BOSTON COLLEGE McMULLEN MUSEUM OF ART
PRESENTS LANDMARK EXHIBITION OF PREMIER ISLAMIC WORKS,
MOST IN FIRST UNITED STATES DISPLAY:

COSMOPHILIA: ISLAMIC ART FROM THE DAVID COLLECTION, COPENHAGEN
SEPTEMBER 1-DECEMBER 31, 2006

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (August 2006) – The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College will present *Cosmophilia: Islamic Art from the David Collection, Copenhagen*. The exhibition—on view from September 1 through December 31, 2006—comprises over 100 of the finest examples of Islamic art, most of which have never before been displayed in the United States.

*Cosmophilia* (literally "love of ornament") will explore, for the first time, the roles that decoration plays in the visual arts of Islam. The lavish use of ornament is one of the most characteristic—and attractive—features of Islamic art, and one that never has been given its due in a major exhibition, according to the organizers. In addition, they describe the exhibition as the first "user-friendly" and accessible presentation of Islamic art, because it is organized visually by theme as opposed to chronologically or historically.

The exhibition is curated by Boston College Professors Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, two of the world’s leading historians of Islamic art, who are married and jointly hold the Norma Jean Calderwood University Chair in Islamic and Asian Art at Boston College. The works on display—drawn from the David Collection, one of the foremost repositories of the arts of the Islamic world—range in media from jewelry to carpets, in date from the 7th to the 19th century and in geographic origin from Western Europe to East Asia. The exhibition will include both secular and religious art.

"The McMullen Museum is honored to have Boston College's Calderwood University Professors Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, two of the world’s foremost scholars of Islamic art, organize a groundbreaking exhibition from one of world’s finest, albeit lesser known, collections of Islamic art. We are pleased and proud to dedicate this exhibition to our former colleague and friend Norma Jean Calderwood, who introduced the study of Islamic art to the Boston College curriculum and to the memory of her husband Stanford Calderwood," said McMullen Museum Director and Professor of Art History Nancy Netzer.
"It is the first time ever that so many works of Islamic art have left the David Collection to be shown abroad. And since scholarship within this field is manifesting itself stronger in the US than anywhere else for the time being, I am especially pleased that this elegant, enlightening and well-documented exhibition takes place there," said Kjeld von Folsach, Director of the David Collection.

Blair and Bloom had unprecedented access—because the David Collection will be closed for renovation in 2006-07—to select for display 123 of the finest pieces in the collection, which comprises some 2,500 works of art. "Islamic art," they note, "a term coined by 18th-century Orientalists, refers not only to the arts made for the faith of Islam, but also to all arts created in lands where Islam was the principal religion." (More on the David Collection, page 4.)

"These magnificent objects testify to the long and vibrant cultures and rich intellectual traditions of the Islamic lands," Bloom says. "This exhibition will introduce Americans to the extraordinary visual virtuosity of one of the world's great artistic traditions, with which they are largely unfamiliar."

AT RIGHT: MIHRAB TILE, LATE 13TH CENTURY, KASHAN, IRAN. FRIWARE, CAST IN TWO PARTS AND PAINTED IN BLUE AND TURQUOISE IN, AND IN LUSTER OVER, AN OPAQUE WHITE GLAZE, 76 X 74 CM. 1/1968

The exhibition provides a rare opportunity for the US audience to view these works, which represent the broadest range in medium, technique, place of origin and date. There have been few comprehensive exhibitions of Islamic art—notably, one in Munich in 1910, and one in London in 1976. And, most temporary exhibitions of Islamic art have focused on particular media, countries, dynasties, rulers or even single works of art.

Cosmophilia's goal—taken from the idea proposed in the preface to the London exhibition catalogue—is "to trace the key themes present in Islamic art, separately or together" and to show how they were developed differently at different times and place. Blair and Bloom note that, for most Westerners, exuberant ornament and a love of pattern distinguish the arts of the Islamic lands from the world's other great artistic traditions.

Public Opening Celebration:
On Tuesday, September 12, an opening celebration—which is open to the public, free of charge—will be held at the Museum from 7-9 p.m. It will include exhibition viewing and a dessert reception. [NOTE: To arrange attendance, call 617-552-8587 or email artmusm@bc.edu]. The public event will be preceded, on September 8, by a black-tie celebration for invited guests.

