

# WORLD CERAMICS: MASTERPIECES FROM THE V&A

- a splendid finale to Damascus Arab Capital of Culture 2008



- To mark the closing celebrations for Damascus Arab Capital of Culture 2008 (DACC), a major international touring exhibition, *World Ceramics: Masterpieces from the V&A*, opened at the historical Khan As'ad Basha in Damascus on 24 November 2008. It ran until 8 January 2009 and was free to all visitors.
- The exhibition was hosted by the DACC and sponsored by Syria Shell, with major support from the General Directorate of Antiquities & Museums and from the British Council in Syria.
- *World Ceramics: Masterpieces from the V&A* is the first major international museum loan exhibition to be held in Syria and in the region by the V&A. It places beautiful objects in an outstanding setting and tells a compelling story of international contacts over five millennia.

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London, is the world's leading museum of art and design, and it boasts the largest ceramics collection in existence. Its holdings range from ancient Egyptian artefacts and early examples of Chinese porcelain to contemporary studio pottery and industrially designed ceramics. This touring exhibition is a rare opportunity to see 116 of the greatest treasures from the V&A's world renowned collection while the galleries in London are being refurbished to reopen in September 2009. The

exhibition will showcase many historic and rare examples that have not been seen outside the V&A since their acquisition.

The exhibition was sponsored by Syria Shell and was housed at the beautiful Khan As'ad Basha, a historic commercial building in the heart of Old Damascus and a striking example of 18th-century Syrian architecture. The Khan, or caravanserai, was built by As'ad Basha al-'Azm, a powerful governor of Damascus, to house merchants involved in long-distance trade, providing a very appropriate setting for an exhibition that reflects the transmission of objects and ideas along trade routes.

Syria has been producing ceramics for more than 8000 years, making it one of the world's earliest centres of pottery production. At times, it has exported its finest wares as far as Italy and Spain. At other times, it has imported porcelain from as far away as China and Japan. The story of *World Ceramics* is of great relevance to the history of Syria, and of Damascus.

Mark Jones, Director of the V&A, said:

*"Damascus has an immensely long history, making it one of the most fascinating of the world's great cities. We are delighted to be taking the World Ceramics exhibition to the city while it holds the title of Arab Capital of Culture and hope to attract a broad range of visitors to see highlights from the V&A's ceramics collection. The exhibition shows how much*