

Contact: Elaine Merguerian, 212-327-9313 or elainem@asiasociety.org

**ASIA SOCIETY MUSEUM PRESENTS EXHIBITION OF
DAZZLING EARLY GOLD FROM THE PHILIPPINES
PHILIPPINE GOLD: TREASURES OF FORGOTTEN KINGDOMS**

On view in New York
September 11, 2015, through January 3, 2016



*Kinnari. Surigao, ca. 10th–13th century. Gold.
H. 4 ¾ x W. 2 15/16 in. (12 x 7.5 cm).
Ayala Museum Collection, Cat. No. 81.5189.*

Asia Society Museum presents an exhibition of spectacular works of gold—including exquisite regalia, jewelry, functional and ritualistic objects, ceremonial weapons, and funerary masks—from collections in the Philippines and supplemented with objects from the United States.

Philippine Gold: Treasures of Forgotten Kingdoms, is on view in New York from September 11, 2015, through January 3, 2016. The exhibition showcases recently excavated objects that highlight the prosperity and achievements of the little-known Philippine Kingdoms that flourished long before the Spanish discovered the region and colonized it.

Comprising approximately 120 objects from the tenth through thirteenth century, the exhibition demonstrates sophisticated gold-working techniques developed during this period. The vast majority of works in the exhibition are on loan from the Ayala Museum and the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Gold Collection and have never been shown outside of the Philippines.

Many of the works, unearthed between the 1960s and 1981, affirm the unprecedented creativity, prosperity, and sophisticated metalworking tradition of the precolonial period. They also attest to flourishing cultural connections and maritime trade in Southeast Asia during what was an early Asian economic boom.

“Asia Society is thrilled to showcase these stunning gold treasures from the Philippines that are not only historically significant, but which demonstrate a rich cultural heritage and point of pride for Filipinos,” says Asia Society President and CEO Josette Sheeran. “The Philippine Gold exhibition showcases the great history of a little-known but captivating era.”

Philippine Gold: Treasures of Forgotten Kingdoms is organized by Asia Society, New York, and Ayala Museum, Philippines. The exhibition is curated by Florina H. Capistrano-Baker, Consulting Curator, Ayala Museum, and Adriana Proser, John H. Foster Senior Curator for Traditional Asian Art, Asia Society.



The exhibition is accompanied by a season of programming that highlights the richness and diversity of Philippine culture and current affairs, and explores its cuisine, performing arts, film, design, literature, and more.



Goblet. Surigao, ca. 10th–13th century. Gold. H. 1 ¼ x Diam. 3 1/6 in. (3.1 x 7.8 cm). Ayala Museum Collection, Cat. No. 81.5166.

Archaeology

The exhibition is organized into four sections, starting with archaeology. In 1981, a hoard of gold objects was accidentally discovered in the hamlet of Magroyong near Butuan. Objects from this cache, now in the collection of the Ayala Museum, are among the most intriguing in a collection of over 1,000 gold objects assembled from the 1960s to 1981 by the late archaeologist-collector Cecilia Y. Locsin and her late husband architect Leandro V. Locsin (1928–1994).

Together, the Locsins were able to collect and preserve for study and posterity pieces that they acquired from not only dealers, but also grave diggers, farmers, and fishermen active in the destruction and commercialization of Philippine archaeological sites. If not for the Locsins, many of these pieces would likely have been sold for the value of the ore and melted down, which was the fate of many of the gold articles unearthed in the Philippines over the centuries.

Trade

The second section of the exhibition, on trade, highlights early Filipino works that share stylistic, iconographic, and technical similarities with distant and neighboring cultures. These shared features suggest direct and indirect contacts with trading partners in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Early Chinese historical sources document various Asian trade missions from different kingdoms, including the ancient kingdom of Butuan. It is recorded, for example, that the Butuan king Ch'i-ling or Kiling sent emissaries to the Chinese imperial court in 1003 and 1007. The impressive quality of recovered gold treasures from Butuan suggests that the flourishing port settlement played an important—and little studied—role in early Southeast Asia with possible links to the powerful trading empire of Srivijaya in what is now Indonesia.



Ear ornament. Eastern Visayas or Northeastern Mindanao, ca. 10th–13th century. Gold. Diam. 1 5/8 in. (4.2 cm). Ayala Museum Collection, Cat. No. 73.4192

The Kingdom of Butuan

The third part of the exhibition focuses on the polity known as Butuan in the southern Philippines that rose to commercial prominence in the tenth century and declined in the thirteenth century. The personal adornments recovered from Butuan appear to be primarily elite regalia. The vast array of golden objects suggests they did not belong to a single individual but to several persons of different heights, weights, and gender. These splendid adornments and ritual objects were probably part of a ruling family's *bahandi* or collective heirloom wealth. The identity and fate of the royal family who presumably owned the treasures are unknown.

Surrounding Kingdoms

The early use of gold throughout the islands that comprise what is now called the Philippines was widespread. From the illustrations and descriptions in *The Boxer Codex* (ca. 1590), a unique document now in the collection of the Lilly Library at the Indiana University Bloomington that will also be on view, it is evident that both men and women wore gold rings on their ears, neck, arms, and legs. The final section of the exhibition will also feature works of gold from Filipino cultures beyond Butuan, such as the islands of Luzon and the Visayas where chiefs wore multiple layers of gold chains—often as many as twelve—wrapped around the neck, with others hanging down in impressive lengths.

Critical support for *Philippine Gold: Treasures of Forgotten Kingdoms* comes from Ayala Corporation.

Asia Society Museum presents a wide range of traditional and contemporary exhibitions of Asian and Asian American art, taking new approaches to familiar masterpieces and introducing under-recognized art and artists. The Asia Society Museum Collection comprises a traditional art collection, including the initial bequests of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, and a contemporary art collection focused on new media. Founded in 1956, Asia Society is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational institution headquartered in New York with major cultural centers and gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Houston, and offices in Los Angeles, Manila, Mumbai, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, Sydney, and Washington, D.C.

Asia Society Museum is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. Hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M. and Friday from 11:00 A.M. – 9:00 P.M. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. General admission is \$12, seniors \$10, students \$7, and free for members and persons under 16. Free admission Friday evenings, 6:00 P.M. – 9:00 P.M. The Museum is closed Fridays after 6:00 P.M. from July 1 through Labor Day. Find out more at www.AsiaSociety.org/museum

Photography by Neal Oshima; images courtesy of Ayala Museum

###