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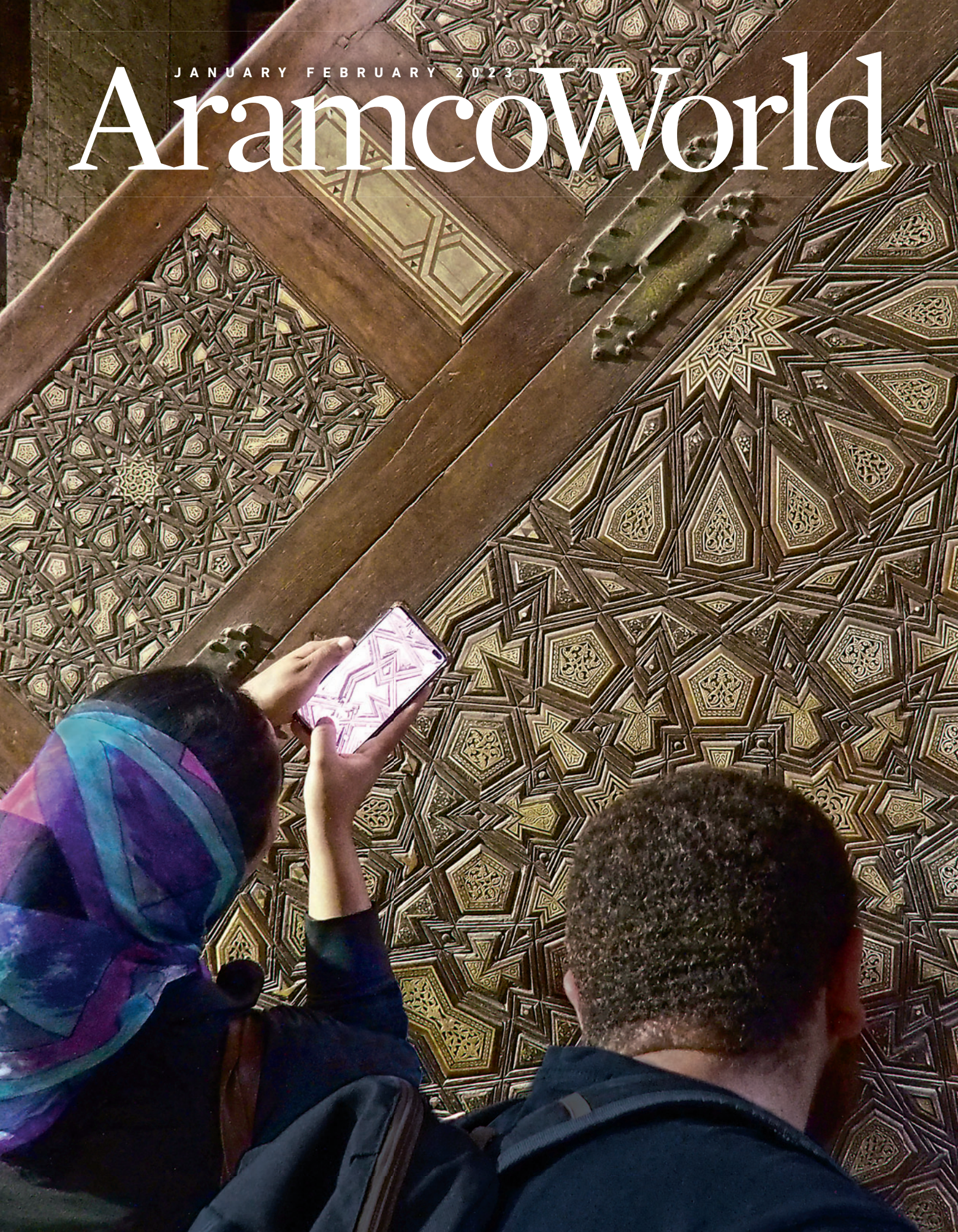

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We distribute *AramcoWorld* in print and online to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections.

FRONT COVER Students of traditional crafts in Cairo examine wood and ivory ornamentation on the minbar of Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, built in 1417 CE and recently restored following partial looting. Photo by Richard Doughty.

BACK COVER "Three Chieftains" was painted in 1937 by Émile Deckers, a Belgian Orientalist living in Algeria. Art courtesy of The Shafik Gabr Collection.

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FIRSTLOOK

Kuylu Valley, Kyrgyzstan

Photograph by Stephen Lioy

Little explored for tourism and not a popular destination even among locals, this section of the Tien Shan mountains, some 360 kilometers east of Bishkek, Kyrgystan's capital, lies near the border with China. We trekked down a rough pasture road off the highway that winds towards the village of Enilchek. With Kyrgyzstan's borders effectively closed to tourists in summer 2020 because of the pandemic, many in the domestic tourism sector took to the mountains to find trekking routes and local travel destinations. Spurred by a pretty view from the bottom of the valley and tempting topography on the map, along with friends from Kyrgyzstan Tourism, we headed up the Kuylu Valley. On our final evening, while laying out our sleeping bags in a vacant hut, local shepherd Altyn (pictured here on the last horse) rode across the river and invited us to join him for a trip to his pastures the next morning.

Horses are excellent models but difficult photography platforms. As I often do in Kyrgyzstan, I rode with the group to the top of the valley to then dismount and take pictures on foot. At some point, as I wandered off from the group, I could see Kanat Murzabek uulu (here on the first horse) approaching and the composition forming. I raced ahead to frame the three horses against the backdrop of the 4,600-meter peaks of the Mola Valley behind them.

—Stephen Lioy

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Beef Stew with Green Peas (Bazela bil roz)

Recipe by Anas Atassi

Photograph by Jeroen van der Spek

This hearty beef stew, a type of *yakhni*, or popular stew, is served with rice in the Syrian style.

It wouldn't be the first choice for a dinner party: It is usually eaten in close family settings. If you do happen to find yourself sitting at a table where it is being served, consider it a compliment, because the message is clear: You're part of the family.

(Serves 6)

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

500 grams (1 pound 2 ounces) stewing beef, cut into 4-centimeter (1½-inch) pieces

2 large onions (chopped)

2 carrots (cut into pieces)

1 *a'atryaat* (2 cinnamon sticks; 2 cloves; 3 green cardamom pods; 1 bay leaf)

2 tablespoons tomato paste

1 tablespoon paprika

3½ cups (800 milliliters) tomato juice

Salt and pepper

3½ cups (500 grams) frozen peas

2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses

Heat the oil in a large pot and sear the meat on all sides until golden brown and caramelized. Remove the meat from the pan and set aside.

Fry the onion, carrot and a'atryaat for 5 minutes in the same pot. Return the meat to the pot, along with the tomato paste and paprika, and continue to cook for another minute.

Add the tomato juice, 2 cups (500 milliliters) of water, and a good pinch of salt and pepper. Bring to a boil and then turn the heat down to low. Cover and simmer for 1 hour, until the meat is tender. Add a bit more water if the cooking liquid evaporates too quickly.

Remove and discard the a'atryaat. Add the peas and the pomegranate molasses, and continue to simmer until the peas are cooked. Taste and add more salt and pepper, if needed.

Serve the stew immediately, accompanied by vermicelli rice.

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Sumac: Recipes and Stories From Syria

Anas Atassi.
Interlink Books, 2021.
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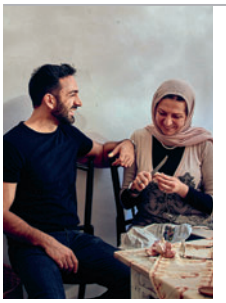


Anas Atassi was born in Homs, Syria, and now lives in Amsterdam. Every summer the whole family goes back to Homs to be together and celebrate the season. Good food continues to be an important part of that celebration, and Atassi has remained a lover of Syrian cuisine, which started his great love for cooking. *Sumac: Recipes and Stories from Syria* is his first cookbook.

"Orientalism in its true form signifies the art of face-to-face engagement."

—MOHAMED SHAFIK GABR

ARTISTS OF DIALOGUE

Written by JULIET HIGHET *Art courtesy of* THE SHAFIK GABR COLLECTION

OPPOSITE Showing what collector Mohamed Shafik Gabr, **LOWER**, calls Étienne Dinet's "intensity and softness of manner that invites the viewer to become a participant," this grisaille, which the artist intended as an illustration for a book, shows six girls on a rooftop terrace enjoying celebrations in the street below. **LEFT** "Egyptian Priest Entering a Temple," painted in 1892 by Ludwig Deutsch, was one of many of the artist's paintings that depicted subjects in visually rich, faithfully rendered cultural settings. **LOWER** Gabr has collected some 180 Orientalist paintings since 1993, and he founded East-West: The Art of Dialogue in 2012. Chairman and Managing Director of the Cairo-based ARTOC Group for Investment & Development, he is also a founder of Egypt's International Economic Forum and the recipient of numerous awards for intercultural philanthropic initiatives.

"Many things in life will catch your eye, but only a few will catch your heart," says Charles O'Brien, who has specialized in Orientalist art for Bonhams auction house in Paris. Orientalism is characterized by paintings by Western artists of people and scenes in what was then regarded as "the Orient." O'Brien continues: "Very occasionally one encounters a collection that not only speaks about the artists represented, but also shouts about the person who had the passion and energy to put such a collection together. Such is the collection of Shafik Gabr."

Widely acknowledged as the world's leading collection of Orientalist art outside of museums, Gabr describes his three decades of collecting more than 180 paintings as not only "a personal journey," but also "a message I want to pass on."

In 1993 Gabr bought his first painting: "Egyptian Priest Entering a Temple," painted in 1892 by Ludwig Deutsch, a Paris-based artist of Austrian heritage and one of the most prominent Orientalists. Its pharaonic theme, Gabr says, resonated.

"I am proud to be an Egyptian and greatly value my country's contribution to world culture," he says. For three years before the purchase, while in Europe on business, he says he became intrigued with Orientalism—much as the painters, primarily from Europe but a few from America, had become intrigued by the "East."

"I studied Orientalism and visited museums and auction houses," he says. "When I felt I knew something, I bought that Deutsch of the Egyptian priest."

He says what he sought were culturally engaged artists, "not 'armchair Orientalists' working from their comfortable European studios who never set foot in the East and who relied on second-hand accounts to paint imagined, often eroticized scenes that had no bearing on observable reality." On the contrary, he sought those artists who "made the time and effort to actually visit the places they painted, some living in the Middle East,

others in North Africa, immersing themselves in the culture and its people, depicting them in a respectful way.

"Through my collecting, I have tried to redefine the term 'Orientalism,'" he adds. "What I am trying to show is that Orientalism in its true form signifies the art of face-to-face engagement between East and West, promoting a better world by constructing bridges of understanding."

In 2012 this helped inspire Gabr to establish East-West: The Art of Dialogue, an annual intercultural exchange program for emerging leaders, primarily Americans and Egyptians, but also of other nationalities. After a hiatus due to COVID-19, The Art of Dialogue held its most recent edition in October and November. The fellowships are provided at no cost to the participants.

Central to Gabr's collection and philosophy are nine paintings by French artist Étienne Dinet. Classically trained at the Academie Julian in Paris, Dinet made his first visit to Algeria in 1884, when he was 23 years old. The experience set the course for his life and career. He began to travel there frequently, and he immersed himself in the culture and Arabic language—all at a time when the cultures of Algeria were ignored at best, and despised at worst, by the French colonial administration. In 1904 Dinet made the move permanent, and he bought a house in a southern oasis town, Bou Saâda (Place of Joy). In 1913 he became a Muslim and took the name Nasreddin (Defender of the Faith). In addition to painting, he collaborated in the production of illustrated books, says Claude Piening of Sotheby's auction house in London, and he did this often with his friend Slimane ben Ibrahim. "Dinet's complete assimilation into the local community lends his Orientalist paintings a particular authenticity and reflection of understanding of Muslim life," says Piening.

Art historian James Parry, author of *Orientalism Lives*, notes it was ben Ibrahim who saved Dinet's life during a tribal skirmish, and it was also he who taught Dinet much about "the folklore, legends and history of the peoples of the Ouled Naïl, a Berber tribe with a strong tradition of music and dance." When Dinet died in 1930, it was said that more than 5,000 Algerians attended his funeral in Bou Saâda.

