

# Long, Winding Journeys

## Contemporary Art and the Islamic Tradition

at the Katonah Museum of Art February 25 – June 17, 2018

Thank you for booking a tour of the exquisite exhibition **Long, Winding Journeys: Contemporary Art and the Islamic Tradition**. We look forward to guiding your students through an intriguing exploration of both traditional Islamic art forms and the contemporary artists' work inspired by them.

Concepts of culture, visual tradition, and heritage are uniquely personal while also universally experienced. We are all shaped and influenced by our own cultural heritage. The artists in this exhibition use visual traditions of their Islamic heritage as a jumping off point for their art. Some embrace artistic customs or contradict them, use traditional techniques to address new ideas or evoke messages, or transform ancient art forms into contemporary works of art. They initiate a dialogue about cultural roots, spiritual practice, and shifting identities, and invite us into the conversation.

This exhibition gives students an opportunity to learn about five Islamic visual traditions: calligraphy, miniature painting, geometric patterning, textiles, and architectural forms. We will explore these art forms in relation to their traditional context – the countries and cultures from which they came – and consider how artists have incorporated them into new through-provoking artworks.

Visits to this exhibition provide a unique learning experience that supports classroom learning goals. Through open-ended inquiry and guided discussion, students will:

- Practice close observation and detailed description
- Use critical and creative thinking to interpret what they see
- Voice their opinions, listen to each other, and make connections between concepts
- Support ideas using evidence and acquired vocabulary

Included in this packet are materials to help prepare your students for their visit. Please share with all classroom teachers. They can also be downloaded from our website: [www.katonahmuseum.org](http://www.katonahmuseum.org) under "Teacher Resources."

- Introduction to the exhibition and Islamic visual traditions
- Three images from the exhibition with questions for discussion
- Pre-visit activities: *Arabic Alphabet* and *Geometric Patterning*
- Glossary, Resources, Fundamentals of Islam, and Map



**Look for this light bulb to indicate ideas for older students!** This packet is designed with upper elementary school students in mind; please adjust for your grade level. Let us know how you will be using your visit so that we may best serve you. Please call 914-232-9555, ext. 2969 to discuss any specific curriculum connections or other tour needs. Thank you for choosing the KMA for your class visit.

Margaret Adasko  
Curator of Education

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS TO NOTE ON YOUR CALENDAR:

- **Understanding Islam:** Saturday, March 17, 4:00pm – Katonah Village Library, 26 Bedford Rd - free
- **Family Day: Celebrate Spring! the Persian Festival of Nowruz:** Sunday, March 25, 12:00-4:00pm – free
- **Artists Talk: Inspiration:** Saturday, April 21, 2:30pm – gallery talk with artists from the exhibition - free
- **Through Our Eyes: Upper Westchester Muslim Society Community Tour:** Saturday, April 28, 2:30pm – free

## Curator's Introduction to the exhibition

*Long, Winding Journeys: Contemporary Art and the Islamic Tradition* presents a focused look at a group of thirty artists of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent, who engage the diverse forms of Islamic visual tradition. Their works draw from calligraphy, architecture, miniature painting, textiles, and geometric patterning, all forms that have come to occupy a central position in the definition of historical Islamic art. The exhibition seeks to answer a foundational question: in an age of instantaneous global visual exchange, heavily influenced by new technology, why do these artists turn to forms that are centuries old? Is it merely that this art history is their heritage? *Long, Winding Journeys* argues for a more complex motivation: these artists have chosen this distinct history of art as a lens through which to view contemporary experience. The exhibition's title is drawn from a text by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Ayad Akhtar, whose writing appears in a collaboration with artist Shahzia Sikander. Akhtar situates Islam's cultural tradition as an inspirational source guiding creative life on a "long, winding, journey."

Employing past modes of representation, artists explore the intersection of visual tradition and the many facets of contemporary life that carry the weight of history. Religious customs, political upheaval, effects of diaspora, and notions of identity, too, constitute a kind of inheritance. Current realities do not exist in a vacuum, these artists' work collectively argues. They are, rather, intertwined with multiple histories that powerfully impact today. It is indeed this mutual dependence that makes Islamic visual tradition so dynamically relevant in our ever-changing time.

The exhibition is made possible in part by the generous support of Janet Benton, the Kathwari Family Foundation, Robin Simon, the Howard and Maryam Newman Family Foundation, Betty Himmel, Yvonne Pollack, Marilyn Glass, Vanessa Diebold, Katherine Moore, and Ellen and Bob Grimes. Exhibition programming sponsored by a Humanities New York Action Grant.

## Islamic Visual Traditions

Scholars have often defined historical Islamic art as that created in regions ruled by Muslims, commissioned by Muslim patrons, made by Muslim artists, or crafted in the service of the religion of Islam. The timespan most typically established is from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, geographically, as far west as Spain and east as Indonesia. Such definitions suggest that, while some works of art labeled Islamic were made for religious purposes, many others with similar stylistic characteristics served in a secular context. While definitions of "Islamic art" incorporate a wide swath of time, place, and function, a number of artistic forms—such as calligraphy, miniature painting, architecture, textiles, and geometric patterning—have often been identified as the most historically recognizable and significant.

