

ISLAMIC ARTS



MUSEUM MALAYSIA

NEWSLETTER



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Greetings from the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia and wishing all of you a blessed Ramadan.

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia follows two main paths that lend it as a strong educational institution. The first path is it consolidates cooperation with local and international universities, by not only offering them access to hands-on display and in-store artefacts, but also sharing with them specialized talks on a regular basis such as the 'Immersion in Islamic Arts' as well as 'Museum's Best Practices' sessions. Thus, the museum becomes the educational ground supporting and working side by side with the classrooms. The second path is that we strengthened our exhibition catalogues with focused, specialized and more academic researches. Thus, with every exhibition we tend to invite experts to guide the research as well as contribute to the publication. It is our aim to reach a wider audience and contribute to scholarship thus become part of the academic milieu. IAMM's Education Department is further reaching out to strengthen the museum's role as an educator.

At the international level, the museum recently launched an exhibition of twenty-seven contemporary and modern Arabic calligraphy paintings at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization in the UAE. It is a collaborative work that invites viewers to look for what is 'Beyond the Letter' with all their senses and listen to the echoes of the silent letters delivering their messages. The exhibition is now open to the public from 28th March until 3rd June 2018.

We look forward to the opening of the British Museum's new Islamic gallery; the 'Albukhary Foundation Gallery - The Islamic World' to the public by the end of 2018. The said gallery reflects years of very fruitful cooperation and dedication between the two renowned institutions.

Ramadan Mubarak.

Syed Mohamad Albukhary



Front cover: A monumental lustre pottery tile fragment from Persia, dated between 13th to 14th century, collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

19 MARCH 2018 - 31 DECEMBER 2018

Exhibition:
Al-Tibb: Healing Traditions in Islamic
Medical Manuscripts

28 APRIL 2018

Talk:
"Early Malay Doctors" by Dr Faridah
Abdul Rashid

5 MAY 2018

Workshop:
"Art of Attar: Aromatherapy of the
Muslim World" by Hafsa Hassan

27 JULY 2018

Workshop:
"Codicological Aspects of Islamic
Manuscripts" by Dr Farouk Yahya

28 JULY 2018

Talk:
"Medicine & Culture" by Dr Farouk Yahya
& Dr Fabrizio Speziale

4 AUGUST 2018

Workshop:
Bengkel Literasi Jawi Klasik & Moden (for
ages 15 and above)

13 OCTOBER 2018

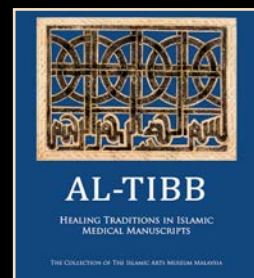
Workshop:
Herbs Drawing & Watercolour Workshop
(for adult)

10 NOVEMBER 2018

Workshop:
Botanical Watercolour Workshop (for
children, 8-15 years old)

MARCH - DECEMBER 2018

Children Weekend Workshops:
Skeletal System (March 2018)
Anatomy Flip Book (April 2018)
Articulated Hand (May 2018)
Me, Myself & I (June 2018)
Hair Styles (July 2018)
My Face (August 2018)
Doctor's Bag (September 2018)
Teeth & Smile (October 2018)
X-Ray (November 2018)
Body Map (December 2018)



28 MARCH 2018 - 3 JUNE 2018



Exhibition:
Beyond the Letter:
Modern Arabic Calligraphy from the
collection of Islamic Arts Museum
Malaysia
Venue: Sharjah Museum of Islamic
Civilization

'IMMERSION IN ISLAMIC ARTS 2018'; LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME AT THE ISLAMIC ARTS MUSEUM MALAYSIA.



The participants looking closely at the architectural models in the gallery.



The participants were intrigued to learn how to write their names in Arabic calligraphy.



Individual presentations by the participants attended by students and experts in Islamic arts.

This year, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM) once again organised its annual programme 'Immersion in Islamic Arts 2018' that took place at the museum from 22 to 24 January 2018. The programme was participated in by the lecturers and students of education, arts and architecture from Charles Sturt University (CSU), Australia, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Centre for Advanced Studies on Islam & Sciences, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (CASIS, UTM) and University of Malaya (UM). This three-day programme involved activities such as artefact investigation, visit to the galleries, Islamic calligraphy class, individual presentations, lectures and dialogues.

