



Katonah Museum of Art
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Katonah Museum of Art Announces Fall 2023 Exhibition Opening October 15

Exhibition offers a fresh and compelling perspective on Syria's rich cultural heritage through its textile production from antiquity to the present

Katonah, NY, September 13, 2023 — The Katonah Museum of Art is pleased to present the exhibition *Stories of Syria's Textiles: Art and Heritage across Two Millennia*, on view from October 15, 2023 to January 28, 2024.

The Katonah Museum of Art (KMA) will present *Stories of Syria's Textiles: Art and Heritage Across Two Millennia*, a compelling exploration into the vibrant history and culture of Syria through its textile production. Featuring many works that have rarely been exhibited, this exhibition offers the opportunity for visitors to experience a broad range of stunning objects created between the 2nd century to the present day, that collectively reveal Syria's central role in the development of global art and commerce, and more broadly, the significance of textiles as a form of material culture that reveals complex socio-political narratives. *Stories of Syria's Textiles* provides a valuable immersive and educational experience to arts professionals, connoisseurs, and the general public alike through exciting new scholarship presented across the exhibition, catalogue, and accompanying public programs.

Stories of Syria's Textiles: Art and Heritage across Two Millennia highlights textiles' outstanding contributions to Syria's artistic and cultural traditions by focusing on four key periods: the Roman Empire and Late Antiquity (first–seventh centuries); the Ottoman Empire (sixteenth century–1922), the French Mandate (1920–1946), and the contemporary

period. Crucially, the exhibition's display of textiles and garments from the modern period helps raise awareness around the importance of documenting and preserving tangible and intangible heritage. The exceptional textiles produced during these periods enhance our knowledge of Syrian history and culture at the local level in multiple cities and villages, both ancient and modern. At the same time, the objects on view illuminate Syria's underemphasized role in the global textile trade. This rich history will be explored through twenty-eight loans from seven U.S. museums, including the Berkshire Museum, Cleveland Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Yale University Art Gallery, among others. Many of these objects entered museum collections decades ago and have received limited scholarly attention. *Stories of Syria's Textiles* will exhibit many of these works to the public for the first time, a rare chance to engage with remarkable examples of Syria's material culture and its evolution across millennia.

The exhibition's first section, which focuses on the ancient cities of Dura-Europos and Palmyra, features ancient textile fragments displayed alongside sculptures that depict people wearing luxurious clothing with intricate embroidery and silks from China: together, these objects attest to Syria's role at the western edge of the Silk Routes in antiquity. The second section features clothing designed and created by skilled artisans from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. These textiles reveal the social and cultural traditions not only of elite city residents in Aleppo and Damascus, but also of nomadic groups living in the Syrian countryside and mountains. Since the conflict in Syria began in 2011, the ongoing humanitarian and refugee crises have led to the destruction and looting of museum collections and archaeological sites in the region. This tragic loss of cultural heritage, which has affected the sites of Palmyra and Dura-Europos, has received worldwide attention. Accordingly, the exhibition's third section will feature several examples of contemporary textiles that reflect the influence of historical traditions, as well as photographs of Syria's silk producers that document the last phase of the Syrian silk industry before the conflict began.

Stories of Syria's Textiles: Art and Heritage across Two Millennia is curated by Blair Fowlkes Childs, in collaboration with consulting curator Deniz Beyazit and curatorial consultant Hany Hawasly.

Exhibition Catalogue

To accompany the exhibition, the KMA has partnered with Scala Arts Publishers, based in New York and London, to co-publish a fully illustrated exhibition catalogue that will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, collectors, and enthusiasts of Syrian textile art. The publication will feature new scholarship across seven essays by leading experts in the field, including Maya Alkateb-Chami, Blair Fowlkes Childs, Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; Deniz Beyazit, Curator, Department of Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Lisa R. Brody, Associate Curator of Ancient Art at the Yale University Art Gallery; Julia Carlson, Associate Conservator, Department of Textile Conservation, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Martina Ferrari, Associate Conservator Preparator in the Department of Textile Conservation, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Rania Kataf, and Janina Poskrobko-Streciwilk, Conservator in Charge in the Department of Textile Conservation, Metropolitan Museum of Art; providing valuable context and historical background to the featured textiles in the color-illustrated plate section. Through this publication, the KMA and Scala Arts Publishers aim to create a lasting resource that will meaningfully contribute to the study and appreciation of Syrian art and culture.