*Long, Winding Journeys* uses the term "Islamic visual tradition," rather than "Islamic art," to suggest a shared visual vocabulary that resists rigid definition. Traditions can be both eclectic and supple, relying on the widely established yet encompassing the distinctly personal. Visual forms can be passed on from generation to generation, as contemporary artists transform the modes of representation that make up a living tradition.

## Calligraphy



Non-illustrated manuscript, late 9th–early 10th century. Ink, watercolor, gold on parchment. Attributed to Syria or Iraq. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Calligraphy is the visual art of writing. It takes the form of hand-written script that employs perfected proportions of letters and words. The form communicates the meaning of the text being read in a harmonious, often expressive interpretation. Calligraphers undergo extensive, years-long training to become professional practitioners.

In the Islamic visual tradition, it has historically been considered the most esteemed arts and is rooted in Islam's holy book, the Quran. Muslims believe the Quran's content to be a revelation from God to Muhammad in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, and its Arabic text a physical manifestation of God's word. Copying and beautifying this text is then practiced as an act of devotion. With its centrality in Islamic tradition established, calligraphy spread to adorn nearly every medium in both religious and secular contexts.

Calligraphy's characteristics have changed throughout time and by geographic location, but its core principals adhere to rules of proportion—such as the vertical measurements in relation to the horizontal, rounded shapes to angular, letters standing alone or attached, among others. Many types of script have developed throughout the centuries and have served a variety of functions. For example, more gestural, looser strokes are often used to write poetry.

**Qalam** is a traditional calligraphic writing instrument made from a dried reed.

### **Geometric Patterning**



Textile fragment, 14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> century. Silk, lampas. Attributed to Spain or North Africa. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Geometric patterning is one of the chief forms of historical Islamic art. The line and the circle create the basis for all patterns and are transformed through steps such as repetition, rotation, and mirroring. The result—a proportional, overall pattern—could be extended infinitely.

As Islam spread during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, artists adopted patterns from pre-existing cultures and created a distinctive artistic form. Islamic mathematicians' innovations helped to perfect the tradition, which continued to be refined for centuries. The geometric patterns decorated everything from monumental architecture, to textiles, to the pages of miniature paintings.

In some contexts, particularly Sufism (Islamic mysticism), geometric patterning is thought to have a cosmological significance. Its repetition suggests spiritual notions of infinity, while its proportional balance evokes themes of unity and harmony. Together, the patterns' strict underlying structure and visual intricacy is said to evoke the divine order of the universe.

### **Miniature Painting**



*The Assassination of Khusrau Parviz*, folio from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), ca. 1535. Watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper. Made in Iran, Tabriz. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Miniatures are small paintings found alongside text in illuminated manuscripts (illustrated books) and on single-page albums called *muraqqa*. With the earliest surviving examples dating in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the art form originated in Iran. It is often referred to as "Persian miniature painting," the word "Persian" historically denoting Iranian culture. The technique spread in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to South Asia, including present-day Pakistan.

This visual tradition is characterized by finely detailed lines, lush colors, and precisely rendered human and animal figures in natural landscapes or architectural settings. A clear relationship exists between miniature painting and calligraphy, both largely defined by an exacting, elegant brushstroke. Also noticeable is the artists' use of collapsed, planar space.

Miniature painting's imagery typically appears as decorative floral designs or narrative scenes. Common themes include rulers and nobility, political events, and stories from famous literary works, and spiritual subjects, including scenes from the Quran.

## Architecture



Imam Ali Mosque, Najaf, Iraq.  
Completed 977, rebuilt and modified 1086, 1500, 1993. Photo:  
Abdullah Fayad/Creative Commons.

Islamic architecture varies greatly by both region and time period. It is, however, marked by common elements that point to the structure's identity and function. A number of the works in the exhibition draw designs from historical mosques, places of Muslim worship and community that originated on the Arabian Peninsula and now exist all over the world. Recognizable features of traditional mosque architecture include:

Some significant features of Islamic architecture include:

- **Dome:** Domes are often part of the ceiling in a mosque. They are very detailed and decorated, and represent the sky above.
- **Mihrab**—a niche in an interior wall pointing in the direction of the city Mecca, toward which Muslims orient their prayer.
- **Minaret:** A tall, thin tower with a pointed tip, built around the dome of a mosque. There are often 4 minarets built around one mosque.
- **Mosque:** A piece of Islamic architecture. Mosques are religious buildings used for prayer and community events. They are often large and detailed, and take a long time to build. Common features of mosques include domes, arches, and tall towers called minarets. A mosque usually has a dome at its center that is easy to spot.
- **Ornamentation**—geometric, vegetal, or calligraphic decoration, which can adorn any and all parts of the mosque.

The **Kaaba** is a singular building in Islamic architecture. Standing at the center of the religion's holiest mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the Kaaba is the most sacred site in Islam. Muslims believe the cube-shaped building originated in pre-Islamic times and, since its creation, it has been frequently rebuilt and modified. The modern-day structure, the bulk of which was constructed in 1631, is made of granite and draped in a black cloth embroidered with gold thread. One of the five pillars of Islam instructs all Muslims to, if able, make a pilgrimage to the Kaaba at least once in their life. In recent years, 1.8 million Muslims have visited each year.