In Dinet's paintings of the life and culture of the Ouled Naïl people around him, Gabr wrote in the catalog *The Art of Étienne Dinet from the Shafik Gabr Collection* that he experiences "a combination of intensity and softness of manner that invites the viewer to become a participant." This shows in the first Dinet painting Gabr bought: Six girls on a rooftop terrace enjoy their

Dinet painted from observation and strove to avoid the idealization and stereotyping common in the Orientalist genre. He "represented accurate, first-hand depictions of the secular and sacred culture of the region, especially his depictions of its inhabitants, who had become his neighbors" after his move to Bou Saâda in 1904, wrote Polly Sartori, director of Los Angeles-based Gallery 19C. **ABOVE** "Night Dance," 1891; **LEFT** "Spectators Admiring a Dancer," 1905.

WHAT IS *Orientalism?*

In the mid-19th century, "The Orient" was defined for the European intelligentsia by the convenience of steam travel. Artists were drawn to visit, and they mainly traveled to North Africa, the Levant and Anatolia. Many developed respect and liking for the people and cultures they encountered. The term "Orientalist Art" was coined in 1893 in Paris, at the first Salon des Orientalistes, though the movement had been around since the middle of the century, and it continued until the 1930s. Despite critiques of Orientalism's relationship to colonialism, Orientalist paintings have become increasingly popular among Arab-world museums and private collectors.

In two other paintings among the nine by Dinet that Gabr has acquired, "Council in the Night," 1905, **TOP**, and "The Lookout," **ABOVE**, evoke both the wariness and commitment of Algerian men resisting French colonial occupation. Dinet's cultural engagement, Gabr wrote, afforded his Western viewers "a profound understanding of a culture so different from their own."

view of celebrations in the street below. Each face, dress and piece of jewelery is carefully observed and uniquely rendered.

Polly Sartori, director of Gallery 19C in Los Angeles, wrote that Dinet "always represented accurate, first-hand depictions of the secular and sacred culture of the region, especially his depictions of its inhabitants, who had become his neighbors."

"Dinet had the ability to enter the states of mind of both women and men," says Gabr. "In one of my paintings, 'The Night Dance,' you can see the faces of men watching the women dancing, not necessarily erotically, but each man reacting individually. One is holding his head, as though entranced. Another is coolly smoking a cigarette. It speaks volumes of emotion about what you can't see," says Gabr. In two other paintings in Gabr's collection, "Council in the Night" and "The Lookout," Dinet evokes the intensity of both fear and commitment of Algerian men resisting French occupation. His approach, Gabr wrote in his catalog, afforded Western viewers "not only a glimpse, but also a profound understanding of a culture so different from their own."

In the foreword to the comprehensive, large-format book, *The Shafik Gabr Collection*, Gabr elaborated on other Orientalist artists who were, like Dinet, "respectful onlookers." These include the prolific Scotsman David Roberts, who "chose to focus on our architectural treasures, such as the Pharaonic temples," as well as Belgian artist Émile Deckers, notable for his "in-depth depiction of the people and faces of North Africa, such as his expressive close-up portraits of Algerian men." The German painter Gustav Baurenfind painted himself into "A Street Scene, Damascus"

"The artist needs to have traveled ... witnessed the region, people and the culture."

—MOHAMED SHAFIK GABR

wearing a pith helmet, trying to sketch but attracting a small crowd. Even a camel is intrigued.

Other work that resonates today, Gabr says, includes Deutsch's "majestic palace guards," which Gabr counts among "interesting paintings in which people of color are honored," he says. Similarly, "The Black Maidservant," by Frenchman Jean-Léon Gérôme, is a "simple, unadorned but deeply sympathetic portrait," and Gérôme's "Napoleon and his General Staff in Egypt" is a poignant depiction of the French general—and the colonialism his invasion brought to Egypt—in retreat.

"I always choose paintings each of which must tell a story," says Gabr, in addition to qualities such as "attention to realism, detail and color." These come out in ceramic tiles in which Arabic calligraphically is

TOP American painter Frederick Arthur Bridgeman's luminous "Preparations for the Wedding," painted in Tunis circa 1885-86, is regarded as a stylistic bridge between neoclassical academicism and impressionism. **RIGHT** One of the later Orientalists, Jacques Majorelle, from 1917 not only focused on everyday life, as in "Souq El-Khemis" (Friday Market), but also showed a modernist fascination with color, pattern and texture. **OPPOSITE, TOP** Around 1887 Gustav Bauernfeind, who had trained as an architect, painted himself into the center of a gathering crowd in "A Street Scene, Damascus." **OPPOSITE, LEFT** Ludwig Deutsch's "A Gathering Around the Morning News, Cairo," from 1885, caught Gabr's attention because "clearly one of the group was literate, the others not. This is moving, this is life," he says. **OPPOSITE, RIGHT** In Max Bredt's "In a Courtyard, Tunis," afternoon heat is palpable on the sun-dappled wall as a seated servant works in the background.

rendered in faithful kufic style, ornate incense burners, rugs and carpets as well as clothes and embroidery. This attention to detail and near-photographic accuracy is characteristic of the empathetic ethnographic approach of Orientalist masters. "The subject matter needs to have been treated with genuine curiosity, compassion, and respect," says Gabr.

But "Orientalist art is more than superb examples of the painter's art," he says. "My collection has been carefully selected to contribute to the message I want to pass on…. The art of face-to-face engagement between East and West, of listening, looking, and learning—with the objective of understanding cultural, religious and ideological differences to allow for a better world by constructing bridges of understanding between all the peoples of this earth."

Each year The Gabr Fellowship accepts roughly 20 applicants, all young leaders in arts, sciences, law, media and entrepreneurship, and invites them to join

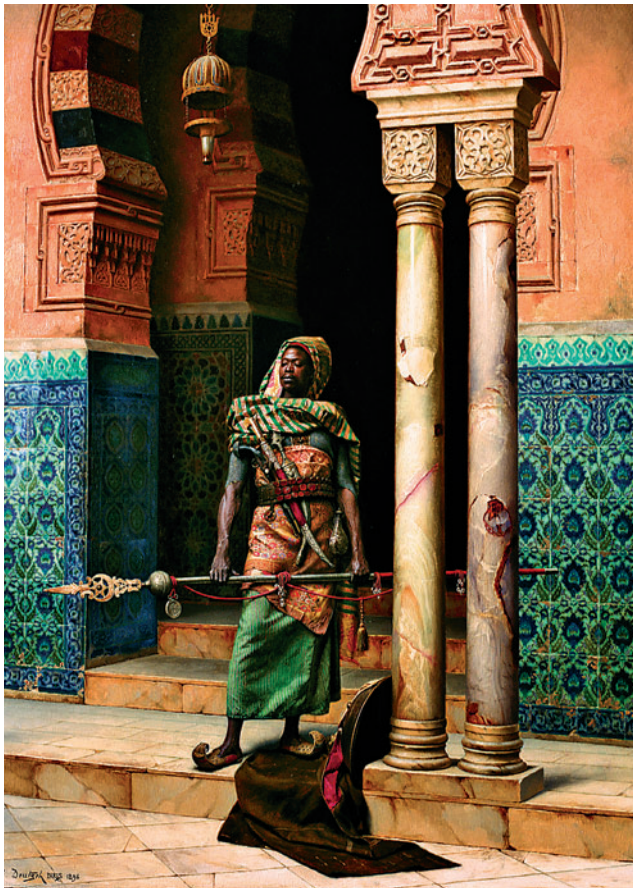
TOP Including a seemingly prosaic social gathering in a work of detailed historical fidelity, Carl Werner's "The Inner Propylaeum, Philae," was to Gabr a painting by a "respectful onlooker," as was David Roberts' 1843 "A General View of the Ruins of Luxor, from the Nile," **LEFT. LOWER** Widely regarded as the leading Orientalist of his generation, Jean-Léon Gérôme depicted countless scenes, from the fantastic to the ethnographic, such as "The Blue Mosque," circa 1870s, in which his rendering of the mosque's tilework is nearly photographic.

East-West: The Art of Dialogue, to "enhance critical understanding and cooperation amongst young emerging and entrepreneurial leaders in the Arab world and the West through global exchanges." The Gabr Fellows then meet for two-week visits to each of the US and Egypt, where they have met with staff of US President Barack Obama and leaders at top universities and businesses, including Yale University, Google, the US Chamber of Commerce and the *Huffington Post*. Visits in Egypt integrate historic and modern aspects of Cairo, Luxor and Alexandria. At each site, there is learning from local leaders, assessments of needs, brainstorming of ideas and face-to-face discussions. These culminate in a series of collaborative Action Projects that the Fellows carry out in the months that follow, thus both addressing regional needs and

"Listening, looking, and learning—with the objective of understanding … allow for a better world."

—MOHAMED SHAFIK GABR

TOP Émile Deckers was a Belgian Orientalist who, like Dinet, moved to Algeria, where he became noted for his portaiture, such as "Three Chieftains," 1937. **RIGHT** Fellow Belgian Edouard Verschaffelt also resided in Bou Saâda, where his sensitive impressionist portraits include "Young Girl with Red Scarf," who looks back at the painter with an unidealized gaze. **LOWER** Few women painted in the Orientalist style, but among them was Danish artist Elisabet Jerichau-Baumann, who traveled extensively and painted "An Egyptian Pottery Seller near Gizeh" in Cairo in 1876. "Strong-minded and puzzling," wrote historian Caroline Williams of the painting that today can appear poised between play to a male gaze and defiant pride.



The Shafik Gabr Collection holds a number of works its founder describes as "interesting paintings in which people of color are honored." These include Deutsch's "The Nubian Guard," from 1896, **LEFT**, and Gérôme's "simple, unadorned but deeply sympathetic" portrait "The Black Maidservant," from 1877, **RIGHT. TOP** Gérôme's "Napoleon and his General Staff in Egypt," from 1867, is also local in its point of view: The French general is shown in weary, shambolic retreat from his colonial venture. "I always choose paintings each of which must tell a story," says Gabr.

For the most recent edition of East-West: The Art of Dialogue, the 2022 Gabr Fellows met in October in Cairo for a dinner reception followed by two weeks in each of Cairo and Washington, D.C., for discussions, meetings with local leaders across industries and fields of expertise, and collaborative project planning.

fostering enduring cooperative relationships and friendships.

Looking back on her experience, 2017 Gabr Fellow Sarah Badr wrote, "I got involved in policy advocacy with a focus on humanitarian causes and gained confidence in public speaking. I became involved in the UN major group for children and youth, advocating for young migrants' rights in the MENA region. I was nominated to become an official spokesperson of the World Youth Forum, becoming the voice that represents millions of young people. If world peace can be established through global understanding, ultimately establishing acceptance of differences and bonding over similarities, then the Fellowship is succeeding at doing exactly that."

Amr Seda, also a 2017 Gabr Fellow, shared that "after the Fellowship, I felt encouraged and motivated to engage with similar activities outside my daily job, one of which was joining the organizing committee of the annual Youth Forum—one of the biggest in the world—that aims to bring youth together for the cause of world peace, which is a very similar mission to the Gabr Fellowship." In 2022, 4,000 young women and men from around the world came together "in meaningful dialogue about world peace, sustainability, and climate change."

"It breaks a lot of taboos," says Gabr. He recalls one session in Washington, D.C., when an American participant asked one of the Egyptian women Fellows what had impressed her about the experiences she was having. She answered that she had been afraid at first, saying "I'd never been to the West, and my English is not perfect. I thought that reading about what Muslims are being called, that I would be looked down on. I found that young American girls are facing some of the same challenges of having to meet deadlines at work, looking for a good husband, etc., that young women everywhere face." Gabr comments that this exchange, more than furthering her career, increased "her experience of well-being."

Each fellow is selected through a process that includes a written application and five interviews, two of which Gabr attends. "The fellowship is a transformative experience," says Gabr, and preference is given to applicants "who would not otherwise have such an experience. We look at the applicants, and what they can do for their country. A young Egyptian man who was extremely shy and introverted in the interview, finally opened his mouth, without my prodding him. Today, he is a member of a very distinguished think-tank in Egypt. I'll give you another example: A young man who participated came from a town in Virginia, USA, of only 600 people. And he had no interest in global issues, but after coming to Egypt, he became intrigued. After the Fellowship experience, he finished up teaching Egyptian history in his little town. Furthermore, a young woman from New Orleans was fascinated by Luxor and changed her entire career to become an Egyptologist in New Orleans."

