

Remastered: New, tech-rich exhibition celebrates rarely displayed Islamic art masterpieces in the Aga Khan Museum's Collection

A collaboration with Ryerson University Library, Remastered showcases 11 classic manuscript paintings and 40 digital interventions, connecting audiences with timeless stories of courage, love, and living well.



Toronto — Tuesday, October 20, 2020 — The Aga Khan Museum's newest special exhibition harnesses digital technology and the power of creative collaboration to showcase masterpieces of Islamic art as they have never been seen before.

Running from November 7, 2020 to March 21, 2021, **Remastered** opens new windows on the Museum's world-class collection of Persian, Turkish, and Mughal Indian manuscript paintings. Anchoring the exhibition will be a selection of 11 resplendent masterworks that rarely go on display, let alone together. Digital interactives developed in collaboration with Ryerson University Library will allow visitors to explore 40 additional pieces from the Collection and get immersed in heroic stories from the manuscripts.

"We have created one of the most innovative showcases of Islamic manuscript paintings ever to have been assembled," said Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, the Museum's Interim Director and CEO. "**Remastered** invites viewers to immerse themselves in the beauty of some of the most impressive masterpieces in the Islamic tradition and find new meaning in centuries-old stories of heroism, love, and principled living."

The idea for a technologically enriched celebration of the Museum's Collection came in response to COVID-19-related travel bans, said Aga Khan Museum Curator Dr. Michael Chagnon. "Because we could no longer rely on artifact loans from peer institutions, we had to look inward for our next special exhibition. This was an opportunity to reflect upon the possibilities of our Collection and think about how we could look at it in new and revelatory ways."

Like the pandemic, the "distinctive contours" of the Museum's Collection called upon Dr. Chagnon and the Museum's Exhibitions team to treat challenges as opportunities to try something creative and new. Typically, only a small selection of the Museum's extensive catalogue of manuscript paintings is on display at a given time. That's because intact manuscripts can only be left open to one two-page spread, while individual folios, like all works on paper, can only be exhibited for so long before they sustain light-related damage.

"We wanted to find a way for audiences to engage with not only an individual painting but a classic manuscript as a whole," said Dr. Chagnon. "After all, the book itself — *the whole book*, from its binding, to its paper, to its pigments, to the stories it tells in words and images — was the intended work of art."

To achieve this effect, the Exhibitions team partnered with Ryerson University Library to create 11 interactive “hubs.” Each hub boasts a single spread or detached folio from the Museum’s Collection and three to four “digital interventions” highlighting other works from the same manuscript.

Types of interventions visitors will encounter include: digital restorations of damaged works in the Collection, illustrating how a painting might have looked when it was originally completed; engaging interpretive animations of scenes depicted in the manuscripts; and lightboxes with 3-D visualizations of paintings from the Collection. In addition, by scanning QR codes planted throughout the gallery, visitors can activate interactives on their smartphones, allowing them to delve into the history behind the masterworks and make connections to other objects in the Collection. Along with the smartphone interactives, **Remastered**’s minimalist gallery design heightens the impact of the art-viewing experience and helps promote proper physical distancing.

The Museum is also preparing digital experiences allowing people who can’t physically visit the Museum to experience **Remastered**. A 3-D virtual tour will be available on the Museum’s website later this fall, and the Museum will host online conversations with Dr. Chagnon where viewers will have the opportunity to ask him their questions about the exhibition.

Remastered was developed for *Rebuild 2020*, the Museum’s programming lineup to reconnect and reinvigorate communities through the arts. With this in mind, Dr. Chagnon chose to highlight paintings — including works from three of the most famous manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* (“Book of Kings”), 11th-century poet Firdausi’s epic mythologizing the rise of the Persian Empire — that evoke timeless ideas of courage, love, and what it means to live an ethical life.

“These paintings are filled with lessons that are emotionally and intellectually relevant to people today,” he said. “We want visitors to draw courage and hope from the classics in our Collection and use that feeling to envision a better future for themselves and for their communities.”

Remastered’s theme of overcoming adversity through collaboration, Dr. Al-Khamis noted, shines through in the story of how the exhibition came into being. “**Remastered** is a testament to the marvellous possibilities that arise when we, as curators and as people, tap into the power of our local community,” she said. “By joining forces with our neighbours, we are more resilient, more creative, and better equipped to overcome tough challenges than we are on our own.”

Opening a week before **Remastered** is *Faig Ahmed: Dissolving Order*, dedicated to the work and thought of Baku-based artist Faig Ahmed. The centrepiece of *Dissolving Order* is a deconstruction of one of the world’s most enduring, remarkably consistent art forms: the carpet. Like many of Ahmed’s sculptures, *Gautama* (2017), a hand-woven carpet itself, distorts familiar features of carpets, warping the past into something otherworldly and new. The carpet appears to fray, swirl, and ooze right in front of the viewer — a helpful reminder that long-lasting traditions or established systems can shapeshift at any time.

“What I love about Ahmed’s work is that he takes one of the most traditional art forms and infuses chaos into it,” said Aga Khan Museum Assistant Curator Bitia Pourvash. “But instead of stopping at chaos, he

restores stability, creating something distinct, solid, and new. At the same time, he helps us better understand and connect to the tradition he's disrupted."

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.

– 30 –

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Olena Gisys, Porter Novelli
olena.gisys@porternovelli.com
416.839.8227

Kelly Frances, Marketing and Communications
Director, Aga Khan Museum
press@agakhanmuseum.org
416.858.8735