and scents of the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures. Get ready for beautiful costumes, mesmerizing melodies, colourful activities, merry-making, and celebration.

Design and make your own stained-glass window, take part in the festivities of Singapore's pan-Asian communities, learn about the living traditions of Asia's Christian heritage through song and dance, and meet a time traveller.

Free entry included to the *Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour* exhibition.