

Aga Khan Museum's 2019 Programming Embraces Theme of Transformation

Lineup includes exhibitions upending historical misperceptions and connecting cultures, performances turning fear into art, and talks celebrating outstanding contributions of exceptional women

Toronto, January 29, 2019 — The Aga Khan Museum dedicates 2019 to transformation, past and present. A wide-ranging slate of public programming celebrates the theme, exploring the multi-faceted ways in which cultures respond to the forces of change through their arts and sciences, traditions and beliefs. On the calendar are four exhibitions, including a one-of-a-kind homage to the moon and the only Canadian stop for a revelation about medieval Africa; a performing arts lineup featuring top international talent; and educational programming that taps into contemporary conversational currents.

EXHIBITIONS

In *The Museum as Studio: Kevork Mourad in Residence at the Aga Khan Museum*, acclaimed Syrian-Armenian artist Kevork Mourad shapes his experiences of cultural destruction into a large-scale, site-specific installation that converts the Museum's temporary gallery into an immersive visitor experience.

The Museum pays tribute to our nightly symbol of transformation — the moon — in an artistic homage to the 50th anniversary of the first lunar landing. *The Moon: A Voyage Through Time* will lead visitors on an interactive journey across faith, science, and the arts, from pre-Islamic societies to the present, from miniature paintings to videos, and from astrolabes to a giant, illuminated sculpture of the moon.

Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange Across Medieval Saharan Africa transforms a long-standing narrative by revealing the story of thriving African cities and trade networks that were foundational to the global medieval world, but have until now often been overlooked and under-represented.

And setting up 2019's theme of transformation is the landmark exhibition continuing from 2018, *Transforming Traditions: The Arts of 19th-Century Iran*, which explores a society at a crossroads, caught between the desire to preserve time-honoured traditions and the increasing need to engage with outside influences.

TALKS

As part of our educational programming we launch *The Changemakers Series*, featuring talks that delve into the critical conversations of our time. This season, we present exceptional women who are forging new paths in art and activism. Among them are Sarajevo-born Azra Aksamija, who directs MIT's Future Heritage Lab, which provides creative responses to conflict and crisis, as well as Toronto-based, New Delhi-born Meera Sethi, whose art explores the politics of dress and is in the permanent collection of the Royal Ontario Museum.

PERFORMING ARTS

The Museum's performing arts season, *The Other Side of Fear*, presents internationally and nationally acclaimed artists who have transformed challenging experiences such as displacement, xenophobia, and racism into inspiring music, spoken word, and dance. Highlights include musician/rapper/director/artist Narcy's launch of his new album, *SpaceTime*, with a collaborative, multimedia show, as well as a comedic series featuring Mo Amer, recently named one of *Rolling Stone Magazine's* "10 comedians you need to know;" Azhar Usman, who the *New York Times* says "turns fear into funny;" and Zahra Noorbakhsh, one half of the acclaimed team behind the podcast *#GoodMuslimBadMuslim*.

"The transformational power of artists and art is something we're tapping into very intentionally," says Henry Kim, Aga Khan Museum Director and CEO. "We hope our 2019 programming not only engages audiences, but also helps them transform fear into courage."

DETAILS OF NEW EXHIBITIONS

January 31 to February 24, 2019

The Museum as Studio: Kevork Mourad in Residence at the Aga Khan Museum

Syrian-Armenian visual artist Kevork Mourad returns to the Aga Khan Museum, following his landmark participation in 2017's multi-sensory Museum exhibition *Syrian Symphony*. For *The Museum as Studio*, Mourad will create an immersive, multi-layered artwork in the Museum using his unique painting and printing process. Museum visitors will be able, periodically, to watch Mourad at work.

This piece, created exclusively for the Aga Khan Museum, will be made with the collaboration of post-secondary students, and will be relocated to different galleries within the Museum, evoking the constancy of change.

Mourad is internationally acclaimed for his fusion of printmaking, animation, and collaborative performance that bears witness to painful and continuing histories. His work is an act of remembering and a profound expression of creativity in the face of tragedy.

