

SELECT WORKS FROM THE L.A. MAYER MUSEUM FOR ISLAMIC ART'S LEGENDARY COLLECTION TO BE OFFERED AT SOTHEBY'S LONDON

Proceeds to Secure the Long-Term Future of the Museum & Expand Programmes Promoting Intercultural Dialogue

Auctions of Islamic Art and Watches & Vertu on 27 & 28 October



LONDON, 14 September – Since it first opened its doors to the public in 1974, the L.A. Mayer Museum in Jerusalem has held true to its founding principle of promoting cultural dialogue through the appreciation of art. Home to world-renowned collections of watches and Islamic art, the museum is one-of-a-kind in Israel – a unique institution founded by philanthropist Vera Bryce Salomons (1888-1969), whose family history tells a story of enlightened activism in the cause of social justice beginning in the 19th century with Vera's great-uncle Sir David Salomons (1797-1873), 1st Baronet, who broke the mould of British society by becoming the first Jewish Lord Mayor of London.

Conscious of the lack of opportunity and absence of places for the Israeli public to see works of Islamic art, Vera set out to establish the L.A. Mayer Museum for Islamic Art, naming it after her friend and teacher Professor Leo Arie Mayer (1895-1959), the distinguished scholar and Professor of Islamic Art and Archaeology at the Hebrew University. Like Salomons, Mayer was a true believer in the relevance of Islamic culture and its ability to aid peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Arab peoples, and pieces from his own collection were placed in the museum on its founding. Salomons then enlisted Professor Richard Ettinghausen (1906-1979), one of the towering figures in the field of Islamic art in the 20th century, to help build the museum's collection. Over the course of twelve years, Ettinghausen hand-picked works of the greatest quality, provenance and academic interest from the leading art dealers and auctions of the period – from manuscripts and calligraphy to metalwork and ceramics, from textiles and rugs to arms and armour.

The L.A. Mayer Museum for Islamic Art is also home to a spectacular collection of watches, bequeathed to Vera by her father, the collector Sir David Lionel Salomons (1851-1925), 2nd Baronet, a scientist and engineer whose passion for horology made him a leading authority on Abraham-Louis Breguet, "the greatest watchmaker of all time". Over the course of his life, Sir David (named for his uncle) acquired the greatest collection of timepieces by the watchmaking genius held in private hands, which forms the core of the museum's watches collection today. In 1917, he bought the world's most famous watch, the spectacular "Marie-Antoinette", which remains one of the stars of the permanent exhibition.

Vera Salomons' founding vision of cross-cultural exchange has flourished under the leadership of director Nadim Sheiban. As the first Arab Museum Director in Israel, Mr Sheiban has introduced a programme of

events and exhibitions designed to break down the barriers between communities. Now, in order to secure both the future of the museum and to sustain its vital outreach programme, a select group of pieces – the majority previously in storage – will be offered at Sotheby’s in London this autumn. First, works of art from across the Islamic geographical arc will be offered on 27 October, followed by a sale of 64 watches and objects of vertu on 28 October. Prior to the sales, the works will be on public view in Sotheby’s galleries in New Bond Street.

Nadim Sheiban, Director of the L.A. Mayer Museum, said: *“The L.A. Mayer Museum is not only a repository for extraordinary works of art, it is also a place that can, through its collection and the spirit of its founding principles, make a meaningful difference to the communities around it. These sales will allow us to continue our efforts to help build bridges between those in the region, with proceeds enabling us to expand our educational programmes while at the same time ensuring the long-term future of the institution.”*

Herbert Winter, Chairman of the Board of Directors at the Museum, said: *“The decision to let go of certain pieces in our collection is one that has unfolded over the course of several years, through thoughtful discussion with all of our key stakeholders, namely our board, our director, and our curators. Together, we have been careful to select for sale works which, for the most part, are either duplicated in the collection or were held in storage. Their sale will not only secure the future of the museum, but will allow us to maintain and display our wonderful collection in an appropriate manner, and – importantly – it will allow us to expand on the educational community projects which align so closely both with our founding mission and with our future vision.”*

Among the many educational and community programmes the museum has introduced thus far are the bringing together of students and children from Jewish and Arab schools and kindergartens, Arabic language classes for Hebrew speakers, and temporary exhibitions showcasing the work of Arab contemporary artists (the museum was the first in Israel ever to stage an exhibition of Arab contemporary art.)