## Textiles



Prayer rug, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Wool. Attributed to Turkey.  
Collection of the National Museum of Warsaw, Poland

Textiles hold a distinct position in the history of Islamic art. As the religion spread during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the evolution of craft applications accompanied the nomadic ruling classes, soldiers, weavers, and merchants. Textiles became an essential commodity in trade across astonishingly diverse regions. They could denote social and political status, serve as tents and flooring, and bring ornamentation to any setting.

This art form also occupies a deeply personal place in communities and individual life. Rugs are a ubiquitous presence in the home. They are often marked by opulent vegetal and geometric designs, as well as rich color combinations. Prayer rugs play a central role in Muslims' spiritual practice. Five times a day, they place these small rugs on the ground and go through a series of postures—which include kneeling, sitting, and prostrating oneself on the rug. The textiles typically feature architectural designs, most notably the *mihrab*, or niche found in mosques that points toward the holy city Mecca, to which Muslims direct their prayers.




## Celebrating the beauty of words

Describe this artwork. What do you see?

- Talk about the colors, shapes, composition on the paper
- How do you think the artist made this?
- What does the central image remind you of? In what way?
- What moods or feelings do you think of when you look at this? How does it make you feel?

The artist Hassan Massoudy practices beautiful handwriting, or calligraphy – from the Greek words *kallos* (beauty) and *graphos* (writing). At the bottom of this artwork, Massoudy wrote a line from a poem that is very special to him: “Oh friend, don’t go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you.” – Kabir, 16<sup>th</sup> century. He then pulled out one word from that quote and made it into a creative painting, which you can see in the center. (See video link in **Resources**)

- Discuss the quote. Does this additional information change the way you look at the artwork?
- How do the image and the quote relate to each other?
- Do you think either the word or the image is more important here? Why? How do they work together?
- Why do you think the artist would pull out one particular word from the quote?

 **Have a discussion:** What special poem, quote, or word would you choose for your own artwork? Why?

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### Hassan Massoudy

*Untitled (“O friend, don’t go to the flower garden, the flower garden is within you.” –Kabir, 16th c.), 2005*

Ink and pigment on paper

29 x 21 in



## A long winding journey

Look carefully at this artwork. What’s going on in this picture?

- Name some elements of the picture that you recognize.
- What other shapes, forms and colors do you see?
- Use sensory words to describe what you might hear, smell, or feel if you were to enter this artwork.
- Discuss the different images and layers and how they overlap and connect.
- What story could the artwork be telling?



The poem accompanying that picture ends with the line “long, winding journey.” Can you describe the artist’s possible journey?



The artist Shahzia Sikander studied Islamic miniature painting while at school. These small paintings (like the one seen here) had long been used to illustrate poems or stories. Her artwork today uses some of the same techniques and images. (See video link in **Resources**)

**Compare and contrast with the miniature painting on the left (not in our exhibition).**

- Do you see any similarities?
- What is different?
- The picture to the left illustrates the story of the Prophet Muhammad’s night journey to heaven on a winged creature, surrounded by angels, called the *Mi’raj*. Read the *Mi’raj* story and discuss connections between the story and the artist’s work. (pg. 14 of packet)

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On previous page:

**Shahzia Sikander**  
*Portrait of the Artist*, 2016  
Etching, 27 x 21 in.  
(In exhibition)

On this page:

*Nizami’s Khamsa’s Five Poems*  
Tabriz, Iran, 1539–43  
depicting the Prophet’s ascent into heaven  
(Image: British Library Online Gallery)





## A contemporary twist on an old tradition

What do you notice about this artwork?

- Describe its colors, patterns, details, shapes...
- What seems to be happening? Come up with some unique, descriptive words.

Describe your reaction to this work:

- What does it remind you of?
- Does anything surprise you?
- If you were to touch it, how would it feel?

Imagine creating a carpet such as this. What materials and skills might you need?

Carpets play an important role in the Islamic visual tradition. They have been used for many purposes, such as coverings for beds, tables, to warm an area, and to kneel on to pray. They have also been an important part of trade with other countries.

Where might you put a carpet such as this?

This artwork is titled “Impossible Viscosity” and is part of the artist Faig Ahmed’s “Liquid Series.” Viscosity means the state of being sticky, thick, and semifluid.

- How has the artist transformed a traditional carpet?
- What ideas might the artist be exploring?”



Can you think of any things, ideas, or world events that may be “viscous,” or stretching apart?

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**Faig Ahmed**

*Impossible Viscosity*, 2012

Handmade wool carpet

98 x 39 in.

## PRACTICE WRITING THE ARABIC ALPHABET

The Arabic alphabet is the second most widely used alphabetic writing system in the world (the Latin alphabet is the most widespread). The alphabet was first used to write texts in Arabic, but after the spread of Islam it is now also used to write several languages in different geographical areas such as Persian, Urdu, Panjabi, Uzbek Azerbaijani and (in Iran), Kurdish (in Iraq and Iran).

### Some of the main features of Modern Standard Arabic writing:

- The Arabic alphabet has 28 letters.
- Words are written from right to left. Letters are usually joined together in Arabic writing.
- Some letters will change form, depending on where they are placed in a word.
- The arrows indicate how each letter is written.

