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For Immediate Release
February 1, 2017

Enduring Splendor: Jewelry of India's Thar Desert
February 19–June 18, 2017



Anklets (*kadla*), Gujarat, Early nineteenth century
Silver
Ronald and Maxine Lind Collection



Necklace (*arya* or *aad*), Rajasthan, Early nineteenth century
Gold, rubies, emeralds, diamonds, pearls, glass beads
Ronald and Maxine Lind Collection

(Los Angeles, CA)—Featuring more than 160 works of art, *Enduring Splendor: Jewelry of India's Thar Desert* opens February 19 and closes June 18. *Enduring Splendor* invites visitors to consider these traditions against the background of a 5,000-year history of jewelry making across the vast Indian subcontinent. Drawing on recent field research carried out in the city of Jaisalmer, a thriving center of contemporary jewelry production, the exhibition is one of the very few to explore the lives and work of *sonis* (silversmiths or goldsmiths). This presentation emphasizes the symbiotic relationships that exist between jewelry and society, artist and jewelry, and artist and society.

To this end, the Fowler Museum commissioned new silver works from four contemporary smiths, who execute and transform traditional designs and techniques of manufacture in distinctive ways. Exhibition highlights include these newly commissioned objects, contextualized by a survey of 19th- and 20th-century jewelry types still worn by rural men and women from Rajasthan and Gujarat.

These exemplary types—including earrings, anklets, bracelets, and necklaces—are borrowed from the Ronald and Maxine Linde Collection, one of the most comprehensive collections of Indian jewelry in the world. Ronald and Maxine Linde's aim in assembling an encyclopedic compendium of Indian jewelry is nurtured by the hope that their collection will help to shape the study of Indian jewelry, as is illustrated by *Enduring Splendor*. This exhibition also serves to announce that the Ronald and Maxine Linde Collection of Jewelry and Ritual Arts of India is part of a promised gift to UCLA, where it will find its future home with the Fowler Museum.

Enduring Splendor is guest co-curated by Thomas Seligman, director emeritus of the Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, who has conducted research on *sonis* during the last eight years, and Usha Balakrishnan, a highly regarded independent scholar of Indian jewelry based in Mumbai.

About the Exhibition

The exhibition unfolds in three sections, beginning with an introduction to long-standing jewelry traditions maintained across the Indian subcontinent.

Sculptures and paintings borrowed from LACMA have been selected to illustrate the profusion of jewelry worn in ancient times, and to introduce comparable designs still in use today. Early stone and terra cotta sculptures (dating from 200 B.C. to 1,000 A.D.) reveal Hindu gods and goddesses adorned in jewels from head to toe, while Mughal miniature watercolor paintings dating from 17th to the early 19th centuries depict in fine detail the elaborate ornaments worn by maharajas and empresses. Interspersed throughout this section, jewelry from the Ronald and Maxine Linde Collection animates a visual exchange, demonstrating how specific forms depicted in these artworks have persisted over centuries.

The second section of *Enduring Splendor* is devoted to 19th- and 20th-century jewelry from the Ronald and Maxine Linde Collection that specifically brings into focus the traditions of India's northwest Thar Desert region. Situated on India's western border, the state of Rajasthan was for many centuries the gateway to India. Genghis Khan, Tamerlane and Babur, Alexander the Great and the Greeks, and countless early European visitors brought their influence to bear on the region.

In the collectors' words, "An understanding of the art of Indian jewelry should not be viewed merely from the perspective of the art of India—but rather in the context of the political, economic, and cultural history of the period in which every single item is positioned."



Rabari woman in Kutch, Gujarat, India, 2012
Photo Thomas K. Seligman



Earrings (*nagali*), Gujarat, Early twentieth century
Silver
Ronald and Maxine Lind Collection

The third section focuses on the commissioned work of four *sonis* from Jaisalmer—B. D. Soni, Dharmendra Soni, Hanuman Soni and Roopkishor Soni—and includes video documentation of each at work using traditional tools and techniques that conform to the standards of the ancient Indian tradition of jewelry manufacture.

Traditionally, the act of manufacturing a piece of jewelry is sacred, and akin to creation. It is this spiritual act of creation that makes every piece unique and induces craftsmen to remain anonymous. By interviewing jewelry makers B. D. Soni, Dharmendra Soni, Hanuman Soni, and Roopkishor Soni, co-curator Thomas Seligman seeks to heighten our sensitivity to the individualism of each family's shop. Seligman's videos capture the signature designs of the artists, their business acumen, and adaptation to fluctuating material costs, global markets, or family aspirations—challenges shared by business-owners and artists everywhere.



Hanuman Soni (Jaisalmer, Rajasthan)
Bracelet (*kangan* or *katria*), 2014
Silver
Fowler Museum at UCLA



Hanuman Soni (Jaisalmer, Rajasthan), 2014
Photo Thomas K. Seligman

Major support for *Enduring Splendor* has been provided by C. Diane Christensen, with additional funding from the Anawalt Program for the Study of Regional Dress Endowment Fund, an anonymous donor, and Avrum and Martha Bluming. The publication has been funded in part by The Ahmanson Foundation, on the recommendation of Foundation Trustee Emeritus, Lloyd E. Cotsen.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated scholarly volume with essays authored by exhibition co-curators Thomas K. Seligman and Usha R. Balakrishnan.

Related Programs

For a full calendar of exhibition-related programs, please visit www.fowler.ucla.edu/events

About the Fowler Museum

The Fowler Museum at UCLA explores global arts and cultures with an emphasis on works from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas—past and present. The Fowler enhances understanding of world cultures through dynamic exhibitions, publications, and public programs, informed by interdisciplinary approaches and the perspectives of the cultures represented. Also featured is the work of international contemporary artists presented within the complex frameworks of politics, culture, and social action.

Fowler Museum at UCLA

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Admission to the Fowler is free.

Hours: Wednesday 12–8pm and Thursday–Sunday 12–5pm

Parking available in UCLA Lot 4, 221 Westwood Plaza at Sunset Blvd. \$3/hr (maximum \$12/day).

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#EnduringSplendor