

Aga Khan Museum Opens Landmark Exhibition on One of the Muslim World's Greatest Civilizations

Timeless ideals and enlightened art revealed in *The World of the Fatimids*



Bowl, Egypt, 12th century. Ceramic, lustre-painted. Courtesy of The American University in Cairo Press.
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Toronto, February 15, 2018 — *The World of the Fatimids*, opening March 10, 2018, sheds light on one of history's most intriguing and vibrant civilizations, which at its height in the 10th and 11th centuries influenced thought and life throughout the Mediterranean, Southern Europe, and the Near East. Luminous ceramics, intricate carvings shaped from rock crystal, and artifacts decorated with Kufic calligraphy and embellished with vines and leaves are some of the luxury objects in this exhibition. All bear witness to a remarkable dynasty that fostered the arts and the sciences, yet is little known in North America.

"We know from accounts of the time that Fatimid art and architecture was glorious," says Henry Kim, Aga Khan Museum Director and CEO. "Most of it has vanished over the ages, so in bringing together objects from many international collections, the exhibition offers a rare opportunity not only to admire Fatimid art but also to understand what life would have been like in this lively, diverse, and tolerant society."

Through monumental architectural pieces as well as intimately scaled artwork, the exhibition conjures up a land of many faiths and explores life, both royal and everyday, in the capital the Fatimids founded, *al-Qahirah*, or Cairo. Drone videography of the site of the Fatimid court and its architectural remains, plus a film on Cairo's Fatimid history, offer insight into what the city was like a millennium ago.

The Fatimids sought out and embraced the skills and knowledge of people from different places and faiths, welcoming them into court and city life. “This multi-faceted society in part accounts for the very diverse sources of inspiration that characterize Fatimid art,” says Dr. Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, the curator of *The World of the Fatimids*. “Another reason for the diversity lies in the multiplicity of influences to which Fatimid Egypt was open.”

Exhibition highlights include:

- An eight-foot long carved marble slab that was discovered buried on what is presumed to be the site of a Fatimid palace
- A rock crystal cosmetics vessel, carved in the shape of a bird, that would have held the kohl that both men and women used as make-up
- A lusterware bowl painted with a Coptic priest swinging a censer and a cross resembling an Egyptian ankh
- An ivory oliphant carved in southern Italy with hunting scenes inspired by the style and court culture of Fatimid Egypt

A catalogue accompanies the exhibition with essays from scholars on Fatimid patronage, literature, calligraphy, cultural influences, and global exchanges, as well as chapters on the Christian and Jewish communities in Fatimid Egypt and the history of the Ismaili branch of Islam. Exhibition-related programming includes lectures, films, and a curator’s tour.

The World of the Fatimids runs from March 10 to July 2, 2018.

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The Museum’s mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage while often reflecting, through both its permanent and temporary exhibitions, how cultures connect with one another. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto’s Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

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FOR PRESS INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Tran Nguyen, Holmes PR
tnguyen@holmespr.com
416.628.5607

Aga Khan Museum
press@agakanmuseum.org
416.858.8735