

Call for Papers - International Conference *From Malacca to Manchester: Curating Islamic Collections Worldwide*

23-24th February, 2017

Proposal deadline: Sunday, 25th September 2016

Proposals for papers are welcome for the two day conference *From Malacca to Manchester: Curating Islamic Collections Worldwide*, to be held at Manchester Museum on the 23rd and 24th February, 2017. The conference is part of a wider project to catalogue and research collections of Islamic art and material culture across the Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership (MMGP), and is supported by the John Ellerman Foundation.

In the UK there is a need to better understand the rich and complex traditions of the Islamic world. A 2010 YouGov survey commissioned by the Exploring Islam Foundation revealed that the British public know relatively little about Islam and tend to problematise it as a consequence of exposure to negative media stereotypes. In an attempt to counteract this, UK museums and galleries are using collections of Islamic art and material culture to increase understanding and challenge misconceptions. In Manchester specifically, work on the Islamic collections will inform an exciting series of events and exhibitions in 2017 to mark UK-India Year of Culture, and a permanent South Asia gallery due to open at Manchester Museum in 2020.

Concurrently, across the UK and Europe high-profile museums such as the Louvre, the British Museum, and the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin, have embarked upon or completed major re-installations of important Islamic art collections. At the same time, smaller and regional museums are developing new ways to work with existing collections. The role of the curator is changing, and previously underrepresented voices are increasingly given space to express personal responses to material cultures. All such projects represent critical opportunities to present the complexity of Islamic art in innovative new ways, reach out to new audiences and utilise the richness of Islamic material culture to promote social cohesion and understanding.

This conference will explore and appraise current and developing practices in the curating of museum collections of Islamic art and material culture around the world, in Europe and in the UK. A keynote address by Dr Stefan Weber, Director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, will be complemented by a series of presentations, panel discussions, practical workshops, and visits to collections in Manchester including the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester Museum, The John Rylands Library (Special Collections), and Manchester Art Gallery. The conference's aim is to offer a vibrant and challenging perspective on the field, review ongoing projects and public and scholarly engagement, and explore professionals' aspirations for the future developments of collections of Islamic art and material culture.

Original proposals are welcome from British, European, and international museum professionals, rising and established academic scholars, and graduate students. Submissions are invited on topics including, but not limited to:

- Recent and continuing developments in the organisation and display of museum collections of Islamic art and material culture.
- The conceptual understanding of these collections (both 'Islamic' and 'art' as concepts).
- The representation of faith in the museum.
- Presenting cultural complexity engagingly.
- Islam in Europe: in the museum.
- How museum education and volunteer programmes are engaging with this field.

- Outreach and education involving both Muslim and non-Muslim groups.
- Particular challenges faced by non-specialists working with these collections.
- Addressing the longstanding scholarly exclusion of certain regions from the traditional consideration of 'Islamic world' (i.e. parts of South and South-East Asia).
- Migration of artistic techniques and transregional interconnection between cultures.
- Approaches to the museum presentation of Islamic artistic traditions alongside those of non-Islamic cultures which are related temporally, geographically, or stylistically.

Guidelines for paper proposals:

Papers will be 20 minutes in length with an additional 10 minutes for questions. Proposals for presentations or panels of up to four participants should be emailed to Jenny Norton-Wright and Stephen Terence Welsh by 25th September 2016, using the following email address: malaccatomanchester@gmail.com.

Proposals should include the presenter's name, position and institutional affiliation, the paper's title, an abstract of up to 250 words, a biography of up to 200 words (written in the third person), and a contact email address. Panel proposals should include the above for each speaker, plus a paragraph of up to 250 words describing the panel's rationale. Informal enquiries in advance of this deadline are welcome.
