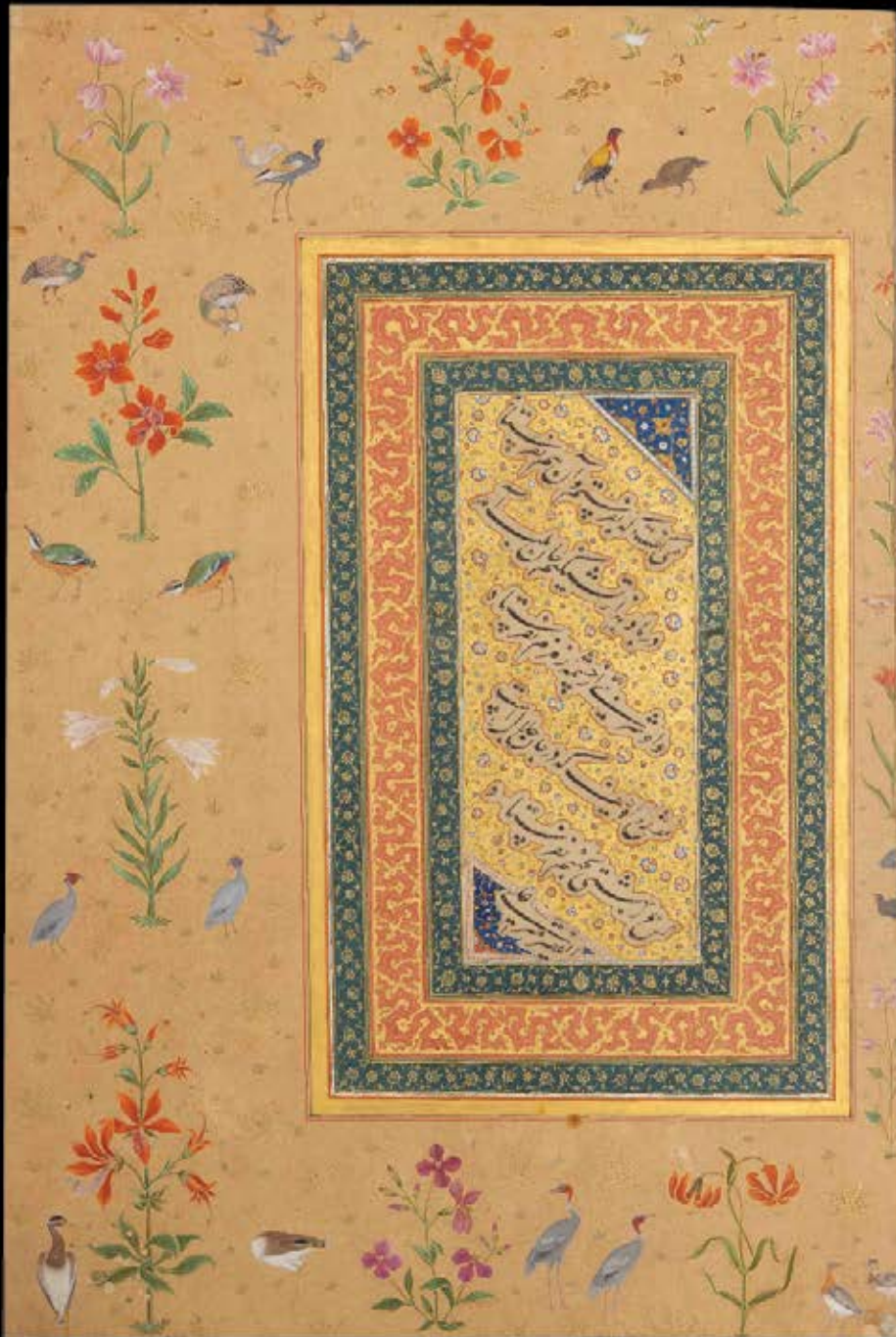


ISLAMIC ARTS  
MUSEUM MALAYSIA

# NEWSLETTER

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# Foreword

Ramadan Mubarak to you and your loved ones.