For this programme, curators and conservators of IAMM played an active role in sharing their knowledge and experiences regarding artefacts and their preservation with participants. A session 'Understanding Artefacts', on the second day of the programme, gave an opportunity for students to get closer to selected artefacts and historic objects from the IAMM collection, such as an 18th century ceremonial army helmet from Iran, 19th century silver pen case with the *tughra* (royal signature) of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid I from Turkey, 18th century prayer book from Morocco and 19th century Islamic calligraphic porcelain plate produced in Europe for the Southeast Asian market.

In this session, the objects were investigated by curators and conservators to acquire visible information from the surface of the objects, to understand stories behind their production and to interpret meanings behind the creations. After the session, with the guidance of curators, all students dispersed to the museum's permanent galleries to choose one of the artefacts and then present their own understanding about the object to all this in attendance.

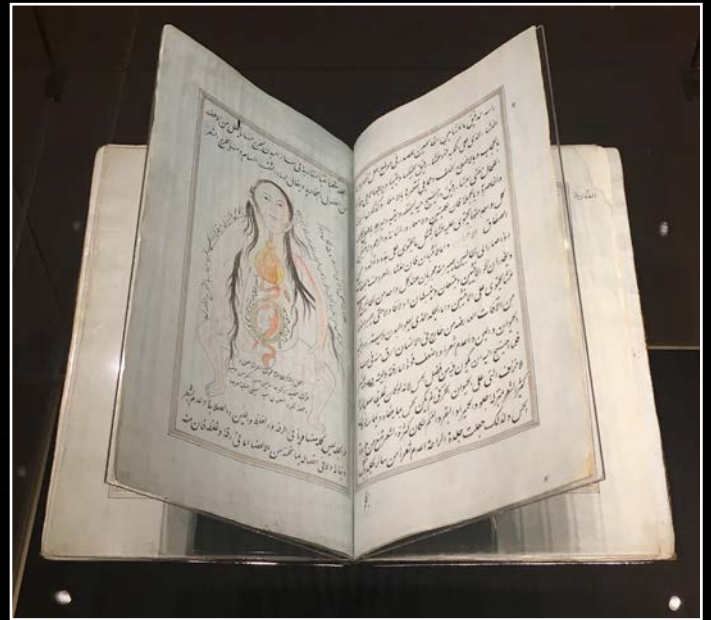
The final day was filled with individual presentations by the participants and an Inter-University colloquium. Dr Sam Bowker, a lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture and the head of the delegation from CSU, gave the first lecture of the evening. This was followed by a series of lectures delivered by academics from different local universities, IAMM's Heads of Curatorial and Conservation Departments, and Malaysian artists.

The 'Immersion in Islamic Arts' programme is a special initiative created by the IAMM as part of our effort to engage with the public and institutions, particularly those involved directly with the field of Islamic art. The programme proved beneficial to the public after we managed to host and apply the same modules to other educational institutions across the globe, such as the alumni of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London; 60 international students attended the WISE Summer School at CASIS, UTM in Malaysia with very positive feedback.

AL-TIBB: HEALING TRADITIONS IN ISLAMIC MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS

The birth and growth of the revered field of Islamic medicine inspired the recent exhibition 'Al-Tibb: Healing Traditions in Islamic Medical Manuscripts'. This exhibition highlights 73 artefacts including renowned Islamic medical manuscripts dating from the 13th century, such as the seminal medicinal treatise *Kitab al-Shifa* (The Book of Healing), authored by polymath Ibn Sina, the 'father of modern medicine'. These prominent medical treatises are accompanied by other unique objects such as an 8th century fish-shaped container and different designs of Egyptian water filters.

The exhibition is divided into six sections, namely Faith and Medicine, the Systemisers; The Textbooks, For the Kings, Unani Medicine Movements; The Branches of Pharmacy; At the Pharmacy; Dietetics and Regimens; and Animal Veterinary. The brilliant details of scholars ranging across Turkey, Spain, Yemen, Persia, India and the Malay Peninsula were thoroughly explored to depict the evolving medical expertise over the centuries into a truly sophisticated science.



A drawing in Al-Bayan fi Tashrih al-Abdan follows closely the 14th century Persian physician Mansur ibn Ilyas' format of anatomical illustration.



Part of the exhibition showcasing Islamic hospitals, manuscripts of horse veterinary and measures pertaining hygiene.



Items related to beauty and wellness are also highlighted. At the front are travel-sized molar flasks, used to store medical substances as well as fragrances.

The audience also gets a glimpse of the earliest example of human anatomy illustrations in the Islamic world, which shows the body systems and internal organs. In addition, the showcase includes treatises by physicians dedicated to the sultans. These highlight the close relationship between court physicians and their masters.