ISLAMIC ART – 27 October 2020

Edward Gibbs, Chairman of Sotheby’s Middle East & India, said: *“The L.A. Mayer Museum in Jerusalem is home to an outstanding collection of Islamic art, encompassing the full breadth of the Muslim World at the height of its artistic and political power. Journeying through its rooms, visitors are faced with art and objects spanning three continents, from Spain to Malaysia, representing over a millennium of production. Having learnt much myself from the treasures within, it is a pleasure to be able to facilitate the forward-looking work that is already underway to bring the collection to a whole new audience both locally and internationally.”*

By its very nature, Islamic art is rich and complex, blending Arab, Turkish, Persian and Indian traditions in an expression of an entire civilisation, unrestricted to a specific land or nation. The Islamic art in the L.A. Mayer collection centres around three core themes; the ‘Arabesque’, geometry and calligraphy, often intertwined on the same object. Spanning the lands that came under Islamic patronage, from Spain to India, 7th to 19th century, many of the most important dynasties are represented: the Mamluks, Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals.

A silver-inlaid Aqqoyunlu turban helmet, Turkey or Persia, second half 15th century (est. £400,000-600,000)

The Ottoman Sultans and the Aqqoyunlu rulers were famed for the decorative splendour of their arms and armour hitherto unseen in the Islamic world – each piece of weaponry reflecting the abundance of skilled workmanship at their court.

Inlaid with important inscriptions in silver, these elegant helmets were designed to accommodate a turban inside that would be representative of the rank or religious order of the owner. The helmet would have been affixed with a protective aventail, leaving only the wearer's eyes visible – the warriors who wore them are described as *"looking like young lions"*.



A fine Ottoman tombak chamfron, Turkey, 17th century (est. £100,000-150,000)

This horse's head defence, made entirely of gilt-copper, is further testament to the grandeur, wealth and glory of the Ottoman imperial army, whose visual splendour would have equalled if not surpassed its physical might. The role of the horse and mounted cavalry played a vital part in the Ottoman war machine, where their status was high, though this particular form of gilded armour may have been reserved for ceremonial and processional use.



A Qur'an leaf in eastern Kufic script, Persia, 11th/12th century (est. £200,000-300,000)

This folio is a strikingly beautiful example of the Qur'anic scripts of the medieval period, originating from a majestic Qur'an that would once have been among the most luxuriously decorated volumes. The original manuscript would have contained 2,250 leaves, with the background of the entire text area decorated throughout, revealing an indication of its breath-taking graphic power.



An early Iznik blue and white calligraphic pottery hanging ornament, Turkey, circa 1480 (est. £200,000-300,000)

Ornaments such as this would traditionally have been used within mosques or tombs, and from the earliest centuries of Islam it was the custom of rulers to send valuable ornaments to be hung at the Ka'ba in Mecca and in the Tomb of the Prophet at Medina.

This hanging ornament belongs to the earliest phase of ceramic production at Iznik during the reigns of Mehmet II 'the Conqueror' and his son, Bayezid II. Characterised by an intense, inky, blue-black colouring, this small and exceptionally rare group of Iznik pottery reflects the embryonic stage of firing control, before the introduction of polychromy had been mastered by the potters.



A 'Star' Oushak carpet, West Anatolia, second half 16th century (est. £70,000-100,000)

Rugs and carpets from the city of Oushak in Western Anatolia were some of the most prized and sought-after luxuries among the European elite from the early sixteenth to the eighteenth century – becoming lasting symbols of wealth and status. These carpets and rugs even made their way into the works of the most distinguished artists of the time, from Lorenzo Lotto to Carlo Crivelli, and in



paintings of King Henry VIII by Hans Holbein and Hans Eworth. Today, only around 150 examples of this group are known to exist.

