

KIMBELL ART MUSEUM PRESENTS *THE HOLY SEPULCHER: TREASURES FROM THE TERRA SANCTA MUSEUM, JERUSALEM*, MARCH 15–JUNE 28, 2026

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FORT WORTH, TX— The Kimbell Art Museum will present the special exhibition *The Holy Sepulcher: Treasures from the Terra Sancta Museum, Jerusalem* from March 15 through June 28, 2026, in the Renzo Piano Pavilion. This extraordinary exhibition showcases more than sixty objects in silver, gold, enamel, and precious jewels, given by European monarchs and rulers to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, a site of Christian devotion and pilgrimage, where they have been used in religious ceremonies for centuries. Including dazzling reliquaries, crosses, candlesticks, chalices, and vestments representing the height of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century craftsmanship, many of these objects have no equivalent anywhere else in the world. Traveling to only two venues in North America, the exhibition represents the first—and possibly only—time these treasures will be seen in the US. *The Wall Street Journal* called the exhibition, “Opulent. Sumptuous. Spectacular. Luxurious. Dazzling. Plus every other adjective for fabulousness you can conjure up,” when it was shown last fall at New York’s Frick Collection.

“The splendor and scale of these precious objects and works of art are stunning,” said Eric Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum. “We are incredibly fortunate that works of such staggering craftsmanship—and from what is arguably the holiest site in Christendom—may be enjoyed by visitors to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. I extend my gratitude to the Custodia Terrae Sanctae for allowing these treasures to travel to the United States ahead of the opening of the Terra Sancta Museum.”

For the past two thousand years, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher has been a principal religious center of the Christian faith, a holy site of devotion and pilgrimage. The church was first built by Emperor Constantine in the fourth century on what is traditionally believed to be the site of Jesus of Nazareth’s death, burial, and resurrection. In the Middle Ages, the Franciscan order arrived in the Holy Land,

establishing the Custodia, the body that is now entrusted with safeguarding some eighty-two Christian holy sites in the Middle East, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Over the centuries, the Catholic rulers of Europe—the Holy Roman Emperors in Vienna and the monarchs of Portugal, Spain, France, and Naples—sent lavish donations to the Custodia and, in particular, to the Holy Sepulcher. Few objects of this kind survive today even in Europe, owing to natural disasters and the frequent melting of gold and silver in times of political and social crisis. For centuries, however, the Custodia has preserved the treasures with which it was entrusted. Though they were used regularly by the Franciscans during mass and other religious ceremonies, these extraordinary masterpieces were unknown to experts in the decorative arts until the 1980s. With their public rediscovery, they are now being studied and displayed as works of art. At the Convent of St. Saviour, in Jerusalem, the Franciscans of the Custodia have established the Terra Sancta Museum—from the Latin for “Holy Land”—which is scheduled to open in 2026.

Examples of these masterpieces include a set of pontifical vestments sent to Jerusalem in 1621 by France’s King Louis XIII, including an antependium, or alter frontal; three copes, cape-like garments worn in processions and solemn masses; and two dalmatics, worn by deacons. Made of red silk and gold and silver thread, royal symbols appear throughout the embroidery, including the crowned arms of France and Navarre and the intertwined initials of King Louis and Queen Anne of Austria. No other vestments of this importance survive from seventeenth-century France.

A richly ornamented Throne of Eucharistic Exposition arrived at the Holy Sepulcher in April 1666, a gift from King Philip IV of Spain, who reigned from 1621 to 1665. Made of silver and gilt silver, gilt copper, glass, and precious and semiprecious stones, it provides a setting for displaying the Holy Sacrament in a monstrance. In 1730, the Custodia received a shipment of gifts from Emperor Charles VI of the Holy Roman Empire, including a gilt silver ewer and basin crafted by artist Daniel Schöffler, who specialized in ceremonial pieces for both church and home. Such sets are used for ceremonial handwashing; in this case, the Custos—the Franciscan leader of the Custodia—uses it to wash his hands during Mass before the consecration of the Eucharist.

A shipment from Portugal’s King Joseph I was sent in 1752 and included a gold sanctuary lamp that had been commissioned by King John V but did not arrive until after his death. The survival of extraordinary objects like this rare piece of goldsmith work bears witness to centuries of devotion. Many comparable pieces were destroyed in the catastrophic Lisbon earthquake of 1755. Sent from Naples in 1757, a glorious gold crozier is made in four sections that screw together, each encrusted with precious stones. Cherubs’ heads support the central portion, which features standing figures of Saints Francis of Assisi,

Januarius, Louis of Anjou, and Bonaventure. The shepherd's crook terminates in a Jerusalem Cross set with rubies and small diamonds. In all of Neapolitan goldsmith work, no comparable crozier survives.