Recently the holy month of Ramadan began, a blessed month which brings people together and closer to God. Each year the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM) welcomes Ramadan with the daily recitation of the Holy Qur'an. Each day one Juz' is recited, inviting the public to participate by chanting with the reciter, Muqri'.

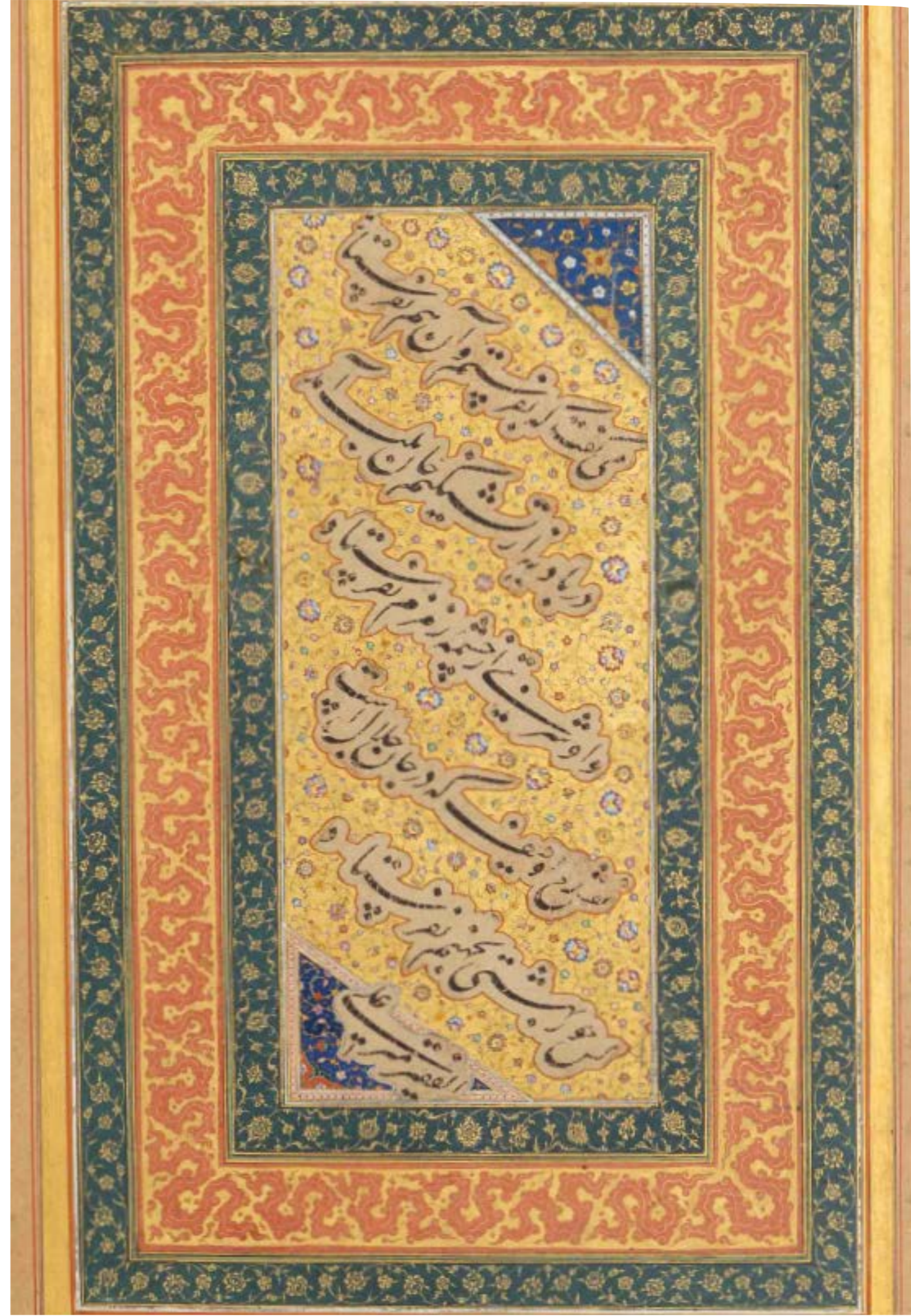
The first quarter of this year was full of international collaborations. We started developing partnerships east and west -- Russia, Uzbekistan, France, United Kingdom, up to Memphis, USA. The Centre for Islamic Civilisation Uzbekistan (CICU) launched a photo exhibition and together we are building an education workshop based on best curatorial practices. In Memphis, the National Ornamental Metal Museum, (Tennessee, USA), we are joining a month-long exhibition with four metal artefacts from the IAMM collection that demonstrate the variety of superb workmanship and techniques used in Islamic metalwork.