IAMM also presents a compact selection of works from the Malay Archipelago that shows how illnesses affected the Malays of the 19th century, in particular yaws, malaria and typhoid. With this exhibition, we hope to introduce and share with the audience a vibrant picture of the passion, curiosity and intellectual impulse that drove the development of medicine in the Islamic world. Above all, we hope to project a glimpse of the medical evolution from the practice of humoral theory to the innovations in chemical medicine to the arrival of modern medicine — a story of one of mankind's greatest intellectual pursuits. The fruits of three years of labour have successfully materialised, well-received and not to be missed.



REPRESENTATION OF FAITH IN ISLAMIC GALLERIES: WHERE DO WE GO WRONG?

Based on the paper presented at the “From Malacca to Manchester: Curating Islamic Collections Worldwide” International Conference on 23-24 February 2017 at the Kanaris Lecture Theatre, Manchester Museum, United Kingdom.

By Dr Heba Nayel Barakat
Head Curator, Curatorial Affairs Department,
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

Representation of faith in Islamic galleries; the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia as a case study

In recent decades, the relationship between Islamic Art and the Islamic Faith has raised many questions that influenced Islamic museums and galleries in different ways. In this article, I attempt to discuss the recent fluctuating approaches to the representation of faith in galleries and museums of Islamic Art, using the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM) as a case study.

The question of whether to showcase religion-related artefacts furnish the way for faith to be represented in museums is a discourse relevant to the sacred arts of all religions. However, the nature of the Islamic artefacts does not provide them with sacred qualities, nor does it allow them to be worshiped nor function as a mediator to the divine, so how can an Islamic object act as a catalyst in the representation of faith in museums?

The Artefact

According to Blair and Bloom, “while some Islamic art may have been made by Muslims for purposes of faith, much of it was not.” Islamic artefacts in museums are mostly utilitarian objects produced to serve a specific function as plates, ewers, textiles, and even the Qur’an mushafs were produced to be read and to spread the word of God. Neither the material nor the form of the artefacts produced in the Muslim world secures them a sacred place, yet their relation to faith is embodied in their explicit and implicit messages they carry. The explicit is shown for example in the use of Qur’anic verses and objects used for religious purposes while the implicit messages surface as symbols or invocations, where the messages remain effective even when the original object deteriorates. These messages reflect the intention of the maker and the artefacts reach out for a chance to voice these messages.

The intention of the calligraphers

Are these messages guided by faith? Historically, faith was clearly expressed by calligraphers when inscribing and illuminating the Qur’an. Not only because the act of writing as transmitter of the

Arabic Qur’an acquired its preeminence in Islam, but because the calligraphers numerously expressed their inner belief that the act of writing is worship.

The conscious connection between faith and calligraphers is also translated in them “performing the Wudu’ (ablution) prior to writing, preparing the ink and reed pen and setting the atelier appropriately with the intention of performing calligraphy as an act of ‘worship’, as well as choosing carefully the messages to be delivered.

Several Muslim scholars indicate that art produced in the Islamic world “adapted their creativity to evoke their inner beliefs.” Non-western scholars argue that “in the mind of these artists” the function of artefacts is to transmit messages of Islam, whether they are inspirational phrases on dishes, or blessing expressions on hand mirrors, they act as reminders, thus reflecting religious beliefs and cultural values of Islamic art.

In Islam, faith (Iman) and Islam are two complementing interpretations to the act of being a Muslim. Islam is mainly the performance of the five pillars and the submission to God, the proclamation of the Shahadah, whereas Iman is the inner belief in Allah, the almighty and the translation of this belief into everyday life, not only through constant remembrance, but also through acts that reflect this inner feeling.

In the Eye of the Beholder

Artefacts on display at the IAMM range from the first century AH to the 19th century AD, representing all major dynasties of Muslim rule. Some artefacts such as the Ka’aba Kiswa (Sitara) — the embroidered door curtain that is on display at the museum — had to be placed in a protective case. The Kiswa covered the Ka’aba for a year, and attains a spiritual connection with the Hajj (annual pilgrimage) and the visitation of devotees to the holy mosques in Makkah and Madinah. The embroidered velvet textile of the Kiswa was subject to vandalism. Small portions of its lining were cut off from visitors and kept to permeate blessings and protection! The artefact, in the mind of a visitor, evoked feelings of sacredness beyond its historical or aesthetic importance.

