



LEFT "Portrait of Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru (1581-1606)," 19th century. Ink and color on paper. **ABOVE** Dr. Parvinder Singh Khanuja poses in the Sikh Art Gallery that he established at Phoenix Art Museum.

Art of Devotion

FOR ONE VALLEY PHYSICIAN, COLLECTING THE ARTIFACTS OF HIS FAITH IS AN INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY.

BY REBECCA L. RHOADES

THE "GURU GRANTH SAHIB," or holy book of Sikhism, speaks of the principle of "seva," an altruistic practice of service on behalf of and for the betterment of the community. It notes, "One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, shall attain his Lord and Master." This fundamental value is deeply ingrained in the collective psyche of Sikhs around the world.

"There are many different ways to do seva, in which we can do things for the common mankind and make them more aware of the world and create tolerance," says Dr. Parvinder Singh Khanuja. As

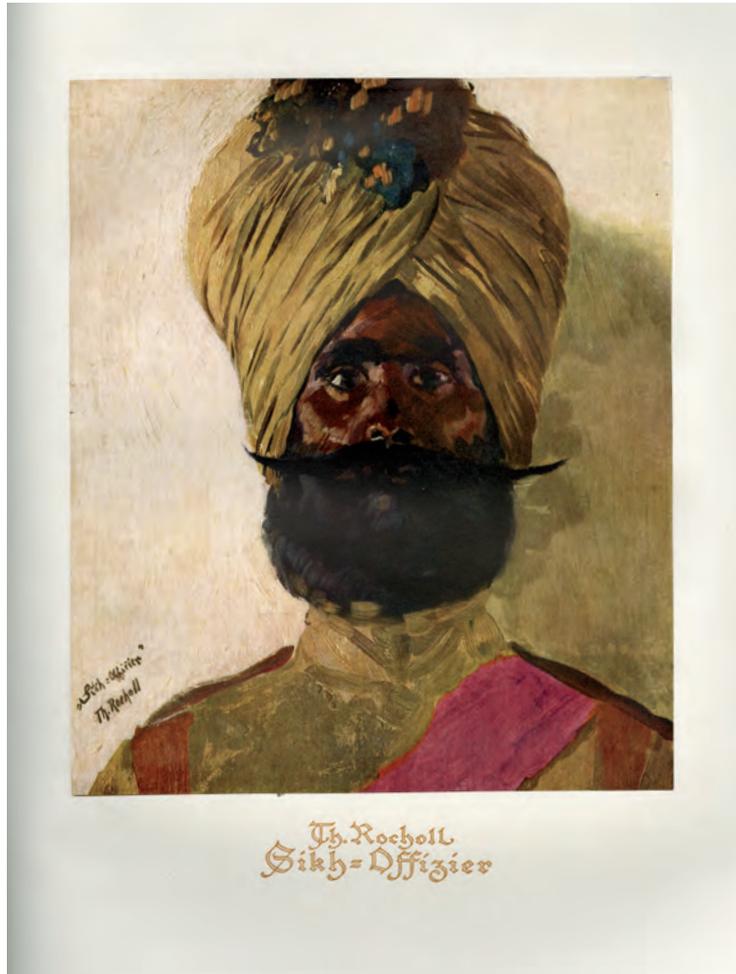
one of the Valley's leading oncologists and founding member of a network of cancer care centers, Khanuja has devoted his career to helping people. But it's the opportunity to share his extensive art collection with the public that brings him immense gratification.

Khanuja began collecting about 12 years ago after coming across some Sikh coins during visits to India. "They're very special to me because they represent the history of sovereignty," he explains, adding that "most Sikhs probably have never seen Sikh coins."

Soon he began acquiring other works that reflected his heritage and faith. "It becomes an obsession, a disease," he says with a smile. For many years, the doctor filled his home with religious paintings from the 1700s and 1800s; centuries-old weapons and armor; vintage photographs that spotlight places, people and events important to Sikh history; sculpture; jewelry; and much more. As the collection grew, so did Khanuja's sense of responsibility. How could he share the works' beauty, stories and lessons with both the Sikh and non-Sikh public?

About four years ago, Khanuja was approached by Janet Baker, curator of Asian Art at Phoenix Art Museum, who requested he include some of his pieces in an exhibit about private collections. One thing led to another and, on April 22, 2017, the museum officially dedicated the Dr. Darshan Singh

RIGHT The most important gurdwara, or house of worship, in Sikhism can be found in Amritsar, India. Destroyed several times throughout history, it was rebuilt in the early 1800s of marble and copper overlaid with gold foil. It is depicted here in "Golden Temple" by S. G. Thakur Singh, 1949.