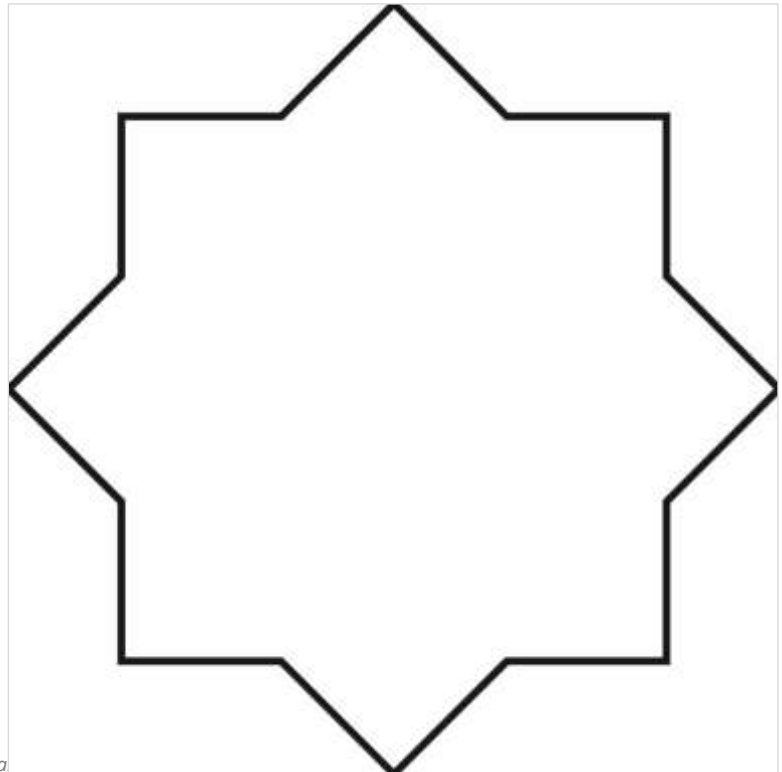
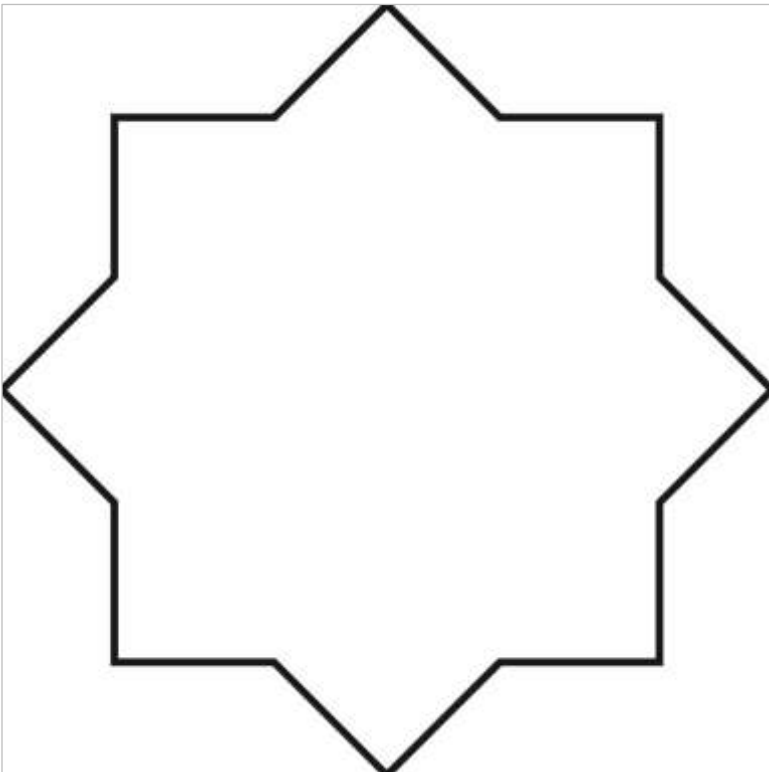
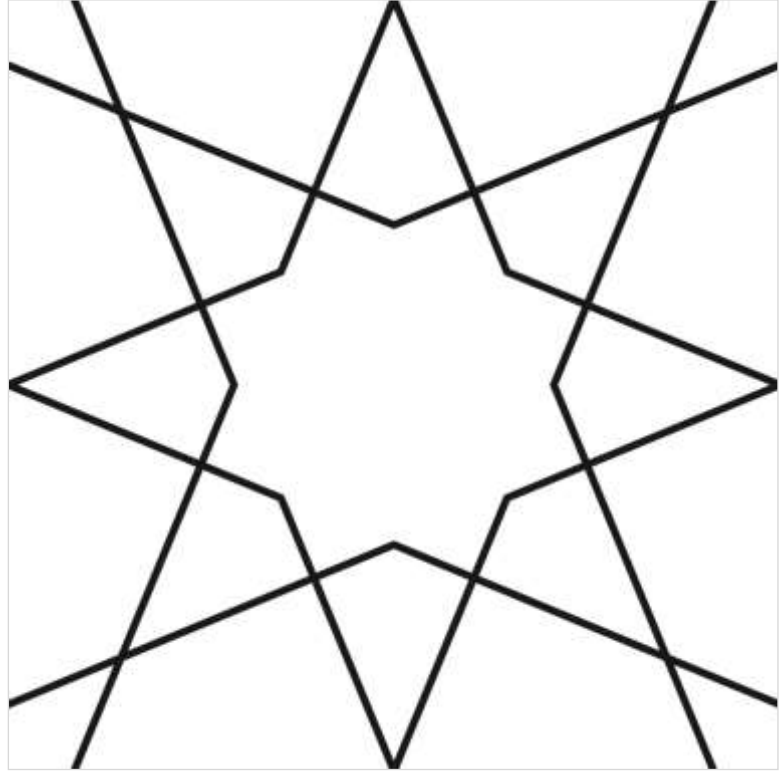
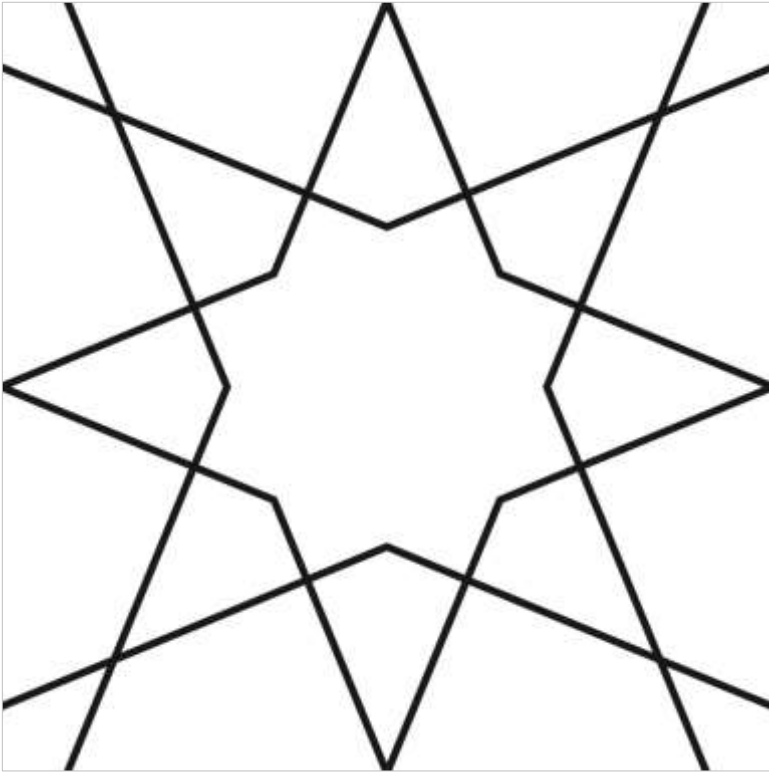
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yeh ي	waw و	heh ه	nun ن				

