

PRESS RELEASE

Minneapolis Institute of Art to showcase collection of African art inscribed with Arabic calligraphy

The artworks on display date from the mid-1800s to today

Minneapolis Institute of Art
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artsmia.org



Left: Somalia, Africa. *Qur'anic writing board*, 20th century, Wood, ink. The Rebecca and Ben Field Endowment for Art Acquisition, 2017.92.

Right: Shop of Abdelkarim and Othman Ben Cherif, Morocco, Africa. *Panel*, second half of 20th century, Rayon, polyester, lurex; lampas weave. The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 91.8.5.

MINNEAPOLIS—October 14, 2020—The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) this month opens “Khatt Islāmi: Sacred Scripts from Islamic Africa,” an exhibition showcasing Arabic calligraphy, which is considered the highest form of art in Islām. Co-curated by Amallina Mohamed, curator at the Somali Museum of Minnesota, and Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, curator of African art and head of Mia’s Department of Arts of Africa and the Americas, “Khatt Islāmi” will highlight 16 artworks from Mia’s African art collection dating from the mid-1800s to today. Many of these objects will be on view for the first time. The exhibition opens October 31, 2020, and runs through August 1, 2021, in Gallery 255.

The exhibition title “Khatt Islāmi” means “Islamic line” or “Islamic design” and refers to calligraphy made by Muslims to transmit the words of God as recorded in the Qur’an, Islām’s holy book. Over the centuries, calligraphers have created beauty inspired by their faith. The calligraphers who created the works on view, comprising both students and virtuosos, show different levels of technical skill. Featured artworks include writing boards used in education, healing, and protection, as well as textiles, iron blades, and a vase created by a contemporary Sufi artist.

“This exhibition is unique because it shows, for the first time in the Midwest, Islamic objects inscribed with religious writings from different regions in Africa,” Grootaers said. “It is important for Mia to present because the Twin Cities is home to many Muslim communities of African origin, including the large Somali community. I am grateful to Amallina Mohamed from the Somali Museum for her collaboration on this project.”

“As a Somali Muslim, the exhibit highlights some of the core teachings of my upbringing,” Mohamed said. “At a young age, I was taught to read and write the Qur’an, so calligraphy was and still is an integral part of those teachings. The importance placed on capturing the beauty of the Holy Book through writing is like no other. I hope the Muslim community of all ages resonates with this exhibit, as it has been a pleasure working on it with Jan-Lodewijk.”

Mia

Transcription and translation of the Arabic was provided by Fahimeh Ghorbani, University of Toronto, in collaboration with Alam Saleh, Australian National University, with additional consultation from Fahimeh Ghorbani, Ayan Ahmed, Nahid Khan, and Dzenita Hadziomerovic.



Left: Hausa, Nigeria, Africa. *Writing board*, 20th century, Wood, pigments, leather. The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 2014.44.1.

Right: Khaled Ben Slimane, Tunisia, Africa, b. 1951. *White Vase*, 2016, Glazed ceramic. Gift of funds from Tamara and Michael Root and the Norman Gabrick Endowment for African Art, 2018.7, © Khaled Ben Slimane.

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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Thursday-Sunday 10am–5pm
Monday-Wednesday Closed
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