

Music and the Visual Arts Unite as the Aga Khan Museum Explores the Resilience of Culture in Times of Conflict

Exhibition and soundscape *Syrian Symphony: New Compositions in Sight and Sound*
invites visitors to look, listen, and contribute



Detail of *People and Power*, Ahmad Moualla, 2011. Oil on Canvas.
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Toronto, May 9, 2017 — The Aga Khan Museum spans the spectrum of cultural expression with the opening of a new exhibition, *Syrian Symphony: New Compositions in Sight and Sound*. This immersive and interactive response from artists to the current situation in Syria, presented in association with Silkroad, the arts organization established by cellist Yo-Yo Ma, opens May 20, 2017, and runs until August 13, 2017.

True to its name, *Syrian Symphony* orchestrates music, painting, and media arts by some of Syria's leading artists and musicians into a multi-sensory experience of the power of art to reach us and teach us. The creative voices brought together speak of the struggle to protect Syria's cultural heritage and of the determination to rebuild.

“In times of conflict or crisis, artists are implicated as our conscience,” says curator Amirali Alibhai, Head of Performing Arts for the Aga Khan Museum. “They help us deal with loss, hope, and empathy. They express our humanity.”

Similar to an orchestral symphony, the exhibition is divided into four distinct yet connected “movements”:

- A collaboration between celebrated composer/clarinetist Kinan Azmeh, a performer on stages from Carnegie Hall to the Bastille Opera House, who has recorded an original musical piece in the gallery, and visual artist Kevork Mourad, who has produced painting directly onto the gallery walls in reaction to the sonic context of Kinan’s music. Pieces from Mourad’s *Ghost Cities* series will also be on display.
- A theatrical installation featuring artwork created before and in reaction to the Syrian civil war, including Ahmad Moualla’s visually symphonic, 12-metre long painting *People and Power*, which is on loan from Atassi Foundation, complemented by a 21st-century disklavier performing Malek Jandali’s modern adaptation of the Hurrian Hymn. A graphic panel will depict the tablet on which the Hymn, which is the oldest known written piece of music, was inscribed in cuneiform circa 1400 BCE.
- A virtual re-creation by Paris-based new media firm Iconem of monuments in the Syrian city Palmyra, including the Temple of Bel and the Temple of Baalshamin, from video recorded by drones just days after ISIS devastated the ancient site. The video is set to a soundscape by Silk Road Ensemble.
- Two interactive installations, one a portrait wall where visitors can take and add photos of themselves to those of newly arrived Syrians and their host families, the other a collaborative textile where visitors can respond to the Syrian situation by selecting and tying pictograms onto frames that will become visual displays of visitors’ non-verbal support for Syria. This fourth and final movement of *Syrian Symphony* will feature the music of Rahaf and Esmaeel Abofakher, a Syrian couple newly arrived in Canada.

The Museum’s creative partner for *Syrian Symphony*, Silkroad, was inspired by the exchange of ideas and traditions along the historical Silk Road, and was established to explore how the arts can advance global understanding.

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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