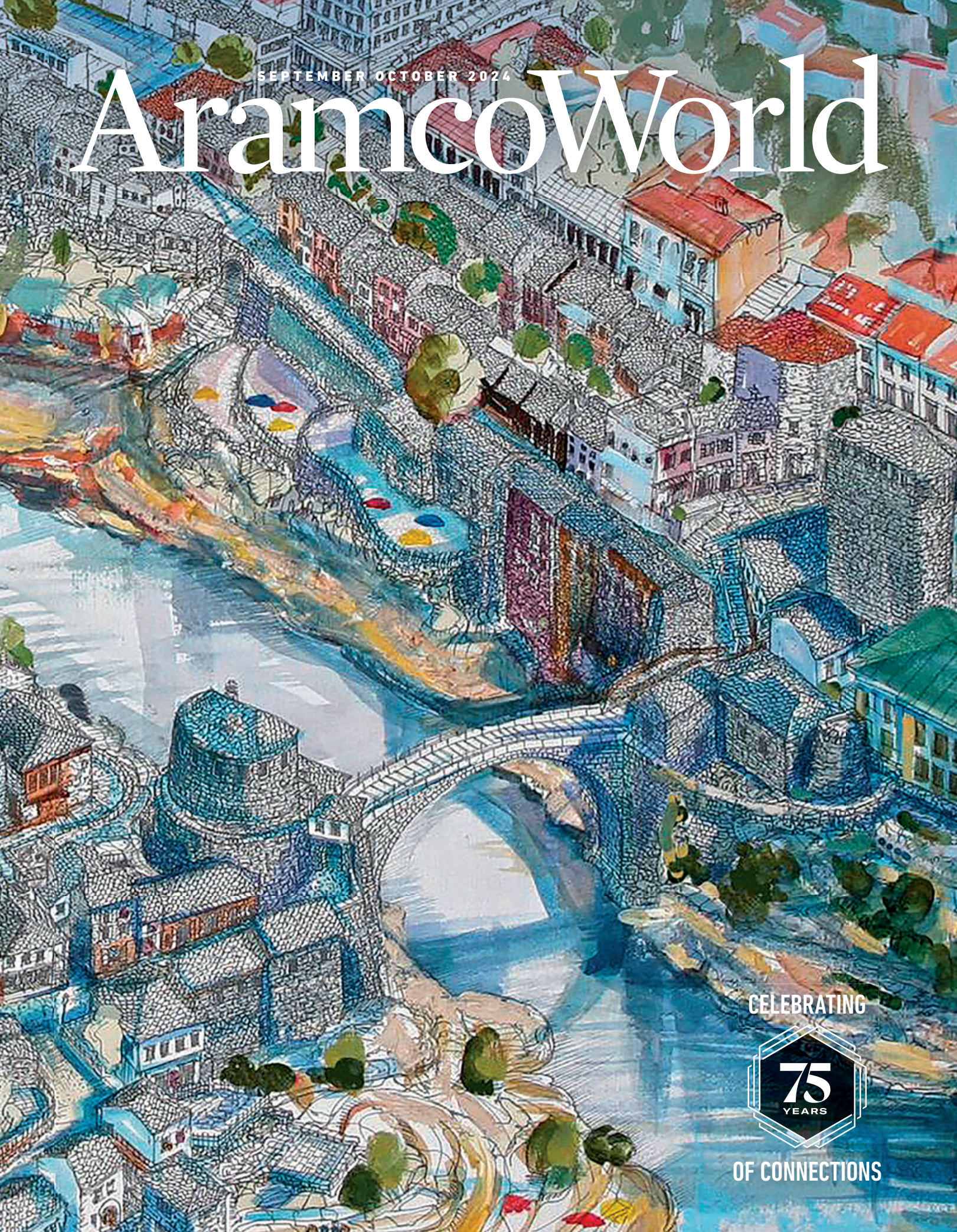
SEPTEMBER OCTOBER 2024

AramcoWorld



CELEBRATING

75 YEARS

OF CONNECTIONS

75 YEARS

AramcoWorld

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2024 | VOL. 75, NO. 5

aramcoworld.com

2 FIRSTLOOK 4 FLAVORS

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.

