

The Department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art mourns the passing of Sheikh Nasser, a major force in the Islamic art world. Sheikh Nasser was an inspired lover of art, and was an early pioneer of collecting in the Gulf, building an unmatched collection in Kuwait. Together with his wife Sheikha Hussah al-Sabah, he supported cultural activities, scholarly projects and publications and education and established a distinguished museum in Kuwait, which is in the process of being rebuilt since its destruction in the first Gulf War. At the Met, Sheikh Nasser held the position of Honorary Trustee while Sheikha Hussah remains an active member of the Board. The Al-Sabah collection of breath-taking Mughal jewels was shown in the “Treasury of the World” exhibition in 2002, and their support for the museum includes endowments towards positions, exhibitions and educational projects.

Sheikh Nasser’s passion and pursuit of objects was legendary. Ever on a quest for an interesting object his keen eye spotted extraordinary works from the sale rooms of London and Paris to the bazaars of Balochistan. Although his art collection is perhaps most famous for its Mughal gems and treasures, he also built a vast and important trove of Islamic and Indian textiles, metalwork, ceramics, glass, arms and armor, fossils and rocks, and most recently, pre-Islamic art from the middle east.

But it was Sheikh Nasser’s personal warmth and informality that will be as much his legacy. He formed a close circle of friends, trusted colleagues, advisors and personal attendants with whom he maintained life-long relationships. When we re-opened our galleries after a historic five-month closure due to Covid, the very first visitor to walk in was Sheikh Nasser, who came straight there from a hospital appointment. He roamed the galleries with a twinkle as though each work of art was a friend.

Sheikh Nasser had been very kind ever since my student days, when he exposed me to his extraordinary collection, from works of art to fossils. He played a great part in shaping my imagination and was always so approachable and disarming. I miss him very much. More recently, one afternoon when I was walking in Central Park I received an inspiring call from Sheikh Nasser. He had been thinking about our future Jahangir exhibition and plunged right into a conversation about objects, jewels, paintings and history, peppered with generous and creative suggestions. It was such an unexpected pleasure that completely uplifted me and made me realize again how the Mughal legacy has been secured by his vision.

Sheikh Nasser will be deeply missed by all who were fortunate enough to have known him. His legacy in art and humanity will be long cherished and celebrated.

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