Art and Design Guide for Teachers

Gift of a Lifetime: Treasures from Chester Beatty’s Collection

19 October 2018 – 28 April 2019
Introduction

Exhibition
*Gift of a Lifetime: Treasures from Chester Beatty’s Collection*. 19 October 2018 – 28 April 2019

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of Sir Alfred Chester Beatty’s magnificent bequest, *Gift of a Lifetime* presents a choice selection of key pieces from this unique collection.

An internationally successful mining magnate and generous philanthropist, Beatty (1879-1968) was one of the most prolific and discerning collectors of his time. From his early years in New York, through his career in London and travels overseas, Beatty collected rare printed books, manuscripts and art objects of highest quality and rarity from Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Beatty brought his collections to Ireland in the 1950s, placing them in trust for the benefit of the Irish people on his death in 1968. From objects of the greatest beauty crafted for powerful rulers to treasures tracing the history of world religions, the artworks drawn together in this exhibition capture the breadth and wonder of this exceptional legacy: a gift to the nation, for Ireland to share with the world.

Art & Design guides for teachers

The collections in the Chester Beatty are as rich as they are diverse, and there are plenty of things to inspire teachers and students alike. Within the collection you can discover a host of artistic treasures from many of the world’s cultures and religions. These can give insight into the styles and techniques used by artists from across Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. The breath-taking range of material seen in the collection demonstrates the richness of human creative expression from about 2700 BC to the present day.

This guide is part of a series of resources designed especially for teachers and students for the teaching of art and design. This will support student’s research skills, knowledge and understanding as a means to help make their practical work more relevant to their studies. For the exhibition *Gift of a Lifetime: Treasures from Chester Beatty’s Collection* the following themes can be explored:

- Creatures
- Faith
- Patronage
- Craft
- Love

Visual Thinking

This resource encourages both teachers and students to use design thinking strategies and links with 21st century learning skills such as creative problem solving, critical thinking, divergent thinking and imagination.

See Think Wonder

Throughout this resource students should examine:

- What do they see?
- What do they think about that object?
- What does it make them wonder?

Other questions to encourage critical thinking during this process can include:

**Origin:** where and when was the museum object made?

**Materials:** what is it made from?

**Process:** how was it made? How was this designed?

**Function:** What is it? Why was it made?

These visual and critical thinking processes will help students understand the context as well as analyse the form and decoration of the museum objects.

**World Cultures**

The themes of creatures, faith, patronage, craft and love can be explored through the Asian, Middle Eastern and European artworks in this exhibition. Teachers and students can compare and contrast these examples, learn about the history of the object as well as the art and design of each work. A glossary of terms and links to other Chester Beatty learning resources are included.

**Cross-curricular topics**

**History** – the objects come from many different eras in world history. Each one has a specific story to tell, about the period that produced it: students can ask who these were made for, and why.

**Geography** – these objects come from all over the world. Students can find these locations on googlemaps, and think about different countries, cultures and languages.

**World Religions** – develop knowledge of world religions through objects and sacred texts.

**Literacy** – read, explore, understand and use a wide range of texts. Express thoughts, feelings and opinions in different kinds of writing.

**Extending the learning environment** – museums offer students the opportunity to learn and explore a wide variety of themes that assist in their learning environments.

**ICT** – research and interpret information. Create, develop, present and publish ideas and showcase learning.
Themes

Faith

Introduction: The Chester Beatty collection includes works representing many of the major world religions including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism among others. Many faith systems are centred upon sacred texts, and expressed through art and architecture.

Look at the following three examples and use visual thinking as well as see, think, wonder (see p.2).

Syria

Qur’an, 8th century, Syria. CBL Is 1404

This large Qur’an dates to the early eighth century and was probably made in Syria. It was written on parchment and in vertical format which was unusual for this time. There is a colourful horizontal band of illumination on the upper left, marking the start of a new chapter. The beautiful Arabic calligraphy is written in dark brown ink in a script known as Kufic.