> "It took Dinet and his colleagues time, effort and open minds, getting to know the people of the East in order to understand and depict them.... [This is] part of what inspired the launching of East-West: The Art of Dialogue."
>
> —MOHAMED SHAFIK GABR

Gabr goes back to Dinet's artistic legacy. "His paintings were part of what inspired the launching of East-West: The Art of Dialogue. It took Dinet and his colleagues time, effort and open minds, getting to know the people of the East in order to understand and depict them, thus creating and building a bridge between the East and West. I felt that in this face-to-screen rather than face-to-face age, it is more important than ever to put effort into really, truly getting to know one another."

Trained as a photographer, **Juliet Highet** lived in East and West Africa as well as India. In Nigeria she began writing and later edited magazines and books from the UK. Widely published on travel, the arts and culture, she is the author of *Frankincense: Oman's Gift to the World* (Prestel, 2006) and a specialist in traditional and contemporary Arab, African and South Asian cultures and heritage.

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Joumana El Zein Khoury's
WIDER LENS

For more than 15 years, Joumana El Zein Khoury has cultivated cultural exchange and fostered talent in the field of storytelling through her work leading organizations such as the Prince Claus Fund, the Lutfia Rabbani Foundation and the Baalbeck Festival. Since February 2021 El Zein Khoury has served as the executive director—and the first with Arab heritage—of the World Press Photo Foundation, an independent, nonprofit organization based in Amsterdam. Founded in 1955, World Press Photo has set standards that have guided photographers and audiences around the world through recognition of high-quality photographs and stories, through its prestigious annual contest as well as exhibits and educational programs that in 2022 alone numbered more than 80.

And El Zein Khoury isn't a photographer.

We sat with her over Zoom to discuss her upbringing, her influence on World Press Photo, and the importance of representation in visual media.

LEFT The opening of the World Press Photo Exhibition 2022 on November 4 at the Drik Gallery in Dhaka, Bangladesh, highlighted one of the Amsterdam-based photography foundation's six new regional partnerships. "By combining our activities we can make sure to more clearly see the stories and hear the voices from the region," says World Press Photo Executive Director Joumana El Zein Khoury, **ABOVE**.

HABIBUL HAQUE/DRIK (2)

Interview by **SARAH TAQVI**
and **JOHNNY HANSON**

Let's start by asking how you grew up and what drew you to the importance of cultural exchange.
I was born in 1975 when the Civil War in Lebanon had started. We left to Saudi Arabia, where we lived for almost 10 years, and since then, I've always been moving from place to place. We've lived in many countries, and every time I remember listening to my parents say, "This is the last year, next year we'll be back home." And so there was always this feeling over my head of waiting to go back to a place where I was part of to try to understand what was happening around me. And that's the guiding principle throughout all my life, trying to find my place, and through this, identity. I never had that space. I guess that that's why I was always attracted to different cultures. And today when someone asks me like, "Who are you?" I say I'm Lebanese in my resilience, French in my Cartesian way of thinking and Dutch in my directness. At the end of the day, why I have been on this quest of multiculturalism is because I was trying to find who I was.

Why do you think it's important for people to be culturally knowledgeable?
One quote I often come back to defines a relationship as change by exchanging, but without losing the essence of who you are. It's important to be able to experience other cultures because it's only by going out of that comfort zone that we're able to understand what humanity is all about. At World Press Photo, we're able to reach many people through social media, and also through the exhibitions. It's such a great experience to just see people visiting these exhibitions, especially the exhibitions outdoors. We were in Myanmar last year, and we were also exhibiting in Kigali. And just seeing how normal people who aren't maybe very used to going to museums or even so much into news interact with these images—and how they interact with the captions that we have. Because of course the captions are as important as the images. There was one woman in Myanmar, and she was looking at the images, and she just said having this exhibition in the outside public space shows that there's a change in Myanmar. Last year we had one winning photographer [who] covered the Afghanistan war. Of course we had tons of images of the planes, [people] getting off in the airport, etc., but what [the jury] chose to nominate as a winner was the story of a cinema in Kabul and how culture was also affected by this war. It's not only about how you interact with things that you don't know, but that you see in a multi-layered way.

Since you became director, you have brought in judges from more different backgrounds than World Press Photo has ever had. Do their viewpoints see things differently? How does that impact the contest and the public?
When I came in, there were a lot of the younger photographers who did not recognize themselves in [World Press Photo] anymore. When we looked and analyzed the numbers of who the winners were from our contest, we saw that,

El Zein Khoury leads a discussion during the World Press Photo exhibition opening together with Shahidul Alam, managing director of Drik Picture Library. "World Press Photo is a hugely respected entity in global photojournalism," says Alam. "Teaming up with them not only allows a synergy between these two impressive organizations but also signals a conscious move towards greater diversity and inclusion that photojournalism must embrace."

if you see that this is the range of all the winners, like 80 percent were coming from Europe and North America. The photographers were mostly men. And for me it was just not possible that we were called World Press Photo and we had that situation, but also we were very poor in terms of stories coming from Africa, stories coming from North, Central and Latin America, and also from Southeast Asia. I really needed to change that. The first thing that I did is I talked to a lot, a lot of people, over 300 people, and I told them, "Just tell me the good, the bad and the ugly." And everybody was ready for it. Then one day I was thinking, "What is the most global thing in the world? How does *football* make this work in an international way?" They do it through competitions that go from the ground and go up. And I thought "That's the solution." In that way we just changed the whole [process of the contest] upside down. It worked, and in such a way that in the first year, almost 80 percent of the photographers were local. We had 38 percent women. And you could see how the discussions in the regional juries were very different. Like in the African jury that was very activist—okay, we cannot have photographers who are depicting Africa in a stereotypical way. The regional juries did not make the final decisions, but they gave the top 20 or 30 stories to the global jury composed of the chairs of the regional juries. And for example every jury member was looking to the jury member for Africa, asking how important is it for *you* to have *this* image? To me it's a happy change. I see a difference.

> "It's about having local partners be our guides and how to navigate this in a context-sensitive manner."
>
> —JOUMANA EL ZEIN KHOURY

Do these changes reflect changes also in how photographers themselves are working for press or news or larger projects?

You see a change in photographers and how they take photos. We've rethought the whole organization this year—upgraded and changed our ethical code, for example, on how do you make a photo, what do you expect from the photographer in front of the subject, and how did the photographer depict or think or respect the subject. What was interesting with the 24 photographers who were all the winners was how dedicated they were to their subjects. I think about the photographer who won for the image of the grandmother who was crying her heart out in Greece in front of her burning house—that photographer had been covering wildfires in Greece for a very long time. So all of the subjects are very close to the photographers. Documentary photography is increasingly going towards [examining] how photographers are working, and that's why we also added not only more documentary photography, but also our "open format," which is looking at how are photographers also playing around with the images: Should it be styled like the press photographer per se, or the documentary photographer, or the documentary artistic photographer? It's three very different photographers somehow, but a lot of them are today interacting more and more [with their subjects].

What do you think was missing due to this historic underrepresentation?

Well first I thought that it was very constraining to have these all these [categories and] sub-themes like the spot news photo, the environment, and all of that. Some images could fit in three different themes, right? And for me that was just so superficial. I thought that it was more interesting to give freedom to the jury for them to say, "This year is a year where there have

been humongous environmental catastrophes around the world, and that's what we want to show through the World Press Photo." This is the kind of liberty that I wanted to give the jury. But of course, the jury is independent…. And maybe the next jury will be different, and we'll be showing different types of images.

Why did you decide to make visual storytelling such a center point of your own life?

Whenever I make presentations, I never speak about the general themes. I always give a story because when you give a story of one person, of how that person has been impacted by a certain thing, not only does that stay in your mind much longer, but you're able to relate to it much more quickly. And you don't forget it. And that's why maybe visual storytelling is what I've been closest to—and for sure the fact that I've been working with the Arab Image Foundation as one of my first jobs. I've been bottle-fed by it. There I was able to see very clearly how just through two images, you have two very different realities of what the region is all about: There was one image in the archive of the Arab Image Foundation where you have a French photographer who is taking an image of the pyramids and then with the camel and everything, and a stage. Then his assistant photographer, who was an Egyptian, is photographing on the back side showing the reality of how the photographer is staging the whole thing. When I see the visitors going through the [World Press Photo] exhibitions, you see how much time they spend and that they are very respectful and passionate. They come back, they want to see what have been the highlights of the past year. They take the time to sit and to listen and to read and to try and feel and understand. I feel that's precious, and it's easier to understand than painting or music. It speaks directly to your emotions in a way that other mediums don't.

> "You see a change in photographers and how they take photos. We've rethought the whole organization this year—upgraded and changed our ethical code, for example, on how do you make a photo, what do you expect from the photographer in front of the subject, and how did the photographer depict or think about or respect the subject."
>
> —JOUMANA EL ZEIN KHOURY

You have a reputation for leading progressive cultural change within organizations. How did you earn that?

I don't know if that's my reputation. I know my reputation is

A Drik curator makes final adjustments to the display of the World Press Photo award-winning visual story from Rehab Eldailil, a documentary photographer living in Cairo, Egypt. "The Longing of the Stranger Whose Path Has Been Broken" focused on the broad theme of identity, which she and her subjects explored through participatory creative practices that included not only photography but also multimedia, writing and embroidery.

HABIBUL HAQUE/DRIK (2)

ABOVE 2022 World Press Photo award winner Senthil Kumaran is a photographer from Madurai in southern India who has documented the relationships between humans and tigers, particularly around tiger reserves where the needs of human livelihoods intersect with those of tiger conservation. **LEFT** Ismail Ferdous is a Bangladeshi photographer and filmmaker based in New York who won a 2022 World Press Award for his stories of Latin American migrants working in US meatpacking factories during the COVID-19 pandemic.

what is called "the democratic dictator." That's true! I always say that I'm always for listening and listening to everyone, and for trying to be democratic. But at the end of the day, someone needs to be a dictator. I like to work in organizations that have a challenge. Maybe because I'm a mother of three, and then I come and I take them under me and make them flourish, and that's what makes me happy. So I'm a people's person. All of the organizations that I've chosen to work with have an impact and can have a big impact. What I like about the organizations that you mention is the way that they respect other cultures, not about imposing your own opinion or how you would do things or that because you're in the West, you do things better. It's about having local partners be our guides and how to navigate this in a context-sensitive manner. And that's why, going back to the regionalization at World Press Photo, that's so important to have regional partners who would know 100 times better than us how to do these things, and what is acceptable and what isn't.

Tell us your thoughts about cultural bridging.

I was lucky enough to work at organizations that had not

only a strong cultural bridging portfolio, but also philosophy. But definitely, cultural bridging, it's soft power, right? It's diplomatic, soft power. Today you see it more and more in all of the conflicts that are happening around the world now. And you see how culture is being used in a way in order to bring messages in a stronger way, in a more emotional manner. And I find that very powerful, like culture is a tool that has been underrated, that hasn't been given the importance that it should be given. If culture wasn't important, why do people die for it? And if culture wasn't something that was so powerful, why are people being imprisoned for it?

What is your outlook for the next five years for the Foundation? And what new initiatives and goals do you have in mind?

When we did our new vision, we finished it in July and then we needed to be ready with the contest in November. Now we have to get focused on the exhibitions, we have to get focused on the educational program. We're

Looking for the top photographs and photo stories of 2022 at World Press Photo's offices in Amsterdam, the jury was comprised of representatives of each of the six continental regions that nominated works: Africa, Asia, Europe, North and Central America, South America, and Southeast Asia and Oceania. "That's so important to have regional partners who would know 100 times better than us how to do these things, and what is acceptable and what isn't," says El Zein Khoury.