Public Programs

The KMA will offer a range of public programs designed to deepen visitors' understanding of Syrian textile art and its cultural significance. These programs will include lectures, workshops, and demonstrations led by expert scholars and artists. A series of talks on the cultural and historical significance of Syrian textile art will offer insights into the techniques, motifs, and symbolism that are present in the textiles on display. The talks will also provide historical context, giving visitors a greater understanding of the political and social events that have influenced Syrian textile art over the centuries. By presenting the beauty and cultural significance of Syrian textile art, the KMA hopes to foster greater understanding and appreciation for the people and traditions of Syria. Through the KMA's outreach efforts, the Museum aims to engage a broad audience, including school groups, community organizations, and members of the Syrian diaspora. As part of the outreach efforts, the KMA will also partner with local schools and community organizations to offer special tours and educational programs, largely provided with free access to the Museum through its *Thinking Through the Arts* and *ArteJuntos/ArtTogether* initiatives.

Rhonda Khalifeh: Immortal Stitch

Pollack Family Learning Center

Experience a unique fabric environment and experiment with various textile arts activities in the Pollack Family Learning Center. *Rhonda Khalifeh: Immortal Stitch* grapples with shifting notions of identity and loss of place. Using a combination of repurposed Aghabani tablecloths and hand-dyed silk and wool, Rhonda Khalifeh's installation explores material heritage and her past and present relationship with Syrian craft. Khalifeh is a Syrian-American artist, dyer, and print designer based in New York.

OPENING WEEKEND

First Look (Curator's Circle Members and above):

Saturday, October 14

5:00 – 7:00 PM

Member Preview:

Sunday, October 15

12:00 – 2:00 PM

Public Opening:

Sunday, October 15

2:00 – 5:00 PM

RELATED EVENTS

An Afternoon of Syrian Music

Co-organized with ArtsWestchester

Saturday, October 21

1:30 – 4:00 PM

Join us for a special program on Syrian musical heritage and preservation with the Syrian Music Preservation Initiative. An interactive demonstration will be followed by a music performance in the Marilyn M. Simpson Sculpture Garden featuring the esteemed Arab chamber music ensemble Takht Al-Nagham.

Free with Museum admission.

Craft and Connect Adult Workshop: Indigo Dyeing

Thursday, November 16

5:30 – 7:30 PM

Inspired by the textiles and processes represented in *Stories of Syria's Textiles*, this adult art-making workshop led by Learning Center artist Rhonda Khalifeh introduces participants to all things indigo—the pigment, its history, and contemporary dye vat preparation. Using the vat, students will hand-dye their own 22" square cotton scarf. Before the workshop, participants have the opportunity to preview the exhibition and enjoy wine and light refreshments.

All experience levels welcome. Members \$45. Non-members \$55. Includes refreshments and materials.

Family Day: Textile Creations

Sunday, December 3

12:00 – 4:00 PM

Fun for all ages at this season's Family Day, delving into textile artistry. From block print patterning to weaving and embroidery experiments and fabric collage, textiles take on many artistic forms through unique art projects. Guest artist Rhonda Khalifeh, whose installation is featured in the Pollack Family Learning Center, leads an interactive fabric arts project throughout the afternoon.

Members: Free. Non-members: Adults \$12. Seniors, students, and children (12 and under) \$6. Registration recommended.

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About the Katonah Museum of Art

The Katonah Museum of Art (KMA) is a non-collecting institution recognized for its innovative exhibition and education initiatives that champion art and artists — past and present — across artistic disciplines, geographies, and historical periods. Housed in a modernist building designed by architect Edward Larrabee Barnes, the KMA was established in 1954 with a mission to spotlight exceptional art, while also responding to the most critical issues of our time through a bold and vigorous lens. Located in Katonah, New York, the KMA is the anchoring cultural institution in Westchester County, drawing visitors from throughout the Tri-State region and beyond.

Advance tickets are recommended. Museum hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM; Sunday 12:00 – 5:00 PM; Closed Mondays. For more information about the Katonah Museum of Art, visit katonahmuseum.org or call (914) 232-9555.

Stories of Syria's Textiles: Art and Heritage across Two Millennia and the exhibition's accompanying catalogue were realized with generous funding from the Coby Foundation and the Nazmiyal Collection.



NAZMIYAL
COLLECTION

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An Afternoon of Syrian Music is sponsored by Montefiore Einstein.

Photo credit:

Textile with rosettes, from Dura-Europos, ca. 200–256. Wool; weft-faced tapestry weave, 9 × 12 1/2 in. (22.9 × 31.8 cm). New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, Yale-French Excavations at Dura-Europos, 1933.487. Photograph courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery.