



Afghanistan. Surviving Treasures
A selected Collection of the National Museum of Afghanistan
11 June - 3 October 2010

Media Conference
10 June 2010

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Exhibition Dates

Duration	11 June - 3 October 2010
Director	Robert Fleck
Managing Director	Bernhard Spies
Curator	Pierre Cambon
Project Manager	Susanne Annen
Head of Corporate Communications/ Press Officer	Sven Bergmann
Catalogue/Press copy	€ 32 (museum edition)/€ 15
Opening hours	Tuesday and Wednesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Closed on Mondays Guided tour for children: Sunday and holidays: 4 p.m.
Admission: standard/reduced/family ticket	€ 8/€ 5/€ 14
Happy hour-ticket	€ 5 Tuesday and Wednesday: 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday: 5 to 7 p.m. (for individuals only)
Audioguide: standard/reduced	€ 4/€ 2
Public transport	Subway lines 16, 63, 66 and bus lines 610 and 611 to Heussallee. There is a car and coach park on Joseph-Beuys-Allee behind the Art and Exhibition Hall.
Press information	www.bundeskunsthalle.de For press files follow press (German/English)
Guided group tours information and registration:	Telephone +49 (0)228 9171-243 Fax +49 (0)228 9171-244 Email paedagogik@kah-bonn.de
General information	Telephone +49 (0)228 9171-200 www.bundeskunsthalle.de (German/English)



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Information on the Exhibition

Afghanistan is currently seen as one of the world's most volatile conflict zones. At the same time it is one of the most important cultural regions of Central Asia. Afghanistan is a country with an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage reaching from the Bronze Age through the Graeco-Bactrian, Kushan and Hephthalite eras to the Islamic period. Situated on the key trade routes between East and West, the country was an important crossroads of civilisations in Central Asia. An abundance of archaeological finds bears witness to Afghanistan as a melting pot of cultures on the ancient Silk Roads.

The exhibition presents 230 objects from four archaeological sites in Afghanistan, among them the treasure of Tillya Tepe which miraculously survived decades of war and destruction. Long thought to have been lost or stolen, it was recovered safe and sound from the vaults of the Central Bank in the presidential palace of Kabul in 2004.

The four archaeological sites are:

- the Bronze Age site of Tepe Fullol in ancient Bactria (c. 2000 BC)
- the city of Aï Khanum, founded by Alexander the Great, which bears witness to the reach and impact of Graeco-Hellenism on the peoples of the steppes (4th – 2nd century BC)
- the magnificent gold finds from a group of six graves discovered in 1979 at Tillya Tepe (1st century AD) which are at the heart of the exhibition
- the finds from Begram which illustrate the Indian influence on the region

In today's world the need for an open dialogue between civilisations has become paramount. Intended as a step on the way towards greater international understanding, this exhibition presents the culture of a country that has been riven by continuous conflict for more than thirty-five years – from the civil war and the Soviet occupation to the Taliban regime and the ongoing hostilities since the ousting of the Taliban at the hands of the US-led coalition forces.

Recovered Treasures

In 2003, after years of uncertainty, the government in Kabul announced news about the whereabouts of the Bactrian gold. The fabled treasure from the ancient kingdom of Bactria had survived the years of conflict, the Soviet invasion, the mujahedin, the rise of the Taliban and, with it, the obliteration of so much of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. Thanks to the timely intervention of the director of the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul, many important objects had been saved from destruction.

First opened to the public in 1922, the collection of the National Museum was once one of the finest in Central Asia with over 100,000 items covering several millennia. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan destroyed the economic and cultural infrastructure of the country. In 1988, spurred by the worsening security situation, the National Museum evacuated its most important collections to the vaults of the Central Bank in the presidential palace of Kabul.

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 left a political and military vacuum. By spring 1992 the victorious mujahedin had brought most of Afghanistan under their military control. However, after the conquest of Kabul, the different mujahedin factions began fighting each other, giving rise to another civil war. As the warlords battled for control over Kabul, fighters pillaged the National Museum.



In 2001 the Taliban regime decreed the destruction of all the sculptures in the collection of the museum – more than 2000 artefacts were smashed to smithereens. Throughout those dark years the director of the museum and his team kept quiet about the hidden treasures, leading many researchers to believe that the valuable exhibits had been either sold on the black market, destroyed by iconoclastic zealots or melted down for bullion.

