

Press release

New Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World to open 18 October 2018

The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World opens to the public on 18 October 2018. **A major re-display of the British Museum's world-class Islamic collection**, the new gallery will be a comprehensive presentation of the Islamic world through art and material culture. Situated within a new suite of rooms at the heart of the Museum, it will underscore global connections across a vast region of the world from West Africa to Southeast Asia and reflect links between the ancient and medieval as well as the modern worlds.

Islam has played a significant role in great civilisations as a faith, political system and culture. The new gallery will feature objects that give an overview of cultural exchange **in an area stretching from Nigeria to Indonesia and from the 7th century to the present day**. From cooking pots to golden vessels, and from 20th-century dress to contemporary art, the objects displayed will demonstrate the extraordinary richness of global encounters. The place and role of other faiths and communities including Christians, Jews and Hindus - will be reflected throughout the gallery, showing their significant contributions to the social, economic and cultural life of the Islamic world.

The British Museum's collection of Islamic material **uniquely represents the finest artworks alongside objects of daily life** such as modern games and musical instruments. The collection includes archaeology, decorative arts, arts of the book, shadow puppets, textiles and contemporary art. The creation of the Albukhary Foundation Gallery provides an extraordinary opportunity to display these objects in new ways that showcase the peoples and cultures of the Islamic world, as well as the ideas, technologies and interactions that inspired their visual culture.

The great medieval dynasties up to about 1500 are explored in the first room, **highlighting connections within nearby galleries relating to Byzantium, the Vikings, the Crusades and Islamic Spain**. A 13th-century incense burner made of intricate inlaid metalwork from Damascus combines techniques developed in Mosul, with decoration depicting Christian scenes demonstrating that such objects were made for a variety of patrons both Christian and Muslim.

Rarely seen archaeological material discovered at two major cosmopolitan centres will bring to life the inner workings of these early Islamic cities. Samarra in present-day Iraq, a vast palatial city on the banks of the Tigris, and Siraf a port city on the south coast of Iran. 20th-century excavations yielded an extraordinary richness of material, from 9th-century wall fragments with painted faces to coveted Chinese porcelain traded across the Indian Ocean in journeys **echoing the tales of the legendary Sindbad the sailor from the *Arabian Nights***.

The second room introduces the three major dynasties dominating the Islamic world from the 16th century: the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals. Their patronage saw the production and trade of magnificent objects, including ceramics, jewellery and

painting. **A new approach in this gallery is to also include 19th- and 20th-century objects and textiles from Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and South and Southeast Asia**, many of which have not been displayed before. From elaborate 19th-century mother-of-pearl inlaid wooden Turkish bath clogs to a brightly decorated Uzbek woman's robe with Russian lining, juxtapositions of objects will continually draw attention to the cross-fertilisation between regions and time periods.

The new gallery will accommodate **a permanent presence for light-sensitive objects such as works on paper and textiles** which will be regularly changed. These will include stunning 14th century illustrated pages from one of the most celebrated oral traditions, the Persian epic *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) which will be shown alongside monumental folios of the 16th-century Indian Mughal emperor Akbar's *Hamzanama* (Adventures of Hamza). These belong to the Islamic literary tradition, which stems from **a rich and diverse history of storytelling that predates the advent of Islam**, featuring epics about real and mythical kings and heroes, as well as romances and religious narratives.

The arts of the book and calligraphy will be displayed alongside musical instruments, including an outstanding 19th-century lyre from Sudan and 20th-century shadow puppets from Turkey. Works on paper by artists from **the Museum's growing collection of contemporary art** will be presented in dialogue with the cultures of the past. An exciting collaboration with the Prince's School of Traditional Arts will also emphasise continuing traditions of paper-making, painting and illumination alongside masterpieces of Persian and Indian painting. An area dedicated to temporary displays will open with an exhibition from the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia exploring the idea of the arabesque; an abstract vegetal motif that spread across the Muslim world for over 1000 years.

The displays are enhanced by an engaging new programme of digital media that comprises a series of introductory films focussing on topics such as architectural decoration, ceramic technology, arts of the book and music. An accompanying website will allow for further research and exploration of the collections on display. The visitor will have the opportunity to engage directly with objects at a dedicated handling desk managed by the Museum's volunteer programme.

