



*Sejak lebih dari sepuluh tahun terakhir perhatian Australia terhadap seni budaya Islam terus berkembang, seiring dengan meningkatnya pertumbuhan masyarakat imigran Muslim dari Timur Tengah, Asia Selatan, dan Asia Tenggara di negara ini. Koleksi Art Gallery of South Australia, di Adelaide – sebagaimana galeri-galeri negeri dan nasional lainnya – mencerminkan perubahan identitas masyarakat Australia dan komitmen sosial mereka terhadap multikulturalisme. Beberapa pameran berkaitan dengan seni budaya Islam yang telah diselenggarakan galeri seni ini adalah Persia and Beyond (1997), Persian Treasures (2003), dan Crescent Moon: Islamic Art and Civilisation of Southeast Asia (2005). Crescent Moon merupakan pameran internasional pertama yang menampilkan seni budaya Islam Asia Tenggara dengan koleksi pinjaman dari Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapura, Brunei, dan Australia. Untuk mengukuhkan perhatian terhadap seni Islam, sejak tahun 2003 Art Gallery of South Australia memamerkan secara tetap koleksi khusus seni Islam, dan ini merupakan yang pertama di Australia.*

*Kata kunci: Australia, Islam, galeri, seni, kebudayaan.*

## Islamic Art at 'The Art Gallery of South Australia

*James Bennett  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide*

OVER the past ten years, Australia has increasingly aware of Muslim cultures yet today there is still only one permanent public display dedicated to Islamic art in this country. Perhaps it is not surprising that the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide made the pioneer decision in 2003 to present Islamic art as a special feature for visitors to this art museum. Adelaide has a long history of contact with Islam. Following the Art Gallery's establishment in 1881, the oldest mosque in Australia was opened in 1888 in the city for use by Afghan cameleers who were important in assisting in the early European colonization of the harsh interior of the Australian continent.

Adelaide has been predominantly a European city for much of its history since first settlement in 1836 but the present profile of the Islamic collection at the Art Gallery of South Australia reflects the wider changing story of Australia's engagement with Islam. The first works of art representing Muslim cultures acquired by the Art Gallery was a small bequest of 19th century Iranian ceramic tiles and Indo-Persian weapons in 1916. During the 20th century the Islamic collection grew slowly with few acquisitions. Then, in 1997, the Art Gallery presented the exhibition *Persia and Beyond* that marked a significant turning point in the story of Australia's engagement with Islamic art.

*Persia and Beyond* presented the story of Islamic art as a global tradition stretching geographically from the Middle East to Indonesia. The exhibition primarily explored historical Islamic aesthetics on the basis of geography rather than its spiritual parameters. Perhaps this reflected the rapidly changing identity of Australian society at a time of increasing growth in Muslim immigrant communities from the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia. The Art Gallery of South Australia, like other state and national galleries, represents the 'public face' of Australian social commitment to multiculturalism. The Art Gallery has subsequently staged several more exhibitions of Islamic art including *Persian Treasures* (2003) and *Crescent Moon: Islamic art and civilization of Southeast Asia* (2005). *Crescent Moon* was the first international exhibition to feature the Islamic art of Southeast Asia and was accompanied by a tri-lingual English, bahasa Indonesia and Malay catalogue. The exhibition included loans from twenty-eight public and private collections in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Australia.

Overwhelmingly, the Art Gallery's donors and patrons supporting the development of the Islamic collection until now have been Australians of European ancestry. Nevertheless, it was an Australian benefactor, Dr. William Bowmore AO OBE (1909-2008), whose parents were migrants from Lebanon, whose extraordinary generosity would transform the Islamic art collection in Adelaide and so create the impetus for a commitment to its development. In 2000 Dr Bowmore first presented a unique Safavid 'Polonaise' carpet, woven in the early 17th century in Isfahan to the Art Gallery [**Image 1**]. In 2003 Dr. Bowmore subsequently gifted a

major collection of forty-five Iranian, Turkish, Syrian and Morocco ceramics. The collection records the history of Middle Eastern ceramics that is one of the glories of Islamic art and technology, as well as one of Islam's oldest crafts.

The Bowmore gift, including a range of ceramics dating from 9th century Nishapur slipware to a colourfully glazed 20th century Kutahya tiled stove, comprehensively documents a millennium of the Muslim potters' art. The most immediately appealing vessels in the collection are the early Persian luster ware with shimmering golden glazes imitating the most precious of all metals. The figurative theme of a 13th century bowl, depicting the famous story of Bahram Gur from the *Shahnama*, suggests the style of vanished illuminated manuscript paintings. **[Image 3]**. It is an eloquent testimony to the skill of early Muslim craft persons worked in an artistic environment where the boundaries between various contrasting media, such as fired clay and the decorated manuscript, dissolved in a shared quest for beauty. This was an era when Iranian civilisation flowered into a culture of extraordinary artistic and spiritual refinement. A thirteenth century Sultanabad bowl presents a powerful image of stillness in movement and its mysterious symbolism hints at the mystical language of early Sufism. Within its cavetto the silhouettes of fish glide beneath a turquoise glaze as clear and intense as the tropical waters of the Persian Gulf. **[Image 6]**.

