

Bequest by Sir Joseph Hotung one of the most significant in Museum's history

A major bequest by the late Sir Joseph Hotung is one of the most significant in the Museum's history, adding to his earlier donations of Chinese works of art. Sir Joseph, a Trustee of the British Museum from 1994-2004, sadly passed away in December 2021 and had already loaned a number of objects to the Museum. Many of these were already on display in The Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Jade Gallery, adjacent to the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia, a gallery which he endowed twice, in 1992 and twenty-five years later in 2017.

In addition to donating those items already on display, Sir Joseph has bequeathed fifteen very fine Yuan (1279-1368) and Early Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) blue-and-white porcelains and a dry lacquer head of a Bodhisattva, all of which will be put on display in the coming months. These additional pieces, alongside the rest of the British Museum's collection, will help the museum share China's history and creativity with a wide range of audiences from all over the world and play an important part in the museum's research activities.

The bequest includes 246 jades (including three new jades), fifteen rare Yuan and Early Ming Dynasty blue-and-white porcelains, 24 bronzes and other items of metalwork, a Neolithic white pottery jar as well as a dry lacquer head of a Bodhisattva.

With this generous gift, the jade gallery at the British Museum can continue to display a chronological history of jade working in China, bringing together jades from all the major Chinese dynasties.

Sir Joseph's collection of blue-and-white porcelains represents some of the finest examples in the world of early Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. The collection covers the first hundred years of blue-and-white production in China during the late Yuan (1279-1368) and Early Ming (1368-1644) dynasties when artists appear to have been working with few restraints and demonstrates the powerful blue-and-white style of the time. The gift of porcelain also includes some of the more sophisticated early Ming style, covering the Yongle (1402-1424) and Xuande (1425-1435) reigns when the production was supervised by the court.

George Osborne, Chair of the Trustees of the British Museum said: "Sir Joseph Hotung was one of the British Museum's most visionary and committed supporters for almost 30 years. He had a warm and enduring relationship with the British Museum and was amongst our most significant philanthropists. This is one of the most generous gifts we've ever received, and it means future generations will be able to enjoy these beautiful objects and learn more about the extraordinary history of China."

Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum, said: "Sir Joseph Hotung was a highly distinguished, refined, and generous man. The British Museum was fortunate to benefit from his wise counsel, as well as his philanthropy, which will be remembered for generations to come."

Carol Michaelson, Curator Department of Asia, said: "It is rare to have a display, outside of Asia, exhibiting a comprehensive and chronological history of Chinese jade. The bequest is a

result of the long and close relationship Sir Joseph had with the British Museum and further underlines his great generosity.”

Sir Joseph’s family said: “Our father thoroughly enjoyed collecting and studying exquisite art and it was his belief that art should be accessible to everyone. Therefore, he donated a large part of his Asian art collection to the British Museum, of which he was an ardent supporter and patron. We are pleased that our father’s collections will now be viewed by the millions of visitors who pass through the Museum every year and that this important area of the world will be further represented.”



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