## Islamic Geometric Pattern

Geometric patterns are repeating designs using basic shapes. Patterns become more intricate through rotation, additional lines, overlapping shapes, and repetitions, creating infinite possibilities. They suggest spiritual notions of infinity, unity and harmony. Colorful, complex geometric patterns are seen throughout Islamic regions of the world. They are used to decorate architecture, textiles, and everyday objects.

Using the outlines below, have student decorate the designs with different colors and patterns. Try making some simple and some more complex. Cut them out and arrange them in your classroom to create a pattern.



## GLOSSARY OF MAIN IDEAS AND ART TERMS

**Architecture:** A general term to describe buildings and other physical structures. The art and science of designing buildings and other structures.

**Calligraphy:** The art of beautiful handwriting. From the Greek words *kallos* (beauty) and *graphos* (writing).

**Contemporary Art:** Works created by artists who are living and working now.

**Culture:** The behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group.

**Cultural Heritage:** An expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values.

**Geometric Shapes:** Shapes that can be measured with a ruler or compass such as circle, square, triangle.

**Islam:** The religion of the Muslims, a monotheistic faith regarded as revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah. The word Islam literally means “submission” in Arabic, referring to submission to God (Allah).

**The Islamic World:** A term used in the exhibition to refer to geographic regions that have historically been ruled and/or inhabited predominantly by Muslims. This term generally encompasses lands reaching from Spain to Indonesia, from the seventh century to the present.

**Islamic Visual Tradition:** A term used in this exhibition to refer to the shared artistic vocabulary from geographic areas dominated by Islamic culture.

**Installation Art:** art that is created, constructed, or installed on the site where it is exhibited, often incorporating materials or physical features of the site.

**Muslim:** Means “one who submits” and refers to a person who practices the Islamic faith.

**Pattern:** An arrangement of lines or shapes, especially a design that repeats at regular intervals.

**Textile:** Fabric or other items produced by weaving, knitting, or felting.

## STORIES FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD

**The Miraj** - Every Muslim, young and old, knows the story of the Miraj. It is one of Islam's most mystical themes and features prominently in miniature painting. The Miraj is a night journey that, according to Islam, Prophet (I think you are supposed to distinguish him as Prophet) Muhammad took during a single night around the year 621CE. It has been described as both a physical and a spiritual journey. The remembrance of this journey is one of the most significant events in the Islamic calendar. During the Miraj, Prophet Muhammad traveled on the steed Buraq, "a white animal, half-mule, half-donkey, with wings on its sides" to "the farthest mosque." Later Muslims identified the mosque as a location in the physical world, the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. At the mosque, Prophet Muhammad led other prophets in prayer. He then ascended to the heavens with the angel Gabriel and met a different prophet at each of the seven levels of heaven; first Adam, then John the Baptist and Jesus, then Joseph, then Idris, then Aaron, then Moses, and lastly Abraham. After Prophet Muhammad meets with Abraham, he continues on to meet God without Gabriel. God tells Prophet Muhammad that his people must pray 50 times a day, but as Prophet Muhammad descends back to Earth, he meets Moses who tells Prophet Muhammad to go back to God and ask for fewer prayers because 50 is too many. Prophet Muhammad goes between Moses and God three times, until the prayers are reduced to the five daily prayers.

