

MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART PRESENTS LANDMARK EXHIBITION SURVEYING THE ISLAMIC ARTISTIC TRADITIONS OF MOROCCO

“Splendours of the Atlas: A Voyage Through Morocco’s Heritage” presents more than two hundred objects to paint a vibrant portrait of Morocco’s thriving cultures

On view 2 November 2024 through 8 March 2025

DOHA, Qatar – 6 August, 2024 – This November, the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) will present *Splendours of the Atlas: A Voyage Through Morocco’s Heritage*, a major exhibition taking visitors on a journey through the legacies of Morocco, revealing the forces that have shaped the country’s unique identity. Organized as part of the Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture, the exhibition presents more than 200 objects including artifacts, manuscripts, instruments, jewelry pieces, and photographs to tell a multifaceted story of Moroccan history, society, artistic expressions, and how they continue to animate the nation’s cultures today.

Splendours of the Atlas includes loans from Moroccan institutions such as the National Foundation of Museums and the National Library of Rabat that have never before been shown in Qatar. Previously unseen works from the collections of Qatar Museums, MIA, and the future Lusail Museum will also be on display. *Splendours of the Atlas* is curated by Dr. Mounia Chekhab-Abudaya, MIA Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs.

Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Years of Culture and Qatar Museums Chairperson, said, “We are extraordinarily fortunate to partner with institutions across Morocco for our Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture, which will greatly expand the ability of Qataris and those living in Qatar to gain insight into the grand Islamic traditions of our neighbor in North Africa. Our shared commitment to scholarship, scientific discovery, and artistic excellence has created a fertile basis for this year’s rich Year of Culture program.”

The Years of Culture initiative spearheads long-lasting cultural partnerships between Qatar and other nations. It exists to promote respect and understanding among diverse cultures and serves as a catalyst for bringing people together.

MIA Director Shaika Al-Nassr, “I can think of no better venue for this remarkable presentation than MIA, which is dedicated to preserving, exhibiting, and publishing on the Islamic cultures of the world. When designing the exhibition, we sought to illuminate the intricate layers of Morocco’s cultural identity, offering visitors a chance to explore its rich heritage. This exhibition serves as a bridge connecting past and present, inviting audiences to immerse themselves in the timeless beauty of Moroccan culture and its enduring global legacy.”

Organized thematically into five sections, *Splendours of the Atlas* highlights Morocco’s diverse and interconnected cultures and their lasting influence on contemporary life. The sections include:

- “Faces of Morocco: Landscapes and Society,” an introductory gallery that will immerse visitors in a mosaic of photographs by Bruno Barbey, Irving Penn, Lalla Essaydi, Mous Lamrabet, and Mounir Raji. The pictures, which depict Morocco’s ecologically diverse landscape and its contemporary inhabitants, offer a glimpse into the everyday lives of Arab and Amazigh communities and the terrains they navigate.
- “The Soul of Morocco: Kings, Saints, and Scholars” delves into Moroccan dynastic history, which cultivated theological scholarship and scientific advances in the cities of Fez and Marrakech, two major centers of learning. The section demonstrates how Morocco’s rulers, whose lineage stems directly from the descendants of the Prophet Muhammed, created fertile ground for pursuits in astronomy, mathematics, and medicine, among other fields. Special attention is paid to institutions of higher learning, such as the famed University of Al Qarawiyyin, founded by the

female scholar Fatima al-Fihri in 859 and regarded as the world's oldest continuously operating degree-granting university.

- "Threads of Tradition: Morocco's Artisanal Mastery"—the largest section in the show—explores the pivotal role of crafts in Morocco's many cultures, showcasing the leather, textile, carpet, ceramic, jewelry, and woodworking industries that have thrived in the country for generations. Ceramic works will illustrate Morocco's Islamic—particularly Amazigh and Andalusian—heritage, while woven tapestries will reveal the country as a crossroads of civilizations, where influences from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East converge. Finally, costumes and jewelry, including traditional garments such as bridal *kaftans*, will showcase how designers and artisans have preserved customs and adapted them to contemporary needs. The gallery design will be informed by artisanal workshops and Moroccan markets, creating an immersive experience.
- "Traditional Sounds of Morocco" presents musical instruments—highlighted by objects from the Dar Jama'i Museum in Meknes—that are used to create everything from the Andalusian melodies of the cities to the *gnawa* music of the South. Videos accompanying the objects will provide a sense of the distinct musical traditions of different regions.
- The final section of the exhibition is an ode to contemporary Moroccan craftsmanship. Featuring seven commissioned works by Moroccan artist Nouredine Amir, the objects respond to traditional crafts while reinventing them for bold, new abstract works that will hang from the gallery's ceiling and a light installation that evokes the feel of traditional crafts' textures and techniques.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication with short essays on each of the show's key themes. Photographs and detailed object entries of each work in the show will also be included. Notably, many of the objects on view from Qatar Museums' collections will be published for the first time.

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About Years of Culture

The Years of Culture initiative, chaired by Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, spearheads long-lasting cultural partnerships between Qatar and other nations. It exists to promote respect and understanding among diverse cultures and serves as a catalyst for bringing people together, nurturing connections, encouraging dialogue, and deepening understanding. Though formal programming spans one year, the lasting impact continues through legacy projects.

The Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture is developed in collaboration with leading organizations in Qatar with counterparts in Morocco and with assistance from the Moroccan Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication, Qatar's Embassy in Morocco, and the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Qatar.

Previous Years of Culture have included: Qatar-Japan 2012, Qatar-UK 2013, Qatar-Brazil 2014, Qatar-Türkiye 2015, Qatar-China 2016, Qatar-Germany 2017, Qatar-Russia 2018, Qatar-India 2019, Qatar-France 2020, Qatar-USA 2021, Qatar-MENASA 2022, and Qatar-Indonesia 2023.

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