

New Galleries for the Gilbert Collection open at the V&A

Opens 30 June 2009



The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Galleries will open at the V&A on 30 June with highlights from the Gilbert Collection, one of the most important collections ever given to Britain. The new galleries reflect Sir Arthur Gilbert's passion for craftsmanship of the highest quality and a fascination with collecting works related to important historical figures including Frederick the Great, Catherine the Great and Napoleon.

Over 500 objects will be on show in newly designed galleries, adjacent to the V&A's silver collections and overlooking the John Madejski Garden. Previously shown at Somerset House in chronological displays, the Collection will now be presented in four galleries each focussing on a broad category of European decorative arts – gold and silver, gold boxes, Italian mosaics and enamelled portrait miniatures.

The first gallery will focus on 16th and 17th-century silver and present pieces made as domestic wares as well as impressive ornamental objects for display. A highlight is a pair of silver-gilt *rimmonim*, a generous gift to the V&A by Marjorie, Lady Gilbert through the American Friends of The Art Fund, shown together with a Torah crown.

The second will show 18th and 19th-century silver, including a pair of monumental silver and gilt gates from a Russian Orthodox monastic church in Kiev, thought to have been commissioned by Catherine the Great. It will also display portrait miniatures by some of the most important artists working in the medium and depicting prominent historical figures such as George Washington, The Duchess of Devonshire and Oliver Cromwell.

On display in the third gallery will be the Gilberts' impressive collection of more than 200 gold boxes. Used to hold snuff or small sweets, they became a fashionable item for elegantly dressed men and women in the 18th century. They were given to friends and lovers, and presented by kings to ambassadors and courtiers. Arthur Gilbert delighted in tracing the links between the boxes and historic events and figures.

The collection includes a snuffbox set with a portrait of Philip V of Spain, a declaration of love to Elisabetta Farnese whom he married in 1714. Five of the finest boxes on display are those associated with Frederick the Great of Prussia and are set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and carved hardstones.

The Gilbert Collection has one of the most comprehensive collections of hard stone mosaics (*pietre dure*) and glass 'micromosaics', a term coined by Sir Arthur. The final gallery will present pieces ranging from large cabinets, tables and pictures, to clocks and jewellery. On display will be two micromosaic vases and a clock decorated with mosaic panels given by Pope Pius VII to Napoleon on his coronation in 1804. Other highlights are the enormous *Panorama of Rome* micromosaic panel, created with such technical virtuosity that Sir Arthur first mistook it for a painting, and a *pietre dure* collector's cabinet made in Prague in 1610.

The galleries will have three audio points to provide a commentary on Arthur and Rosalinde Gilbert as collectors, an introduction to Frederick the Great's gold boxes, and another on the Kiev monastery gates. There will also be a specially commissioned video, filmed in Florence in 2008, which will explain the materials and techniques used to make a Florentine hardstone mosaic.

In addition, a display of silver marked by London's leading 18th-century silversmith, Paul de Lamerie, modelled and chased by the celebrated 'Maynard Master', will be shown in the adjacent Whiteley Silver Galleries. On show will be the Le Quesne tea kettle, the Mountrath ewer and dish and salvers from the Gilbert Collection, together with the Mountrath silver fish slice on loan from the Honourable Mrs John Dawson-Damer in Australia. The magnificent *Maynard Dish* is on loan from the Cahn Collection, USA and four silver candlesticks are from an English private collection.

A number of pieces from the Gilbert Collection are being returned on loan to the houses for which they were originally made, including the National Trust properties Dunham Massey, Cheshire and Belton House, Lincolnshire. A silver howdah has been lent to the Curzon Museum in Kedleston, Derbyshire.

Mark Jones, V&A Director, said: "*I am delighted that the V&A will be the new home for the Gilbert Collection. There is a natural affinity between the V&A's collections of silver and the objects collected by Sir Arthur. These displays, and the loans to the National Trust, will ensure that the Gilbert Collection continues to be widely seen.*"

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Notes to Editors:

- Entry to the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Galleries at the V&A is FREE.
- A new book, *The Gilbert Collection*, edited by Timothy Schroder will be published by V&A Publishing. It provides an introduction to the Collection.
- The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Galleries are curated by V&A curator, Tessa Murdoch with consultant curator Timothy Schroder.
- The new galleries are designed by V&A Design

About Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert and the Collection

Sir Arthur Gilbert was born in 1913 in Hackney, London. His parents were successful Polish Jewish immigrants, the Bernsteins, who settled in London in the 1890s. In 1934, Arthur took the family name of his first wife Rosalinde. Together they made a fortune through her made-to-order dress-making business. In 1949, they retired to California. Arthur made a second fortune in Los Angeles property, and from the 1960s, collecting works of art became a passionate means of self-expression. By the 1970s the Collection had outgrown the Gilberts' home and a relationship with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was fostered.

In 1996 the Collection was given to Britain. The donation played a pivotal role in opening up Somerset House to the public. In 2000 a dedicated gallery space at Somerset House was officially opened by the Queen Mother where the Collection was displayed until January 2008.

Rosalinde Gilbert died in 1995. In 1997 Arthur married Marjorie Haworth. Arthur died in 2001. His second wife, Majorie, lives in Los Angeles and has presented Dutch silver covered cups and rimmonim from the Gilbert Collection to the V&A.

For further PRESS information about the galleries please contact the V&A Press Office on 0207 942 2500/02 or email press.office@vam.ac.uk

A selection of high-resolution images are available to download free of charge from www.image.net

About the Art Fund

The Art Fund is the UK's leading independent art charity, committed to funding art for everyone to enjoy. It offers millions of pounds in grants each year, to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections, campaigns on behalf of museums and their visitors, and promotes the enjoyment of art. It is completely independent and receives no government funding, relying on the generosity of its supporters to achieve its aims.

The Art Fund also acts as a conduit for lifetime gifts and bequests of works of art to UK museums and galleries, and since 1903 more than 60,500 objects have entered public collections through this route. The American Friends of The Art Fund is the US fundraising arm of the organisation and facilitates tax-efficient giving for supporters from the US. The Lady Marjorie Gilbert Gift is the first gift in kind made to a UK museum through the American Friends of The Art Fund, and the gift also includes two works for Temple Newsam House, Leeds.

For more information about The Art Fund please contact The Art Fund Press Office on 020 7225 4888 or visit www.artfund.org