

News Release

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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For Immediate Release

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Metropolitan Museum to Open Renovated Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia

Opening: November 1, 2011
Press preview: Monday, October 24, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

The grand reopening of a suite of 15 dramatic **New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia** will take place at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art on November 1. The greatly enlarged, freshly conceived, and completely renovated galleries house the Metropolitan’s renowned collection of Islamic art—one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of this material in the world. Design features within the new space highlight both the diversity and the interconnectedness of the numerous cultures represented here; multiple entryways allow visitors to approach the new galleries—and the art displayed within—from different perspectives.

“The opening of these extraordinary new galleries underscores our mission as an encyclopedic museum and provides a unique opportunity to convey the grandeur and complexity of Islamic art and culture at a pivotal moment in world history,” stated Thomas P. Campbell, Director of the Metropolitan Museum. “In sequence, the 15 new galleries trace the course of Islamic civilization, over a span of 13 centuries, from the Middle East to North Africa, Europe, and Central and South

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Asia. This new geographic orientation signals a revised perspective on this important collection, recognizing that the monumentality of Islam did not create a single, monolithic artistic expression, but instead connected a vast geographic expanse through centuries of change and cultural influence. The public will find galleries filled with magnificent works of art that evoke the plurality of the Islamic tradition and the vast cross-fertilization of ideas and artistic forms that has shaped our shared cultural heritage.”

Sheila Canby, the Patti Cadby Birch Curator in Charge of the Department of Islamic Art, said: “Although our galleries represent a vast territory over a long period of time, the diverse artworks shown here are nonetheless unified in several distinctive ways. Primary among these is the extensive use of Arabic script, which resulted in exceptional examples of calligraphy—often in conventional media, such as metalwork or architectural elements—and virtuosic achievements in the arts of the book. A profound love of embellishment is often expressed through intricately interlaced, complex geometric forms that are most familiar to us in textiles, woodwork, and tilework. There are many examples of luxury materials, due to royal patronage. And technical expertise of the highest level is always evident, no matter what the medium. Because the objects in our galleries are primarily secular in nature, they can easily be appreciated both for their innate utility and for their astonishing beauty, whatever the viewer’s background may be.”

The collection comprises more than 12,000 works of art drawn from an area that extends from Spain in the west to India in the east. Some 1,200 works of art in all media will be on view at any time, representing all major regions and artistic styles, from the seventh century onward. Important loans from the Hispanic Society of America will also be shown. (Displays of textiles and works on paper will change frequently due to the sensitivity of these materials to light.)

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As part of the reinstallation of the galleries, a team of conservators and scientists has engaged in extensive study and conservation of the major objects within the collection, from the Museum's remarkable collection of manuscripts to fragile glass objects and rare and precious carpets.

Highlights of the Museum's collection include: the sumptuously ornamented Damascus Room, built in A.H.1119/ 1707 A.D. and one of the finest examples of Syrian Ottoman reception rooms from the house of an important and affluent family; glass, metalwork, and ceramics from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran; some of the finest classical carpets in existence from the 16th and 17th centuries, including the recently restored, celebrated *Emperor's Carpet*, an exceptional classical Persian carpet of the 16th century that was presented to Hapsburg Emperor Leopold I by Peter the Great of Russia; notable early and medieval Qur'ans; pages from the sumptuous copy of the *Shahnama*, or Book of Kings, created for Shah Tahmasp (1514–76) of Iran, and outstanding royal miniatures from the courts of the Arab World, Ottoman Turkey, Persia, and Mughal India, including paintings from the imperial "Shah Jahan Album," compiled for the builder of the Taj Mahal; and architectural elements including a 14th-century mihrab, or prayer niche, from Isfahan decorated with glazed ceramic tiles, which would have served in a Muslim house of worship to indicate the direction to Mecca.

Galleries

Gallery 450: Patti Cadby Birch Gallery—the introductory gallery—showcases masterpieces from across the collection in the major media employed in the art of the Islamic world: pottery, carpets and textiles, jeweled arts, calligraphy, painting, and architectural elements. The styles, themes, and motifs that visitors encounter here recur in successive rooms, thereby connecting distinct cultures. This gallery

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is one of three rooms named in honor of Patti Cadby Birch. The others are galleries 456 and 457.