Byzantine Empire

Gospel Book, late 11th or early 12th century, Greece or Turkey. CBL W 139

The Gospels are four books of the New Testament in the Christian Bible. They tell the story of Jesus’ life, teachings and sacrifice. The earliest known copies are not illustrated. Over time, it became standard to introduce each individual Gospel with an author portrait depicting the specific Evangelist: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. In these portraits, the author is usually sitting at a desk, writing out their text.
Verses from the Benchūhenron sutra, 1117-1126, Japan. CBL J 1204

This scroll is one of a set of some five thousand scrolls of Buddhist religious texts and regulations made for the powerful warrior Fujiwara no Kiyohira. The scrolls were made using paper dyed deep blue with indigo, and the text was copied out in gold and silver. The frontispiece painting here shows the Buddha preaching at Vulture Peak. Kiyohira presented the scrolls to Chūsonji temple in northern Japan.

General Discussion

- Identify which world religions these texts represent. How were they used?
- Students are encouraged to research these religions, and their key beliefs.
- These texts were first written down over a thousand years ago, but remain meaningful to people today. Do you think objects like this should be in a museum?
Patronage

Introduction: throughout history, the visual arts have been used to express power and sophistication. Religious organisations, wealthy families and royal courts were all patrons of artists, architects and musicians, commissioning new works. Below are a number of examples of works made for specific people.

Look at the following three examples and use visual thinking as well as see, think, wonder (see p.2).

Mughal India

Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan with their Ministers from the Minto Album, Bichtir, 1631, India. CBL In 07A.19

This group portrait shows three generations of the Mughal emperors who ruled parts of India (1526-1827), and were extraordinary patrons and collectors of art. They are seated on separate thrones: Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan (he is famous for the Taj Mahal building in Agra). Akbar passes a golden crown to his grandson Shah Jahan, closely watched by Jahangir (whose name means “world-seizer”). This symbolises the passing of power from one generation to the next. Three court ministers stand in front of the throne; witnessing the transition of power.

Flanders

Adoration of the Magi from the Beatty Rosarium, Simon Bening (1483-1561), 1540-1545, Bruges, Belgium. CBL W 099 f.20

This Rosarium (a collection of devotions dedicated to the Virgin Mary) was commissioned by Charles V or his son Philip II, King of Spain. The artist Simon Bening was one of the most celebrated painters in Flanders and made many other works for the Hapsburg dynasty. At the time, Bening was regarded as the greatest master of illumination in all of Europe. This painting depicts the Adoration of the Magi, with the three kings bringing gifts to the infant Jesus.
China

The Great Encyclopedia of the Yongle Reign, 1562-1567, China. CBL C 1758

In 1403 the Yongle Emperor commissioned a team of clerks to copy down all existing writings on the subjects of religion, history, literature, philosophy, science and the arts. The resulting encyclopedia was completed in 1408 and consisted of 11,095 volumes. It was copied again in the sixteenth century, but only a few hundred volumes survive today. The Chester Beatty collection includes three of these rare volumes, with entries on paper, poetry and bamboo. This illustration shows a bitter orange tree.

General Discussion

- Why do you think these objects were commissioned? What do these objects tell us about their owners? Why do rulers need the visual arts? Do we know which artists were employed to make these objects, and why?
- Students are encouraged to research well-known patrons from history to the present-day.
- Who are the modern patrons of artists and musicians, in the twenty-first century?
**Introduction:** animals are often depicted in art. Sometimes they communicate special qualities to the viewer. Below are a number of examples of works depicting creatures as central character in a story, as decorative motifs or as symbols of power.

Look at the following three examples and use visual thinking as well as see, think, wonder (see p.2).