ON THE COVER This pen-and-watercolor illustration of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, by the late architect and professor Amir Pašić puts the Old Bridge, which is the subject of this issue's cover story, as a focal point. Pašić started drawing his hometown in the mid-1990s amid its wartime destruction and completed the artwork as the city was rebuilt. Local artist Eno Volić reinvigorated the illustration with watercolors several years after the 2004 reopening of the Old Bridge. Today it is framed and hanging in the Pašić' home.

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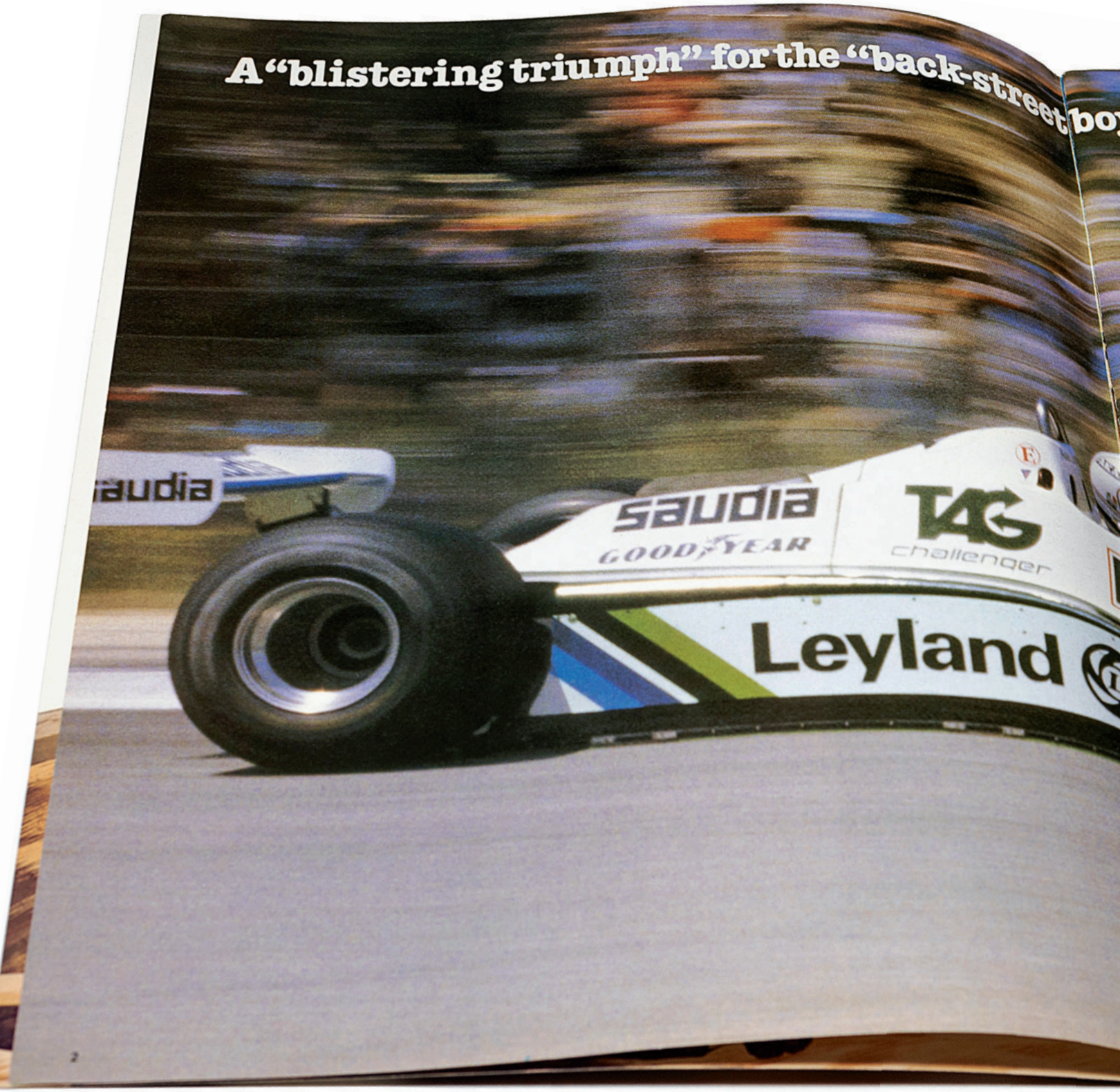
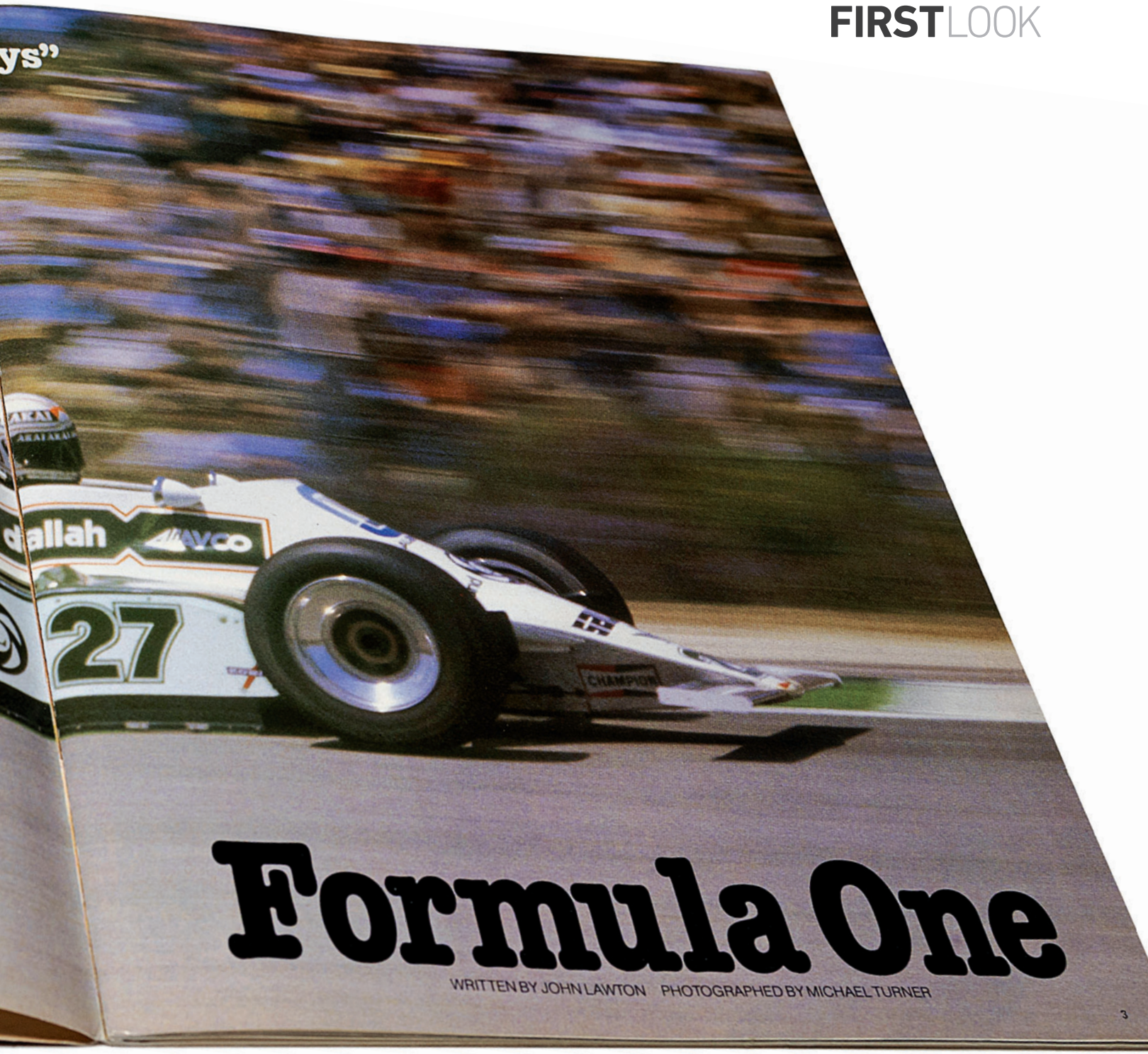