Redesigning our galleries is an on-going task. This quarter we focused on the Textile Gallery by revisiting the story line of the gallery and adding new and unique textiles and rugs. Textiles and furnishings played an integral role in shaping the social, political and economic fabric of Muslim communities. Among the most recent acquisitions on display is a collection of unique weavings: a Lotto and an Ushak carpet from Turkey, and a Polonaise carpet from Persia. Also on display is a new collection of Palestinian women's costumes, each representing a region in Palestine, including Al Quds, Jenin and Nablus. Palestinian costumes reveal a longstanding tradition of intricate cross-stitch embroidery, a legacy that we safeguard for future generations.

The highlight of this season is an exhibition by European painters of the 19th and 20th centuries, capturing in their oil paintings the life and customs of the lands formerly known as the Orient. "Orientalist Paintings: Mirror or Mirage?" will be on display from the beginning of June to mid-October, 2023. We invite you to enjoy each painting, examine carefully and contemplate the artists' intentions.

With this, I wish you all an uplifting season of Ramadan

Syed Mohamad Albukhary  
Director  
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia



# Focus I

## Uzbekistan: Centre for Islamic Civilisation Photo Exhibition



*Dato Sri Tiong King Sing, the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia (right) and Firdavs Halimov, the Deputy Director of the Centre of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan during the ribbon-cutting ceremony.*

The 'Uzbekistan: Centre for Islamic Civilisation' photo exhibition is a collaboration between the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM), the Centre of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Uzbekistan. Officially launched on 1 March 2023, the exhibition will run at the Open Space Gallery until 27 April 2023.

Dato Sri Tiong King Sing, Malaysia's Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture launched the exhibition, which was also graced by the presence of His Excellency Ravshan Usmanov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Uzbekistan in Malaysia, and Firdavs Halimov, Deputy Director of

the Centre of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan.

The photo exhibition celebrates the history of Islam in Central Asia, more precisely in modern-day Uzbekistan. The unique positioning of the region made way for the spread of Islam, and the integration of its traditions into local cultures. The 46 photos selected for the exhibition visually narrate the continuity of contributions made in the fields of science, education and architecture among many others, from the arrival of Islam in the region to the present day.

Each section of the exhibition showcases unique elements of Islam in Uzbekistan that have contributed to Islamic civilisation. From madrasahs to maqams and masjids, glimpses of the stunning architecture of historic Central Asian cities, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Tashkent, Nasaf and Termez, are presented in the exhibition. All were important sites for cultural exchange along the Silk Road.

In addition to architectural splendour, the exhibition also offers a peek into Uzbek culture, embedded with rich Islamic heritage. As the exhibition aims to encourage the study of the rich and distinctive Islamic heritage of the people of Uzbekistan, the images in the exhibition also complement the IAMM collection, displayed in the permanent galleries: these artefacts range from a 7th-8th century Sogdian robe and Samanid earthenware to vibrant 19th century ikat robes.



## Focus II

# Reinstallation of the Textile Gallery

We are pleased to announce the reinstallation of the Textile Gallery, now boasting a stunning collection of over 80 Islamic textiles from our permanent collection. This new installation features visitors' all-time favourites alongside recent acquisitions and returned loans, now displayed in the museum for the very first time. Nestling in the open corridor on the second floor (directly above the Malay World Gallery), the Textile Gallery's strategic proximity to the Jewellery Gallery and the Living with Wood Gallery forms a cultural trifecta aimed at delivering an immersive viewing experience.