WORLD PRESS PHOTO (2); OPPOSITE, TOP: SENTHIL KUMARAN; LOWER: ISMAIL FERDOUS

TOP This photograph appears in a series titled "A Tale of Two Girls," by Deepti Asthana, a self-taught photographer based in Mumbai who won a 2022 World Press Photo 6x6 Global Talent Program award. The program spotlights six visual storytellers from the six global regions to highlight talent from around the world and present stories with diverse perspectives. **ABOVE** Photographer Nuits Balnéaires' "The Power of Alliances" tells a story rooted in tradition, culture and imagination from the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. The project received support from The West Africa Visual Journalism Fellowship, a World Press Photo Foundation education program that partners with others to support emerging talent and offer connections to the international community.

now working on having more exhibitions in different regions. We have an educational program that was mostly focused for photographers whom we would bring to Amsterdam and have them work there. But now we see that there are different needs for photographers especially in Africa and Latin America. The third biggest change is that we're just a small office of 30 people in Amsterdam working all over the world. And now what we're going to be doing is we're going to be having a regional partner in each region to help us have access to new networks of people of photographers, of audiences, but also help us think about and develop programs, especially educational programs, not only for the photographers but also for the audiences in order to be able to make it as context-sensitive as possible. What we don't speak about so much are about the captions, and for me, the caption and the image are just as important. We spend as much time on writing out the captions and researching the captions as on making sure that the camera or software filters are not manipulated. We have forensic experts for the photos in order to make sure that they're not manipulated. But then for the caption writing, we have the whole team of researchers who start off from the caption the photographer gives to us, but then asking, "Is this neutral enough?" So how do you explain that

ABOVE At the Metrography Gallery in 2021 in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq, young women visit the World Press Photo exhibition held there as one of the foundation's events worldwide. **LEFT** Photographer and video journalist Sodiq Adelakun Adekola, based in Abuja, Nigeria, leads a discussion at the 2022 Winners' Program in Amsterdam. He also participated in the World Press Photo expert talks online.

to such a wide audience in a way that is inclusive enough? And that's always a challenge.

Are photo contests still relevant? What role do they play, and specifically World Press Photo, in the general media landscape?

That's a tough question that I've been asking myself, like, "How relevant is it today to have a contest?" Basically, if I were me, Joumana, sitting here, having never been a photographer in my life, I will tell you it's not important. But when I see the photographers that have won World Press Photo, I see how important it is in two ways. For the photographers, the awards help them access different media around the world and have commissions, like a trademark saying World Press Photo. Then the public. We have over two million people who see this story online, and we have more than three million people who visit our [in-person] exhibitions all over the world. One person told me, "You just stop thinking of yourself as a contest organization, you're actually one of the biggest media organizations in the world." And when you think about it in that way, I thought that it was very important to make sure that we have a balanced showcasing of what is happening in the world with different storytellers and through different voices.

Sarah Taqvi is the assistant editor of *Aramco-World*, and **Johnny Hanson** is the magazine's digital media editor.

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SARTEP OTHMAN; OPPOSITE, TOP: DEEPTI ASTHANA; LOWER: NUITS BALNÉAIRES

A REVIVAL for EGYPT'S MAMLUK MINBARS

Written by

REBECCA ANNE PROCTOR

Photographed by

RICHARD DOUGHTY

On the ground floor of his workshop in a former palace amid the narrow streets of Darb al-Ahmar, one of the oldest districts in Cairo, Hasan Abu Zayd squints as he shaves slivers from one end of a thumb-sized rectangle of wood. He continues until the joint fits snugly into the lattice of octagons, hexagons and stars that splays out across his table. Fitted among more than 1,000 other pieces, it becomes part of one of the two side panels he is reconstructing for the 15th-century minbar, or stepped pulpit, that was stripped by thieves more than a decade ago from inside the nearby Mosque of Ghanim al-Bahlawan.

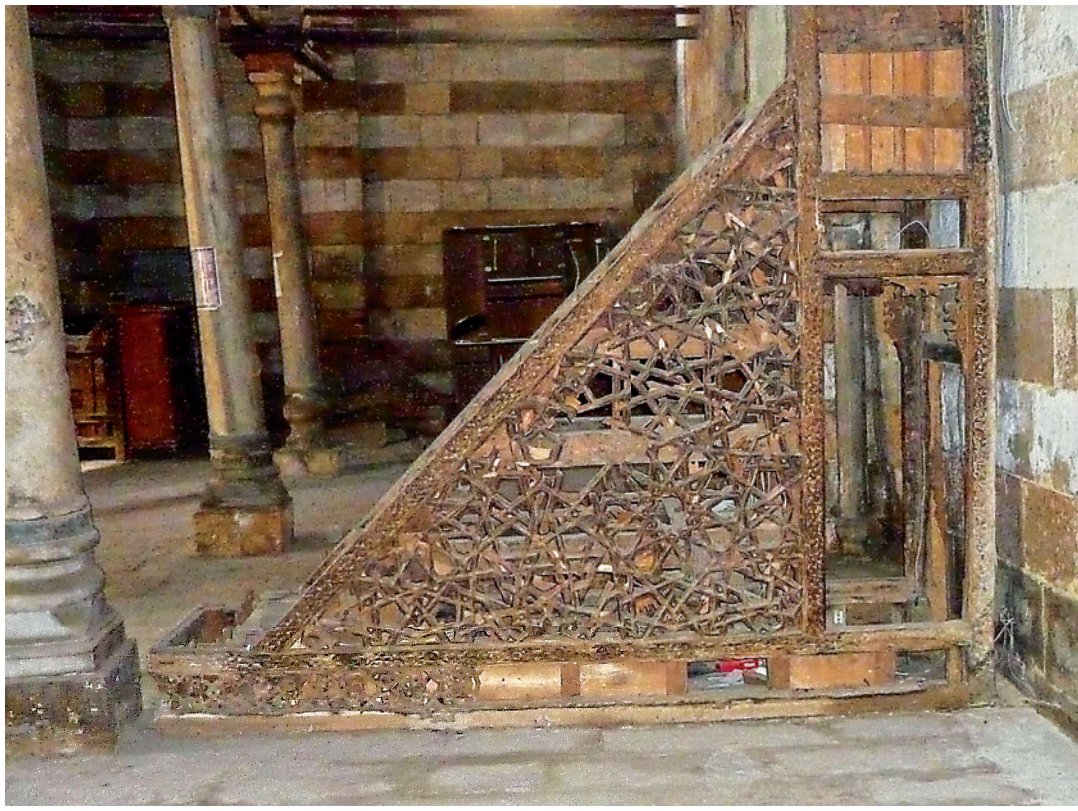
LEFT Mamluk-era minarets and domes dominate Cairo's historic Darb al-Ahmar district, where the mosques built under royal patronage often included some of the world's most intricate wooden minbars, or stepped pulpits. **OPPOSITE** Inside the Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh Complex, the masterpiece minbar, completed in 1417 CE, was partially looted in 2006 and again in 2011, but the pieces were recovered, and the minbar has been restored. **TOP** *Gameya* is the joinery technique practiced by Mamluk artisans that today master carpenter Hasan Abu Zayd uses in minbar restoration.

Now age 70, Abu Zayd is a master woodworker descended from a wood-crafting family that goes back at least five generations. He is also one of the only remaining masters of *gameya*, the joinery technique that artisans used to create dazzlingly intricate wooden patterns on doors, windows, walls and, most spectacularly, on minbars during Egypt's Mamluk period. This era lasted 267 years, from 1250 CE to 1517, and it has become known as a zenith of Egyptian Islamic arts and architecture. Sultan after sultan commissioned ever grander and more elaborate works in metal, stone, calligraphy, architecture and more. Among the resulting masterpieces, the wooden minbars are among the most elaborate of all.

In the art-collecting world, this has not gone unnoticed. Nearly every major collection of Islamic art has acquired, at one time or another, a piece of an Egyptian Mamluk minbar. Various parts of minbars can be found

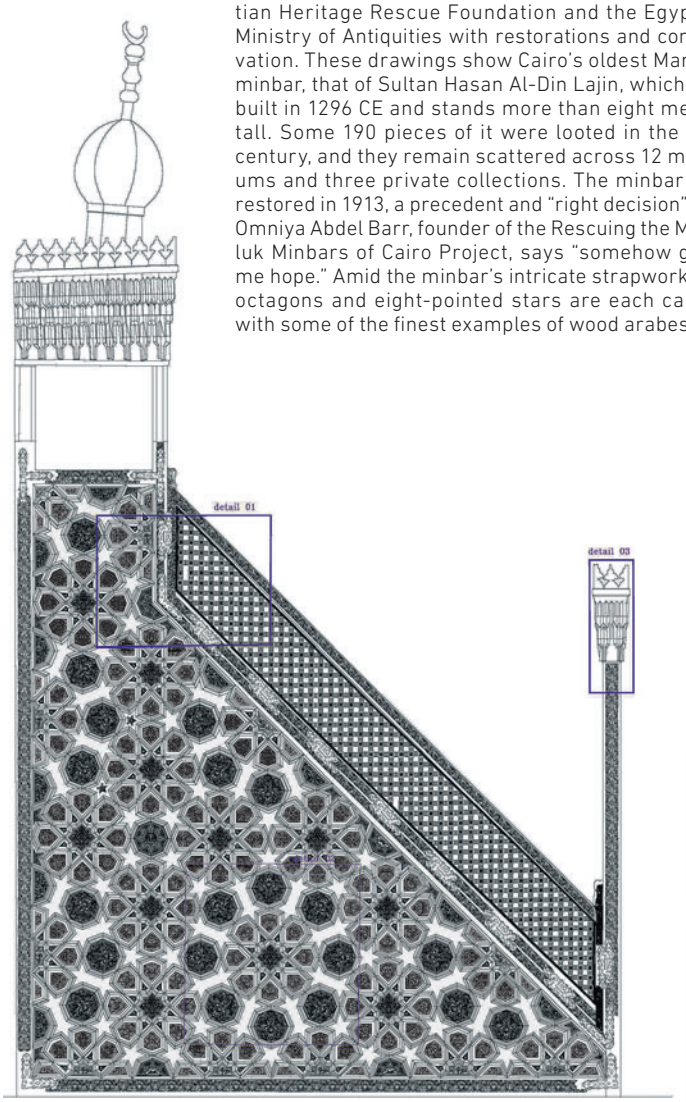
What are MINBARS?

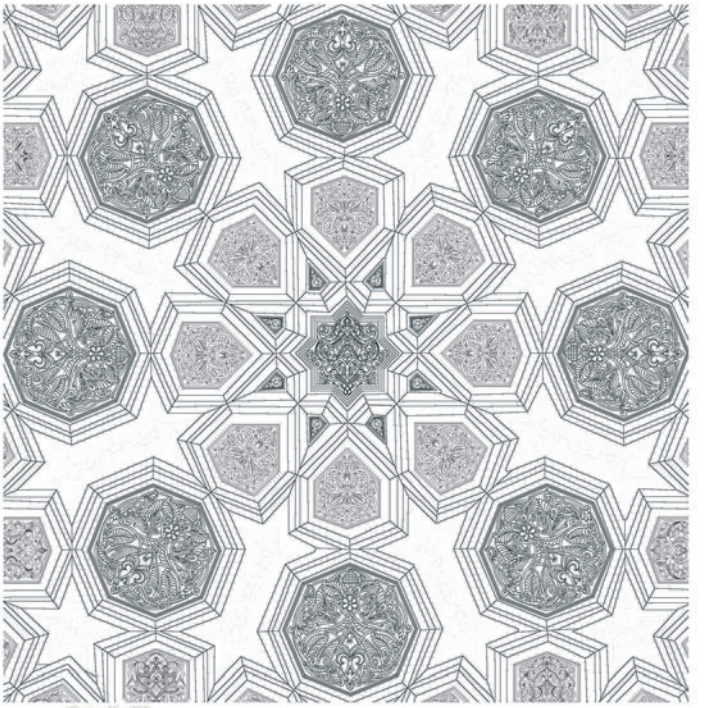
Found in mosques throughout the world, minbars are stepped pulpits placed to the worshiper's right of the mihrab, the prayer niche that indicates the direction to Makkah, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam's holiest city. Ascending the steps to the top of the minbar, the imam, or prayer leader, stands to deliver his weekly khutba, or sermon. The design comes from the story of the raised structure from which the Prophet preached, next to the trunk of a palm tree, until he ordered a raised seat with two steps be made: This became the first recorded minbar, in 629 CE, in Madinah.