Gallery 451: Arab Lands and Iran in the Umayyad and Abbasid Periods (7th–13th centuries) explores early Islamic art, focusing primarily on the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), whose capital was Damascus, and the Early Abbasid dynasty (750–ca. 900), which was based in Baghdad. Also highlighted are pre-Islamic traditions from ancient Rome, Byzantium, and Persia that evolved into Islamic art under the Umayyads. During the Early Abbasid period, the melding of influences from as far away as China and India resulted in a golden age of creativity. Among the many treasures on view is an outstanding selection of manuscripts and early Qur’an pages in Kufic script. These are displayed alongside textiles from all reaches of the empire, from Yemen to Egypt, as well as ceramics, including luster-painted pottery; wooden doors in the beveled style from Samarra in Iraq; metalwork; and glass.

Gallery 452: Nishapur and the Sabz Pushan Site presents materials that were excavated by the Iranian Expedition of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in several digs from 1935 to 1947. The most outstanding objects are a group of architectural decorations from an excavated mound known locally as Tepe Sabz Pushan (“The Green-covered Mound”). New scholarship has made it possible to reconstruct with accuracy the walls of a small room, now called the Sabz Pushan Room, decorated with finds from the site including tall carved plaster dadoes, wall painting fragments, and stucco elements called *muqarnas*, the stalactite decoration characteristic of many Islamic buildings.

The reinstallation of this gallery is made possible through the generosity of the

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Iranian-American community. Conservation of glass, ceramic, and stucco objects from the Nishapur excavation is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Gallery 453: Iran and Central Asia (9th–13th centuries) focuses on the far-reaching impact of the Abbasid style in the eastern Islamic world. Included are the artistic achievements of the 11th-century Ghaznavid and 12th-century Seljuq Sultans, whose patronage ushered in a brilliant and inventive period of art and culture in Iran and Central Asia. Among the highlights will be luster-painted and other ceramic vessels from 12th-century Kashan and Rayy, a pair of life-size statues of palace guards, and an early 13th-century monumental bronze incense burner in the shape of a lion.

Gallery 454: Egypt and Syria (10th–16th centuries) features a comprehensive display of the three major periods in the medieval history of Cairo: the Fatimid (909–1171), Ayyubid (1169–1260), and Mamluk (1250–1517). Known for its history, rich culture, and diverse population, Cairo has played a vital role in the artistic life of the Islamic world for centuries. Under Mamluk rule, Cairo became one of the wealthiest cities in the Near East and a hub of artistic and intellectual activity in the Arab world. On display is an outstanding selection of woodwork, gold jewelry from the Fatimid period, textiles, splendid inlaid metalwork and enameled glass from the Mamluk period, and luster-painted ceramics. This gallery will also offer another point of entry into the whole suite, from the adjoining Orientalism gallery, which is part of the adjacent 19th- and Early 20th-Century European Paintings and Sculpture Galleries.

Gallery 456: Patti Cadby Birch Court, based on Moroccan late medieval design, has been constructed by craftsmen from Fez as an intimate interior court. Adjacent

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to the **Patti Cadby Birch Gallery** for art from Spain, North Africa, and the Western Mediterranean, this area of repose and quiet reflection underscores the living heritage of the Islamic world. Here, original Nasrid columns define the patio space, and dadoes of custom-made glazed tiles in a traditional pattern frame a fountain that will bring the sound of falling water to the galleries.

Gallery 457: Patti Cadby Birch Gallery—Spain, North Africa, and the Western Mediterranean (8th–19th centuries) showcases the spread of Arab influence to the west through the rich material culture of Al-Andalus, highlighting the arts of the 10th-century caliphate of Cordoba and the 14th- and 15th-century Nasrid emirate of Granada. The reciprocal creative exchanges between southern Islamic courts and northern Christian- and Judaeo-Spanish areas are shown. Highlights on display include important loans from the Hispanic Society of America.

