

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

111 South Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60603
t 312.443.3626 f 312.443.0193 www.artinstituteofchicago.org

ART
INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 17, 2015

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Rebecca Baldwin
(312) 443-3625
rbaldwin@artic.edu

Nina Litoff
(312) 443-3363
nlitoff@artic.edu

HEAVEN AND EARTH: ART OF BYZANTIUM FROM GREEK COLLECTIONS

EXTENDED THROUGH MAY 10, 2015

**Over 60 Works From Greece Represent Life in the
Empire that Lasted for More than a Millennium**

The popular exhibition *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections* at the Art Institute of Chicago has been extended for three months beyond its original closing date of Feb. 15, 2015. The show, which presents more than 60 superb artworks of the Byzantine era, from the 4th to the 15th centuries, will remain on view through May 10, 2015.

Organized by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports of Athens, Greece, with the collaboration of the Benaki Museum, Athens, and originally exhibited at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the exhibition includes major artistic holdings from Greece consisting of mosaics, sculptures, manuscripts, luxury glass, silver, personal adornments, liturgical textiles, icons, and wall paintings.



For more than 1,000 years, Greece was part of the vast Byzantine Empire, established in 330 A.D. by the emperor Constantine the Great, who moved the capital of the Roman Empire east to a small town named Byzantium in modern-day Turkey. Renamed for him and transformed into Constantinople, Byzantium would come to represent an empire of splendor and power that endured for more than a millennium. Greek replaced Latin as the official language, and Greece

itself was home to important centers of theology, scholarship, and artistic production—as evidenced by the luxurious manuscripts displayed in the exhibition.



Heaven and Earth explores the rich legacy of the Byzantine Empire through five main themes: the transition from the Classical to the Byzantine world, spiritual life, intellectual life, the pleasures of life, and cultural exchange in the waning years of the empire in the 15th century. The exhibition opens with the *Head of Aphrodite*, a Roman marble sculpture of the Greek goddess Aphrodite that had later been altered with a cross carved on her forehead, presumably to Christianize it or reuse it as an image of a saint. From its beginning in the 4th century the

Byzantine Empire would embrace its Classical origins while forging a new spiritual aesthetic to outfit the ceremonies and interior of the Christian church.

Icons of holy persons, saints, important theologians, and sacred events were painted to be channels for the devoted to the heavenly realm while mosaics and silks embroidered with gold and silver reflected the glimmering candle light of the church. Jewelry, resplendent with precious and semi-precious gems—including a personalized engagement ring—perfume flasks, and silver and ceramic dinnerware that reveal the spectacle of the banquet, all allow visitors a glimpse into the individual lives of the Byzantines.



Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections was organized by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Athens, with the collaboration of the Benaki Museum, Athens, and in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Major funding for *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections* has been provided by the Jaharis Family Foundation, Inc. Additional support has been provided by the Stratis family, Charlotte Vern Olson, and Karen and Walter Alexander.

The exhibition's US tour is made possible through OPAP S.A.'s major funding. Financial support is also provided by the A. G. Leventis Foundation.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Images: *Icon of Christ Pantokrator*, late 14th century. Byzantine; Thessaloniki. Tempera and gold on wood; 157 x 105 x 5 cm (61 3/4 x 41 1/3 x 2 in.). Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki.

Head of Aphrodite, 1st century A.D. Byzantine; Greece, probably Athens. Marble, H. 40 cm (15 3/4 in.). National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Pendant with Christ Pantokrator, rock crystal: 11th century, mount: 16th century. Byzantine, probably Constantinople.
Rock crystal, gold, precious stones, and pearls; 6.1 × 6 × 1.2 cm (2 3/8 × 2 3/8 × 1/2 in.). Benaki Museum, Athens.

#

www.artic.edu

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

MUSEUM HOURS

Daily: 10:30–5:00

Thursdays until 8:00

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's days.

Children under 14 always free

Members always free

The Art Institute of Chicago gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the citizens of Chicago.