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Exhibition celebrates the art and history of the game of chess

Salem, Ore. – The Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University is pleased to present "Checkmate! Chess Sets from the Maryhill Museum of Art." This exhibition traces the fascinating history of chess across continents and through time, from its origins in India to its current popularity throughout the world. Organized by curator Jonathan Bucci and drawn from the extensive collection of the Maryhill Museum of Art in Goldendale, Washington, one of the finest collections of its kind in the United States, the exhibition opens January 7 and continues through April 26, 2020, in the Study Gallery.

The exhibition features approximately two dozen chess sets from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas that date from the 18th through 20th centuries. While working within the predetermined structure of 32 game pieces, chess makers have historically brought their own creativity and interpretation to each set, resulting in a wide variety of materials and themes. Created in wood, glass, bone, and ivory, the sets include traditional designs as well as abstract, non-figurative sets and narrative sets depicting mythological characters and historical figures. Discover Ferdinand the Bull and his friends. Look eye to eye with the Red Queen from "Alice in Wonderland." Face the Inuits of the north with pawns who are seals, and be sure to not get trampled by the caravan of elephants on their way to battle.

Lecture

In conjunction with the exhibition, Colleen Schafroth, executive director of the Maryhill Museum of Art, will deliver an illustrated lecture on the history and art of chess on Thursday, February 13 beginning at 7:30 p.m. in the Paulus Lecture Hall in the Willamette University College of Law. Schafroth is the author of several books on the history of chess including *The Art of Chess*.

Chess Tournament

A "Leap Day Chess Tournament" will take place Saturday, February 29 from 12 noon to 4 p.m. in the Maribeth Collins Lobby of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art. For further information, and how to register, visit willamette.edu/go/hfma-tournament or call 503-370-6855.

This exhibition is supported by general operating support grants from the City of Salem's Transient Occupancy Tax funds and the Oregon Arts Commission.

The Hallie Ford Museum of Art

The museum is located at 700 State St. in Salem. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. The galleries are closed on Monday. General admission is \$6, \$4 for seniors and \$3 for students 18 and older. Students 17 and under and children are admitted free. Admission is free for everyone on Tuesdays. For more information call 503-370-6855 or visit willamette.edu/go/hfma.

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Images and Captions

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Story of Ramayana, India, c. 1930, ivory, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1970.4.1. Photo: Dale Peterson.

This set depicts the battle between the demon king, Ravana, and Prince Rama, as told in the Hindu epic the Ramayana. Ravana is represented here by a ten-headed creature whose army is composed of horrible creatures. Rama and his brother, Lakshmana, are aided by an army of monkeys.

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Story of Ramayana (detail), India, c. 1930, ivory, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1970.4.1. Photo: Dale Peterson.

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Figural Chess Set, India (Province of Rajasthan) late 18th century, painted ivory, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1964.11.1. Photo: Dale Peterson.

Madras-style chess sets, named after the port from which they were exported, were actually carved a thousand miles away in the Province of Rajasthan. These impressive sets are usually large and were made more for presentation than play. The British forces are here represented by helmeted pawns carrying fixed bayonets (and in one case, a fife). They confront Indian forces represented by pawns wearing traditional Indian dress and carrying spears and longbows.

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Figural Chess Set (detail), India (Province of Rajasthan), late 18th century, painted ivory, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1964.11.1. Photo: Dale Peterson.

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Giuseppe Bessi (Italian, 1857–1922), **Abstract Chess Set**, 1957, alabaster, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1962.11.004. Photo: Dale Petereson.

Italy has been extremely receptive to the modern art movements of the twentieth century. Movements such as Futurism found a home there and may have influenced the design of this chess set, created by the sculptor Giuseppe Bessi in Volterra, Italy. Bessi was best known for busts based on historical figures but he also carved smaller items such as chess sets and everyday items. This set was a gift from Maryhill Museum's first director, whose passion for chess inspired the museum's collection.

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Giuseppe Bessi (Italian, 1857–1922), *Abstract Chess Set* (detail), 1957, alabaster, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1962.11.004. Photo: Dale Petereson.

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Muslim Chess Set, Middle East (possibly Iran), 19th century, painted wood, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1987.4.8. Photo Dale Peterson.

The simple, abstract designs of Muslim playing sets are often said to be dictated by Islamic laws that forbid realistic and pictorial imagery. These religious strictures have prompted the creation of a non-representational chess pieces. This set is typical of that style, having been turned on a lathe and painted bright red and green.

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Muslim Chess Set (detail), Middle East (possibly Iran), 19th century, painted wood, collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1987.4.8. Photo Dale Peterson.

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Régence-Pattern Chess Set and Board, France, 19th–20th century, glazed ceramic (faience), collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1979.1.1. Photo: Dale Peterson.

Faience sets of the Régence Pattern have been made in the French ceramic and porcelain centers of Rouen, Gien and Paris since the early nineteenth century. Faience is fine tin-glazed earthenware that is capable of receiving brilliant enamels such as blue, green, yellow and red, as seen here.

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Régence-Pattern Chess Set and Board (detail), France, 19th–20th century, glazed ceramic (faience), collection of Maryhill Museum of Art, 1979.1.1. Photo: Dale Peterson.

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