Gallery 458: The Hagop Kevorkian Fund Special Exhibitions Gallery, known for its focused presentations drawn primarily from the Museum’s holdings and occasionally supplemented by important loans, has been enlarged and better situated. The gallery provides the opportunity to present the depth of the Museum’s Islamic collection while offering views into innovative, stimulating, and unexplored aspects of the field. The inaugural exhibition in the new location, *The Making of a Collection: Islamic Art at the Metropolitan*, focuses on collectors who have helped shape the Museum’s collection.

Galleries 459 and 460: Koç Family Galleries—Carpets, Textiles and the Greater Ottoman World and Arts of the Ottoman Court (14th–20th centuries)—presents the art of the Ottoman world in a series of grand spaces of over 3,500 square feet with 24-foot ceilings, showing the rich diversity of courtly, provincial, and village

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art. The new galleries provide a comprehensive overview of the multi-layered nature of Ottoman patronage for the first time. Among the strengths of the collection are works from the imperial workshops of Istanbul under the reign of Sultan Süleyman, and the Museum's unparalleled collection of Ottoman carpets, textiles, and arms and armor.

Gallery 461: The Damascus Room (18th century), previously known as the Nur al-Din Room, is a reception chamber from an upper-class home in Damascus and an important early 18th-century example of domestic Ottoman architecture. A high point of the new installation is the repositioning of the room within its proper regional context, off the gallery dedicated to the arts of Ottoman Istanbul, underscoring the influence of the imperial Ottoman arts on those of the provinces. An extensive scholarly study and conservation treatment has resulted in a better understanding of the room's original appearance and a more accurate reinstallation of the interior, closer to its original layout.

This room is a gift of the Hagop Kevorkian Fund in memory of its founder, Hagop Kevorkian.

Galleries 455 and 462: Iran and Central Asia (13th–16th centuries) and Safavid and Later Iran (16th–20th centuries) are two major galleries that provide a chronological overview of the art of the Persian world, while underscoring its many connections with other cultures.

Gallery 455 displays material from the 13th to the early 16th century under the Mongol, Turkmen, Timurid, and Uzbek dynasties, as these arts came to flourish in such royal capitals as Tabriz, Samarkand, and Herat. Among the highlights are

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manuscript pages from 15th-century Herat, such as painted folios from the famous *Assembly of the Birds* or *Mantiq-al-Tair*, and other examples of the arts of the book.

Gallery 462: Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Gallery features masterpieces created in Tabriz and Isfahan under the imperial Safavid dynasty in the 16th and 17th centuries and its successors. Highlights include the celebrated mid-16th-century *Emperor's Carpet* and the famous illustrations to the *Book of Kings* or *Shahnama*, displayed in specially designed cases for seated visitors to view.

Conservation of the *Emperor's Carpet* is made possible in part by the generosity of Dr. and Mrs. Richard R. Lindsey.

Galleries 463 and 464: Mughal South Asia (16th–19th centuries) and Later South Asia (16th–20th centuries) unifies the rich holdings of the Islamic and Asian departments in grand adjoining spaces, thus presenting for the first time a historically cohesive and visually spectacular overview of the many facets of the art of the region. The two galleries—which have over 20-foot-high ceilings and over 4,000 square feet of space—highlight the artistic and cultural diversity of the Indian subcontinent and its wider connections with the Islamic world, Europe, and beyond.

The first major space displays works of art from the Sultanate, Mughal, and Deccan courts in a chronological and regional sweep from ca. 1450 to the 19th century. Masterpieces include celebrated folios from the *Emperor's Album*, jades and jewels of the Mughal period, and fine examples of Deccan court arts. The second gallery, which offers an independent entrance into the larger suite of

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galleries, presents vibrant examples of Jain, Rajput, Pahari, and “Company” school painting from the 16th to the 19th century, as well as textiles and decorative arts, showcasing the artistic variety of the Indian courts.

Generous support for these galleries is provided by the South Asian-American community.

History of Galleries and Construction

The new 19,000-square-foot (1,800-square-meter) galleries will house the collection of the Museum’s Department of Islamic Art, more than 12,000 works of art acquired through gift and purchase over the entire span of the Museum’s 140-year history. The first dedicated suite of galleries for this collection was inaugurated in 1975 under the direction of department chairman Richard Ettinghausen.