Islamic textiles have left a lasting legacy, providing insights into the rich cultural heritage of the Islamic world, as well as offering a glimpse into the technical achievements and artistic sensibilities of Muslim artisans throughout history. Serving all levels of society – from nomadic encampments and urban settlements to royal courts – textiles played an integral role in shaping the social, political and economic fabric of the Muslim community. Building on the previous concept that focuses on regional textiles, the renewed display, encompassing a timeline stretching from the 8th to the 21st century, includes three more categories: early Islamic textiles, inscribed textiles and carpets and rugs.

The display begins with the IAMM's renowned 8th-century Sogdian robe, the oldest textile in our collection, which has gained immense popularity among our visitors due to its monumental size. This time, the robe is no longer presented alone; instead, it is juxtaposed with two *tiraz* fragments dating from the 10th to 11th centuries. The objective of this



*Installation-in-progress on the group of carpets in the wall showcase. Display personnel is attaching a Velcro on the backside of the Mughal "Flower-in-Lattice" carpet alongside the "Lotto" (middle) and the "Polonaise" carpets.*

placement is to demonstrate the gradual transition from the portrayal of animal figures inherited from the pre-Islamic era (here the confronting animals within pearl roundels) to the emergence of Arabic inscriptions on textiles in the early Islamic period.

Textiles with Islamic epigraphy are highly valued in Muslim communities; Arabic inscriptions were adapted into various designs in delicate curved, angular and geometric forms, as reflected in our selection of artefacts. The section continues with an array of inscribed textiles: shrine cover, curtain (*sitara*), and banners, including a silk fabric akin to the *kiswa* (cover of Ka'ba) design of calligraphic within stacked chevrons, often used to cover tombs of the Prophet (pbuh) and his Companions. These textiles range from those bearing the names of Allah and the Prophet (pbuh), to Qur'anic verses, prayers or poetry, often giving a clue to their functions.

*'Polonaise' carpet  
Isfahan, Central Persia  
17th century AD  
/ 11th century AH*

*Lustrous silk-piled carpet  
with a pastel colour  
palette, here in darker to  
lighter shades of green,  
saw a departure from the  
traditional use of single  
ground colour of Persian  
carpets. Extensive gold and  
silver brocading further  
enhanced its appearance.*





At the centre of the gallery, carpets from the regions of modern-day Türkiye, Iran and India stand as a testament to the critical role of textiles as decorative draperies. Carpet weaving has long been a revered tradition in Islamic culture as carpets are a ubiquitous element of interior decoration in homes, mosques and palaces. The four carpets are displayed in two cases: the first, formed by the Persian “Polonaise”, Turkish “Lotto” and Indian “Flower-in-Lattice”, simultaneously illustrates the abstract, geometric and natural rendering of vegetal ornaments, while the second lays out a Turkish “Ushak”, featuring the medallion design popular in the 16th century. Immediately following this is a group of prayer rugs, known in carpet literature as niche carpets, which illustrate the place of textiles in religious rituals.

These carpets do not only serve as proof of the thriving carpet-weaving industries in these regions but also the popularity of Islamic carpets in the West. The “Lotto” carpet – characterised by bright, yellow geometricised arabesque octagons and quatrefoils upon a scarlet ground – for instance, widely appeared in Renaissance paintings and received its name after its appearance in several works by Italian painter Lorenzo Lotto (d. 1556). By the same token, the “Polonaise” carpet received its misattribution when a carpet of similar design embroidered with the coat of arms of a noble Polish family was on display during the 1878 Paris World Exhibition. Later historical evidence nonetheless proved that these carpets are in fact Persian in origin, believed to be from the court of Shah Abbas (r. 1587–1629), ruler of the Safavid dynasty. Our example, in excellent condition, features a central field of quatrefoil medallion and arabesque leaves against a gradient palette of green, further enhanced by the silky lustre with gold and silver brocading characteristic of carpets of this type.