**The Shahnameh** - *Shahnameh*, or the Persian *Book of Kings*, is an epic poem composed between 977 and 1010 AD by the court poet Ferdousi. It recounts the mythical history of Persia from the beginning of time to the Arab conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. One of the mythological heroes in the story is Rostam, a powerful winged god of Persia known for his extraordinary strength, bravery and loyalty, who fights demons who live in caves.

Notes about the Shahnameh (**also spelled Shahnama**) and Rostam (**also spelled Rostam**):

- "It is hard to imagine another modern culture more in thrall to its distant literary past than Iranians with their Shahnama, the national epic composed by the poet Ferdowsi in the eleventh century. With its luminous array of villains, heroes, and demons, and stories probing the struggle of love against betrayal and good against evil, the Book of Kings is at once a retelling of Persian history before the Arabic conquest and a repository of literary myths that places Ferdowsi alongside Shakespeare and Homer as one of the great giants of storytelling. The Shahnama exerts a profound emotional and psychological hold over Iranians to this day, and the epic remains central to contemporary Iranian identity, a perennial cultural refuge in turbulent political times." From Iranwire.com
- "The Shahnama provides the inner logic of how the Persians operated vis-a-vis their foes, and also inside the Persian world," said Professor Touraj Daryee of the University of California, Irvine. "But it's also a living tradition, very much alive in the psyche of Iranians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."
- The Shahnameh, also transliterated as Shahnama ("The Book of Kings"), is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between c. 977 and 1010 CE. Consisting of some 50,000 couplets (2-line verses), the Shahnameh is the world's longest epic poem written by a single poet. It tells mainly the mythical and to some extent the historical past of the Persian Empire from the creation of the world until the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century. Modern Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and the greater region influenced by the Persian culture (such as Georgia, Armenia, Turkey and Dagestan) celebrate this national epic.
- At the heart of the Shahnameh is Rostam, the ageless, fearless, forever hero.
- 8-year-old Rostam states in the Shahnameh: "My heart is fixed upon valour, a horse do I crave and a saddle, a coat of mail and a helmet, and my delight is in the arrow. Thine enemies will I vanquish, and may my courage be like unto thine."

## WEB RESOURCES FOR ISLAMIC VISUAL TRADITIONS

### INTRODUCTION:

Met Museum - Art of the Islamic World: Resource for Educators

<https://www.metmuseum.org/learn/educators/curriculum-resources/art-of-the-islamic-world>

BBC gives an introduction to Islamic art, emphasizing its relation to Allah

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/art/art\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/art/art_1.shtml)

### CALLIGRAPHY:

In the studio with Hassan Massoudy (French with English subtitles)

<https://vimeo.com/66642358>

Victoria and Albert Museum: Calligraphy in Islamic art

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/calligraphy-in-islamic-art/>

An excellent overview of the history and styles of calligraphy in the Islamic world

Asian Art Museum, San Francisco

<http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/history-islamic-calligraphy>

Includes links to artwork, background information, and activities

“Calligraphy Is the Islamic Art,” Huffington Post

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-wolfe/calligraphy-islamic-art-of-arts\\_b\\_1647263.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-wolfe/calligraphy-islamic-art-of-arts_b_1647263.html)

An article to inspire you

Mohamed Zakariya, Islamic Calligrapher, gives a survey of the history of calligraphy

<http://mohamedzakariya.com/history/arabic-islamic-calligraphy/>

### GEOMETRIC PATTERNING:

TEDEd

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-complex-geometry-of-islamic-design-eric-broug>

Nice 5 minute video that shows how patterns are made

Metropolitan Museum of Art

[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd\\_geom.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd_geom.htm)

Brief overview

“Geometry – The Language of Symmetry in Islamic Art,” by Richard Henry

<http://artofislamicpattern.com/resources/educational-posters/>

Excellent, brief, description with pictures

### MINIATURE PAINTING:

Met video - Shahzia Sikander (one of the artists in our exhibit) speaks about miniature design

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74ZqtCfkNkQ> – 3 min

Harvard Art Museum artist demonstration

<https://vimeo.com/35276945>

6 minute video demonstration of how a traditional miniature is made

Iran Chamber Society: A brief history of Persian Miniature

[http://www.iranchamber.com/art/articles/history\\_iranian\\_miniature.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/art/articles/history_iranian_miniature.php)

Discusses the different schools of art through the centuries

#### **ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE:**

IEREK – International Experts for Research Enrichment and Knowledge Exchange: Islamic Architecture through the Ages

<http://www.ierek.com/news/index.php/2017/08/19/islamic-architecture-through-the-ages/>

Reviews the styles of Islamic architecture around the world and through time

Islamic Arts & Architecture

<http://islamic-arts.org/2012/islamic-architecture/>

Excellent lesson on Islamic architecture. It's long, but worth reading to the end.

