



Aga Khan Museum Exhibition Illuminates Syria's Rich and Diverse Contributions to World Heritage over 5,000 Years

**World Premiere of *Syria: A Living History*, a panorama of global heritage
October 15, 2016–February 26, 2017**

**A collaboration of museums and private collections in Europe, North America,
and the Middle East offers a manifesto of hope through over 50 artifacts**

Toronto, August 3, 2016 – The Aga Khan Museum will open its exhibition *Syria: A Living History* on October 15, 2016. The exhibition brings together over 5,000 years of art highlighting the contributions that the diverse cultures within Syria – Mesopotamian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Ottoman, and Arab – have made to world heritage. The exhibition, which represents collaboration between seven international museums and private collections, will run through February 26, 2017.

Many of the works of art are being exhibited together for the first time and will give audiences a unique insight into the marvellous cultural traditions of both ancient and present-day Syria, thereby underscoring the dialogue between these traditions throughout the ages.

“We hope that a better appreciation of Syria’s priceless contributions to the world’s heritage over five millennia will add urgency to the efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation in that country,” says Aga Khan Museum Director and CEO, Henry Kim. “The sheer variety of these artifacts and their cultural breadth reveal just how multicultural Syria was, long before the term ‘multicultural’ was even invented, and how essential that diversity was to the development of so many of the world’s greatest civilizations.”

Exhibition highlights include:

- An eye idol from Tell Brak, Syria, carved around 3,200 BC;
- A stele with a depiction of a prayer from Tell Halaf, Syria, (10th–9th centuries BC), still bearing the marks of a Second World War bombing raid in Berlin, Germany;
- Contemporary works by Elias Zayat (b. 1935) and Fateh Moudarres (1922–99) that merge personal experiences with reflections on modern-day Syria.

The exhibition represents an unprecedented partnership between several renowned public and private institutions. Institutional partners include the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin; the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin; the Louvre, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Atassi Foundation, Dubai; and the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection, Toronto.

The historians and curators behind the exhibition include Dr. Filiz Çakır Phillip, Curator, Aga Khan Museum; Professor Nasser Rabbat, Aga Khan Program of Islamic Art and Architecture, MIT; and Dr. Ross Burns, a historian based in Sydney, Australia. The exhibition showcases objects carefully chosen by Dr. Çakır Phillip in discussion with each partnering institution.

Dr. Çakır Phillip observes, “Together, the selected works show a continuously strong and deep interest in both human and animal imagery in the arts of Syria, regardless of their artists’ differing belief systems or ethnic backgrounds, amounting to the rich cultural heritage of the country.”

A section of the exhibition will highlight work currently underway to document major monuments and sites. Professor Nasser Rabbat provides the interpretive voice for the exhibition. He will also contribute to a two-day symposium at the Aga Khan Museum (October 29–30), in which he will examine Syria from both historical and cultural perspectives.

Exhibition-related programming includes a lecture by Dr. Ross Burns on the architectural heritage of Syria, a round-table discussion on post-conflict Syria, and performances by Syrian-born artists and musicians such as Lubana Al Quntar and Kinan Azmeh (joined by visual artist Kevork Mourad). The elegant Damascus panels that adorn the interior of Diwan, the Museum’s restaurant, provide the perfect backdrop for a unique series of special concerts and themed events.

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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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