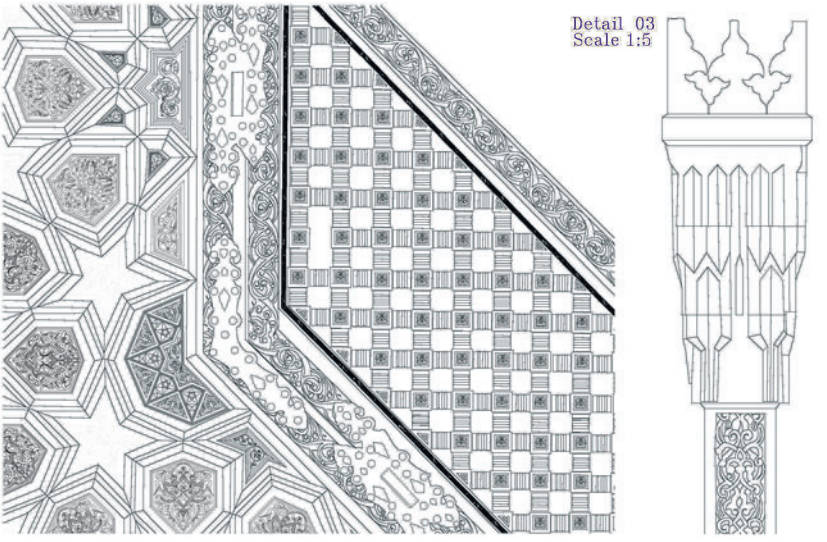


RIGHT In 2008 the minbar of the Madrasa of Ganim al-Bahlawan was stripped by thieves. Abu Zayd, **LOWER LEFT**, shows a piece of joinery to visitors while Abdelrahman Aboulfadi, apprentice and recent graduate of Cairo's Jameel School of Traditional Arts, prepares another piece of what will become one of the minbar's restored side panels. **LOWER RIGHT** Abu Zayd's plans come from his study of photographs of the original minbars—when available—and five generations of family craft.

Architectural drawings of each minbar help the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation and the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities with restorations and conservation. These drawings show Cairo's oldest Mamluk minbar, that of Sultan Hasan Al-Din Lajin, which was built in 1296 CE and stands more than eight meters tall. Some 190 pieces of it were looted in the 19th century, and they remain scattered across 12 museums and three private collections. The minbar was restored in 1913, a precedent and "right decision" that Omniya Abdel Barr, founder of the Rescuing the Mamluk Minbars of Cairo Project, says "somehow gives me hope." Amid the minbar's intricate strapwork, the octagons and eight-pointed stars are each carved with some of the finest examples of wood arabesque.







ABOVE AND OPPOSITE, TOP: EGYPTIAN HERITAGE RESCUE FOUNDATION

in London at the British Museum, and in 1867 what would become the Victoria and Albert Museum purchased a whole minbar commissioned in the late 15th century by Sultan Al-Ashraf Qaytbay, and it has been on display there ever since. Panels from the minbar of Sultan Lajin, created in 1296 for the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, are dispersed among 12 museums and three private collections.

"The skill used to carve the woodwork on these minbars is extraordinary," says Venetia Porter, curator of Islamic and Contemporary Middle East Art at the British Museum. "These Mamluk minbars are monuments filled with history. Every time you walk into a mosque with one of the Mamluk minbars, you feel the weight of Mamluk history. Each one was commissioned by a sultan, or a patron, and they found the best people to do them. That's why the craftsmanship on them is so extraordinary."

> "Minbars are like your crown jewel pieces of a mosque."
>
> —OMNIYA ABDEL BARR

Made from both local and imported wood, the minbars range in height from five to eight meters. Every surface is ornamented with geometric and vegetal patterns set in finely carved and assembled panels featuring polygons, stars and interwoven strapwork, the dark wood often contrasting with delicate inlays using slivers of ivory, ebony, mother-of-pearl, camel bone and more, as well as calligraphy. While a few minbars of the era were made using polychrome marble for their patterns, the great majority are made of wood.

Watching Abu Zayd are Abdelrahman Aboulfadi, 29, and Alyaa Gamal, 27. They address him as "Usta Hasan" (Master Hasan) or, in less

formal moments, "Am Hasan" (Uncle Hasan). Both are recent graduates from Cairo's Jameel School of Traditional Arts, and they are now apprentices. It's a relationship Abu Zayd finds familiar.

"I began watching my father and grandfather work on the gameya Arabic joinery technique as a child," remarks Abu Zayd. "It can take a day or days just to make the drawings. Students must have patience and talent to persevere. You need to study for at least one year. Through this work we are continuing a tradition and preserving a legacy."

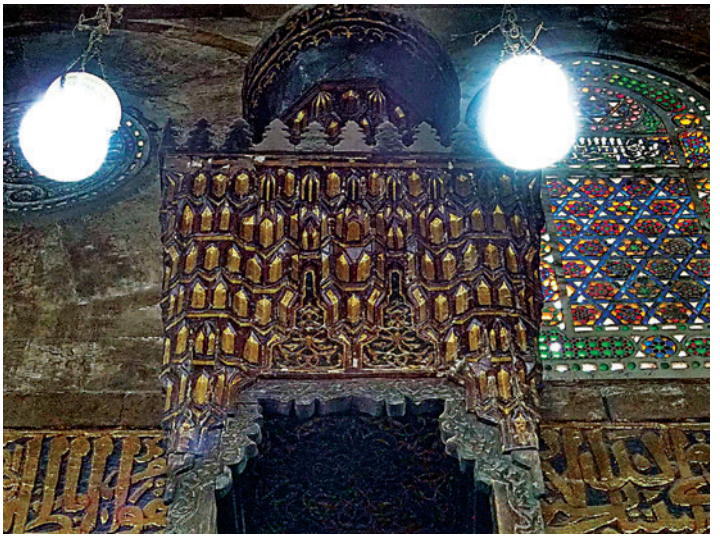
The minbar of the mosque of Ghanim al-Bahlawan is one of four that the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation (EHRF) has helped to reconstruct as part of its Rescuing the Mamluk Minbars of Cairo Project, which launched in 2018 and concluded two years later. The minbar project was the brainchild of architect and Islamic art specialist Omniya Abdel Barr, Ph.D., who received support from EHRF, founded in 2013 to safeguard and promote Egyptian cultural heritage, to implement the project in partnership with Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The project was funded by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund in partnership with the Department of Culture Media and Sports. It documented 44 minbars, mostly in the Cairo area, 43 from the Mamluk period and one from the earlier Fatimid period. These are, Abdel Barr points out, living masterpieces that are still used for Friday sermons.

"Minbars are like your crown jewel pieces of a mosque, but they aren't well documented," says Abdel Barr. "You need to hire the best of the best to work on them because they are very intricate objects, very delicate, sophisticated and valuable."

Eleven of the 44 minbars, she explains, received "first aid for emergency interventions" to repair damages due to centuries of wear and thefts of various pieces large and small. This work involved analyses of the contexts of damages, risk assessments of each minbar's security against future thefts, and stabilization to preserve the affected minbars. Another 25 received "mitigation," meaning action to prevent further damage such as removals of electrical wiring that could pose a risk of fire. Four minbars required full restorations. From documentation to restoration, most of the work was carried out by a team of 75 local volunteers. After the project ended in March 2020, Abdel Barr and her team worked for the next year under the title of the Mamluk Heritage Project, in which the team identified and documented other architectural elements in Cairo's historic mosques that could be at risk of theft or damage.

"Omniya is preserving this crucial historical moment in time for future generations, and that is fundamental to Arab world history," says Porter.

For all of the minbars, conservation involved cleaning, such as that applied to minbar of Qadi Yahya Zayn al-Din, **ABOVE**. For others it also meant structural repairs. **RIGHT** Omniya Abdel Barr, Ph.D., founded EHRF's Rescuing the Mamluk Minbars of Cairo Project in 2018, which enlisted some 75 volunteers and professionals. "The team proceeded with love and passion," she says. "They felt that by removing the dust they were bringing an object back to its former glory."



OPPOSITE (2): EGYPTIAN HERITAGE RESCUE FOUNDATION

> Of the 44 minbars EHRF documented, 13 had been affected by theft, 25 required conservation, and four needed full restorations.

Minbars are prominent elements of mosques worldwide, from simple ones to other masterworks, such as the 12th-century minbar of Salah al-Din, made in Aleppo, Syria, and moved to al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem following his conquest of the city in 1187 CE. In 1969 the minbar was destroyed by arson, and it took until 2007 to reconstruct it. Similarly, the 12th-century minbar of the Kutubiyah Mosque in Marrakesh, Morocco, has been estimated to comprise some 1.3 million wooden pieces. In Cairo, some of the most historically important minbars are those in the mosques of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay (1474 CE), al-Salih Tala'i (1160 CE) and Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (1421 CE).

To assure better protection for several of the most valuable minbars, Abdel Barr says her team surrounded them with protective glass walls—like large museum exhibit cases—with locked doors that allowed the mosque's imam (prayer leader) to continue to use them. "When we are not 100 percent sure if we can protect these precious elements, we add a layer of protection to the most vulnerable and beautiful minbars," explains Abdel Barr.

The project faced formidable challenges. "We were working in very dark, dusty spaces—in not the best working conditions," says Abdel Barr. "The team proceeded with love and passion. They felt that by removing the dust they were bringing an object back to its former glory." After restoration and cleaning, they now glisten, radiant with their meticulous craftsmanship, much as they would have centuries ago.

Barr says she's particularly fond of the minbar commissioned by Sultan Lajin in 1296 CE during his restorations of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, which in Lajin's time was already more than 400 years old. This is a minbar whose octagons, pentagons and connecting stars are each carved with intricate, interwoven vegetal designs in a decorative scheme that "shows the connection with previous minbars made by the Fatimids and the Ayyubids, especially the minbar of al-Aqsa," explains Abdel Barr. "It shows the experience

Every element of the minbars is ornamented. Many have at their top a crown-like globe, such as this at **TOP** from the Mosque-Madrasa of El-Ghuri, where the patterns are carved on the spherical surface. At the top of the steps, the platform where the imam stands to speak is often covered with a cupola of stalactite-like muqarnas, such as this one **ABOVE** from the Mosque of Amir Qimas al-Ishaqi, built between 1479 and 1482. At the front of the minbar are doors, **LEFT**, shown here also from the Mosque-Madrasa of El-Ghuri.

added in the craftsmanship and the development of the geometry."

This is also the minbar from which panels are now housed in at least 12 international collections, including the V&A and the Louvre, the result of gradual stripping that took place in the late 19th century and even then raised conservation concerns.

"It took the Committee for the Conservation of the Monuments of Arab Art, which was established in 1881, 30 years to take the right decision to restore it a century ago, from 1913 to 1914," she says. "This somehow gives me hope."

While the minbar of Sultan Lajin illustrates how Cairo's Mamluk minbars have been at risk of thefts for a long time—much like Egypt's archeological sites—the problem spiked in the wake of the instability that followed the popular uprisings of 2011 in

The minbar of the Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, **RIGHT**, recently had four pieces stolen from its right side, and to deter further theft, it is one of several minbars EHRF has put behind glass. **LOWER, LEFT TO OPPOSITE RIGHT** This seven-point star, inlaid with ivory arabesque, made possible a design transition from a six- or 12-point pattern to an eight-point one. This muqarnas above a minbar door is missing several pieces at the bottom. This 12-point star was made radiant through interwoven ivory strapwork and a swirling central arabesque. This balustrade is made of mashrabiya, or turned-wood lattice. Counting the points of stars and tracing patterns on the minbar at the Mosque of El-Ghuri.

Cairo. Historic buildings, cultural institutions, archeological sites and museums all became targets of vandals and looters, many aiming to profit by sales. To Abdel Barr, it was as if sites of pride and identity were being wounded, disfigured.

As early as 2012, EHRF began documenting thefts in monuments and historic buildings in medieval Cairo, but often, lack of documentation made it difficult to prove whether a theft had taken place or if the minbar had been damaged over time due to mere neglect. This inspired EHRF's work documenting the state of all the minbars in Egypt: a full set of architectural drawings and a photographic catalog for each one.

