The Jewish Museum and Museum Fine Arts, Boston Announce Joint Acquisition of Rare Silver Torah Finials from 1729 by Early Jewish Silversmith

New York, NY, August 11, 2023 – The Jewish Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), have jointly acquired a pair of rare Torah finials (1729) by Abraham Lopes de Oliveyra (1657-1750), the earliest known Jewish silversmith to work in England. The pair of finials are currently on view at the Jewish Museum in New York City through late-October. The pair will then be on view at the MFA beginning December 2023.

The finials are an artistic feat of a master silversmith. Oliveyra, an Amsterdam-born Jew from a Portuguese family, moved to London in the 1680s or 1690s. When he made the finials, London was home to Jewish communities that were both of Iberian descent and central and Eastern European origin. Jews in Western Europe were excluded from the artists’ guilds, including the silversmiths’ association. Despite this prohibition, Oliveyra was gradually able to practice his profession after moving to London, where he became a prolific maker of Jewish ceremonial art, especially Torah finials.

Bold openwork with interwoven shell motifs and ornate foliate patterns comprises the body of these finials. The crowns at the top of the finials are a symbol of the Torah scroll’s regality. The exquisitely engraved and partially gilded staves are characteristics of Oliveyra’s work.

Darsie Alexander, Acting Director and Susan & Elihu Rose Chief Curator, The Jewish Museum, said, “We are thrilled to partner with the MFA on this acquisition, which serves both institutions and their communities so deeply. In addition to representing a spirit of true collaboration in their joint purchase, these extraordinary finials will further enhance the Jewish Museum’s strong holdings in Judaica, and will be seen by audiences within and beyond New York.”

"We are thrilled to deepen the MFA’s rich holdings of Judaica with Torah finials by such a celebrated Jewish silversmith," said Matthew Teitelbaum, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the MFA. "They are truly magical. To acquire these objects in the public trust, in partnership with the Jewish Museum—home to one of the best Judaica collections in the world—is deeply meaningful. Thanks to this
joint endeavor, the finials will be shown in different contexts and enjoyed by our communities in Boston, New York and beyond.”

Oliveyra made at least 11 pairs of Torah finials for London’s early congregations. Of those pairs, only one other pair exists in the United States—in Congregation Shearith Israel (Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue) in New York. Other known objects by this maker include a Torah pointer and a hanging Sabbath lamp in the Jewish Museum, London, as well as a silver platter gifted to the mayor of London at the time, in the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

About the Jewish Museum
The Jewish Museum is an art museum committed to illuminating the complexity and vibrancy of Jewish culture for a global audience. Located on New York City’s famed Museum Mile, in the landmarked Warburg mansion, the Jewish Museum was the first institution of its kind in the United States and is one of the oldest Jewish museums in the world. The Museum offers diverse exhibitions and programs and maintains a unique collection of nearly 30,000 works of art, ceremonial objects, and media reflecting the global Jewish experience over more than 4,000 years. The public may call 212.423.3200 or visit TheJewishMuseum.org for more information. Follow on social media @thejewishmuseum.

About Museum Fine Arts, Boston
The MFA brings many worlds together through art. Showcasing masterpieces from ancient to modern, our renowned collection of nearly 500,000 works tells a multifaceted story of the human experience—a story that holds unique meaning for everyone. From Boston locals to international travelers, visitors from all over come to experience the MFA—where they reveal connections, explore differences and create a community where all belong. Open six days a week, the MFA’s hours are Saturday through Monday, 10 am–5 pm; Wednesday, 10 am–5 pm; and Thursday–Friday, 10 am–10 pm. Plan your visit at mfa.org.

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