

Press Release



May 2009

Reinstallation of Islamic Galleries at Brooklyn Museum to Open June 5

The Islamic galleries at the Brooklyn Museum will be completely reinstalled with a selection of 134 objects from the Museum's important holdings of some 1,700 works representing the diverse cultures and contexts of the Islamic world. The new presentation, which opens on June 5, includes works in a wide range of media, including ceramics and glass, metalwork, paintings, and textiles, which range in date from the 8th century to the present, among them nearly twenty that have never before or only rarely been on view.

The new galleries feature new labels, didactics, and maps; cases containing works that are thematically arranged; and new colors and window treatments. A portion of the galleries will be devoted to small rotating installations. The first rotation, on view through January 2010, will be devoted to the arts of the book and storytelling. It will focus on the Qur'an, prayer books, and histories of religious figures in Islam that will address the common misconception that figural imagery is prohibited in Islamic art.

The reinstallation has been organized by Ladan Akbarnia, Hagop Kevorkian Associate Curator of Islamic Art at the Brooklyn Museum, who is also responsible for the exhibition *Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam*, which opens on the same day.

The new installation will include works from a wide geographic area, including Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Central Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. In addition to devotional objects, it will include ceremonial and household goods, arms and armor, costumes, horse trappings, and jewelry. The most dramatic addition to the galleries will be a large-scale Qajar period (Iran, late 19th–early 20th century) “coffeehouse”-style painting of the legendary *Battle of Karbala*, which commemorates the martyrdom of Husayn, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad. This work once served as a backdrop for either a processional or theatrical narration of Husayn's story and will be the focal point of the main gallery's central niche dedicated to the art of storytelling.

Among the other highlights of the presentation is the top section of an earthenware water jug from 12th or early 13th century Northern Iraq or Syria, embellished with a carved depiction of a ruler seated on a carpet and flanked by armed attendants and winged harpies with tails that terminate in dragon heads, and a wide range of exceptional ceramic pieces including an Iranian bowl from the late 12th or early 13th century, elaborately decorated with an enthronement scene and featuring leaf gilding.

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Also included in the reinstallation is a lacquered papier-mâché mirror case with a Portrait of Manuchihr Kahn, the powerful Georgian eunuch who served as viceroy of several provinces and later as governor of Isfahan under the reign of Muhammad Shah Qajar in the mid-19th century, as well as an extraordinary woven silk woman's robe from 19th-century Turkoman, created using the *ikat* of "resist-dye" technique commonly used on Central Asian silks. Among the other notable objects are a panel of Iranian tiles that once adorned the shrine of Zayn al-Mulk in Isfahan using a polychrome palette and intricate mosaic design with vegetal motifs, which were typical of late 15th-century architectural decoration under the Timurids, and an 18th-century garden carpet that depicts a stylized version of a traditional Persian garden, with landscaped sections, adorned by flowering shrubs, divided by pools and channels of water inhabited by small fish. Representing contemporary Islam is a 2007 digital print by Iranian born artist Sadegh Tirafkan, *The Loss of Our Identity #1 (Boy)*, that explores the layering of traditional and modern Iranian culture and the conflicts between Iranian and western culture.

The Art of the Islamic World Collection at the Brooklyn Museum is considered among the top collections of Islamic art in the United States and includes one of the largest and finest collections of later Iranian art outside of that country. It contains material from North Africa, the Middle East, Central and Southeast Asia, and the Islamic Diaspora and dates from the 7th century to the present day. The collection includes illustrated and illuminated manuscripts, calligraphies, single-page drawings and painting, and photographs, large-scale oil paintings, ceramics, metalwork, woodwork, glass, stone, costumes, jewelry, carpets and textiles, and architectural elements.

The collection originally was part of the Department of Ethnology established in 1903 by R. Stewart Culin, who acquired objects during expeditions to India, China, and Japan. In 1969, an endowment from the Hagop Kevorkian Fund established the position of Curator of Middle Eastern Art and Archaeology, first held by Charles K. Wilkinson, who along with curator Lois Katz significantly augmented the collection in the 1960s and '70s. In the 1980s, the department merged with the Department of Asian Art and continued to grow under the leadership of former Chair Amy Poster and Wilkinson's successors Sheila Canby, Aimée Froom, and Layla S. Diba. In 2007 the Arts of the Islamic World holdings were separated from the Asian Art collection. The collection was renamed the Arts of the Islamic World Collection in 2008.

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