"Most of these attacks targeted minbars," says Barr. Thirteen were affected by partial or total losses, she says. Attackers were lured not only by the meticulous woodwork but also by the wood's relatively light weight and the small size of individual pieces that, if detached, could be slipped into a bag or even a pocket. This appears to have happened to the minbar at the Mosque of Al-Salih Tala'i, which lost panels on the lower corner of its right side. Though they have been replaced, the replicas lack the intricate ivory and bone decoration found elsewhere on the minbar. At the Mosque of Amir Qanibay Al-Rammah, built in 1503-1504 CE and overlooking the *midan* or plaza of Cairo's Citadel, the minbar was stolen in its entirety.

> "Mamluk minbars represent a very important era of Islamic Egypt.... It is crucial that we preserve them for future generations."
>
> —OSAMA TALAAT, EGYPTIAN SUPREME COUNCIL OF ANTIQUITIES

Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities acknowledges the value of the minbars, but with the country's tourism economy overwhelmingly pegged to Pharaonic-era sites and monuments, it does not allocate funds for this facet of Egypt's vast heritage. In 2017, however, a Mamluk minbar was included in the displays at The National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, which opened that year. Its presence serves as a testament to the importance of the minbar craft, and of artisanal woodworking in general.

"Mamluk minbars represent a very important era of Islamic Egypt," says Osama Talaat, who heads the Islamic Antiquities Sector in the Supreme Council of Antiquities. "Minbars are one of the main components of mosques and ritual schools. During Friday prayers, the imam uses these minbars to speak to Muslims. Fortunately, we have over 200 mosques and ritual schools from the Mamluk era [in Egypt], and many of them still have the original minbars. It is crucial that we preserve them for future generations."

This also means preventing the circulation and sale of illicitly obtained minbar pieces. "The looters of these minbars knew their value," says Abdel Barr.

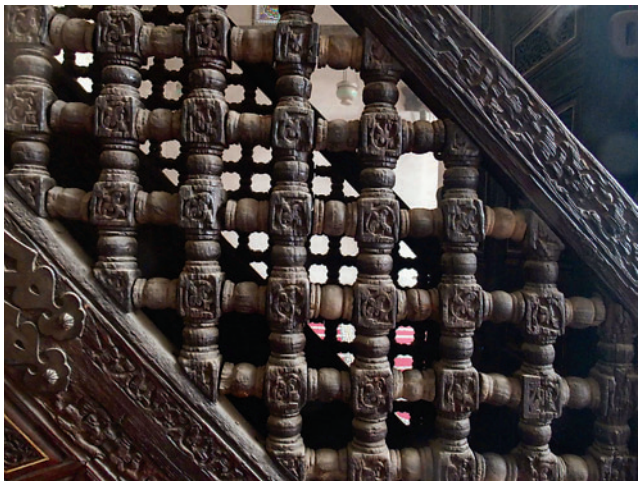
According to research by Maria Magdalena Gajewska, a doctoral student at Cambridge University's Department of Middle Eastern Studies who is specializing in Islamic archeology and material culture, the prices of Mamluk minbar pieces have varied from under approximately $1,750 for a single panel to more than $1 million for a complete door.

She also found that over the two decades between 2000 and 2019, out of 53 lots of Mamluk wooden panels—comprising mostly minbar panels—auctioned at the leading houses of Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams, more than half had no disclosed provenance.

While it is illegal to remove antiquities from Egypt, prosecution is difficult. This led to another role for EHRF's documentation: proving where a piece came from and when it was *in situ* or in its place of origin.

"The database allows us to document not just minbars but other objects, too, and it is shared with Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities," explains Abdel Barr. "This is a very important resource that allows us to identify any object whenever it appears on the art market and to know its provenance or where it is coming from."

"Omniya's work is crucial in raising awareness of the issue, as well as the public's appreciation of Mamluk art and in particular of minbar panels," says Gajewska. "This is important especially in a country like Egypt, where the focus on ancient antiquities



The DESIGN *Hub*

Launched in 2020 by the EHRF design team at the end of the Rescuing the Mamluk Minbars of Cairo Project, the Design Hub encourages the creation of contemporary design objects inspired by Cairo heritage. Based at the historic Bayt al-Razzaz palace, 14 design professionals gathered and, over the following months, took inspiration from nine Mamluk minbars to produce the group's first collection, comprised of furniture items, home accessories and fabrics. The group is working on its second collection.

has meant that there is not much public outcry about the looting of medieval pieces, or indeed much awareness of their existence outside of specialized circles."

The best way the market can assist in raising awareness of the importance of the minbars and their upkeep, stresses Gajewska, is by performing due diligence, erring on the side of caution when provenance is uncertain and consulting experts such as Abdel Barr and her team.

"EHRF is raising consciousness about the importance of the minbars, their heritage and the way they have been brought onto the market," adds Porter.

Islamic art specialists agree that the goal is not to lessen the demand for Mamluk antiquities—in fact, Abdel Barr and EHRF, by reviving and documenting Egypt's minbars, may be helping raise their market value and prestige—but to ensure that antiquities are acquired legally.

As Aboulfadi and Gamal watch Abu Zayd's every move, they are using their skills not only to help restore Mamluk architecture, but also to create contemporary design objects with traditional techniques and motifs. In 2020 Abdel Barr and her colleagues set up a collaboration with more than a dozen young Egyptian artisans called The

Among the Design Hub's inaugural collection were, **TOP**, "Muzhir Tea Box," by Nesreen Sharara, who used materials and a pattern inspired by the minbar of Abu Bakr Mazhar (see **OPPOSITE, LOWER**). "Lajin Tray," **ABOVE**, by Hana al-Masry, uses a star and arabesque from the minbar of Sultan Lajin. **RIGHT** *Tuhfajji* (traditional carpenter) Sabry Saber made "Mu'ayyad Table" with a 12-point design found along the balustrade of the minbar of Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh.

In 2019 EHRF helped sponsor a workshop for children and youth in Alexandria, Egypt, in which minbar patterns inspired kite designs. **LOWER** The minbar of the Mosque of Abu Bakr bin Mazhar was built in 1480 out of ebony and mahogany. In 2018 it was moved from the mosque of its founder to become part of the permanent display at Cairo's Museum of Egyptian Civilization, where it represents the heritage of Mamluk woodcraft.

Design Hub. From tea boxes to tiles, clothing, dishware, furniture and more, their creations reverberate with the same beauty and energy found on Mamluk heritage items.

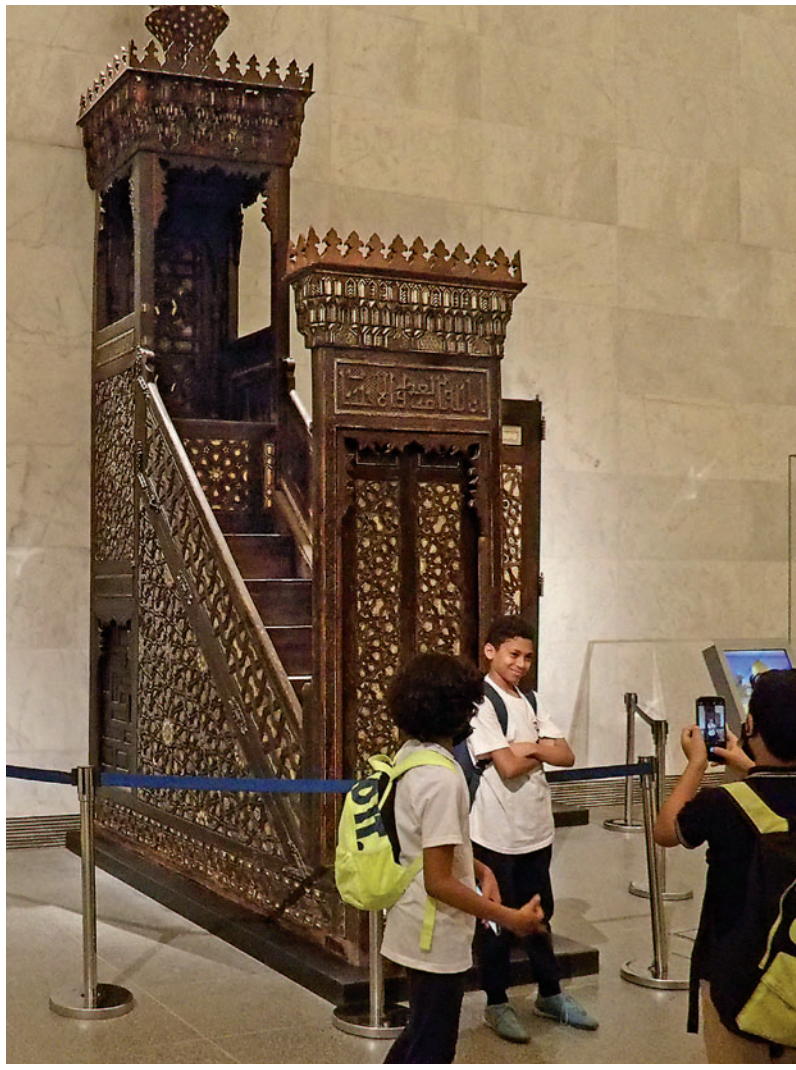
"I love sculpture and geometry, and I found my true passion working with wood, especially joinery technique, as I found it is like problem-solving using logic and adding details to any piece through carving and inlay," explains Gamal.

For her graduation project last year, Gamal created a prototype for a joinery panel, and she documented the steps to its creation, including trials and errors, as a kind of living guidebook for future students. Now she tutors students in joinery at the Jameel center while also apprenticing with Abu Zayd.

"I love analyzing all of his samples, drawing them again and making some of them," muses Gamal, who this year traveled to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to teach a wood workshop there at the Prince's School of Traditional Arts.

For Abdel Barr, there remain more minbars she would like to see restored, such as the minbar of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay in his 1474 CE funerary complex in Cairo's northern cemetery. But it is on hold until Abdel Barr secures further funding and arranges the artisans.

"We have realized the lack of expertise in the field of woodwork and are trying to think of how we can create a new generation of makers who can assist us with the conservation," says Abdel Barr. "There are other minbars that are awaiting help."



Rebecca Anne Proctor (@rebeccaanneproctor) is an independent journalist, editor and broadcaster based between Dubai and Rome. She is a former editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar Art* and *Harper's Bazaar Interiors*. **Richard Doughty** (@richardedoughty) is editor of *AramcoWorld*, and he holds a master's degree in photojournalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

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TOP AND OPPOSITE (3): EGYPTIAN HERITAGE RESCUE FOUNDATION

1 INGENUITY • INNOVATION •

KOHL

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Written by LEE LAWRENCE

Could one of the oldest and most popular eyeliners have precipitated a world-changing innovation in chemistry? Philippe Walter, founder and director of Sorbonne University's Laboratoire d'Archéologie Moléculaire et Structurale, says yes, this is exactly what happened some 4,000 years ago.

Ever since then, particularly in parts of North Africa and West and South Asia, kohl has been in continuous use. Today it can be found just about everywhere, but until relatively recently, nobody understood the innovation that went into the making of kohl nor the extent of the cosmetic's therapeutic effects.

The Arabic term *kohl*—known as *kuul* in the Horn of Africa, *kajal* in South Asia, *sormeh* in Persia—today denotes the eyeliner that Egyptians, around 2000 BCE, called *mesdemet*, a word that meant, "mineral powder to render the eye expressive," says Walter. And not just in terms of beauty or personal expression: Mesdemet conferred upon its wearer the eye of Horus, the god whose properties included protection,

healing and wholeness. We may consider King Tutankamun's kohl-lined eyes regal, but to his fellow Egyptians, mesdemet made them "emanations of the god's eyes," as Walter puts it.

Today, kohl carries a wisp of this old meaning in such practices as applying a bit of kohl on children to protect them from the evil eye. Kohl also retains some of its associations to health, as when men and women use it to reduce the hazards of sun glare. A 2009 paper from the Department of Pharmaceuticals at the University of Karachi, Pakistan, confirmed that when the shiny mineral particles found in Egyptian kohl mingle with the watery film that covers the cornea, they help protect the eye from ultraviolet rays. Mostly, however, kohl is now used for beauty. To women, performers and their makeup artists worldwide, kohl is one of the most versatile tools in their kits, allowing them to create pretty much any kind of look they can dream up: You name it, someone somewhere has "kohled" it.