The Republics of Venice and Genoa both sent pontifical vestments to Jerusalem in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The Venetian Republic, a vital port connecting Europe to the Holy Land, sent a complete set of seventeen vestments of crimson silk velvet, gold and silver thread, and semiprecious stones, of which a chasuble and miter are on display in this exhibition. Genoa sent a remarkable set of thirteen silk pontifical vestments attributed to the Genoese painter Domenico Piola and his workshop, one of which is displayed in this exhibition. The virtuosic embroidery on the hood depicts St. George, patron saint of Genoa, slaying the dragon. The decorative bands combine the arms of Genoa and the Custodia with scrolling flowers.

The Holy Sepulcher: Treasures from the Terra Sancta Museum, Jerusalem is an unprecedented opportunity for the American public to examine and appreciate treasures by some of Europe's greatest goldsmiths and textile artisans.

"The objects in this exhibition are spectacular—luxurious, costly, often ornate," said George Shackelford, deputy director of the Kimbell Art Museum and curator of the exhibition. "It's important to remember that at every stage of their creation, from the commission to the execution to the donation, they were motivated by a profound religious faith. They are the concrete expression of that sincere belief."

ORGANIZATION AND CATALOGUE

The Holy Sepulcher: Treasures from the Terra Sancta Museum, Jerusalem is organized by The Frick Collection, New York, and curated by Xavier F. Salomon with Benoît Constensoux and Jacques Charles-Gaffiot.

The 384-page hardcover catalogue includes essays by Marie-Armelle Beaulieu, Editor-in-Chief of *Terre Sainte Magazine*, the French edition of a periodical published by the Custody of the Holy Land; Jacques Charles-Gaffiot, art historian and iconography expert; Benoît Constensoux, art historian at Galerie Kugel in Paris and a member of the Scientific Committee of the Terra Sancta Museum; Alvar González-Palacios, art historian who has written numerous books on Italian and French decorative arts; Xavier F. Salomon, former Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, The Frick Collection, and current Director, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon; and Béatrix Saule, Honorary Director General and Curator of the Château of Versailles and president of the Scientific Committee of the Terra Sancta Museum; as well as entries by Maria Pia Pettinau Vescina, art historian and ancient textiles expert, and a member of the

Scientific Committee of the Terra Sancta Museum; and Danièle Véron-Denise, specialist on liturgical and secular embroidery and former Curator at the Château de Fontainebleau Museum, and a member of the Scientific Committee of the Terra Sancta Museum.

SUPPORT

The exhibition is supported in part by the Fort Worth Tourism Public Improvement District. Promotional support for the Kimbell Art Museum and its exhibitions is provided by American Airlines, the Fort Worth Report, and NBC 5. Additional support is provided by Arts Fort Worth and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Exhibition tickets are \$18 for adults, \$16 for seniors and students, \$14 for children ages 6–11, and free for children under age 6. Audio guides are available for \$4.

Admission is half-price all day on Tuesdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays. Additional discounts are available on-site for K–12 teachers, active-duty military, and SNAP program recipients. Museum members receive unlimited, free access to all special exhibitions and free audio guides. Admission to the museum’s permanent collection is always free for everyone.

The Kimbell Art Museum is open Tuesdays through Thursdays and Saturdays, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Fridays, noon–8 p.m.; and Sundays, noon–5 p.m. It is closed Mondays, New Year’s Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For general information, call 817-332-8451.

ABOUT THE KIMBELL ART MUSEUM

The Kimbell Art Museum, owned and operated by the Kimbell Art Foundation, is internationally renowned for both its collections and its architecture. The Kimbell’s collections range in period from antiquity to the twentieth century and include European paintings and sculptures by artists such as Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi, Bernini, Velázquez, Gainsborough, Monet, Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse, as well as important examples of Egyptian and classical antiquities. Also included are significant works of Asian art from China, Japan, the Himalayas, and South and Southeast Asia; notable African sculptures primarily from West and Central Africa; and a wide range of ancient American art representing cultures across Mexico and Central and South America.

The museum’s 1972 building, designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn, is widely regarded as one of the outstanding architectural achievements of the modern era. A second building, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, opened in 2013 and now provides space for special

exhibitions, dedicated classrooms, and a 289-seat auditorium with excellent acoustics for music. For more information, visit kimbellart.org.

PRESS IMAGES

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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