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A DAZZLING SHOWCASE OF INDIAN JEWELRY OPENS AT PHOENIX ART MUSEUM

When Gold Blossoms: Indian Jewelry from the Susan L. Beningson Collection Explores
Indian Experiences of Jewelry

PHOENIX (February 11, 2008) – Phoenix Art Museum presents *When Gold Blossoms: Indian Jewelry from the Susan L. Beningson Collection*, a showcase of more than 150 spectacular pieces of Indian jewelry primarily from South India and dating from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. The exhibition, which opens on Saturday, February 16, 2008 includes intricate rings, anklets, earrings, necklaces, hair pendants, ivory combs, and jeweled crowns – a dazzling array of exquisite objects of adornment that reveal complex signals of communication and beliefs. *When Gold Blossoms* is organized by the Asia Society and Museum, New York, and the national tour of the exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts.

Traditionally, jewelry in India has been worn and valued for both its ornamental and symbolic qualities. Replete with meaning, jewelry could reveal the wearer's regional origins, beliefs, marital status, wealth, and social position. *When Gold Blossoms* not only celebrates the beauty and awe-inspiring craftsmanship of Indian jewelry but also examines how it was worn to communicate identity in social and religious contexts.

"In India, jewelry acts as an essential medium of social relationships, meanings and exchanges. From one community to another, from one person to another, the meanings and rituals that guide the use of jewelry and the emotions surrounding their wearing vary immensely," commented Janet Baker, Curator of Asian Art, Phoenix Art Museum. "Described in medieval poetry, 19th century diaries and even contemporary Web sites, the Indian experiences of jewelry go far beyond the search for beauty and the desire to display wealth."

The precious materials selected for each piece of jewelry holds significance beyond beauty: gold was thought to have the power to purify those it touched, and gems the power to focus planetary influences, benefiting those who wore them. While the majority of the pieces included in the exhibition were intended to be worn in daily life, others were dedicated to deities and meant to convey the devotion of their worshipers. In Indian tradition, deities most often appear extensively bejeweled; religious practices have for millennia included the gift of gold and jewels to the gods.

The title of the exhibition takes its name from the many jewelry pieces that reproduce the form of berries, seeds, buds, or flowers and also alludes to the preferences for gold in South Indian jewelry, as opposed to the North Indian preference for precious and semiprecious stones. From ear studs in the shape of lotuses to armbands formed in the shape of weaving leaves and petals, organic forms from nature were considered particularly auspicious and were believed to promote fertility and also express a woman's procreative powers. Chains, linked beads and scrolling ornaments suggest growth through repetition and, by extension, life and prosperity.

"This is the first time Phoenix Art Museum has hosted a special exhibition focusing on Indian art. It is our hope that *When Gold Blossoms* stimulates additional interest in Indian art and culture, one of the major civilizations of Asia, and attracts new audiences. We also encourage visitors to see the works of Indian art on display in our Asian Gallery," commented Baker.

The exhibition is organized by the Asia Society and Museum, New York. The national tour of the exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts. The national tour of this exhibition is made possible, in part, by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, with additional support from the Philip and Janice Levin Foundation Fund for Collection-Based Exhibitions at the American Federation of Arts. The presentation in Phoenix is made possible by the Asian Arts Council of Phoenix Art Museum, Dr. Dhira B. Mahoney, in memory of Dr. James W. Mahoney, and UMB Bank of Arizonan, n.a. Promotional support for this exhibition has been provided by Valley India Times and India Association of Phoenix.

Public Events:

The Museum is offering a full schedule of programs and events relating to the exhibition, such as workshops, lectures, music and more. Updated information regarding public programs can be found on the exhibition Web site, www.phxart.org.

Exhibition Details:

When Gold Blossoms will be on view in Phoenix Art Museum's Orme Lewis Gallery February 16 thru May 11, 2008.

Admission to the exhibition is included in general museum admission, which is \$10 for adults, \$8 for senior citizens (65+), \$8 for full-time college students with ID, \$4 for children ages 6–17 and free for children under 6 and for

museum members. Admission is also free on Tuesdays from 3:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m. and for everyone on First Fridays, 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Phoenix Art Museum is located in downtown Phoenix at the corner of Central Avenue and McDowell Road. Museum hours are Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. and Wednesday – Sunday from 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. The museum is closed on Mondays and major holidays.

About the American Federation of Arts:

The AFA is a nonprofit institution that organizes art exhibitions for presentation in museums around the world, publishes exhibition catalogues, and develops education programs. For more information on the AFA, please visit www.afaweb.org.

About the Asia Society and Museum, New York:

The Asia Society is the leading global organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders and institutions of Asia and the United States. They seek to enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression and generate new ideas across the fields of policy, business, education, arts and culture.

About Phoenix Art Museum:

The classically progressive design of the 203,000 sq. ft. Phoenix Art Museum integrates art and architecture with the Southwestern landscape, accommodating large traveling exhibitions and a collection of over 17,000 works in American, Asian, modern & contemporary, European, Latin American and Western American art, and fashion design. Visitors also enjoy the Sculpture Garden, the Thorne Miniature Rooms of historic interiors, PhxArtKids interactive space for children, Art Museum Café and The Museum Store. Visitors can learn more about the Museum's collection through its bilingual, random access MP3 audio guide, available at the admissions desk. The museum recently opened its \$50 million expansion project, which included the addition of a glass-enclosed lobby and entry plaza, 4-level gallery wing, sculpture garden and expanded store.

For more information about this exhibition or Phoenix Art Museum, visit the Web site at: <u>PhxArt.org</u>, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.