Regional textiles occupy the final section of the gallery. These cover regions in Africa, Turkey, Iran, India, Palestine, the Malay world and Central Asia. Decked with an impressive panoply of fabrics – made for sartorial needs, household use, ceremonial purposes, or as diplomatic gifts and trade items – visitors are in for a visual feast of motifs and patterns. The diverse and unique interpretation of flora and fauna, geometry and calligraphy on these textiles served as an expression of cultural identity, achieved through evolving technical knowledge of weaving, embroidery and painting, to name but a few.

We invite you to visit our reinstalled collection of textiles from the Islamic world for a new experience at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

*A few snapshots of the renewed display in the Textile Gallery.*

## Curator's Section

# Warriors and Palace Guards

*Ludwig Deutsch*

The master of palace guards was unquestionably Ludwig Deutsch. The calm and precision of his painting style were perfect for this demanding subject matter. All four of these works are dominated by Sub-Saharan subjects. They all exude a raw power that is far from the effete impression that was often associated with palace life in what was then called the Orient. On Deutsch's many visits to Egypt, he accumulated enough physical material and memories to specialise in subject matter that he truly made his own. The earliest of the paintings in this group of four is from several years after his first working trip to the Orient, in the mid-1880s.

It is most unlikely that he saw sentinels on duty in the locations that he so painstakingly painted. Instead, his works are imbued with imagination and knowledge of local settings, all wonderfully staged. Despite becoming a French citizen later, and changing his name from a Germanic Ludwig to a Gallic Louis, he retained that perfection of finish at which many Austrian Orientalists excelled. His work is theatrical, but without the excess romanticism and violence of an earlier generation led by Delacroix.



Stationed in an opulent interior, this work is emblematic of Deutsch's oeuvre. *The Guard* (1907) is on duty at the entrance to what is most probably a mosque. The solidity of the subject is highlighted by the wisps of incense that dance in the breeze before him. The guard's imposing build is framed by the equally solid stone walls and steps. The blood-red circles on the suzani behind him add to a feel of menace that is present to some extent in all Deutsch's depictions of sentinels. The red theme is continued in the lavish carnelian belt that he wears, each of these auspicious stones with a variegated colour bringing it to life. The shawl that covers his head and shoulders, used by most guards when not wearing a pointed Persian steel helmet, is also in a warning shade of red.

This man is more heavily armed than most. Tucked into his belt is the inevitable yataghan short sword, backed up by a pistol and khindjal dagger. This has previously been identified as having a jade hilt although it looks very much more like ornately carved ivory. The only mysterious item is the 'alam that he holds like a weapon. This is a religious symbol and yet in the powerful hand of the guard it seems more like a lance than a processional standard. The same 'alam appears in an earlier painting (*The Nubian Guard*, 1902), with a handle so elongated it looks truly threatening.





For the much earlier painting here, *The Palace Guard* (1892), Deutsch used a long-barrelled rifle rather than an 'alam. With its extraordinary thinness, it has a less imposing presence. This is more than made up for by the look on the subject's face. There is something entirely uncompromising about the upward tilt and the direct eye contact. As with all the other guards, this one is equipped with more than weapons. Deutsch has chosen to focus on the armour rather than the dagger that is mostly hidden beneath the chain mail of a gorgeous gold-inlaid Persian helmet. A matching shield stands resplendently nearby.

In this painting Deutsch uses less strident shades of red to convey his message of potential aggression. The guard wears a bright sash but not a carnelian belt. A piece of startlingly red cord is attached to the dagger, leading the eye into the display that he has arranged. The shimmering steel and gold are highlighted by the large square void behind them, with only a suggestion of woodcarving to suggest it is a doorway. Leading to where? The route is blocked by a massive wooden chest with yet more sumptuous inlay; this time in mother-in-pearl. Deutsch liked to intrigue his viewers, and these guard paintings are always filled with unanswered questions. Never do we seem to find out what they are actually protecting.