The traditional way to use kohl has changed little over the millennia. Dip a stick-like applicator into kohl powder, and then place it along the inside of the lower eyelid or water line. Squeeze the eye shut, and pull the applicator out toward the temple, thus coating the inner rim. Egyptians were also the first to mix powdered kohl with oil and other emollients. They then used the applicator more like a palette knife to outline the exterior contours of the eyes, varying the coverage area, shape and line to whim, fashion or need. Present-day kohls tend to be both silkier and more smudgy than other types of eyeliners, and just as mesdemet did in Egypt, today's kohls come in many different varieties.

Archeologist Jolanda Bos, author of *Paint it, Black: A biography of kohl containers*, points out that hieroglyphics on some Egyptian cosmetic containers describe their contents and can even seem to promote them. These vary from "this is very good kohl of such-and-such quality," she says, to naming what appear to be ingredients, many of which remain uncertain.

But to Bos, the containers speak volumes about daily life, particularly the "little reed containers." Simple, made of an easily available material and therefore cheap, Bos says, they served as "single-use packages for kohl that you take home and you empty out in your own beautiful glass container" or, if you could not afford glass, use as is. "I realized there's a whole economy behind kohl," she says, from the procurement of materials to the development of formulas to promoting and selling different mixtures with words like, "very good quality" or "a kohl you have to apply in summer."

So what was mesdemet made from? For a long time, many thought it was primarily soot, along with finely ground minerals, often believed to be stibnite, a natural mineral source of the chemical element antimony. But in the late 1800s, Egyptologists found that the metal most commonly used in kohl was lead, which today rings public-health alarm bells. Subsequent

Kohl was used extensively by both men and women in Egypt from around 2000 BCE, when the cosmetic was called *mesdemet* and it was associated with the protective eye of the god Horus. Its color varied from green—as on the 1375 BCE gilded sarcophagus of Tjuyu, **OPPOSITE**, to the near-black that appears, **LOWER LEFT**, on the 14th-century-BCE wooden bust of child-king Tutankhamen. Kohl was one of several cosmetics known in Egypt, as witnessed by a royal make-up kit, **LOWER RIGHT**, and a finely polished kohl jar, made of obsidian with a gold-rimmed lid, **OPPOSITE, LOWER. RIGHT** Kohl has remained popular ever since, and artist Kees van Dongen's 1919 portrait "The Corn Poppy," showing a kohl-eyed model wearing a bright hat, is one of the Dutch artist's most popular paintings.

TOP RIGHT: MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES; LEFT: EGYPTIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES; RIGHT: BRIDGEMAN IMAGES; OPPOSITE, TOP: DEAGOSTINI / GETTY IMAGES

Portable kohl tubes came in countless varieties over centuries in Egypt. **LEFT TO RIGHT** An octagonal tube with ivory base and lid included wire loops to hold the applicator stick. A tube from Nubia (today southern Egypt and northern Sudan) is made with ivory columns and inlays. Blue "feathered" glass, produced in the 13th-11th centuries BCE, makes this tube shaped to resemble a palm trunk. **LOWER** More everyday kohl pots were often made of plain clay. Traces of kohl that remain in tubes and pots have allowed extensive chemical analyses of the cosmetic.

studies showed that most frequently, the lead came from galena, an ore that Egyptians ground to a fine, shimmering powder. Mixed with a variety of other inorganic as well as organic substances including plant-based soot, it created varied hues of grays and blacks. Kohls today are as diverse a mix as then, with many mixing in minerals, oxides, carbonates as well as, still, lead.

This makes Walter's research all the more eye-opening. In the late 1990s, as a young researcher of restoration science at the Louvre, he became fascinated by the magical powers Egyptian texts ascribed to kohl. The Louvre's collections held plenty of samples to study: dozens of cosmetic containers, some still filled with kohl, others with remnants, all dated between 2000 BCE and 1200 BCE. "Nobody had studied this since the 1950s," he says. "I thought, 'We have better equipment now, so maybe we'll gain a new understanding.' And I was not disappointed."

Most of the 50-or-so samples analyzed by the team contained two minerals that "only form under very particular geological conditions" and thus "very rarely occur naturally," says Walter. They are called laurionite and phosgenite, and their presence in sample after sample could only mean one thing: They had been manufactured.

Though no Egyptian description of the process has been found, some descriptions appear in first-century-CE writings by Pliny the Elder and in Dioscoridis' *De Materia Medica*. The procedure involved immersing a natural lead oxide found on galena in water and monitoring the water's salinity for some 40 days. When Walter and his team did this in the lab, the precipitate was none other than laurionite. When they started off with natron, a powdery sodium carbonate used in mummification, the result was phosgenite.

"Fire-based technology has been used to manufacture Egyptian blue pigments since about 2500 BC," their study concluded. "We have now shown that wet chemistry was used as long ago

Kohl was so popular that it came to define the way the human eye was depicted in Egypt for nearly 2,000 years. At **RIGHT**, a canopic jar with a panel of hierolyphs on the front. **FAR RIGHT** Two women appear in this fresco detail removed from a tomb in Thebes. **LOWER RIGHT** The painting on this rectangular wooden coffin has mostly faded, but the protective, kohl-lined eyes of Horus endure.

as 2000 BC." This was a discovery: Instead of using heat to trigger a chemical reaction, Egyptian chemists had figured out how to induce reactions using water. This technique has proven fundamental to science ever since.

But what would have prompted Egyptians to try doing it at all? And even after learning how to do it, why would they have invested so much time and effort in creating these particular ingredients for a cosmetic? Walter points to the environment and kohl's medicinal use.

Every year, the Nile flooded, flowing not only into the fields of the Nile Valley but also into bodies of water such as the saline lakes of Wadi El Natrun. The resulting annual, natural chemical interactions between the saline water and the lakebed's limestone offered opportunity to observe and imitate nature, explains Walter.

Egypt also was known far and wide for its expertise in treating eye ailments, and multiple studies have shown that kohl was part of Egyptians' medical kit. A 2009 collaboration between Walter and fellow French chemist Christian Amatore, at the time a professor at Centre national de la recherche scientifique, uncovered an astonishing property in this cosmetic. Their study used microelectrodes to investigate biological mechanisms at the cellular level, a technique Amatore had pioneered.

Testing the synthesized chlorides found in kohls, they found them "ever so slightly soluble in the fluid of the eye," Walter says. As a result, "the cells of the eye were not poisoned or killed by the presence of lead." Further testing of the laurionite showed that its very low concentration of lead also tricked the body's immune system into dispatching bacteria-fighting macrophages and phagocytes. This equipped the kohl-user's eyes with defenses against bacterial infections.

> Instead of using heat to trigger a chemical reaction, Egyptian chemists making kohl learned to induce reactions using water.

When people noticed that using kohls with laurionite led to healthier eyes, Walter speculates, that spurred production. Such empirical observation would also explain why some kohl containers specify the times of year for which a particular kohl is best suited.

"And that means they had an extraordinarily well-developed pharmacopeia," says Walter. It included a preventive medicine and immunotherapy, not to mention one of the earliest windows into the workings of the eye—a subject we will look into more in the next installment of the Ingenuity and Innovations series.

Based in Brooklyn, New York, **Lee Lawrence** (leeadairlawrence.com) writes frequently on Islamic and Asian art for *The Wall Street Journal* and cultural affairs for *The Christian Science Monitor*.

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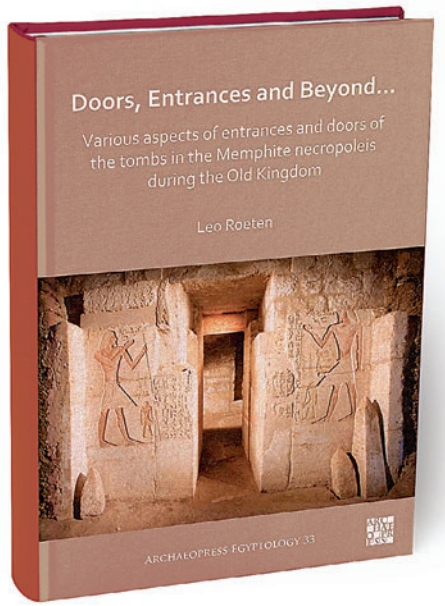
REVIEWS



"After the funeral, the monument became the focus of its second, and in fact its most important, function: acting as the daily stage for the 'eternal' mortuary rituals, a recurrent offering ritual, necessary for the sustenance of the *k3* [life-force] of the deceased."

—From *Doors, Entrances and Beyond ...*

Doors, Entrances and Beyond ...: Various Aspects of Entrances and Doors of the Tombs in the Memphite Necropoleis During the Old Kingdom

Leo Roeten. Archaeopress Publishing, Ltd, 2021.

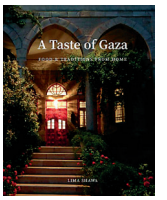
In this second book on how Egyptians of the Old Kingdom perceived and interacted with the dead, Egyptologist Leo Roeten explores the layout, purpose and meaning of the different parts of tombs from the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth dynasties, specifically in the necropolises of Giza, Saqqara and Abusir. From doors being both practical necessities required for priests and family to access a royal mortuary complex, as well as symbolic liminal spaces between the land of the dead and that of the living, to the choice of a funerary chapel's decoration being a reflection of the occupant's life before and after death, this volume offers an exhaustive investigation of how the people of the time understood death and continued their relationship with the departed well after passing away. The whole is supported with an extensive and bibliography, as well as illustrations, pictures and diagrams of the sites and examples discussed. —NURTILEK ABDIMALIKOV

Without endorsing the views of authors, the editors encourage reading as a path to greater understanding.

A New Divan: A Lyrical Dialogue Between East and West

Barbara Schwepcke and Bill Swainson, eds. Gingko, 2019.

This collection of poetry and essays continues a "lyrical dialog" between the West and the Islamic world begun 200 years ago by the German poet and polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Captivated by a collection of poems by 14th-century Persian poet Hafiz, Goethe in 1819 wrote *West-Eastern Divan*: 12 volumes of poetry, with notes and essays, aimed at broadening Western views on the Islamic world. Two centuries later, *A New Divan* brings together today's poets (12 from the Islamic world and 12 from the West) and six essayists, to continue the dialog Goethe began with Hafiz. The compilation explores the challenges of translating poetry, including the writings of Goethe, Hafiz and various Arabic poets (pre-Islamic and modern). English translations are furnished for poems in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and European tongues. —ROBERT W. LEBLING



A Taste of Gaza: Food & Traditions from Home

Lima Shawa. Rimal Books, 2021.

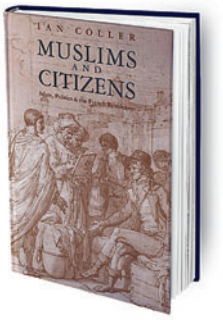
To write about food is to write about culture. This especially rings true in this celebration of Gaza's cuisine by opening with a lengthy introduction on how Gazans celebrate weddings, feasts and holidays. The 80 recipes that follow are as diverse as they are local, with some ingredients difficult to find outside the region or season. Along with falafel, lentil soup, fattah (braised pieces of lamb with a lemon sauce over rice and bread) and other familiar classics are dishes for the more adventurous cook: hamasses (wild sorrel with red lentils); rice-and-meat-stuffed purple carrots with tamarind sauce; and spicy, stuffed blue crabs. The book showcases Gaza's distinctive cuisine within the Middle East while allowing the Jordan-based author to generously share her culinary memories of growing up in Gaza. These are recipes meant to be shared, and those who cook from the book will surely create their own tasty remembrances. —JEFF KOEHLER

Revolt Against the Sun:

Nazik al-Mala'ika, Emily Drumsta, ed. and tr. Saqi Books, 2020.

It is shocking there are so few translations of Iraqi poet Nazik al-Mala'ika's work, considering how the Arab literary world holds her in high esteem for pioneering the *al-shi'r al-hurr*, or free verse, poetic form in the mid-20th century. Al-Mala'ika's poetry is not equivalent to English free verse poems, as Arabic free verse informalizes rules for meters and hemistiches and the English eschews prosody entirely. Drumsta, a scholar of Arabic literature and culture, divides the book into six sections, each containing selected poems from one of al-Mala'ika's books. While the anthology contains no complete poetry books, distinct themes still permeate each section. Overall, the selection from al-Mala'ika's 1968 book, *The Moon Tree*, is a personal favorite; "Greetings to the Iraqi Republic" and "A Song for the Moon" are standouts in the anthology. —MARINA ALI

AUTHOR'S CORNER



Muslims and Citizens: Islam, Politics and the French Revolution

Ian Coller. Yale UP, 2020.