COSMOPHILIA

The exhibition is organized visually by theme in five sections—figures, writing, geometry, vegetation-arabesque and hybrids—which unite the visual arts of the Islamic lands, and reveal how artisans explored major types of decorations.

Figures explores representations of people and animals, both real and imaginary, which form a major theme of the secular—but not the religious—arts of the Islamic lands. It will present some of the world's finest Persian book paintings from a 16th-century manuscript
of the *Shahnama*, or Book of Kings, as well as life-size weavings decorated with courtly figures and tiny metalwares inlaid with silver and gold.

*Writing* shows viewers how the word—especially the Koran—is the primary theme of Islamic religious art, but the love of writing spilled over into all the arts. Viewers can examine varieties of beautiful writing on objects ranging from sumptuous manuscripts of the Koran to inscribed textiles and ceramics.

**At Right:** *Leaf from a large Koran manuscript written in Muhaqqaq script, 1400-1405, Afghanistan. Ink and gold on paper, 45 x 98 cm. 20/1987*

*Geometry* reveals how artists in the Islamic lands greatly expanded the designs found in pre-Islamic times into complex geometric patterns applied to the works of art ranging from superb inlaid wooden doors to patchwork tablecloths.

*Vegetation/Arabesque* reveals how artists transformed the rich traditions of decoration with plants, flowers and leaves inherited from the Sassanian and late-Antique worlds into major motifs of decoration. This section explains the development of the arabesque, the quintessential ornament in Islamic art, where plants grow according to the laws of geometry rather than nature.

*Hybrids* presents some or all of these themes present on a single work of art.

The exhibition also will examine the unifying principles that characterize Islamic arts: color, repetition, symmetry, direction, juxtaposition, layering, framing, transferability, abstraction and ambiguity. Exhibition wall texts, labels and an audio tour will explain to visitors how artisans in the Islamic lands embraced decoration, embellishing everything from tablewares to tapestries with various exuberant motifs. [NOTE: Full exhibition description at www.bc.edu/artmuseum]

**Lion-headed doorknocker, 11th century, Southern Italy. Cast and engraved bronze, partly inlaid with niello, 44.3 cm. 50/2000**

After it leaves the McMullen Museum, the exhibition will travel to the University of Chicago's Smart Museum, where it will be on display from February to May, 2007.

**EXHIBITION CATALOGUE**

Blair and Bloom are the principal authors of the accompanying illustrated catalogue. Like the exhibition, the 300-page catalogue—including essays on ornament, individual entries, and color reproductions of all 123 objects—is intended to be a major scholarly contribution. It will include an essay on the David Collection by its Director, Kjeld von Folsach, as well as related essays on ornament by Netzer, a noted medievalist; and Associate Professor
Claude Cernuschi, a Boston College expert on modern art. [For more details, see www.bc.edu/artmuseum]

**ACCOMPANYING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

Educational programs will allow the exhibition to play a special role in current discussions about art, religion and political culture in the Islamic lands.

Public events—including a lecture and film series—will be offered (see below). Blair and Bloom will also offer teacher-training sessions to enable teachers to incorporate an Islamic studies component into their curricula and tour the exhibition with their classes. Museum docents will offer weekly tours and group tours on request (see page 5). An audio tour, written and narrated by Blair and Bloom, will be available free of charge on iPods and on the Museum website.

In addition, the McMullen Museum and the Ilex Foundation will host a viewing and reception in conjunction with the 40th meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of America (MESA), which will be held in Boston in November 2006. Blair and Bloom are program chairs for the entire meeting, which focuses on the theme of cultural expression and will bring several thousand scholars of Islamic studies to the exhibition.

**PUBLIC EVENTS:**

Public Opening Celebration
*Tuesday, September 12, 7 – 9 p.m.* Dessert reception and exhibition viewing.