In *The Sentinel* (1900), Deutsch puts more distance between the subject and the viewer. There is no eye contact or sense of possible confrontation. A haughty look is the closest to character analysis that the artist is aiming for. In this painting, the star of the show is the setting. Whilst the previous painting was sufficiently two dimensional to push us into the same space as the man trying to keep us out, 'The Sentinel' is almost beckoning the viewer into a third dimension beyond him. A hand on the hilt of his yataghan is the most obvious warning that this is forbidden territory. Once again, the onlooker is unsure about what is being guarded. The only clues are a pillar and patch of sunlight filtered through leaded glass. To see even such a limited amount of the real world is unusual for a Deutsch interior. This world is usually enigmatic, with lustrous emanations in controlled environments.

Leading us into this space penetrated by the sun is a curtain of a type usually found at holy tombs. The gold and silk embroidery gives Deutsch an opportunity to show his expertise with softer textures than usual. A less lavish Ushak carpet provides a simpler woven form on the floor. The artist's superb rendering of tiles, metalwork and inlaid wood completes the picture of crafts dominated for centuries by Islamic masters.







In contrast to the rich, multi-textured look of *The Sentinel is The Harem Guard* (1903). There are no textiles at all, except the Ottoman military tunic and the non-regulation green silk shawl, which the guard holds close to himself with elegant fingers. His space in the painting is flooded with light, none of it direct. The suffused glow illuminates the Kufic square on the wall behind as much as the man in front. The tiny pieces of gold inlay shimmer in a way that all the other stones in this setting do not. The only word in the inscription is Muhammad and yet the presence of its geometrical perfection is very strong indeed. So much so, that the human subject looks cowed. His body language is entirely different from the other three guards in this group. Subjection to God's will is more apparent than wilful assertiveness. Deutsch has been criticised for using the same models for some of his paintings, but at least he gave each one an element of individuality.

The same could be said for the props that turn up with regularity in his works. The incense burner in the first painting of this group is on display again here. There is no ostentation in it. This is a type of metalwork that was greatly admired in the 19th century for having an appearance that mirrored the look of the European Middle Ages. Its robust simplicity and practicality are combined with design flourishes that excited collectors greatly. The book *Mamluk metalwork fittings in their artistic and architectural context* by L.E.M. Mols praises Deutsch's powers of observation.

The incense burner-brazier is the only metalwork on view. Unusually, this guard has no weapons. painting is also unusual in its size. It is much larger than most, although only a little bit more than the painting on the previous page. All four here are executed on wooden panels – his favourite foundation for the delicate application of oils at their richest. There is no texture beneath the painted surface, just a look of serene smoothness that permeates all his work except during his brief impressionist phase.

Written by Lucien de Guise  
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

# Conservation's Section

## Reflections & Remarks of a Conservator

*"A museum is a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are kept and shown".*

*Source: Collins English and Oxford English Dictionary definition, sources online accessed, March 2023.*

This common definition is general and straightforward, based on what a building, called museum, is housing and for which purpose. A more precise definition, formulated by experts working in museums or in the field of museology, would be:

*"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing."*

*Source: international council of museums*

This, 2022 definition is more elaborate and precise, stating the aims and goals, but it still does not state who is to accomplish these objectives. I would, therefore, like to add a specific definition of the last element.

I compare a museum to clockwork, as found in a traditional clock. This has, in addition to the visible parts, a housing, casing, a clock face (dial) and hands, to show the progression of time — and a source of a driving force and energy. The housing, the dial and the hands of a clock are, in the case of a museum, the building and also the presentation of objects. The driving force behind these is a visionary director/curator, who gets things started and done. What is almost invisible, in a clock and a museum,

are the other parts, the set of gears through which the spring's, or battery's energy is released. These are exactly the components to make everything happen; to transform the visions, ideas, concept and instructions. They are the professional staff.

A museum, like clockwork, consists of different parts. Playing an important role are curators, conservators and educators, as well as members of marketing, graphic design and photography teams, along with facility-maintenance and security staff. Last, but not least, housekeeping plays an important role. All of these parts work inter-departmentally, closely with each other, to present the visitor, the viewer, the best that can be achieved.