A 'blistering triumph' for the 'back-street boys'

March / April 1981

Photographed by Michael Turner

Amid the roar of racers zooming toward the finish line in London during the 1980 Grand Prix, longtime auto-racing photographer and renowned artist Michael Turner trained his lens on a Saudia-Williams FW 07. Its Australian driver, Alan Jones, was about to make history. Slowing his camera's shutter speed, Turner clicked away while following his lens along with the speed of the car, causing it to stay in sharp focus and blurring the background of fans. This technique, called "panning," shows the race car is in motion—and about to drive off the page to victory in the March/April 1981 cover story "Formula One." Jones won the race, his fourth victory of the season and third win in a row. *AramcoWorld* highlighted the achievement of the "back-street boys," referring to the British and Saudi partner builders and sponsors of the car who saw the promise in showcasing innovative automotive technology and a wide-open track for beating the giants of the Formula 1 world.



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CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF CONNECTIONS

Shorbat 'Adas (Divine Lentil Soup)

Recipe by Sarah al-Hamad

Photograph by Sue Atkinson

Shorbat 'adas or shorbat al-dal, as it is known, is the quintessential Middle Eastern soup.

My aunt is famous for hers—particularly during Ramadan when she ladles it out daily to scores of relatives and fast-breakers. The tradition is to start with a date (regulate blood-sugar levels after the long, daily fast) and follow with a restorative bowl of dal. This recipe is nutritious and satisfying. The cooked limes, or lumi, are the secret ingredient. Squeeze one against the side of your serving bowl to release the tart juice. Variations of this soup exist across the region and throughout the Indian subcontinent.

(Serves 6–8)

200 grams (7 ounces) red lentils

4 medium tomatoes, skinned and roughly chopped

3 dried limes (lumi) or 3 tablespoons lime juice

4 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 medium onions, finely chopped

½ teaspoon garlic puree

½ teaspoon ginger puree

½ teaspoon Madras curry powder

½ teaspoon turmeric

½ teaspoon cumin

2 tablespoons tomato puree

2 vermicelli nests or 50 grams (1 ¾ ounces) vermicelli

Rinse the lentils until the water runs clear. Put them in a large pan and add 2 ¼ cups of boiling water. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, until the lentils are soft. Add the chopped tomatoes and cook for about 5 minutes.

Blend the mixture in batches in a blender or food processor. Set aside.

Pierce each dried lime a few times with a knife. Heat the oil in another deep pan, and fry the onion and the dried limes together until the onion is golden brown. Stir in the garlic and ginger purees, and the spices.

Combine the lentil mixture with the onion mixture, stir well, and season with salt to taste. Add the tomato puree. Cook over medium heat until the mixture starts to bubble.

Lastly, add the vermicelli. When they are cooked—within 3 minutes—the soup is ready. Adjust the consistency by adding water, if necessary.

Pour into soup bowls, and don't forget the limes.

Reprinted with permission from

Cardamom and Lime: Recipes from the Arabian Gulf

Sarah al-Hamad.
Interlink Books, 2008.
interlinkbooks.com.

Sarah al-Hamad grew up in Kuwait and lives in London. She worked as an editor for Saqi Books and is the author of several cookbooks, including the 2013 award-winning *Sun Bread and Sticky Toffee*. She recently completed an MA in creative nonfiction at the University of East Anglia.

KATE WHITAKER

AUTHOR'S CORNER

Vibrant Portraits: A Conversation With Maliha Abidi

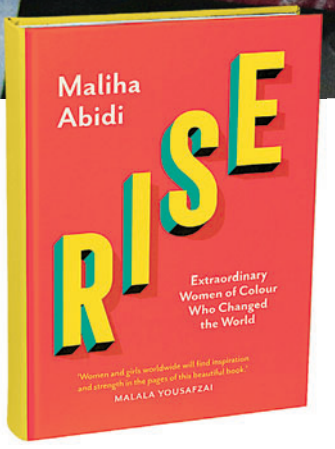
Written by PINEY KESTING

After growing up in Karachi, Pakistan, and moving to California as a teenager, artist and author Maliha Abidi found it difficult to find stories of women who looked like her or with whom she felt she could identify.

In 2019, Abidi, then 23 and living in the United Kingdom after getting married, decided to remedy this, publishing her first book, *Pakistan for Women*. Featuring profiles of 50 Pakistani women, Abidi, a multidisciplinary artist, created colorful portraits for each subject using pencils, acrylics, markers and other media.

Two years later, Abidi followed up with *Rise*, sharing the lives of 100 women from more than 30 countries. "At the end of the day," explains Abidi, "my work is trying to celebrate and share a moment of joy when it comes to Brown identity."

AramcoWorld recently chatted with Abidi about how her books have impacted her as an artist and a Muslim woman.



Rise: Extraordinary Women of Colour Who Changed the World

Maliha Abidi. Saqi Books, 2021.