#### **TEXTILES:**

Museum of Islamic Art

<http://www.mia.org.qa/en/collections/textile>

Very brief idea of kinds of Islamic textiles

Louvre Museum: Three Empires of Islam

<http://mini-site.louvre.fr/trois-empires/en/tapis-textiles.php>

Nice overview

Islamic Arts and Architecture

<http://islamicart.com/main/rugs/intro.html>

Describes oriental rugs; click on side bar for information on designs, process, materials, etc.

#### **Books for students**

##### Elementary students:

*Lailah's Lunchbox: A Ramadan Story* by Reem Faruqi and Lea Lyon

*The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq* by Jeanette Winter

*The Knight, the Princess, and the Magic Rock: A Classic Persian Tale* by Sara Azizi and Alireza Sadeghian

*The New Year's Goldfish: A Nowruz Story* by Solmaz Parveen and Tata Bobokhidze

*Razia's Ray of Hope: One Girl's Dream of an Education* by Elizabeth Suneby and Suana Verelst

##### Older students:

*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi



## Fundamentals of Islam

Sources: Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Art of the Islamic World: A Resource for Educators," Wikipedia, pbs.org, and the Pew Research Center

### Islam: A Brief History

Islam emerged near the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Although there were Jewish and Christian communities in the area at the time, most people were polytheistic, believing in multiple gods as the ancient Egyptians did.

It is written that the Prophet Muhammad received revelations from Allah (Arabic word for God) through the angel Gabriel beginning in 610 AD. These revelations would later form the Qur'an, which is believed to be the recording of the actual words of Allah. Essential to the revelations is the understanding that there is only one God. The word Islam means "surrender" or "submission;" in the religious context it means submit to the will and teaching of Allah. The term Muslim means "one who practices Islam."

What began as a religious movement took on political dimensions and Islam spread quickly throughout the Middle and Near East as leaders of the Islamic community (caliphs) battled for control of lands reaching from Spain to Pakistan. The spread of the faith stimulated a flourishing of science, philosophy, math, art and architecture.

The Islamic Golden Age (8<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century) was brought to an end by the Crusades, plagues, and Mongol invasions. However, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries three major Muslim empires formed: the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, the Balkans and Northern Africa; the Safavid Empire in Greater Iran; and the Mughal Empire in South Asia. These imperial powers were made possible by the discovery and exploitation of gunpowder and more efficient administration, and the world saw another flowering of art.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all the empires had fallen apart. European powers modernized, globalized, and colonized, and nationalism began to emerge in the Muslim world.

Today, Islam is a vibrant, global religion. There are 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide, making it the second-largest religion, following Christianity. Muslims make up approximately 1% of the US population, while Indonesia has the largest following of the Islamic religion at 13%.

### The Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars form the core beliefs and practices of Islam, and unite all Muslims.

1. **Profession of Faith (*shahada*)**. The belief that "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" is central to Islam. This phrase, written in Arabic, is often prominently featured in architecture and a range of objects, including the Qur'an. One becomes a Muslim by reciting this phrase with conviction.
2. **Prayer (*salat*)**. Muslims pray facing Mecca five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark. Prayer includes a recitation of the opening chapter (*sura*) of the Qur'an, and is sometimes performed on a small rug or mat used expressly for this purpose. Muslims can pray individually at any location or together in a mosque, where a leader in prayer (imam) guides the congregation. After the prayer, a sermon focuses on a passage from the Qur'an, followed by prayers by the imam and a discussion of a particular religious topic.
3. **Alms (*zakat*)**. In accordance with Islamic law, Muslims donate a fixed portion (usually 2.5%) of their wealth to their community or to community members in need. This is a religious duty and secures the blessings associated with charity.
4. **Fasting (*sawm*)**. During the daylight hours of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, all healthy adult Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink. Through this temporary deprivation, they renew their awareness of and gratitude for everything God has provided in their lives—including the Qur'an, which was first revealed during this month. During Ramadan they share the hunger and thirst of the needy as a reminder of the

religious duty to help those less fortunate.

5. **Pilgrimage (hajj)**. Every Muslim, whose health and finances permit it, must make at least one visit to the holy city of Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia. On the eighth and twelfth days of the final month of the Islamic calendar, pilgrims from around the world gather to walk around the Ka'ba, a cubical structure covered in black embroidered hangings, at the center of the Haram Mosque in Mecca. Muslims believe that it is the house Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic) built for God.

### **The Qur'an and Hadith**

In Islam, as with other religions, there are multiple sources of inspiration and information. The most important are the Qur'an and hadith.