What evoked this spirituality? Why was this particular artefact seen as representing faith? What message did it deliver? How did the manner in which it is displayed play a role? And to what extent can museums arouse or suppress such messages? Thus, it’s not only that some museum visitors have expectations, but also museums of ‘Islamic art’ have obligations towards visitors.

² www.muslimheritage.com/article/introduction-islamic-art#sec_9

³ <http://khaledalsabt.com/cnt/dros/1765>, <https://www.al-islam.org/180-questions-about-islam-vol-2-various-issues-makarim-shirazi/6-what-difference-between-islam-and-verse-14-of-Suratul-Hujurat>, “The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You do not believe but say, We submit; and faith has not yet entered into your hearts.” <http://knowingallah.com/en/articles/difference-between-faith-iman-and-islam/>.

¹ Sheila Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field,” *The Art Bulletin* 85 (2003) 152-184,

In 2002, the IAMM showcased a collection of swords that reflected those that belonged to the Prophet Muhammad and the companions: Fakhr al Suyuf: The Glorious Swords. The exhibition featured 14 exact copies of the Prophet's and the companions' swords and highlighted their religious and historical significance. "The idea that these items reflect those carried by the most holy people, the pioneers of the religion, suggests a halo of sacredness around them — something that people could relate to"; visitors' notes attested to the spirituality attained through the visit, others indicated that they shed tears as the exhibit evoked an emotional state.

At the IAMM, exhibitions that address a religious subject and instil an atmosphere where visitors can inspire faith are well received by a predominately Muslim audience. An exhibition in 2016 featured a collection of prayer manuals, 'Dalail al Khayrat' produced in North Africa in the 16th century and transmitted across the Islamic world, recopied and illuminated up to the 19th century. This sparked a spiritual atmosphere attested by visitors. Away from the secular modes of meanings, these artefacts' significance emerges and derives from its content rather than its function or aesthetic beauty. To a Muslim audience, it may spark spirituality, to others they are but aesthetically pleasing historical objects. Yet the intention of the museum to represent faith is achieved.

The artefacts send different messages to different individuals and their symbolic quality is received in diverse ways. Given the diversity and complexity of religious communities and beliefs, expression of faith does not only rely on the objects on display.

The Museum

The representation of faith starts from the building itself? Graham Howes explains that the "building itself has the capacity to render spiritual things visible", furnishing the museum visitor with a mystical experience. Museum settings play a vital role in presenting the visitor with the messages carried by the artefacts. Museums can augment this experience and can enhance an intimate relationship between the artefacts and the visitor, especially as artefacts affect and inspire visitors differently. The message and the curation of exhibitions are encouraged to serve different target groups.

The IAMM, dedicated the first artefact-based gallery to the 'Qur'an and the Written Word'. This hierarchical division of space at the IAMM attests to the vital importance of the Holy Script, and that through its guiding instructions the Muslim civilisations produced much of their art. In its permanent galleries, IAMM interprets the importance of understanding Islamic art and culture through adding verses of the Qur'an and hadith either above the gallery's introduction panels or within the gallery walls. In recent decades, there was a wave of building and refurbishing Islamic art museums and galleries around the world, and all of

them are about to display outstanding new exhibitions of Islamic art. "Many beautiful words about tolerance and cultural dialogue have been spoken at the openings of these exhibitions. But what do they actually exhibit? Objects that were never collected with an aim of creating an understanding of Islam or represent the cultural heritage of ordinary Muslims." Even the museums in Muslim countries created the separation between Islamic art and Islam.

A new type of Islamic museum emerged and was titled 'Islamic Museum' rather than Islamic Art museum. The name indicates that if the component of faith is not necessary present in 'Islamic Art museum' rendering it as simply an Art Museum, then an 'Islamic Museum' clearly stresses this particular faith over any bedazzling artefacts.

Where do we go wrong?

"Despite well-meaning and well-informed scholarly and museological intentions, Islamic art history has had limited success as a good ambassador for Islam." According to Shaw, galleries tend to redefine the term Islamic to connote a culture rather than a religion and to fragment Islamic art into regional and temporal sections. Thus museums which have the tendency to move away and silence Islam from Islamic art by cutting off information that would engage with Muslim visitors are not considering Muslim visitors as a vital part of their audience. What is missing in our creation is our ability to recognise that the artefact is the byproduct of and neither belongs to a civilisation that is united by faith, even though it is not necessary of one interpretation nor is it religious. What is feared is that there be misrepresentation of faith... Consciously or unconsciously.

