

Exhibition at the Queen's Gallery – Gold



The beauty and symbolism of gold, from the Early Bronze Age to the 20th century, is celebrated in an exhibition opening at The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse on 27 March.

Through over 60 items drawn from across the entire breadth of the Royal Collection, *Gold* explores the distinctive qualities that make this rare and precious metal an enduring expression of the highest status, both earthly and divine.

Over millennia and across diverse cultures, gold has been used to represent and reflect royal wealth and power. Among the most striking examples in the exhibition are the Rillaton gold cup, from a Bronze Age burial around 1700 – 1500 BC, a gold crown from Ecuador that pre-dates the Inca invasion, and a tiger's head in gold and rock crystal from the throne of Tipu Sultan (1785–93), ruler of Mysore in India.



Many of the sacred and ceremonial items associated with the coronations of British monarchs incorporate gold. The exhibition includes a design from 1760 by Sir William Chambers and Giovanni Battista Cipriani for the Gold State Coach, then the most expensive coach ever made. It has been used at every coronation since that of George IV in 1821. The text of John Whittaker's illustrated account of the *Ceremonial of the Coronation of King George IV in the Abbey of St. Peter's Westminster*, 1823, is printed entirely in gold. Only six copies of the book were ever produced, one for each of the crowned heads of Europe, and the project bankrupted the author. The painting *Queen Victoria Receiving the Sacrament at her Coronation, 28 June 1838* by Charles Robert Leslie shows the Queen dressed in the shimmering Dalmatic Robe standing in

a pool of golden sunlight.

Highly malleable and versatile, gold has been used to decorate every possible surface, from paper and silk to wood and leather. The exhibition shows gold incorporated into lacquer on a pair of 18th-century Japanese bowls and applied over carved gesso on a table by James Moore, who created furniture for Queen Anne and George I. Gold leaf and gold paint are used to decorate scenes on a Chinese-inspired fan which belonged to Queen Adelaide, consort of William IV. The fan's guards are made of solid gold, studded with amethysts and rubies, and bear Queen Adelaide's cipher.

The Padshahnama is the finest Islamic manuscript in the Royal Collection. Written on paper flecked with gold, the manuscript chronicles the first ten years of the reign of Shah-Jahan, the fifth Mughal emperor and builder of the Taj Mahal (reigned 1628–58). It includes beautiful miniature paintings by some of the finest artists working at the Mughal court in the mid-17th century and an elaborately decorated frontispiece, which features a golden *shamsa* (sunburst or image of the sun). The *shamsa* was said to be a divine light 'which God directly transfers to kings, without the assistance of men'.

Among other highlights of the exhibition are Simon van de Passe's engraved gold portrait medallion of Elizabeth I, two landscapes by the 17th-century artist Pier Francesco Cittadini drawn in pen and ink on paper covered in gold leaf, and William Nicholson's still life, *Gold Jug*, 1937 – a study of the play of light on metallic surfaces.

