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From Earth's core comes a rare gift

BY TERRY LONCARIC  
Post-Tribune correspondent

The Field Museum lures visitors down the dazzling path of “Gold.” The beauty and allure of this precious metal radiates in the treasures, the geological stories, and in the history lessons that accompany this special exhibit. Arranged by the American Museum of Natural History, New York, and the Houston Museum of Natural Science, Chicago is the last place where viewers can take in this landmark exhibition.

This exhibit explores gold as a symbol of power, mystery, and wealth. Chicago Project Coordinator Hilary Sanders said “Gold” tells the fascinating story of the world’s most desired metal, exploring its natural beauty, scientific value, and how it influenced society. Gold was the first metal worked by mankind and immortalized in mythology. The rise of influential societies coincided with their ownership of gold. The Field Museum celebrates all of these connections.

“This exhibit is a perfect fit for the Field Museum,” Sanders said. “The exhibit explores the natural and cultural aspects of gold. People look at some of the unique properties of gold and see some of the most beautiful objects. Traditionally and historically, gold has been associated with the rich and the powerful because it is so rare.”

The geological story of gold is revealed, too.

“People are surprised at how gold is formed,” Sanders said. “People ask me, is gold being formed right now? My answer is, absolutely. What happens is hot water cycles through the earth’s crust and moves gold to the surface of the earth. But this is a rare occurrence. Out of a billion atoms of the earth’s crust, only five are gold atoms.”

TEST YOUR IQ

What did the Egyptians call gold?

The gold treasures are unique. So are the stories associated with each item. The exhibit features more than 550 objects, including exquisite jewelry, enormous nuggets, gold bars, and ancient coins. Visitors can peer inside a wrecked ship and then feel the frenzy of the California Gold Rush.

“We have the largest gold bar from the California Gold Rush — the 100-pound Eureka bar,” Sanders exclaimed. “You are going to see a lot of gold bars made in different shapes. The gold bars were used to finance wars and pay off debts. The exhibit shows how the Gold Rush led the Europeans to America. You see how the fever for gold really spurred the development of our country.”

Visitors can travel around the globe and see some exotic gold treasures, too. Some special items include a pendant from Ghana in the shape of a mask, a gilded Buddha from Tibet, a rare Peruvian vase, a Japanese sword sheath, and beautiful Persian earrings.

Other unique items include Susan Sarandon’s Oscar, the White Sox World Series Trophy, a gold nugget in the shape of a sea horse (a natural phenomenon), and 24 pieces of Cartier jewelry. There is even a room encased in gold. When flattened, an ounce of gold is so malleable, it can cover an entire room.

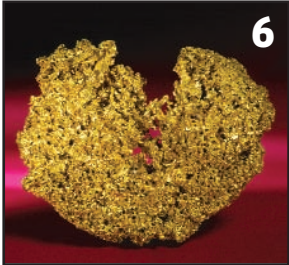
The road to gold stretches back to ancient times, but as an object of monetary value and a symbol of beauty, gold remains unheralded. “In this exhibit, you see the substance, and then you see what is done with the substance,” Sanders said. “You see how different cultures around the world have used gold to create beautiful things. What’s really fascinating about gold is the story behind it.”



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Gold Facts

- Gold is extremely dense, it conducts heat and electricity, and it never rusts.
- In ancient Egypt, gold was called “the flesh of the gods.”
- Some Native Americans believe consuming gold will allow humans to levitate.
- Asian countries put gold in fruit, jelly snacks and tea.
- Gold has been discovered on every continent on Earth.
- There are more than 400 references to gold in the Bible.
- More than 80 percent of the gold supply is still in the ground.
- The world’s largest stockpile of gold can be found five stories underground inside the Federal Reserve Bank of New York’s vault.
- Most of the Federal Reserve’s gold belongs to foreign governments.
- Elvis Presley had three gold cars.

If you go

**What:** “Gold”  
**When:** Through March 6  
**Where:** Field Museum, 1400 S. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago  
**Tickets:** \$22-\$28 for adults, \$18-\$23 for students and seniors, \$15-\$19 for children.  
**Phone:** (312) 922-9410

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1. Mixtec Bell

This elaborate gold bell, crafted more than 500 years ago, is thought to depict the patron of fire — Xiutecuhtli. Bearded with two fangs, the deity wears an elaborate headdress and carries a shield.

— CRAIG CHESEK/AMNH

2. Inca Figure

A hollow gold Inca figurine from Peru was probably used as an offering and was originally wrapped in cloth.

— DENIS FINNIN/AMNH

3. Keris Handle

This keris (pronounced “crease”) handle found in Bali, Indonesia (circa late 1800s to early 1900s), is an example of the traditional dagger of Southeast Asia. The keris originated in Java as far back as 1400 BC.

— C. CHESEK/AMNH DIVISION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

4. Baby Rattle

A Tiffany baby rattle with mother-of-pearl handle, manufactured around 1890, features 18-karat “chased” gold, a technique that involves pushing and pulling the metal with chisels and hammers to create a high-relief decoration.

— TIFFANY & CO. ARCHIVES

5. Byzantine Coin

A Byzantine gold Histamenon Nomis coin (1028-1034 A.D.) with a depiction of emperor Romanus III being crowned by the Virgin Mary.

— CRAIG CHESEK/AMNH

11. Colorado Gold

This delicate, crystallized gold specimen was found in Leadville, Colo. Formed from superheated gold-bearing water, crystallized gold specimens like this are extremely rare in nature.

— DENIS FINNIN/AMNH