To conclude

The approach to faith in Islamic museums and galleries is polarised; from museums dedicated to highlighting, defining and displaying faith, to galleries that rejected even the term Islamic in their names. This extreme difference in the approach reflects the difference in the representation of faith in Islamic museums. As indicated above, some museums search for ways to represent faith, test their approaches and develop them, not just to secure positive visitor responses, but also to attempt to voice all messages embedded in artefacts, while others question the role of faith in Islamic museums.

The advantage of representing Islam in museums and galleries of Islamic art is certainly that it would ultimately challenge misconceptions about the nature of Islamic art, the perception of artefacts and the religious-guided culture they grow out of, allowing the field to grow with less tension.

⁵ Klas Grinell *Museological Framings of Islam in Europe, funded by the National Research Council of Sweden. The Swedish version of the article with full bibliography is published in Ord&Bild 3-4/2016. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2016-10-18-grinell-en.html>*

⁶ Shaw, Wendy M.K., *The Islam in Islamic art history: secularism and public discourse* <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/shaw1.pdf> (1-34)

⁷ Ibid p.

⁴ Amir H. Zekrgoo and Mandana Barkeshli, *Collection management of Islamic heritage in accordance with the worldview and Shari'ah of Islam* <http://www.studfiles.ru/preview/5592285/page:11/> ICCROM_ICS03_ReligiousHeritage_en.pdf



IAMM HIGHLIGHTS

INVISIBLY MOUNTING COSTUMES USING FOSSHape: *Textile Conservation Workshop with Suzanne Chee*



The flexibility of the FossShape helps shaping the mount with ease and no mess.

The innovation in gallery exhibition display has inspired conservators to use FossShape to mount costumes invisibly. FossShape is a white non-woven, heat-activated fabric that is proprietary 100% polyester polymer blend with no additives or post treatments. Individual fibres are composed of two polyesters that have different melting points; the outer fibre has a lower melting point than the core. The fibres are mechanically entangled to form the fabric. It is a material that is both visually and practically acceptable. The mounts could be created reasonably quickly with relative ease and no mess. It is lighter in weight than polyethylene foam and could be formed into heads and limbs strong enough to support accessories where needed. The lightness of the weight affords suspension of costumes in the gallery besides also being less time-consuming to use than carving multiple forms. Moreover, it is also less abrasive and easier to work with than buckram. The resulting forms were constructed to be invisible unless otherwise desired and were able to support accessories, including trousers and headdresses.

The workshop was conducted by Suzanne Chee, Senior Conservator in textiles, costume and fashion from the Powerhouse Museum, Australia, on 30 January 2018, in conjunction with the dismantling of *Faith Fashion Fusion Exhibition*.



Suzanne Chee showing how to shape the FossShape to create invisible mounting.



The lightness of FossShape affords the costumes to be displayed in suspension.



Displaying costumes in suspension provides a more interactive and interesting way of communicating fashion design to the audience



PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP "PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY: MODEST STYLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN" *By Shuhada Hasim*

An endeavour to correct the misrepresentation of Muslim fashion and the term 'modesty', Shuhada Hasim took a brave approach in the titular workshop which took place at IAMM on 13 January. A total of 25 participants joined this workshop, challenged to discuss fundamental issues in photography and Muslim fashion. A theoretical session in the morning followed by a practical in a mock-studio set up in Education Wet Workshop. Shuhada coached participants on how to set up a photo shoot appropriately with the help of three volunteer models. Shuhada also encouraged participants to support Muslim entrepreneurs and brought up platforms for creative Muslims to engage in the arts.



A RATIS STUDIO TALK AND BATIK WORKSHOP

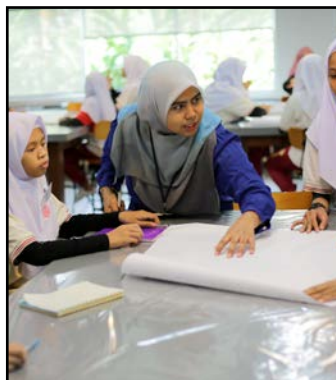


In conjunction with the exhibition 'Faith Fashion Fusion: Muslim Women's Style in Australia', there was a Ratis Studio talk, 'The Evolution of Traditional "Kelubung" to Hijab'. The purpose was to gather interested parties and artisans in order to discuss the condition of current Muslim fashion and its identity by tracking back to its original traditional clothing. The talk also addressed local East Coast artisans and efforts to make their products marketable as well as to compete with the surge of modern art talent. Held on 20 January at the Education Briefing Area, the talk was supposed to be followed by a batik workshop, which was postponed due to unforeseen circumstances.