March 9 to August 18, 2019

The Moon: A Voyage Through Time

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of a courageous and transformative moment for humanity – the first lunar landing – this interdisciplinary exhibition explores the significance of the moon in Islamic cultures. The moon, a constant reminder of the cycles of change, has also long served as a cultural mirror. Through the ages, people the world over have created art, articulated astronomical understanding, and formed beliefs through their observations of the moon.

Spanning pre-Islamic times to the present day, and covering spirituality, ritual, science, and the arts, *The Moon: A Voyage Through Time* will showcase Islamic manuscripts, miniature paintings, scientific instruments, and a broad range of artifacts, including metalwork, ceramics, and textiles. Masterworks from the Aga Khan Museum are joined by loans from such prestigious international institutions as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford, the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City, and the Harvard Art Museums in Cambridge. The immersive and interactive exhibition design will give

visitors the opportunity to interact with displays and devices that allow the moon to be observed and imagined in new ways.

A highlight of the exhibition's contemporary section is the large-scale sculpture *Moon*, by contemporary British artist Luke Jerram. Visitors will come face to face with an internally illuminated moon replica featuring detailed NASA imagery of the lunar surface and measuring five metres in diameter – to get an idea of scale, it would take 40 people standing shoulder to shoulder to circle the sculpture. Jerram's installation includes sound composed by BAFTA-winning composer Dan Jones.

The Moon: A Voyage Through Time is curated by Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Director of Collections and Public Programs, Aga Khan Museum, and guest curator Dr. Christiane Gruber, Professor of Islamic Art, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

"We're thrilled to be putting historical objects 'in conversation' with scientific discoveries, including imagery from the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, NASA's robotic spacecraft," says Dr. Gruber. "We hope the exhibition will be an uplifting experience for visitors, and will inspire adults and children to learn more about the moon in Islamic culture and the arts."

September 21, 2019 to February 23, 2020

Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange Across Medieval Saharan Africa

Caravans of Gold is the first major exhibition to tell the story of West Africa's significant contribution to civilization. It transforms the historical record by revealing the foundational role Saharan trade routes played during the Medieval era (700–1500) by fueling the global economy with gold, objects, and ideas.

Combining recently excavated fragments from Nigeria, Mali, and Morocco with contemporary scientific research, this exhibition disproves common assumptions about West Africa's role, revealing the region to be more than just a trade route, but actually a hub of great economic wealth, commerce, and production.

In a unique curatorial approach, *Caravans of Gold* features archeological fragments placed alongside intact artworks from around the world, giving an entirely new dimension to treasures from the Western canon – for instance, a 14th-century Italian painting of the crucifixion covered with gold leaf that, as it turns out, was very likely transported along Saharan caravan routes.

"*Caravans of Gold* is not only exciting due to its substantial new scholarship and unique interdisciplinarity, but also in the way that it allows for the intellectual and artistic voices of Africa to be heard on their own terms," says Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Director of Collections and Public Programs at the Aga Khan Museum. "We are enthusiastic about the exhibition's ethos, which challenges conventional notions of world history and gives a voice to a crucial part of the world usually ignored in the presentation of world history."

Caravans of Gold was curated by Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, where the exhibition debuts (January 26 to July 21, 2019). After its residence at the Aga Khan Museum it will travel to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art in Washington D.C. (Spring 2020). A version of the exhibition will be displayed in Nigeria, Mali, and Morocco after the North American run. The Aga Khan Museum is delighted to have contributed several artworks to this international collaborative venture.

Caravans of Gold was organized by the Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University. *Caravans of Gold* has been made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, as well as by Northwestern University's Buffett Institute for Global Studies. An anonymous donor made possible the exhibition's travel to the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Myers Foundations, the Alumnae of Northwestern University, the Robert Lehman Foundation, the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation, and the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The Museum's mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage while often reflecting, through both its permanent and temporary exhibitions, how cultures connect with one another. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto's Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

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FOR PRESS INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Olena Gisys, Porter Novelli
olena.gisys@porternovelli.com
416.422.7152

Kelly Frances, Aga Khan Museum
press@agakhanmuseum.org
416.858.8735