

Dear Sheikha Hussah,

I was much saddened to hear the unhappy news of Sheikh Nasser's death. I hope I may offer to you and to your family my sincere sympathy, not just as a member of the museum community, for whom you have both done so much world-wide, but also on an entirely personal level, as someone to whom you have both shown great and fondly remembered hospitality.

I know how much your work together transformed and enriched the cultural life of Kuwait. But as you are certainly well aware, the world far beyond Kuwait also has cause to be deeply grateful for the discernment with which Sheikh Nasser built his collections, the scholarship with which he curated them, and the magnanimity with which he shared them. The exhibition of Mughal gold and jewellery at the British Museum took place just before I arrived there, but its impact was — and still is — a lasting one: it re-focused the Museum's attention on the great cultures of the early modern, and indeed contemporary, Middle East and their impact on the world; and it established a pattern of international sharing and friendly collaboration which has grown steadily ever since, and now embraces museums from Houston to the Hermitage. If I mention these two particularly, it is of course because I remember comments made by Mikhail Pietrovsky at the celebrations of the 250th Anniversary of the Hermitage, and because I have been able to see in Houston the impact of the objects on loan there, and how the local community responds to them. But I know that the same is true in Berlin, Madrid, and many other cities and museums. His collections have allowed the world to think in a new way about their shared past.

As you know, I met Sheikh Nasser only once. It is a day of which I have the clearest recollection. For several hours, he showed me objects in the collection, especially new acquisitions from Central Asia / Iran: handling them, talking about them, asking questions of them, eager to have them yield their secrets and their stories. Knowing the range of his curiosity and his interests, I was struck by how deeply he engaged with the different objects in turn — and how eager he was to have others interrogate them in different ways and different contexts. And then, after the time in the collections, you and he invited us — Mahrukh and myself — to that marvellously happy, utterly hilarious dinner, where he showed us the settings that he had designed for some truly wondrous stones, to much admiration and great laughter. It was a day of many pleasures: and it allowed me to gain some idea of the stature, the achievement and the

humanity of a man with a rare combination of gifts, which he used to the full.

His death will leave a great gap, and a memory universally honoured. I cannot guess the loss that it represents for you and your family.

This comes with my tribute to his memory, and my warmest sympathy to you.

Yours sincerely,

Neil MacGregor