LEFT This 1930 print, titled "Deutschland Gegner Im Weltkriege (Germany's Opponents in the World War)," by Theodor Rocholl portrays the distinctive turban and facial hair of a Sikh officer during World War I. **FAR LEFT** An undated lithograph shows Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the leader of the Sikh Empire.

and Ajit Kaur Khanuja and Mr. Jaswant Singh and Mohinder Kaur Sikh Art Gallery, named after Khanuja's and his wife, Parveen's, parents. "We are the second museum in the country to have a dedicated Sikh gallery," says Baker. "The other is in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco." The inaugural exhibition, "Virtue and Valor," explored key aspects of Sikh religion and history.

For Khanuja, finding a public space to share his artwork brings purpose to the collection. "The way I look at it, it's not my collection. I may have funded it, but it belongs to the community," he says.

All of the pieces on display are on loan from Khanuja, and exhibits are rotated about twice a year. Some works illustrate the religious history of Sikhism and tell the tale of its founder, Guru Nanak. Others are more tangential, having been produced by Sikh artists or in the Punjab region of India, where the faith was established and is centralized. "Last year, we displayed the flag of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, the leader of the Sikh Empire," says Khanuja. "There are only eight flags left in the world." Currently on exhibit is a grouping of contemporary paintings by India-based artist Arpana Caur, who uses gemlike hues and abstract figuration to address such themes as spirituality, environmentalism, feminism and even socio-economic inequality. "Her paintings make you stop and ask yourself, 'What is her message, what is the symbolism here?'" Baker comments.

Recently, Khanuja has begun collecting textiles, including Kashmiri shawls from the 1700s and 1800s, as well as "phulkari." To celebrate the birth of a



ABOVE Though Sikhs made up only 1% of India's population in the early 20th century, they counted for more than 20% of the British Indian Army that fought on many fronts during World War I. This photograph shows Sikh soldiers in France in 1914. **BELOW** Sikh warriors often carried a shield, or dhal, such as this metal version, circa 1854-1856.

female child, women in the Punjab region decorate brightly colored cloths with exquisite embroidery. "It is something the girl will have all of her life," says Baker. Adds Khanuja, "Phulkari have a lot of emotional value. It can take two to three years to make one. They're stunning."

While visual interest is of utmost importance for pieces displayed in the museum, for Khanuja, the real value of his collection is when visitors take the time to learn about the religion and culture that's expressed in the art. "Our gallery is about saving the heritage and spreading awareness," he explains. "For me, the biggest reward is when I see kids in there. They get to experience diversity and gain an understanding about the world around them. Art makes you a more cultured and better person. You become more aware of different events, faiths and people from other parts of the world. It's good for the soul."

For more information, see Sources on Page 134.



What is Sikhism?

Founded in the Punjab region of India in the 1500s by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world with more than 25 million devotees. Following are some facts about Sikh culture and history.

- Sikhism is a monotheistic religion, as represented in the tenet "Ik Onkar," meaning "One God." Unlike Hinduism, with which it is often confused, Sikhism believes that all creation is equal, without distinction by caste, creed, race, gender or station in life.
- Guru Nanak had nine successors, each building on what he had begun. For example, the fourth guru, Ram Das,

established Amritsar, India, as the pre-eminent Sikh pilgrimage site. The next, Arjan Dev, completed the Golden Temple there. The last, Gobind Singh, who died in 1708, appointed the "Guru Granth Sahib," the Sikh holy book, as the final and eternal guru. It lays down moral and ethical rules for development of the soul, spiritual salvation and unity.

- All male Sikhs have the surname Singh, which means "Lion," and all females have the last or middle name Kaur, or "Princess." The titles were introduced by Gobind Singh, when he administered "amrit," or baptism.
- One of the most public identifiers of Sikh males is the turban, which serves

as a spiritual crown and a reminder that the wearer is committed to living according to Sikh principles. Guru Gobind Singh said, "Wearing a turban declares sovereignty, dedication, self-respect, courage and piety." Sikhs also follow "Kesh," the practice of allowing their hair to grow naturally as a sign of spiritual devotion.

- Phoenix has one of the Top 10 largest Sikh populations in the U.S., with more than 4,000 followers. The Guru Nanak Dwara at 9th and Oak streets was the city's first gurdwara, or Sikh house of worship, established in 1970.