The galleries were closed for renovation in May 2003 as part of the Museum’s comprehensive “21st-Century Met” interior construction project throughout the south wing of its Fifth Avenue building. Beginning in June 2003, thematic displays of selected highlights of the collection have been shown continuously on the balcony overlooking the Museum’s Great Hall and in various locations elsewhere in the Main Building. Major exhibitions have also been organized by the Department of Islamic Art and presented at the Metropolitan Museum, including *The Legacy of Ghengis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353* (2002–2003), *Pearls of the Parrot of India: The Emperor Akbar’s Illustrated Khamsa, 1597–98* (2005–2006), and *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797* (2007).

Among the other “21st-Century Met” projects in the Museum’s south wing are a

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series of other new galleries—for Hellenistic, Etruscan, South Italian, and Roman art; Native North American art; Oceanic art; and 19th- and early 20th-century European paintings and sculpture—and the Ruth and Harold D. Uris Center for Education. All of these projects are now complete.

Related Programs

To connect audiences of all ages with the collection in the galleries and to enhance their understanding of the multiple perspectives and diversity that exist within Islamic culture, a variety of educational initiatives for families, students, teachers, and general visitors is being offered. These include musical performances, hands-on workshops, lectures, films, gallery talks, K-12 teacher workshops, an international symposium, panel discussions, and conversations with artists, supplemented by publications and online resources.

Programming in conjunction with the new galleries is generously supported by Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani; The Patti and Everett B. Birch Foundation; Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art; Lavori Sterling Foundation, Inc.; Aga Khan Music Initiative, a program of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture; American Institute of Iranian Studies; and the Moroccan-American Cultural Center.

An in-depth special online feature about the new galleries is available on the Museum's website (www.metmuseum.org/newgalleries2011), including videos on the conservation of the Damascus room and the creation of the Moroccan court, images of highlighted works of art in the collection, photographs of the new galleries, and a floor plan. This feature is available in several languages, including Arabic, Turkish, and Persian.

Audio Guides featuring commentary by curators at the Metropolitan Museum and
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other scholars and special information for children are available. The fee for rental is \$7 for adults, \$6 for Museum members, and \$5 for children under 12.

The Audio Guide program is sponsored by Bloomberg.

Publications

A new guide to the collection—*Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*—has been published to coincide with the opening of the New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia. Nearly 300 works are assembled in this volume, which has an introduction by Sheila Canby, the Patti Cadby Birch Curator in Charge of the Department of Islamic Art. Principal authors are Maryam Ekhtiar, Senior Research Associate, Department of Islamic Art; Priscilla Soucek, John Loeb Professor in the History of Art and Director of Graduate Studies, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; Sheila Canby; and Navina Najat Haidar, Curator and Coordinator for the new galleries in the Museum's Department of Islamic Art. The lavishly illustrated book—which is intended for the general audience—is available in the Museum's bookshops for \$65.

This publication is made possible through the generous support of Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani.

A facsimile edition of *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: The Persian Book of Kings* reunites and reproduces for the first time in color all 258 illuminated pages of the renowned volume, with an introduction by Sheila Canby on the history and importance of the manuscript. A clothbound edition with slipcase is available in the Museum's bookshops for \$200; a limited and numbered deluxe edition with leather binding in a clamshell box is available for \$500. (more)

This publication is made possible through the generosity of the Iranian-American community.

Additional books have been published by the Metropolitan Museum in conjunction with the opening of the new galleries. *Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn Wolf Collection* (by Layla S. Diba, \$60) marks a recent major gift of Turkmen jewelry to the Museum. *Wonder of the Age: Master Painters of India, 1100–1900* (by John Guy and Jorrit Britschgi, \$45) accompanies an exhibition that is concurrently on view at the Metropolitan (through January 8, 2012). *Sultans of the South: Art of India's Deccan Courts, 1323–1687* (edited by Navina Haidar and Marika Sardar, \$50) includes essays from a 2008 symposium on Indo-Islamic art. A major upcoming exhibition on the same subject is planned.

