Aga Khan Museum Collection in Berlin, 17 March to 6 June 2010,
at the Martin-Gropius-Bau

Over two hundred masterpieces of the Muslim world, spanning over a thousand years of history, will be shown at the Martin-Gropius Bau in Berlin from 17 March to 6 June 2010. The artworks are some of the most important pieces in the collection of the Aga Khan Museum, which is due to open in 2013 in Toronto, Canada.

The collection contains some of the world’s most important masterpieces of Muslim art, including:

- Pages from the Shahnama, or the Persian “Book of Kings”, made for Shah Tamasp, considered to contain some of the most exquisite miniatures ever created;
- The earliest known manuscript of the Canon of Medicine of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), written in Arabic and later translated, which served as the standard medical reference in Europe for 500 years;
- One of the best preserved silk lampas Mongol Robes from the thirteenth century;
- A double page of the celebrated Blue Qur’an, a ninth century manuscript written in gold kufic script on a blue-dyed parchment.

Comprising works of art in stone, wood, ivory and glass, jewelry and metalwork, ceramics and rare works on paper and parchment, the items in the collection create an overview of the artistic accomplishments of Muslim civilisations from the Iberian Peninsula to China and from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries.

Elements of the Aga Khan Museum’s collection have been shown in London, Paris, Lisbon and Madrid, but the Berlin exhibition will be the largest exhibition to date. The Aga Khan believes that exhibitions such as these have an important role to play in promoting understanding, respect and appreciation for different cultures and traditions.

The exhibition is organized along two main themes: “The Word of God”, and “The Route of the Travelers”. “The Word of God” presents Qur’anic manuscripts and folios as well as objects related to pilgrimage, prayer and mysticism, illustrating how the sacred text was a source of inspiration both for artists and architects. “The Route of the Travelers” takes the visitor along an itinerary throughout the Islamic world, stretching from Al-Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula to the Maghreb and Sicily, to the Egypt of the Fatimids and Mamluks and on to Ottoman Constantinople, Ummayad Damascus and Ayyubid Baghdad. The route continues through Persia to Central Asia and to the India of the Moguls, each providing a glimpse of the extraordinary creativity, richness and diversity of the societies of the time, as well as the mingling of influences from Asia and Europe.

Within the exhibition, a special section pays homage to the great Persian poet Firdowsi, often compared to Homer, who finished writing his great Shahnama or “Book of Kings”
exactly 1000 years ago. His work became the handbook of Shahs and Sultans, who vied with each other to obtain lavishly illustrated copies. Two such books have been digitalized, and for the first time, the public will be able to turn their pages on tactile screens.

The exhibition is held under the patronage of His Highness the Aga Khan, founder and Chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), and its cultural arm, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). The Aga Khan expects that the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto will become a centre of education and learning dedicated to the presentation of Muslim arts and culture in all their historic, cultural and geographical diversity. Surrounded by a large landscaped park, the museum will be housed in a 10,000 square-meter building designed by the Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki. The Aga Khan Museum will offer unique insights and new perspectives into Muslim civilisations.

It is one of three museum projects currently under development by the AKTC. The other two are the Museum of Historic Cairo, in Egypt, and the Indian Ocean Maritime Museum in Zanzibar. The museums are part of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture’s wide range of activities aimed at the preservation and promotion of the material and spiritual heritage of Muslim societies. As the cultural agency of the Aga Khan Development Network, AKTC leverages cultural heritage as a means of supporting and stimulating development.

For more information about the exhibition, please see the Martin-Gropius-Bau for information in English and German.

For more information about the Aga Khan Museum, please see the Museums site.

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