On 24 February, the workshop 'Traditional Batik on Kain Kelubung' inspired by Australian Aboriginal motifs took place at the Education Wet Workshop and was attended by 19 local and overseas participants. They were taught complex tie-dye techniques and experimented with natural colours and materials to produce beautiful veils.



SAHABAT MUZIUM WITH SMK (P) METHODIST, KUALA LUMPUR



Sahabat Muzium is IAMM's version of 1 Murid 1 Muzium, in collaboration with History Club of SMK (P) Methodist, Kuala Lumpur. The modular programme, which started on 22 February, will be held once a month at IAMM for one year. Students are required to complete a personal journal throughout their stay at IAMM, with various activities such as gallery session, Muslim historical figures' trails, talk and discourse. IAMM aims to spark the students' passion for understanding history and art while at the same time offering IAMM's facilities as a conducive place to learn.

UPCOMING PROGRAMMES

TADARUS AL-QUR'AN 2018

Continuing its annual tradition, IAMM will be hosting Tadarus Al-Qur'an for the public starting from 12 May until 9 June 2018. The recital ceremony will be guided by authoritative experts in Qur'an recitation throughout the 30 days. The programme will be held every day, starting from 10 am until 12 pm. Interested parties may contact the Education department for further information.

THE EARLY MALAY DOCTORS *By Prof. Faridah Abdul Rashid*

In conjunction with the exhibition 'Al-Tibb: Healing Traditions in Islamic Medical Manuscripts', a special titular talk will be held on 28 April at the IAMM Auditorium. 'The Early Malay Doctors' is research by Prof. Faridah Abdul Rashid over many decades tracing the history of medicine and the star figures who have contributed to the medical field in the Malay Archipelago.

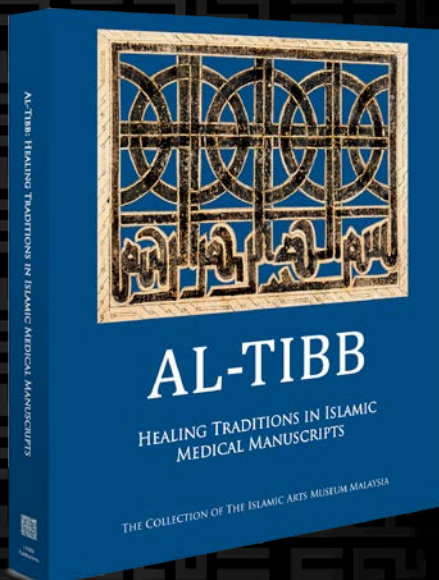
AROMATHERAPY WORKSHOP: 'ART OF ATTAR: AROMATHERAPY OF MUSLIM THE WORLD'

Considered to be a method of healing in the past, aromatherapy is a practice of using fragrance extracted from healing plants for medical purposes. It is said that fragrance is one of the important element of Muslim hospital, as it soothes and calms the physiological and physical condition of patients. For just RM100, join us on 5 May 2018 for the Aromatherapy Workshop with instructor Hafsa Hassan.



IAMM PUBLICATION

'AL-TIBB: HEALING TRADITIONS IN ISLAMIC MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS' CATALOGUE



Accompanying the recent exhibition is a catalogue entitled Al-Tibb: Healing Traditions in Islamic Medical Manuscripts. The catalogue provides analysis of 42 manuscripts on various medical subjects, including: The Spread of Medical Knowledge in the Islamic World, Prophetic Medicine, Anatomy and Physiology in Medieval Islam, Concepts of Pathology in Muslim Culture, Pharmacy and its Offshoots, Eating and Good Health in Medieval Islam, Malay Traditional Healing, Divination and 'Magic' in Islamic Medicine, and Equine Veterinary Knowledge in the Islamic World. The catalogue aims to introduce the cornucopia of medicinal manuscripts within the IAMM collection and to contribute to the growing interest in medical manuscripts among scientists and academics. Readers will benefit from the writings of notable scholars from Malaysia and abroad with a 20% discounted price throughout the exhibition.



MUSEUM SHOP

Merchandise Code : 48008

Description : **H25 - SEXTANT**

A sextant is an instrument with a graduated arc of 60° and a sighting mechanism, used for measuring the angular distances between objects and especially for taking altitudes in navigation and surveying.

Price : MYR 2500.00



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