#### **The Qur'an:**

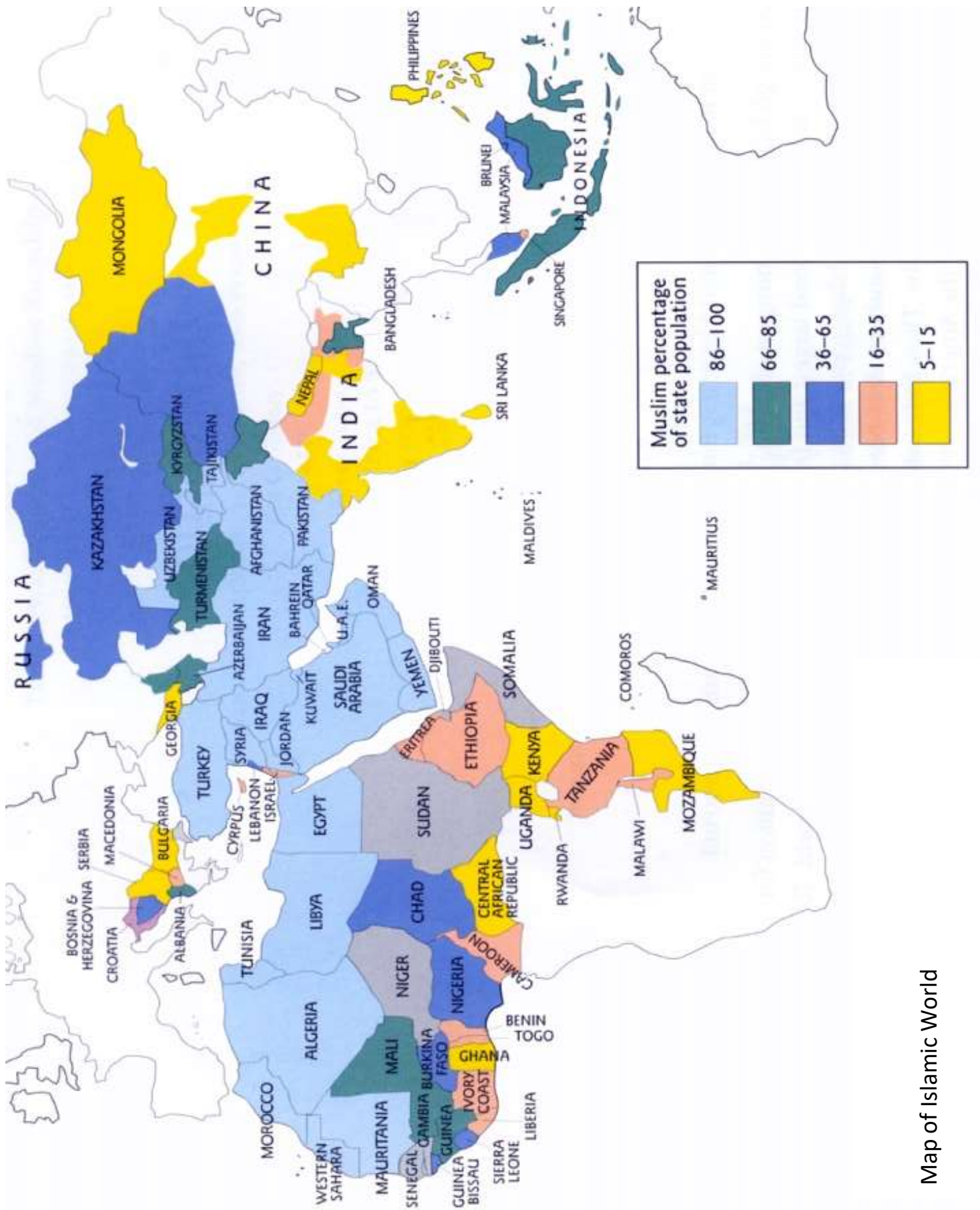
Muslims believe that the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, was revealed to Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years, starting with an initial revelation. After the Prophet's death, his successors compiled these divine revelations in a manuscript.

The Qur'an contains prayers, moral guidance, historical narrative, and promises of paradise. It opens with a short prayer called the *Fatiha*, the most widely recited passage, and is divided into 114 chapters (*suras*) organized in descending length. For binding and reading purposes, manuscripts of the Qur'an are often divided into thirty equal parts, called *juz'*. Every chapter of the Qur'an (except one) begins with the *bismillah*, the collective name for the invocation "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." Muslims often repeat this phrase at the start of an event or task—before giving a speech, beginning a meal, or even boarding a bus. The calligraphic *bismillah* is frequently written on both religious and secular objects.

The Qur'an places Muhammad at the end of a long line of prophets that began with Abraham. Although narrative is not central to the Qur'an, it includes the stories of Noah, Moses, and Jesus. It recognizes Jews and Christians as "People of the Book"; as a result, Muslims accept many of the teachings of the Jewish Torah and Christian Bible. Many of the great Islamic empires (like those in Spain, Iran, India, and Turkey) were tolerant of religious minorities.

#### **Hadith:**

The word hadith means "report" or "account" and refers to accounts passed down through time of the words, actions, and habits of the Prophet Muhammad (in contrast to the Qur'an which contains the words of Allah). The hadith refers to different hadith collections, and different branches of Islam (Sunni, Shia, Ibadi) consult different collections of hadith. Hadith are regarded as important tools for understanding the Qur'an and commentaries (*tafsir*) written on it. Some important elements, which are today taken to be a long-held part of normative traditional Islamic practice and belief, for example, the detailed ritual practice of the five *salat* (obligatory Islamic prayers), are in fact not mentioned in the Qur'an at all, but are derived solely from the hadith.



Map of Islamic World