In October 2003, two years after the fall of the Taliban, the Afghan government confirmed the existence of the treasure in the Central Bank. One year later the safes were opened in the presence of a group of international specialists, among them Viktor Sarianidi, the archaeologist who had discovered the Tillya Tepe treasure in 1979 and who had travelled to Kabul to witness its being brought back to light.

Germany's Commitment in Afghanistan (Source: Federal Foreign Office)

The archaeological sites covered by this exhibition are all situated in northern Afghanistan, in an area that has been the regional focus of the German reconstruction effort since 2001. Germany is the lead nation of Regional Command North and heads two of the five Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in the region (Kunduz and Fayzabad). In February 2008 a new permanent Provincial Advisory Team (PAT) was launched in Taloqan. Civilian personnel (diplomats, police instructors, civilian reconstruction volunteers) and the military work in close cooperation to bring about security and reconstruction in the provinces.

The German Government's wide-ranging engagement in Afghanistan extends to education and cultural policy with a particular focus on the development of an active and democratic Afghan civil society. Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage suffered immense damage during the decades of war and conflict. With German support the surviving fragments of the Bamyān Buddhas – blown up by the Taliban in March 2001 and since listed as a World Heritage site – are being preserved for posterity. Another project is the restoration of the historic Babur Gardens in Kabul, laid out under the first Mughal emperor in 1528 AD and now one of the city's few public parks.

Since 2000, Germany has made available around 5.7 million euro to some 60 individual projects concerned with the preservation of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. The exhibition at the Art and Exhibition Hall documents the measures taken to preserve Afghan culture and presents some of the biggest projects, for example the reconstruction of the Babur Gardens, on a series of ten display panels in the South Cabinet.



Background Information



In the heart of Asia, on the strategically most important routes of the Silk Road that connected China, India and the Mediterranean world, Afghanistan is a country with an extraordinarily rich civilisation. International trade routes, the campaign of Alexander the Great and neighbouring kingdoms have left their impact from the Bronze Age to the Graeco-Bactrian, Kushan and Hephthalite and to the Islamic era. So it comes as no surprise that the cultural heritage reflects the influence of Greece, India, Persia, Mesopotamia and the steppe people.

Following the traces of four excavation sites in Bactria – the historic region around the former capital Bactra in the north of what is today Afghanistan – the exhibition reflects the archaeological adventure of Afghanistan as well as the history of the country, from ancient times to the Kushan Empire.



These four sites, Tepe Fullol (around 2000 BC), the city of Ai Khanum (4th – 2nd century BC), the archaeological site of Tillya Tepe (1st century AD) and Begram (1st – 2nd century AD), stand for the Bactrian culture of the early days, the spread of Hellenism to the edges of India and for the steppe peoples' influences that have shaped Afghanistan's tradition since the very beginning.

TEPE FULLOL (around 2000 BC)

In June 1966, farmers accidentally discovered gold and silver vessels close to the settlement of Fullol. In order to divide the finds amongst them, they chopped them up with an axe. Thanks to the quick intervention of the public authorities, five gold and seven silver vessels were saved. After the looting of the Kabul Museum, only three of the five gold vessels have been recovered so far. They are displayed in the exhibition.

This accidental discovery takes us to the country's prehistory. It shows the Afghanistan of the eastern Iranian plateau and bears witness to an art that had drawn its inspiration for animal figures from local traditions. The gold vessels are characterised by a refined aesthetic. They illustrate the role Bactria played in the interchange between the Middle East and Balochistan or the Indus Valley Civilisation.

AĪ KHANUM (4th – 2nd century BC)

After the campaign of Alexander the Great and his death (323), Seleucus, a governor of the king, founded the city of Ai Khanum according to the Greek architecture. It can be seen as an example of the Hellenistic influences at the edge of the steppe. As the Greek name of the city is unknown, the place is called Ai Khanum – “Lady Moon” – after an Uzbek princess, which is the local denomination of the excavation site. In this city it becomes obvious that Bactria was an outpost of the Hellenistic, settled world. Situated in an empire that surprisingly flourished at the very edge of the Greek world, Ai Khanum is the furthest the Hellenes penetrated into the east and into the heart of Asia.

TILLYA TEPE (1st century AD)

The treasure of Tillya Tepe was the last big discovery before the Soviet invasion and the chaos of the subsequent years. It consists of grave goods dating back to the beginning of the Christian era. The tombs from around the early 1st century AD belonged to members of wealthy nomad families and were generously endowed with gifts. The deceased – five women and one man – were all wearing jewellery of incredible splendour. Gold jewellery set with gems and Graeco-Roman, Indian and Chinese finds prove that this people had close contact with the big empires of the settled world and that Afghanistan was an important leg on the Steppe Road. Tillya Tepe got its name “Golden Hill” with good reason.