WATCHES & VERTU – 28 October 2020

Daryn Schnipper, Chairman of Sotheby's International Watch Division, said: *“Over 100 years ago, Sir David Lionel Salomons assembled the world's greatest collections of Breguet watches in private hands. Today, his watches, steeped in the watchmaker's genius and the legend of their original owners - have achieved mythic status. If the name of Sir David continues to carry so much gravitas, it is certainly because his passion for horology was inspired by the same enlightened values that drove Breguet in his quest to revolutionise timekeeping. It is a huge honour to have been entrusted with the sale of these watches, thereby perpetuating Sir David's legacy and the humanist values of the museum created by his daughter, Vera.”*

The Watches sale is spearheaded by an unprecedented group of timepieces by Abraham-Louis Breguet, a “celebrity watchmaker” whose pioneering creations were sought after by the crowned heads and elites of Europe in the early 19th century. All of the lots were created by the watchmaking genius during his most active period, from 1790 until his death in 1823. The watches accompanied the “Marie Antoinette” along its tumultuous journey through the past century, from the legendary collection of Sir David Lionel Salomons to the museum in Jerusalem and its miraculous recovery following history's greatest watch heist¹.

The auction features pieces made for the watchmaker's most eminent clients and loyal patrons: the Prince Regent (future King George IV), the Duc of Praslin (owner of the famous eponymous watch, bequeathed in 1924 by Sir David to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris) and Princess Caroline Murat, Napoléon's ambitious sister for whom Breguet created the “Reine de Naples”, the very first wristwatch. For these clients – all passionate about horology - Breguet created some of his most ambitious pieces, incorporating revolutionary inventions.

A watch fit for a king: The Prince Regent's Resonance Watch (est. £400,000-600,000)

The Breguet No. 2788, bought for £350 (7,200 Francs) by the Prince Regent, future King George IV of England on 2nd October 1818

The star lot of the Watches sale is a very rare experimental gold precision watch bought in 1818 by the Prince Regent (later George IV) who shared a passion for horology with his father, George III. Both were avid collectors of Breguet pieces (N.B.: In July 2020, [George III's gold four-minute tourbillon watch](#) sold for a record-breaking \$2m at Sotheby's in London).



When the Prince Regent bought this watch in 1818, he paid the remarkable sum of £350 (7,200 francs) - one of the most expensive watches ever sold by Breguet. The price matched the importance of the watch which featured one of Abraham-Louis Breguet's greatest discoveries: the Parisian watchmaker was the first to apply the principle of resonance to a watch movement. Breguet's 'double watches' introduced two independent movements within the same case, beating in sympathetic opposition to one another. Only

¹ On 15 April 1983, more than 100 watches from the museum collection, including the Marie Antoinette and 55 other Breguet watches disappeared in the biggest burglary in the history of horology. The watches resurfaced in 2008, before being safely returned to the museum.

three “double watches” are known and two of them were made for monarchs (or future monarchs), including this one and another sold to the King of France, Louis XVIII in 1821.

The Duc of Praslin’s “Perpétuelle” (est. £250,000 - 350,000)

Breguet no. 148 sold to Duc de Praslin in December 1792 for 4,000 francs

The Duc of Praslin was an avid supporter and close friend of Breguet. A soldier and a politician, he owned a number of Breguet pieces, including one of the most famous and complicated watches ever made by the watchmaker: the no. 92, better known as the “Duc of Praslin” and bequeathed by Sir David to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of Paris in 1924.



The watch in the sale – no. 148 – is a “perpétuelle” (i.e. self-winding watch) sold to the Duc of Praslin in 1792 for 4,000 francs. In his book *The Art of Breguet*, British watchmaker George Daniels said: “Breguet did not invent the perpétuelle but he certainly did perfect it” and this is admirably illustrated by this watch which also unusually combines chronometer escapement and dial displays, days of the week and a thermometer.

Princess Murat’s Thermometer Watch (est. £200,000-300,000)

Breguet No. 1806 sold to Napoleon’s sister on 25th May 1807 for 4,000 francs

A further highlight was made for another of Breguet’s best clients: Princess Murat, better known as Caroline Bonaparte (1782-1839), the younger sister of Napoleon. When she purchased this watch in May 1807, Caroline Murat was very much in ascendance. The year before, she and her husband had been granted the Grand Duchy of Berg and Cleves and the following year would see their elevation to King and Queen Consort of Naples. Between 1808 and 1814 Caroline Murat purchased some 34 further clocks and watches from Breguet, including an ultra-slim watch designed to be worn on the wrist – one of the first wristwatches ever created.



The watch in the sale includes a thermometer – an invention Breguet devoted considerable time to develop. The watch’s gold engine-turned dial also displays day, date, month and, unusually, the year. In typical Breguet fashion, what may otherwise have required an extremely complex arrangement is instead elegantly and ingeniously executed.

About Sotheby’s

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