Over the past decade, an increasing focus of the Islamic art collection has been the Muslim traditions of India. As early as the 1940, the Art Gallery acquired a small group of very fine 17th century Mughal miniature paintings, such as the portrait of *Dara Shikoh as a boy* (c1628-1630) **[Image 5]**. Dara Shikoh was the son of the great Shah Jahan (1592-1666) who built the famous Taj Mahal. Among more recent acquisitions has been a spectacular collection of Mughal era silverware included two Deccan *alam* religious standards that are said to be conventionalised versions of the battle standards carried by Husein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and his followers. They were intended for display in a mosque or religious processions during the month of Muharram when Shia Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Husein at the battle of Karbala in Iraq. The *Religious standard, with Arabic script* features the invocation 'In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the

All-Compassionate...’ in *thuluth* calligraphy surrounded by the names of unidentified individuals. The *Religious standard in the form of the Hand of Fatimah* [Image 2] depicts the stylised hand of the Prophet’s daughter is believed to possess talismanic powers of protection. The five fingers are said to represent the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, son-in-law Ali and two grandsons Hasan and Husein although the use of the hand symbol as an amulet against evil in the Middle East dates back to pre-Islamic times. The style of both standards is similar to examples preserved today in the royal *ashur khanah* of Hyderabad and were most likely made in that city.

It is true that much of the greatest Islamic art has been produced for the secular context of court use and the Art Gallery patron, Geoffrey Hackett-Jones, who recently generously gifted the religious *alam*, has also presented two splendid examples of Mughal metalware intended for aristocrats. The exquisitely wrought *Ewer, in the form of a goose* [Image 4] and *Pair of flasks*, each flask with the head of a bird and the body of a mango fruit, are decorated in intricate designs of flowers and leaves interspersed with birds. The elegant decoration epitomises the taste of the Indian Muslim courts during the 18th century.

Two major supporters, through many generous gifts and long-term loans of Islamic art to the Art Gallery of South Australia, are the Adelaide collectors, Barrie and Judith Heaven. Their outstanding gifts include a very rare silver *Celestial globe* depicting the heavenly constellations. The *Celestial globe* has the apocryphal signature of the renowned Persian astronomer al-Din Tusi (1201-1274) and indicates it was possibly a copy of an original globe, now lost, made by him. According to the inscribed actual date, the *Celestial globe* dates from the Lucknow reign of the Nawab of Oudh, Asaf-ud-daula (1775-1798) who was noted for his interest in astrology. The *Celestial globe* is one of only about 130 examples of globes, made during the history of Islam, to survive until today. The finely crafted hollow silver sphere, depicting the stars with zodiac symbols, epitomises the fusion of science and art so central to the expression of Islamic cultural identity throughout Muslim history.

The most recent acquisition to the Art Gallery’s Islamic art collection is also a gift from Barrie and Judith Heaven and was presented earlier this year. It is a very rare and unusual 18th century Indian miniature painting *Portrait of the Prophet Muhammad riding*

*the bouraq steed*. The depiction of the Prophet's face has been forbidden in Islam yet a surprising number of Muslim Middle Eastern and Indian artists painted imaginary portraits. Perhaps the most famous are the depictions of the Prophet's life in Rashid al-Din's *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, dated 714 AH, and now in the Khalili collection which is the most extensive private collection of Islamic in the world. The *Portrait of the Prophet Muhammad riding the bouraq steed* may be considered heterodox from the view of religious scholars yet the spiritual devotion of the Lucknow artist, who created the painting, is apparent in the words in Arabic written above the figure:

The pride of the prophets.  
The lamp of the pure ones.  
The beloved of the creator of heaven and earth.  
The presence (*hadrat*) of the chosen Muhammad.  
God's prayers be upon him.

**Image 1.** Iran, Safavid period, reign of Shah Abbas 1 (1587-1629), *The Yakob 'Polonaise' Carpet*, c1625-30, Isfahan region, silk pile with brocading in silver thread, 266.5 x 164.0 cm; Gift of Mr William Bowmore AO OBE through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation

**Image 2.** India, Late Mughal Period, 1628-1858, *Religious standard (alam), in the form of the Hand of Fatimah*, 18th century, Deccan, north India, gilt silver, 63.0 x 33.0 cm.

**Image 3.** Iran, Seljuk Period 1038-1194, *Bowl*, early 13th century, Kashan, lustre and underglaze decoration, stone-paste earthenware, 21.4 cm diameter; Gift of Mr William Bowmore AO OBE through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2003. 20035C24

**Image 4.** India, Late Mughal Period 1628-1858, *Ewer, in the form of a goose*, 18th century, Deccan, north India, gilt silver, 35.5 x 27.5 x 21.0 cm; Gift of Geoffrey Hackett-Jones in memory of his brother Frank through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2007.

**Image 5.** India, Late Mughal Period, 1628-1858, *Dara Shikoh as a boy*, c1628-1630, Agra or Delhi gouache on paper, 41.0 x 32.0 cm; Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund 19400.1142

**Image 6.** Iran, Ilkhanid Period 1215-1353, *Bowl*, 14th century, Kashan or Sultanabad underglaze decoration, stone-paste earthenware, 20.8 cm diameter; Gift of Mr William Bowmore AO OBE through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 200320035C20