**Iran**

*Zal Rescued by the Simurgh, Shahnama, late 16th century, Iran.*
*CBL Per 277.12*

This painting shows an episode from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), the famous epic saga of Persian literature. Much-loved and treasured by Iranians all over the world, the Book of Kings tells the adventurous stories of fifty different rulers of Iran. The tales cover adventures, magic, romance, conspiracies and conquests. Here, the artists have created a beautiful and dramatic scene: a giant magical bird (the *simurgh*) is flying up to her rocky mountaintop nest and carrying with her the baby Zal. The white-haired boy is adopted into the *simurgh* family, and only later returns to the world of humans.

**England**

*Historiated Initial ‘I’, Walsingham Bible, c. 1153, England. CBL W 022*

The Walsingham Bible dates from the 12th century and contains beautiful examples of decorative capitals such as this letter I. It incorporates a series of gold medallions with Christ in Majesty over scenes showing the creation of the world and all its creatures culminating in Adam and Eve tempted by the serpent. The initial itself ends with a “column-biter”: a head of a monster devouring what lies beneath.
China

The Song of the Jade Bowl, 1745, China. CBL C 1001

The ten tablets of this jade book are inscribed with a poem composed by China’s Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736-95). The poem describes a large antique jade bowl in the emperor’s collection, and the craftspeople who engraved the text followed his handwriting. The final tablet of the book is decorated with a single dragon chasing a flaming pearl. The five-clawed dragon was the emblem of the emperor.

General Discussion

- Why do you think people created these objects? What function do they play?
- Students are encouraged to research cultural meaning in art and design. How are images of animals used in modern art and design, such as advertising logos?
- What do the different animals mean in these artworks? Are they good or bad?
- Why are human beings interested in monsters?
Craft Skill: Making Art

Introduction: the objects below were made by trained artists who had excellent craft skills as well as fine materials to work with. Some are still remembered today as famous names, while others remain anonymous.

Look at the following three examples and use visual thinking as well as see, think, wonder (see p.2).

Iraq

Qur’an, Ibn al-Bawwab, 1000-1001, Baghdad, Iraq. CBL Is 1431

This small Qur’an is one of the great treasures of the Chester Beatty Library. Completed in 1000-1001, it is important on a number of counts, but especially as it is a very rare example of the work of Ibn al-Bawwab, (d. 1022), who was a famous master-calligrapher. Ibn al-Bawwab is greatly admired for his elegant style of writing Arabic in the cursive script known as naskh. For this manuscript, Ibn al-Bawwab also designed and painted all the decorative illumination, as well as writing out the text so beautifully.

Ireland

Wotton’s Element of Architecture and Vitruvius’ De Architectura, bound by Edward Beatty (d. 1794), binding c. 1755, Dublin, Ireland. CBL W 192

The Chester Beatty’s collection of bindings includes many fine examples of craftsmanship. This rare leather binding, recently identified as the work of Edward Beatty, is one of the most important Irish bindings to survive from the eighteenth century. Using gilt leaf, heated stamping tools and compasses, he created his own intricate design style and technique.
Darani of One Million Pagodas, 764-770, Japan. CBL J 1697

In 764, Empress Shōtoku ordered the production of one million miniature wooden pagodas, each containing a small prayer. Rather than being written out by hand, these Buddhist prayers (or darani) were printed onto paper. The pagodas were given to ten leading temples.

It is possible that this pagoda was one of 3,000 sold by Hōryūji temple in central Japan in 1908 to pay for restoration expenses. These prayers are the earliest known printed texts from Japan.

General Discussion

- Students are encouraged to pick a favourite object, and to research the craft techniques and tools used to make it.
- How do different writing styles and fonts matter? Do they change the way you read a text?
- What is the ideal size for a book, in your opinion?
- Does it matter if you do not know the artist’s name, when you are researching an artwork?
Love

Introduction: Themes of love and devotion are often expressed in the visual arts and in literature. Here are three examples of works about love and fidelity.

Look at the following three examples and use visual thinking as well as see, think, wonder (see p.2).

