On November 21 His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Shahinshah of Iran, opened at the Museum an exhibition of Iranian art sent to this country by the Iranian Government. It includes some of the greatest treasures from the shah’s own collection, from the museums of Teheran, and from mosque shrines, all shown in this country for the first time. The selection was made by Dr. Mehdi Bahrami, the Director of the Archaeological Museum in Teheran and a well-known authority on Iranian art.

The objects in the exhibition range in date from the second millennium B.C. to the nineteenth century, offering the visitor an excellent account of the artistic tradition of the Iranian people, who, since remote antiquity, have played an important role in the evolution of the arts and crafts of the Near and Middle East. In the course of history Iran has been occupied by many races and peoples, but the Iranian culture has survived these changes and absorbed the foreign elements.

Among the choicest pieces in the exhibition are some of the archaeological materials, particularly the gold objects from Kalar-Dasht and Saqqiz and a lapis lazuli head from Persepolis (500 B.C.), which equal the finest objects from Mesopotamia and Egypt.

The greatest number of objects belong to the Islamic era, which began in 642 A.D. with the conquest of Iran by the Arabs. The Iranians created a style of their own apparent in ceramics, metalwork, and especially in the arts of the book. Nineteen magnificent Korans and twenty-three illuminated manuscripts in the exhibition are among the finest in existence. The earliest of these is an important Koran dated 1073, beautifully written in Kufic, an angular script. The evolution of writing and illumination in Iran is illustrated by other Korans from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries. Of great beauty is a portion of a Koran written and illuminated by the Timurid prince Ibrahim Sultan in 1421.

In the manuscripts of the Shah-nama, or Book of Kings, and poems by Nizami, Sadi, and Hafiz, copied and illustrated by the Iranian court painters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the exhibition brings us superb examples of miniature painting, an art often regarded as the highest manifestation of the Iranian genius.

ABOVE: Gold plaque with winged creatures like those in Assyrian reliefs. Gold pendant with confronting lions in openwork, part of a necklace of glazed and granulated gold beads. Both objects were found at Zeiwa, near Saqqiz, in the province of Azerbaijan, VIII century B.C.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Gold cup with three lions embossed and chased in low relief, found with other gold objects and pottery in a tomb at Kalar-Dasht, in Mazanderan, in northern Iran. xi century B.C. The heads of the lions are attached with gold rivets. Silver dish with engraved decoration, found in Mazanderan. vii century A.D. The bird and palmette ornament is characteristic of the Sasanian style of decoration that continued in early Islamic metalwork, particularly silver vessels. ABOVE: Half of a double title page of a fragmentary Koran dated 1306-1307, written in a large script called Thuluth. The art of calligraphy was cultivated by the Muhammadans from earliest times and was more esteemed than that of painting. The rich illumination of arabesques and geometrical interlacings is characteristic of the Mongol period of Iranian art.
Detail of a bronze incense burner in the shape of a lion. The entire body is decorated with a pattern of trefoils in openwork. Pottery elephant with howdah and riders, glazed dark blue. Both pieces are from Gurgan, east of the Caspian sea. End of the xi century.
Large dish with a decoration of four seated figures painted in red, brown, and green under a transparent glaze. It is a 14th century piece of Gurgan pottery and is important as an example of early Islamic polychrome figure painting in Iran. Other magnificent examples of pottery, glass, and metalwork of the 14th century and later were discovered recently in Gurgan, a city that flourished in the pre-Mongol era (before 1221). Bronze candlestick inlaid with silver, made in Khurasan. Early 13th century. In the province of Khurasan, in eastern Iran, Saljuk metalworkers developed and perfected the technique of inlaying bronze and brass with other metals such as copper and silver. From the east the technique spread to the rest of Iran and Mesopotamia. The inlay decoration of the candlestick with the letters of the script ending in human heads and the stylization of the human figures characterizes this kind of Iranian metalwork.
The battle of the crows and the owls. Miniature painting from a xv century manuscript of "Kalila wa Dimna," a well-known book of animal fables that originated in India, one of the sources that later inspired European writers.
A lion killing an ass. Miniature painting from the same manuscript of fables. This manuscript, one of the most famous from Iran, was copied about 1410 at Herat, where the Timurid princes established libraries and art academies. It contains thirty-five exquisite miniatures, some of the finest animal and landscape painting in existence.
Miniature from a famous Timurid manuscript of the “Shah-nama,” or Book of Kings, copied at Herat in 1430. It shows Luhrasp hearing of the disappearance of King Kai Khusrau.
Fighting camels and their guides. Miniature painting from an album made for the Emperor Jahangir (1605-1628). The album contains miniatures, gouache painting, calligraphy, and printed pictures of various dates done by both Iranian and Indian artists. According to the inscription the miniature above is the work of Bihzad, a celebrated Persian painter of the end of the xv century. Two other paintings in the album are also attributed to the artist Bihzad, called “the marvel of the age” for his color, composition, and realism.