For example, the conservator provides, shares and archives, in cooperation with object management, condition reports, suggestions for and the execution of conservation work that is needed for every new object arrival and for the existing collections.

When a new addition to our collection arrives and its condition assessed, the object then proceeds to the storage facilities, unless immediate action by conservators is needed. If required, this object will be brought back to the laboratories, before it is exhibited, for a final assessment and for any necessary conservation work to be executed.



In the following, I'd like to highlight the contributions of conservators to interdisciplinary teamwork within a museum. The focus is on the upcoming exhibition Orientalist Paintings – Mirror or Mirage?

In preparation for this large-scale special exhibition, conservators take on additional tasks for objects which are not yet accessible to the museum visitors. One of these is to reassess the condition of every painting leaving the climate-controlled storerooms

to be put on display. The other is, if needed, final conservation work to be done. This can include a multitude of conservation activities and preventive actions, some of which are shown below Re-assessing the actual condition of the artwork again, in the light of new or different factors.

After a visual inspection, several technologies and methods are applied, for example Raking Light and UV Light.



*A painting's sections under the UV light, showing retouching, later additions and over-painting of the original, as well as first indications of pigment type used in mixing the paint.*

Due to aging and browning, if varnish can make details of a painting nearly invisible. Is it the varnish, or simply the accumulation of dust and air pollution over time? In the case of the painting [left], it was not the discolouration of varnish. It was tested again and found to be the result of dust and air pollution.

The surface cleaning was prepared accordingly. The square marking (red), cleaning is in progress, after meticulous testing of materials and methods to be used.



Picture (above), before and (below) after cleaning by a professional conservator.



FRAMES and CANVASES have their own specific problems.



*Previous canvas residue and adhesives on the frame's rebate*

Previous canvas fragments left on the picture, from housing another painting before the present one, give a clue about the secondary use of the frame for the present painting. Residue and adhesives have been removed and documented; the canvas fragments are kept and archived. If a canvas has weakness at the tack line, the part which is tacked on the stretcher and no longer assures the right tension of the canvas, only an extra reinforcement of this part of the canvas is necessary. The solution is strip lining, as shown below.



*A painting's sections under the UV light, showing retouching, later additions and over-painting of the original, as well as first indications of pigment type used in mixing the paint.*

## CONCLUSION

Conservation/restoration and Conservation Science are defined as a broad multiple disciplinary field that incorporates many disciplines (and associated concepts, knowledge and approaches) such as chemistry, physics, biology, geography, history, environment sciences and public policy.

Written by Friedrich Farid Zink  
Head of Conservation Centre  
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia



Despite frames often look intact and stable, before they are shipped via air freight from overseas to our museum, the unexpected can still happen. On a frame, smaller or larger parts of gesso and gilding can become loose or fall off. Or old joints of the wooden construction, below the gesso and gilding, might separate.

The unavoidable vibration is not felt in the passenger seats, but heavily in the cargo area, during a flight. Impact on landing can be especially severe. The result is the exposure of a so-called original 'in-built problem' — the separation of aged glue and unstable joints, not visible previously under the gesso and gilding.



*Final preparation*



## Education's Section

# The Journey Continues: Celebrating the Malay World's Legacy

*"Sir, this (keris) is the Malay kings' heritage of which cannot be discarded. Being unarmed would make us seem unclothed (incomplete)..."*

- Sultan Hussein Shah of Johor-Riau  
Sultanate in Hikayat Abdullah bin Abdul  
Kadir Munsyi



### Keris Day, 28 January 2023

In conjunction with the "Keris: Power and Identity" exhibition at the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia, the Education Department organised a day when keris collectors and admirers can get together to celebrate this weapon's rich history and legacy. Visitors were also encouraged to come in traditional Malay clothing and, to our surprise, many did!

This Keris Day allowed visitors to meet and greet Malaysia's renowned collectors as they shared stories about the significance and history behind each of the keris in their collection. We also had silat performances for that day as the keris is a defence tool and silat is an art of self-defence. The two complement each other.