Muslim Perspectives on European Connections: A Conversation with Historian Ian Coller

by DIANNA WRAY

It wasn't until he found himself thousands of kilometers from his native Australia in September 2001 that Coller, a UCLA-Irvine professor of history, began to realize that his seemingly disparate early interests in French culture, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, his longing to understand the Middle East and his determination to speak Arabic were all parts of his innate fascination with people. But in the aftermath of 9/11, Coller realized that as much as he loved literature, his true passion was the past. Since then Coller has carved out a niche in his field by examining the evolution of ties between Muslims and Europeans over the centuries. He talked with *AramcoWorld* about his research and the story behind his latest book, *Muslims and Citizens*, which chronicles the influence of the Muslim world on the French Revolution.

How did you know you wanted to study history?
After my undergrad I traveled to the Middle East for the first time and got inspired to study Arabic. I was on my way to continue my studies in Damascus in September 2001, and I was stranded in India when September 11 happened, and that was when I decided that history really meant something to me. I realized that it was important to study not just how peoples end up in conflict with one another but also how they live and coexist together. That was what inspired me to go back to Australia and enroll in a Ph.D. program for history. And, of course, I found plenty of conflict, but I also found a lot of coexistence. And I wanted to know more about that, so I kept going.

Much of your work is part of a broader trend in the history field that explores the global context of events. What does this viewpoint change about our understanding of the past?
European history has never happened in a bubble. Europe has clearly had an enormous impact on the globe, and that impact has not always been a positive one. It's a very complex and ambivalent legacy, and in a way the most dangerous part of that legacy is this essentialism, the way in which the whole history of the world has ended up being told as if Europe or any other place was naturally at its center. That's the broader point that really needs to be understood, that European history, like all history, unfolds in a global context.

How did you find the focus of your work, the connections between the Muslim world and Europe, especially France?
Before I decided I wanted to study history, I had pitched a book to a historian I knew about the history of the Arabic community in Paris, and he was very excited about it, even though he was a French social historian who had never studied the Middle East. So, I became a French historian. But the path to that was a complete reverse, with my interest in the Middle East leading me to Europe. There was a certain sense of inevitability though. I dressed up as a French Revolutionary for that costume party years ago because those were my heroes, and I studied *A Tale of Two Cities* as part of my undergrad thesis. So finding connections between these two things was really a convergence of two topics that fascinated me.

What inspired you to dive into research for *Muslims and Citizens*?
My previous research on the first Arab population in France, which I discovered was established a lot earlier than most people ever imagined. A lot of the people in the Arab population who moved to France before 1798 were Arab Christians, while Muslims were much less frequently represented. I started looking for places in French history where Muslims were more present in the record, and it all came down to the French Revolution, a time when the leaders of that movement were intent on welcoming all people no matter their race or religion. I wanted to know more, and eventually I had a book.

Was there anything you discovered in your research that truly surprised you?
The fact that nobody seemed to know a thing about it. It's amazing how many times I tell people about how the French and Muslims have been impacting each other, and they're so shocked. And that's incredible to me, given that Algeria is as close, as the crow flies, as Marseilles is to Paris. The Muslim world is so close to France, and there has been connection, and colonialism, between France and the Muslim world for centuries, dating back to the Crusades and stretching down to the large French Muslim population the country has today. What surprised me most once I started working on this was how much these connections surprised everyone else.

Keep reading this article at aramcoworld.com.

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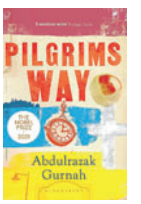
Fayoum Pottery: Ceramic Arts and Crafts in an Egyptian Oasis

R. Neil Hewison. AUC Press, 2021.

Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History

Mona Hassan. Princeton UP, 2018.



Pilgrims Way

Abdulrazak Gurnah. Bloomsbury, 1998.

EVENTS

Highlights from aramcoworld.com

Please verify a venue's schedule before visiting.

CURRENT / JANUARY

Safar highlights the experiences and stories of Afghan refugees through a collection of videos, photographs and illustrated stories beginning with a look at Afghanistan's history, the importance of its geographical position at the crossroads of ancient trade routes, its wealth and natural resources, as well as being part of important and large empires and a basis of civilizations since the Bronze Age. Museum of Islamic Art, **Doha**, through January 23.

CURRENT / FEBRUARY

Zaha Hadid Design: Untold presents a design-focused look that explores world-renowned architect and designer Zaha Hadid's pioneering vision and showcases the range of her work and relentless pursuit of perfection. From furniture to dinnerware, fashion, jewelry, lighting, and even a prototype for an electric car, the exhibition dives into Hadid's philosophy and approach to redefining the built environment—and our experience therein. The exhibition also pays tribute to the MSU Broad Art Museum's own architectural features. MSU Broad Art Museum, **East Lansing**, through February 12.

CURRENT / MARCH

Science, Nature and Beauty: Harmony and Cosmological Perspectives in Islamic Science showcases more than 90 manuscripts, instruments and objects focused on the Islamic sciences broadly conceived some 100 years ago. The items contribute to an understanding of Islamic science as a robust, diverse and lively scholarly endeavor that touched on many aspects of the Muslim world, and as a central and non-reducible component of larger, non-linear histories, cultures and traditions of the arts and sciences. Columbia University Libraries, **New York**, through March 3.

Sacred Words, Timeless Calligraphy: Highlights of Exceptional Calligraphy brings together 52 rare objects that show Islam's influence as a unifying force as well as a source of inspiration in many different cultures and peoples, from the Middle East to China, Southeast Asia, and India to Spain and the Maghreb. The collection of Qur'an manuscripts and folios reflect the importance given to the Qur'an throughout the Islamic world. Each work that has been acquired over the past 40 years represents an exceptional and unique masterpiece of its type. **Sharjah** Museum of Islamic Civilization, through March 19.

CURRENT / APRIL

Ghada Amer is the first retrospective of the Franco-Egyptian artist Ghada Amer to be held in France. Outraged by the difficulty of asserting herself as a painter in the 1980s, and even more so as a female painter, Amer developed an oeuvre of canvases, embroidered installations, sculptures and gardens, through which painting gradually asserted itself. The retrospective brings together modes of plastic expression from her beginnings to her most recent works. Mucem, **Marseille**, through April 16.

An Ocean in a Drop: Muslims in Toronto is a photographic exhibit entitled after a poem by the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi about the uniqueness and universality of the human condition. In the exhibition, Mahtab Hussain turns his lens on the city's Muslim youth in ways that bring to the fore their individual identities, contributions, and perspectives. The portraits are accompanied by personal statements, based on the Scottish-born artist's conversations with the sitters, providing further insight into their stories of everyday life in Toronto. Aga Khan Museum, **Toronto**, through April 30.

CURRENT / JUNE

Unstill Waters: Contemporary Photography from India features 29 works by some of the most prominent photographers working in the country. Through photography and video, these artists portray the landscapes of India, both real and imagined, as a powerful means to examine contemporary environmental and social issues of broader global concern. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through June 11.

Readers are welcome to submit event information for possible inclusion to proposals@aramcoamericas.com, subject line "Events."

Islamic Arts Biennale will showcase the vibrancy of Islamic art past and present. Honoring the richness of creative heritage while exhibiting innovation and fresh ideas, the biennale will explore spirituality in the esthetic realm through a diversity of artistic expressions. The theme will be divided into complementary sections: Galleries and outdoor installations will create a dialogue between sacred sites and rituals, which will invite artists to interpret and reflect on the personal and communal expressions and the emotions they evoke. The principal theme of the indoor galleries will be qiblah (sacred direction), with Makkah as the focus. Under the canopy of the former Hajj Terminal of the Jiddah airport, the installations will explore multiple senses of hijrah (migration), from the initiation of the Muslim era to reflections on contemporary displacement. Hajj terminal, **Jiddah**, January 23 through April 23.

The curatorial team of the Islamic Arts Biennale stands in the former Hajj Terminal in Jiddah. From left to right: Sumayya Vally, Julian Raby, Saad Alrashid, Omniya Abdel Barr.

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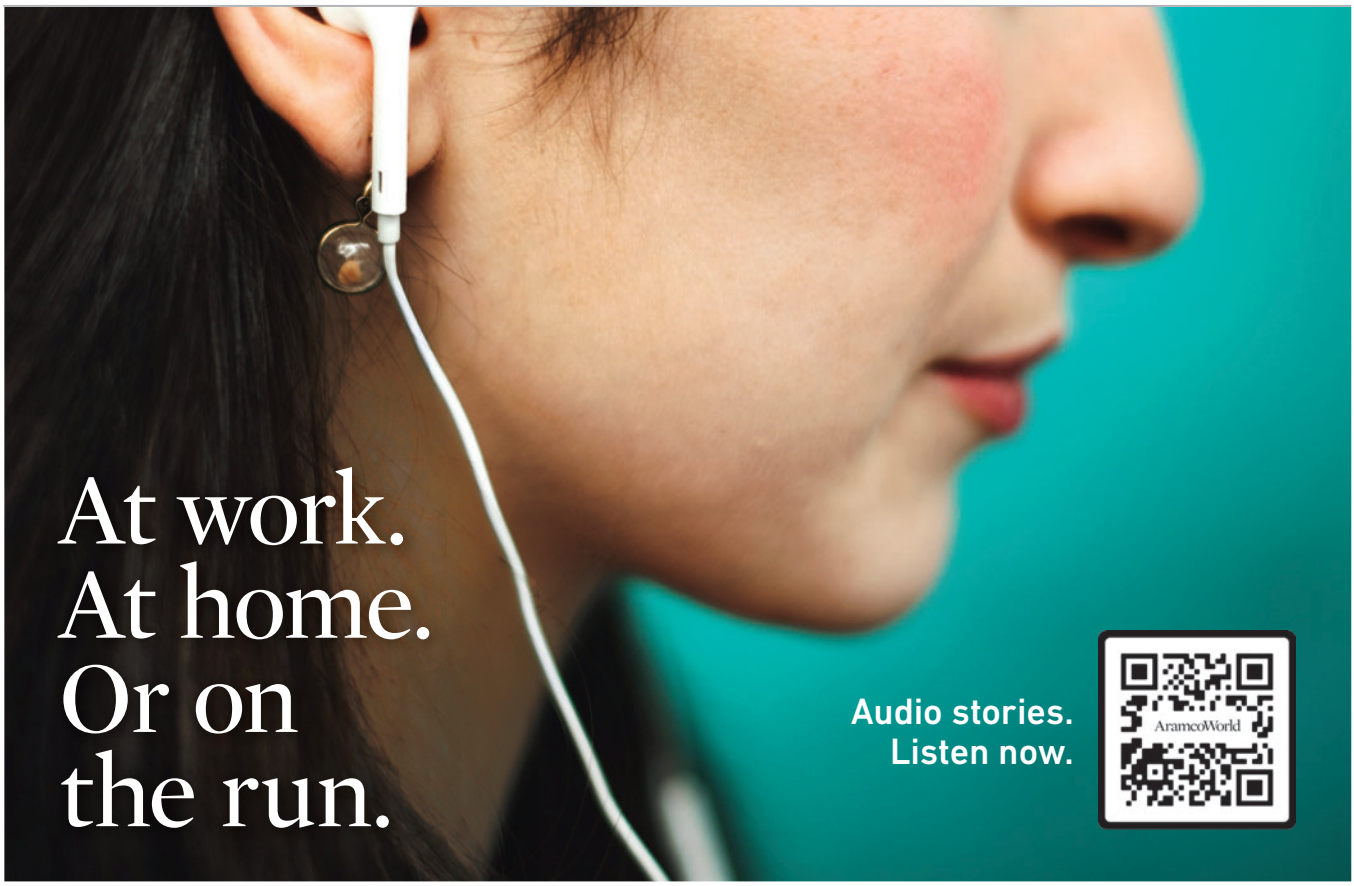

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