Egypt

Love Poems, c. 1160 BC, Egypt.
CBL Pap 1.2

This is an ancient Egyptian love song, written on papyrus. Very few survive, and this is the most complete known example. There are two voices in the poem, each speaking in turn about their love, but (somewhat sadly) each without hearing the other. It begins with the man talking about his beloved:

One alone, a sister without her peer, comlier than all mankind. Behold she is like the star-goddess arising at the beginning of a happy year; a sheen surpassing, of radiant skin, lovely of eyes wherewith to gaze, sweet lips wherewith to speak, she hath not a word too much.

Iran

Faridun’s Sons meet the Three Daughters of the King of Yemen, Shahnama, late 16th century, Iran.
CBL Per 277.5

Taken from the great epic poem of Iran, this scene is set in a beautiful palace courtyard, where King Sarv of Yemen (centre) has begrudgingly accepted that his three beloved daughters will marry the princes from distant Iran. His sorrow is reflected by the sad pose of a woman sitting in the upper balcony (presumably the girls’ mother), and also by the empty nest in the tree overhead.
Song of Lasting Sorrow, Kanō Sansetsu (1590-1651), late 1640s, Kyoto, Japan. CBL J 1158

The Song of Lasting Sorrow was written by the Chinese poet Bai Juyi in the ninth century. Based on historical events, it tells of the tragic romance between Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) and the beautiful Yang Guifei. Blamed in part for the An Lushan rebellion of 755-6, their love affair ended with Yang Guifei’s execution. Bai Juyi’s poem captured hearts across China and beyond. These scrolls were painted in Japan by the artist Kanō Sansetsu.

General Discussion

- Love stories have always been popular, in literature, songs and poetry: can you name three modern examples, similar to these?
- Do these works describe emotions which are still realistic and relevant today?
- How many famous couples can you name, in reality or from fiction?
Projects and activities

**Creatures**
Design your own creature. Does it have any unusual powers? Where does it live? What does your creature symbolise? Tell a story about your creature.

**Craft**
Create your own book and decorate it in a style inspired by your visit to the Chester Beatty.

**Love**
Think of a song that reminds you of an object you liked in the exhibition.

**Post-primary**

**Exhibition themes**
The themes in this exhibition were: craft, love, patronage, creatures, and faith. What other themes would you pick (for the same objects), and why?

**Here are some other questions you can consider when you visit the exhibition and help with critical thinking:**

**Origin:** Select an object from the exhibition and ask the following questions: Who was it made for? Which language is it written in?

**Process:** Can you sketch the layout/outline of this object? How would you describe it?

**History:** How did people live then when these objects were made? Why were these objects special to them?

**Geography:** Can you learn to say “hello” in one of the languages found in the countries reflected in the exhibition?

**Literacy:** Why are stories so important? How many writing systems can you find in this one exhibition? How do paintings and images tell a story?

**Art, craft and design**
Design and make your own work inspired by your favourite object in the exhibition. What art techniques did you use in the making of your piece? What made you choose this object?

**Faith**
Which religious artwork in this exhibition did you find the most interesting, and why?

**Glossary**
**Art object** used to describe a work of art other than a painting.
**Binding** the act of attaching the pages of a book together and securing it within a cover; or the cover itself.

**Calligraphy** decorative handwriting.

**Clerks** a person employed to keep records.

**Composition** in art, composition refers to the way in which an artist arranges the elements within the work to create balance, movement or other visual effects.

**Commission.** A request for a particular art work to be made, which is paid for by the patron, or person who made the request. It often comes with very clear specifications regarding size, subject, materials and fees.

**Craftsmanship** skill at making something usually by hand.

**Cursive** a style of writing where the characters are joined up.

**Darani** Buddhist prayers.

**Decorative capitals** a letter at the beginning of a work, chapter or paragraph. It is usually larger than the other characters and ornamented.

**Devotees** a believer and follower of a religion.

**Discerning** someone who shows good judgement.

**Evangelists** the writers of the Four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

**Flanders** a Dutch-speaking area in Belgium.

**Folios.** The text of a book is written on large bifolios (sheets), which folded in half and sewn in the middle create two folios (leaves) or four pages. Each pages is a single side of a folio. The two sides of a leaf are referred to as the recto (front) and verso (back).