Along with the curator's book-review session, we had a demonstration on donning the Malay attire and the philosophy behind it. Every pleat, fold and style carries a huge meaning and represents a projection of status and the wearer's intentions. Visitors were also awed by the "Standing Keris" demonstration. They were able to experience it first-hand here.

For families and younger visitors we offered screening of *Wayang Kulit*/Shadow Puppet Play on Hang Tuah and his close-knit band of warriors. Children then got to make their own keris in the Children's Library after the screening. We encouraged parent-children engagement for this activity.





### Tadarus Al Quran 1444 H / 2023 AD at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is once again organising the Al-Qur'an Recitation Programme 2023 in conjunction with the holy month of Ramadan. This will be the 16th year since this yearly programme was first launched in 2006. The Al-Qur'an Recitation programme will be held daily throughout the Ramadan month starting from 18 March 2023 (Saturday) to 15 April 2023 (Saturday) and is open to members of the public of all ages.

### School Holiday Special: Quick Art (Batik & Iznik World)

For the school holiday, we offered a Quick Art session for visitors of all ages on Batik and Iznik motifs. For Batik, visitors can enjoy Batik painting on a pre-designed wax designs, and for Iznik World, visitors will get to know the floral motifs found on Iznik wares from the 17th century and produce their own artwork inspired by similar colours and designs. Visitors may inquire our customer service for the available slots.



### International Museum Day 2023, 18th May 2023

For this year's celebration our museum is determined to provide more educational programmes for the community. With the theme of sustainability and wellbeing, we want to be a part of the global community that will promote positive change alongside the idea of sustainability, getting more and more groups to involve themselves in this role of life-long learning. Fostering inclusivity, tackling

social isolation and improving mental health are now our aims – to go a step further in education, especially of the younger generations. Please check our updates for this year's International Museum Day via our social media.



Scan the QR code to explore our range of educational resources.



### Talks, Demonstrations & Workshops

Another successful workshop that was held in conjunction with this exhibition was the Wayang Kulit: Puppet Making Workshop on 18 February 2023, where the importance of Keris was highlighted further. Participants were able to indulge themselves in the art of making shadow puppets and learning more about the legacy of the keris.

Our also received an overwhelming response to our series of Curator's Gallery Talks and four other talks by guest speakers. The four talks were on *"Keris: Sains dan Seni di Sebalik Sebilah Besi dalam Kayu"* by Prof. Dato' Dr Abdul Mua'ti on 11 February 2023, *"Mahakarya Keris: Falsafah Perkerisan, Klasifikasi Keris, Ujian Metalurgi dan Jati Diri Melayu"* by Prof. Dr Khamis Mohammad on 22 February. Last but not least the *"Peranan Ukiran dan Hiasan pada Hulu dan Sarong Keris"* by Noorhaiza Noordin and *"Kemajuan Teknologi Melayu Melalui Fabrikasi Keris"* by Ts Dr Mukhtaruddin Musa on 4 March 2023. We are proud and pleased to know that the attendees participated well and were mostly from the younger generation. Alongside these events, we also had our conservators demonstrating their work in "Conservation of Keris in the IAMM collection on 9 February 2023.



# IAMM Museum Shop

## Fridge Magnet Arabic Alphabet

The IAMM Museum Shop presented a special product that combined the two most important elements of Islamic art: calligraphy and geometry. The Arabic Alphabet fridge magnet not only offers varieties of letters, but stunning designs to choose from. The geometric design that appear as the backdrop of the alphabet is based on an artefact from the collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, the sixteen-pointed star pattern from tiles produced in Toledo, Spain around the 16th century. This basic geometrical outline is then enhanced with customised colours that give a modern look.

The IAMM Museum Shop is open from 10 am to 6 pm, Monday to Sunday, including most public holidays, and entrance is free. Follow our Instagram page @ islamicartsmuseumshop for the latest updates and ordering. Alternatively, you can contact us at: museumshop@iamm.org.my

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