All are published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and distributed by Yale University Press, and will be available in the Museum's book shops.

Credits

The planning and realization of the new galleries have been underway since 2003. They open under the departmental leadership of Sheila Canby, Patti Cadby Birch Curator in Charge of the Department of Islamic Art. The project has been overseen for the past six years by Navina Najat Haidar, Curator and Coordinator for the new galleries. The department's team of scholars for the project also includes Maryam Ekhtiar, Senior Research Associate, Stefan Heidemann, former Associate Curator, and Deniz Beyazit, Assistant Curator, and Ellen Kenney, Marika Sardar, Denise-Marie Teece, and Iman Abdulfattah, Research Associates, and Elena Chardakliyska, Kress Interpretive Fellow. Senior consultants were the late Marie

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Lukens Swietochowski, Research Curator; Walter B. Denny, Professor of Art History and Adjunct Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; and Priscilla Parsons Soucek, John L. Loeb Professor in the History of Art and Director of Graduate Studies at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Special Scholarly Consultant for the Patti Cadby Birch Court was Nadia Erzini, Curator of the Museum of Islamic Life at the Luqash Madrasa Museum in Tétouan; Special Design Consultant was Achva Benzinberg Stein, Professor, Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture at the Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York.

The project was initiated by Philippe de Montebello, now Director Emeritus, and Mahrukh Tarapor, former Associate Director for Exhibitions and Director for International Affairs. Early planning and conceptualization also took place under Daniel Walker, the Patti Cadby Birch Curator in Charge (through 2005), Michael Barry, the Patti Cadby Birch Consultative Chairman (2006–2009), and Stefano Carboni, Curator (through 2008).

Examination and conservation of the objects was carried out by the Museum's departments of Objects Conservation under Lawrence Becker, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge, and including Mechthild Baumeister, Jean-François de Lapérouse, and Lisa Pilosi, Conservators; Textile Conservation, under Florica Zaharia, Conservator in Charge, and including Janina Poskrobko, Associate Conservator; Paper Conservation, under Marjorie Shelley, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge, and including Yana Van Dyke, Associate Conservator, and Valerie Faivre, Assistant Conservator; and Scientific Research under Marco Leona, David H. Koch Scientist in Charge.

Project design is by Michael Batista, Exhibition Design Manager; lighting is by
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Clint Ross Coller and Richard Lichte, Lighting Design Managers; and graphics are by Constance Norkin, Senior Graphic Designer, all of the Museum's Design Department. Architectural design was by Garry S. Leonard, Senior Design Associate at Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates, the Metropolitan Museum's longtime architects. Installation work was coordinated by Annick des Roches, Collections Manager in the Department of Islamic Art and carried out by staff supervised by Fred Sager of Objects Conservation and Taylor Miller of the Building Department. The Patti Cadby Birch Court was built by the Naji family and craftsmen from Moresque of Fez, Morocco.

Construction was overseen through 2009 by J. Nicholas Cameron, former Vice President for Construction, and is currently overseen by Eric W. Hahn, General Manager for Capital Construction, with Mahan Khajenoori, Assistant Project Manager, and Philip H. Tharel, Architectural Project Manager, Construction and Facilities Department.

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October 24, 2011

VISITOR INFORMATION

Hours

Fridays and Saturdays 9:30 a.m.–9:00 p.m.
Sundays, Tuesdays–Thursdays 9:30 a.m. –5:30 p.m.
Met Holiday Mondays in the Main Building: December 26, 2011;
January 2, January 16, February 20, April 9, and May 28, 2012 9:30 a.m. –5:30 p.m.
All other Mondays closed; Jan. 1, Thanksgiving, and Dec. 25 closed

Recommended Admission (Includes Main Building and The Cloisters Museum and Gardens on the Same Day)

Adults \$25.00, seniors (65 and over) \$17.00, students \$12.00
Members and children under 12 accompanied by adult free
Express admission may be purchased in advance at www.metmuseum.org/visit
For More Information (212) 535-7710; www.metmuseum.org

No extra charge for any exhibition.