**Frontispiece** an illustration at the beginning of a book placed opposite the title.

**Gilt leaf** fine thin leaves of gold used to decorate surfaces such as bindings.

**Group portrait** a representation of a group of people in a painting or photograph.

**Illuminate.** The act or process of creating illuminations.

**Illuminated manuscripts.** Handwritten books that have been decorated with ornamental designs and/or miniatures.

**Illuminations.** Painting and other adornments applied to books, scrolls or other document types for the purpose of illustrating or decorating a text; this includes miniatures, decorated initial letters and decorated borders. The media generally includes ink, colours and precious metals on parchment, paper or silk.

**Inscribed** to write or carve letters or words on to a surface such as wood or metal.
Kufic handwriting: this is the oldest calligraphy known in Arabic scripts and originates from 7th century Iraq.

Magnate a wealthy individual.

Manuscripts. Handwritten documents, particularly books, created before the invention of the printing press.

Medallions a round shape with patterns such as flowers and leaves used to decorate in books, manuscripts, buildings and decorative art objects.

Miniatures. Small pictures that are often set apart from the text and comprise a self-contained design.

Mughals a family of Muslim rulers in India from the 16th – 19th centuries.

Naskh a type of calligraphy in Arabic dating from the 4th century.

New Testament second part of the Bible which includes the Gospels and the story of Jesus.

Pagoda a religious building in the form of a tall tower with several levels.

Parchment. Material made from calf, sheep or goat skin which has been limed, dehaired, scraped and dried under tension to produce a thin, strong material for writing, bookbinding or other uses.

Papyrus a writing material made out of the beaten inner part of the papyrus plant found along the River Nile in Egypt.

Patron. A supporter of artists, especially those who commission and pay for individual works of art. The Christian Church and the Medici family in Renaissance Florence were important patrons of artists, architects and musicians.

Philanthropist a person who helps others through donations of money, art and similar support.

Prolific productive, i.e. an artist who produces many pieces of work can be described as prolific.

Qur’an the holy book of the Islamic faith.

Rectilinear lines appearance of straight lines.

Scroll a long roll of paper or other similar material used for writing and painting e.g. early Gospels on papyrus scrolls or Japanese paintings on scrolls.

Tablets a piece of material either clay or semi-precious stone inscribed with important writing.

Taj Mahal a well-known building in India made out of white marble. It contains the tomb of the wife of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan

Volumes a book forming part of a set or series.
Vertical format something that stands upright or points upwards.

For further information on art-related terminology, see Artefacts: A Teacher and student resource for Leaving Certificate Art and Design Appreciation
https://chesterbeattyeducation.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/artefactslr.pdf

Curriculum Links

Junior Certificate: History and Art, Craft, Design. How we find out about the past; Our roots in ancient civilisation; Castle, church and city; Gothic; History of Art, Craft and Design; Use of tools in the creation of miniatures and books; painting; composition

Junior Certificate: Religious Education. Communities of faith; foundations of religion; major world religion; celebration of faith

Leaving Certificate: Art History and Appreciation. European art; Gothic; religious painting; landscape and portrait paintings; architecture; depiction of real space; composition; stories; narrative; patronage; European cities as centres of art production; Book of Hours; book of prayers; exhibition in an Irish museum

Leaving Certificate: Religious Education. Christianity origins and contemporary expressions; worship, prayer and ritual

Further resources

Chester Beatty website www.cbl.ie

Chester Beatty image gallery http://www.cbl.ie/Image-Gallery.aspx

Chester Beatty Education Learning Resources https://chesterbeattyeducation.wordpress.com/resources/

Exhibition details 19 October 2018 – 28 April 2019

Entry to the exhibition is free. To book a guided tour of the Chester Beatty Library please book on