**LECTURES**

*Thursday, September 14, 7 p.m.*, Devlin Hall room 101
"'God is Beautiful, and He Loves Beauty': Remembrance and Repetition in Islamic Arts."
By James Morris, Professor of Theology, Boston College

*Thursday, September 28, 7 p.m.*, Devlin Hall room 101
"Collecting and Exhibiting the Middle East in a Post-9/11 World."
By Linda Komaroff, Curator of Islamic Art and Department Head, Ancient and Islamic Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

*Tuesday, October 17, 7 p.m.*, Devlin Hall room 101
"Heroes and Saints in Islamic Art and Literature."
By John Renard, Professor of Theology, St. Louis University

*Thursday, November 2, 7 p.m.*, Devlin Hall room 101
"Adolf Loos, Alois Riegl, and the Debate on Ornament in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna."
By Claude Cernuschi, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, Boston College

*Thursday, November 16, 7 p.m.*, Devlin Hall room 101
"Islamic Architecture: The Triumph of Color."
By Bernard O’Kane, Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, American University in Cairo

**FILMS**

Thursday, September 21, 7 p.m., Devlin Hall room 026
*The Color of Paradise* (1999), directed by Majid Majidi
Thursday, October 5, 7 p.m., Devlin Hall room 026
*Paradise Now* (2005), directed by Hany Abu-Assad

Thursday, October 19, 7 p.m., Devlin Hall room 026
*Journey to the Sun* (1999), directed by Yesim Ustaoglu

For accompanying programs on *Jews in the Islamic World*, visit BC’s Jewish Studies Program web site at: www.bc.edu/schools/cas/jewish. For more information on public programs, or directions to the BC campus, call 617-552-8100 or visit www.bc.edu/artmuseum.

**THE DAVID COLLECTION**

The David Collection, established in 1945 by Christian Ludvig David (1878–1960), is a non-profit museum (open to the public) housed in David's former residence on Kronprinsessegade, facing the Royal Gardens in Copenhagen. Since 1962 its directors have actively been purchasing Islamic art, and it now houses one of the finest collections of Islamic art in the world, produced in a wide variety of media across the vast region from northwest Africa and Spain to India. But because it is located outside a major artistic center, the David Collection remains relatively unknown.

Most of the 123 objects in *Cosmophilia* have never been displayed in America. It is anticipated that an audience of some 25,000 will view *Cosmophilia* at the McMullen Museum of Art.

"We hope that visitors of all ages and backgrounds will leave *Cosmophilia* encouraged to explore the Islamic contribution to American culture and to recognize and appreciate the Islamic decorative elements that surround them in mainstream American architecture and design," Netzer said.

**MCMULLEN MUSEUM OF ART**

The McMullen Museum is renowned for organizing interdisciplinary exhibitions that ask new questions and break new ground in the display and scholarship of the works on view. It serves as a dynamic educational resource for all of New England as well as the national and the international community. The Museum displays its notable permanent collection and mounts exhibitions of international scholarly importance from all periods and cultures of the history of art. In keeping with the University's central teaching mission, the Museum's exhibitions are accompanied by scholarly catalogues and related public programs. The 10th anniversary of the formal reopening of the Museum was marked in 2003-04.

The Charles S. and Isabella V. McMullen Museum of Art was named in 1996 in honor of the late parents of the late Boston College benefactor, trustee and art collector John J. McMullen.

**MCMULLEN MUSEUM HOURS AND TOURS**

Admission to the McMullen Museum is free; it is handicapped accessible and open to the public. The Museum is located in Devlin Hall on BC’s Chestnut Hill campus, at 140 Commonwealth Avenue. Hours are: Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. Closed on the following dates: September 4, October 9, November 23-24, December 24-26. No parking on the following Saturdays: September 9, 16, and 30; October 28; November 11 and 18.
Exhibition tours will be given every Sunday at 12:30 p.m. Free group tours arranged upon request; call (617) 552-8587. For directions, parking and program information, visit www.bc.edu/artmuseum or call (617) 552-8100.

According to the American Association of Museums (www.aam-us.org), 2006 marks its 100th anniversary and has been designated the Year of the Museum.

COSMOPHILIA DEDICATION AND SPONSORSHIP

This exhibition is dedicated to Norma Jean and the late Stanford Calderwood, who fostered the study of Islamic art at Boston College. It was organized by the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College in collaboration with the David Collection, Copenhagen. Major support has been provided by the Calderwood Charitable Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Patrons of the McMullen Museum. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. In 2000, the endowed chair in Islamic and Asian art at Boston College—jointly held by distinguished art scholars Blair and Bloom—was created through a gift from the late Stanford Calderwood in honor of his wife, Norma Jean, a part-time lecturer in the BC Fine Arts Department from 1983 until her retirement in 1996.

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