BEGRAM (1st – 2nd century AD)

The Begram treasure, dating back to the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd century AD and thus to the time of the Kushan emperors, emphasizes that during this period the centre of power shifted south. The treasure, discovered in two sealed rooms during the excavations in Begram, the ancient Alexandria of the Caucasus, bears witness to the power of the Kushan conquerors. Along with the early ivory items a number of glasses, bronze sculptures and plaster medallions indicate connections to Alexandria and the Roman world. The glasses can be considered to be the oldest preserved examples of Graeco-Roman glass art. While the Graeco-Roman and the Chinese items can be dated to the beginning of the Christian era with fair certainty, the ivory works remain a controversy among scientists.



Catalogue

Afghanistan. Surviving Treasures **A selected Collection of the National Museum of Afghanistan**

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Current and Upcoming Exhibitions

Liam Gillick

One long walk... Two short piers...

until 8 August 2010

The English artist Liam Gillick is internationally acclaimed as an artist whose practice investigates the continuation of radical Modernism into the present. He has been appointed to represent Germany at the 53rd Biennale in 2009 – the first non-German artist to be honoured with a one-man exhibition in the German Pavilion. The Art and Exhibition Hall is delighted to be able to bring the artist to the attention of a wider audience in Germany after the conclusion of the Biennale. Focusing on the interaction between the critical potential of Gillick's art and the aesthetic qualities of his works, the exhibition traces the development of the artist's practice with important groups of works that shed light on the themes he addresses.

Byzantium

Splendour and Everyday Life

until 13 June 2010

A wide-ranging selection of magnificent and historically important works of art brings to life the fascinating history and art of the Byzantine empire. The exhibition provides a comprehensive survey of the 'Byzantine millenium' which began with the foundation of Constantinople by Constantine the Great in 324 AD and ended with the conquest of the city by the Ottomans in 1453. The exhibition focuses on the period of Byzantium's greatest glory from the time of Justinian I (527–565) to the sacking of Constantinople at the hands of Christian crusaders in 1204.

More than 400 loans from European and American museums – precious ivories, spectacular icons and manuscripts, architectural fragments, sculptures and everyday objects – are presented in their original contexts. Digitally reconstructed sites (e.g. Constantinople or Ephesus) address key questions about the Byzantine state, its art, culture, society and economy and offer visitors an unprecedented insight into everyday life in the Byzantine empire.

Thomas Schütte

Big Buildings

15 July – 1 November 2010

Models and Views

Press Conference: 14 July 2010, 11 a.m.

Internationally acclaimed as one of the most significant German artists, Thomas Schütte participated in several of the *documenta* exhibitions and won the prestigious Golden Lion at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005. Schütte's sculptures address a wide range of subjects and are characterised by a multifaceted formal vocabulary. His work encompasses voluminous sculptures that reflect the life of ordinary people in everyday situations, architectural models, memorial sites, drawings and watercolours.

VIBRACIÓN. Modern Art from Latin America 17 September 2010 – 30 January 2011

The Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection Press Conference: 16 September 2010, 11 a.m.

The exhibition presents an overview of 20th-century abstract art in Latin America, an unknown continent as far as classical Modernism is concerned. The display draws on the holdings of the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, which caused a sensation when the collection first opened in Miami in 2005 and which now makes its first appearance in Europe. The exhibition focuses on three European émigré artists whose work had a decisive impact on abstract art in Latin America: the German photographer Grete Stern, the German sculptor Gertrude Goldschmidt (Gego) and the Swiss Mira Schendel.



**Napoleon and Europe
Dream and Trauma**

17 December 2010 – 25 April 2011

Press Conference: 16 December 2010, 11 a.m.

During the near-twenty-year span of his reign, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), more than any other historical figure, revolutionised the political, social and cultural landscape of Europe and wrought changes that can be felt to this day – both positively and negatively. The Art and Exhibition Hall has been able to secure outstanding loans from all over Europe in order to draw a comprehensive picture of Napoleon and his time. Painting and sculpture reached new heights of excellence in the Napoleonic era – both in the propaganda paintings by David, Gérard and Ingres and in the work of those who opposed the French emperor, among them Goya and the German romanticists. Under Napoleon's aegis the Louvre was opened as the first 'modern' museum of fine arts. The exhibition will also shed light on the large-scale plundering of art collections in the countries occupied by Napoleon.

Subject to change!

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