Designed by Stirling Prize-winning architects Stanton Williams and in close collaboration with the British Museum, the new gallery has been created by opening up and significantly refurbishing two historic, 19th-century spaces on the first floor of the Museum. Adjacent to recently renovated European galleries, these spaces have been closed to visitors for several years.

The curatorial team consists of Venetia Porter, Ladan Akbarnia, Fahmida Suleman, Zeina Klink-Hoppe, Amandine Mérat and William Greenwood.

Hartwig Fisher, Director of the British Museum, said, "The galleries and permanent displays of the British Museum's collection show us the interconnectedness of our shared cultures. The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World allows us to display this world-class collection to tell a more universal story of Islam in a global

context. I am grateful to the Albukhary Foundation and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia for supporting this important new gallery.”

Venetia Porter, Assistant Keeper of Islamic and Contemporary Middle East at the British Museum, said, “This new gallery has given us the opportunity to completely re-visit our collection and to explore the history, complexity and diversity of the cultures of the Islamic world from West Africa to the Malay Archipelago.”

Syed Mokhtar Albukhary, Chairman of the Albukhary Foundation, said, “I would like to thank the British Museum for a fruitful collaboration and for the opening of the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World which aims at displaying the convergence and divergence of Islam. In the context of globalisation, I sincerely hope that this new gallery will attract a multicultural audience, and contribute in understanding the history, arts and cultures of the Islamic World”.

Syed Mohamad Albukhary, Director of the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia, said, “After years of preparation, it is enormously gratifying to see the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World open to the public. This gallery will certainly form an educational space and will contribute in strengthening the visitors’ experience and in their understanding of the Islamic civilisation”.

Notes to editors

The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World will open on 18 October 2018 in Rooms 42-45, next to The Sir Paul and Lady Ruddock Gallery, Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300–1100, Room 41.

There will be a programme of free public events to celebrate the opening of the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World on Friday 19 to Sunday 21 October including a Late evening on Friday 19 October. More information will be available nearer the opening.

There will be two new publications accompanying the opening of the new Gallery. *The Making of The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World* will be published in November 2018 by the British Museum. Hardback, £40.

This highly visual publication details the concepts, construction and design of the new Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World at the British Museum. The book includes a series of essays which explore the nature of Islamic visual culture, the formation of the collection of Islamic material culture at the British Museum, and the challenges of designing a new gallery for the 21st-century within a historic building.

The Islamic World: A History in Objects by Ladan Akbarnia, Venetia Porter, Fahmida Suleman, William Greenwood, Zeina Klink-Hoppe and Amandine Mérat. Published by Thames and Hudson in October 2018. Hardback, £29.95.

This illustrated introduction to the history of the Islamic world takes its cue from the British Museum’s outstanding collections of art and artefacts from Islamic lands, offering a penetrating insight into the history and culture of this region through everyday objects and treasures from the ancient world to recent works of contemporary art.

The Albukhary Foundation

The Albukhary Foundation is a non-profit organisation based in Malaysia with an international presence. For the past forty years, it has been promoting goodwill through education and cultural heritage. With the objective of nourishing a world that is more equitable and tolerant, the Foundation’s manifold initiatives have been cultivated

by the values of compassion, tolerance, and coexistence. In improving the lives of the underprivileged and neglected communities, the Foundation has spearheaded extensive humanitarian projects, widening windows of educational opportunities, as well as promoting scholarship among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Albukhary Foundation's key role at the cultural front is reflected in its initiation and ceaseless support of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. An esteemed cultural institution in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, the museum is now the largest in Asia Pacific dedicated to the arts, culture and heritage of the Islamic world. The chain of success in Malaysia has spurred the Foundation to expand further. Besides its unrelenting commitment in the areas of education, social welfare and religion, the intent to bridge further understanding between cultures and faiths also makes up much of the Albukhary Foundation's international component. This initiative continues in the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World.

<http://albukharyfoundation.my/>

Stanton Williams

Stanton Williams is a multi-award winning architectural design practice based in London. The practice has developed its portfolio from an initial focus on museums and galleries towards a wide variety of projects, all of which demonstrate its overarching objective of putting the user's experience of space, light and materials at the forefront of the agenda, as well as creating places that sensitively respond to their cultural, social and physical context. Stanton Williams also designed the British Museum's Waddesdon Bequest Gallery, which opened in 2015.

www.stantonwilliams.com

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