The Walsh Gallery Presents

The Beauty of Sacred Garments

September 10—October 26, 2007

Opening Reception
September 19, 4pm to 8pm

Curated by Leslie Meyer
and
Tova Rothman
The Beauty of Sacred Garments presents religiously significant garments from four locally found faiths: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. At first glance, the religions are rather different in their beliefs. Upon closer inspection, however, similarities and common themes emerge: all four faiths worship through prayer as well as mark rites of passage with unique rituals and by the use of special garments.

The garments can be seen as works of art, with aesthetic value, but first and foremost the garments on display are something a person wears and associates with his or her faith. Each item holds specific meaning for the faith and its followers. Highlighting those meanings provides for informational exchange and promotes deeper understanding and respect among people of all faiths.

While preparing for this exhibition, we met and spoke with many people both from the museum field and the various faiths represented. Overall, everyone was helpful and quite enthusiastic in their desire to promote interfaith understanding. As one can deduce from the object labels, most of the exhibited objects come from individuals or religious organizations.

Working with individuals and religious organizations is quite different from working with museums in that we were able to learn firsthand about the history of each object through the personal recollections of the lenders. This aspect of organizing this exhibition was very gratifying, helping us to make deeper connections to the subject matter. Additionally, this experience has increased our respect and understanding of people of different faiths.

We hope that visitors see The Beauty of Sacred Garments from three different points of view. First, the garments should be seen as objects of beauty. Second, the objects represent each faith and rite of passage. Finally, visitors should also recognize that the garments on display represent the collaboration and cooperation of many people working towards a mutual goal.

Leslie Meyer
and
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Christianity
The largest religion in the world, Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in Galilee and died in Judea about 30 C.E. Jesus' life and ministry are recorded in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, while the Old Testament includes the Hebrew Bible/Jewish Scriptures. Christians consider Jesus to be the Messiah or the Christ, meaning God's "Anointed One." The vast majority of Christians also believe that Jesus is divine, the Son of God, who took human form so that he could be the mediator between God and the human race. His obedient loving service to God, culminating in his death and resurrection, reconciled humanity with God. Through faith in Jesus, one can be saved from sin and spiritual death, living eternal life with God. The Sacrament of Baptism initiates individuals into the faith community and prepares them for a Christian life. Other sacraments and ceremonies, including Confirmation, Marriage, and Ordination, mark a person's faithful journey through life. Worship for Christians involves the Liturgy of the Word, the proclamation of the Old and New Testament, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, a ritual meal representing the Last Supper of Jesus with his followers. There are three main confessions of Christianity: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, of which there are many denominations. Based on the Christian Bible, these communities of faith vary in specific doctrines and practices.

Hinduism
Considered the world's oldest extant religion, Hinduism, also known as Sanaatana Dharma, means Eternal Principles of Life in the Sanskrit language. It originated on the Indian subcontinent with foundations in the Vedic civilization, a conglomerate of diverse beliefs and traditions. Among several manifestations of One God, the religion centers around three omnipresent beings: Brahmaa
the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Dissolver. The faith emphasizes a life purpose to realize the original state of spiritual bliss and peace. A vast body of scriptures provides insights and guidance on the practice of dharma or religious living. These texts outline sixteen rites or samskaras, including birth, name-giving, marriage, and death, which mark different stages in the journey of life that will help to purify and sanctify the individual. Other prominent themes in Hinduism include Punarjanma (rebirth), Karma (right action), Yoga, Meditation (Dhyana) and Moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth). For Hindus, everyday life is imbued with spiritually meaningful aspects and religious practices generally are meant to assist one to think of divinity. Hindus may engage in worship or puja either at home or at a temple. At home, followers may create a shrine dedicated to the individual’s chosen form or forms of God. Usually, temples are dedicated to a main deity along with several additional deities. Veneration involves making the sacred presence tangible through devoted worship practices that employ all the senses.

Judaism

Judaism is a monotheistic religion believing in a God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. This one divinity created and rules the world where all things within the world were designed to have meaning and purpose as part of a divine order. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the physical and spiritual ancestors of Judaism. Judaism stems from the covenant made between Abraham and God to create from his descendants a great nation. The Torah, the primary text of Judaism, was given to Moses at Mount Sinai after the Jewish People were freed from slavery in Egypt, in a covenant between God and the people of Israel. Torah, which means "teaching", is God's instructions on how to live, containing 613 commandments or "mitzvoth", which includes The Ten Commandments. Along with the written Torah there is also the Oral Torah that was received by tradition of transmission and developed further in each generation. This Oral Torah consists of Rabbinic teachings that further explain the Torah and form a significant part of Jewish study and
observance. The life cycle is celebrated with circumcision and naming, bar/bat mitzvah, marriage and death. The community has rhythms of worship: daily and weekly prayer and annual cycles of holidays and fast days. In Judaism, there is no one set of beliefs that all Jews follow, as there are different Jewish movements, including Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. However, in all movements of Judaism, doing good deeds is the most important aspect of Jewish life.

Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in early 7th century Arabia. It is the youngest of the world religions, and among the most widespread. The word Islam means "submission" and the religion focuses on the total surrender of oneself to God. Over a period of 23 years beginning in 610 C.E., Muhammad, believed to be the last Prophet of God, received divine revelations through angel Gabriel. Muhammad memorized the revelations and orally transmitted them to his followers who wrote them down and compiled them as the Holy Qur'an, the very words of God. The Qur'an is the primary sacred scripture of Islam. After the Qur'an, Hadith or the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and practice or Sunnah is the second most important authority to follow. Ijtihad or ongoing scholarly commentary on the Qur'an and Hadith serves as important source of guidance for Muslims. Believing in one God, in the day of Judgment, and in salvation through good deeds form the bedrock of Islamic theology. The ritualistic aspects of the faith are the Five Pillars of Islam. These pillars comprise the duties and practices that unite all Muslims together. They include the Shahadah, recitation of the fundamental creed of Islam to believe in God and Muhammad as the Messenger of God, Salah or prayer five times a day, paying Zakah or alms, Saum or fasting during the month of Ramadan, and Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime for those who can afford it and are physically able to make the journey. Due to the cultural diversity in the Muslim world, Islam in different Muslim cultures manifests itself differently through a variety of dress and variations in celebrating rites of passage and religious holidays.
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