MALIHA ABIDI

What motivated you to write your first book?

I was living with my husband in Crawley, England. In our local bookstore I discovered books about women from around the world, including *Rebel Girls*, a series by Elena Favilli. It was exciting to find books that introduced me to so many incredible women, but I rarely found someone who looked like me in those books. There were few stories about Muslim women, and there were very few, if any, narratives about inspiring Pakistani women.

My other inspiration was my own life. When I moved from Karachi to California at 14, I was exposed to preconceived notions about Pakistani girls and women. I wore a headscarf to school, and one of my teachers was surprised when he discovered I rode a bike. He clearly didn't think a Pakistani girl was allowed to do that. Recalling my own experiences, I decided to challenge these misperceptions by writing about remarkable Pakistani women using my art and research.

What made you decide to expand your stories to include women outside of Pakistan with *Rise*?

With my second book, initially we were going to focus on Muslim women, but my publisher and I decided it was important to celebrate women of color from around the world. That was the easy part. It was much harder to narrow it down to 100 names. Then it was even more difficult to draw the portraits. There are 100 stories and portraits in the book, but I created at least 220 portraits. With each one I was always worried whether I had really captured the spirit of these incredible women. But in the end, those two years of hard work helped me grow a lot as an artist.

***Pakistan for Women* received international acclaim and led to interviews with the British Broadcast Company, the United States morning show, *Good Morning America*, and other media outlets. What was the general response to the book?**

It was very positive, both from readers and from the women I profiled. The best compliment I've received, one that I will always remember, came from a 14-year-old girl who was born and raised in Australia with a Pakistani background. She wrote that she never wanted to tell people where her family came from because of the way her country is portrayed in the news. When her father was traveling to Pakistan, she asked him to get her a copy of *Pakistan for Women*. After reading the book, she told me that she now had something to be proud of. That was very heartwarming for me.

What impact have these books had on you as an author, an artist and as a Muslim woman?

I learned a lot. In terms of my identity as a Muslim woman, I was raised by a very cool Pakistani dad who never limited me. I have always felt very liberated and confident. But throughout the process of working on these books, I learned so much about Muslim feminism from the women I profiled. It increased my understanding of world politics and how gender is viewed in different parts of the world.

I also became a better artist, because working on the illustrations pushed the limits of my creativity. In general, I feel like working on these books has made me a more curious person, a more curious learner. These books have allowed me to live my dream and continue to open so many doors for me as a researcher and an artist.

This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for length and clarity.

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An Irish Tale of HUNGER and the SULTAN
75
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Reflections on PEOPLE

Written by J. TREVOR WILLIAMS | *Illustrated by* RYAN HUDDLE

As AramcoWorld *celebrates its 75th year in 2024, the magazine is publishing a six-part series reflecting on the connections and impact it has generated over the decades.* AramcoWorld*'s approach to intercultural bridge-building has always been integral to its mission.*

In the fifth part of our series, we look back on the human element—the people across eras and empires whose achievements bind us all. In an often divisive world, AramcoWorld*'s profiles of both famous and lesser-known figures have inspired fresh perspectives, again underscoring a mission to highlight commonalities and our shared humanity.*

—AramcoWorld *editorial team*

In her most intense globetrotting years, Raha Moharrak's loved ones gave her a moniker that anyone in the Arab world would understand.

"My family nickname was Battuta," she says.

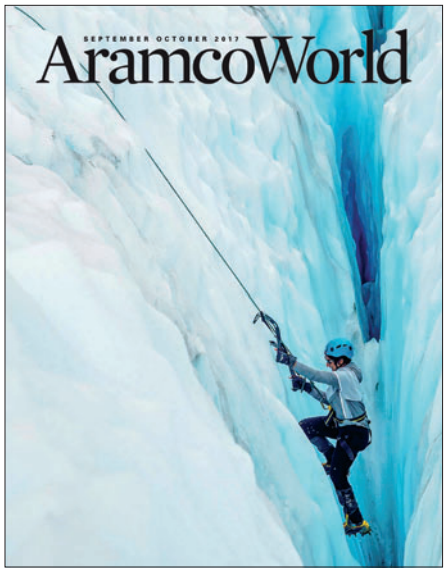
It referenced the 14th-century traveler and writer Ibn Battuta, who made his name by recording cross-cultural encounters while traversing 75,000 miles of empires and transcontinental trade routes, starting with the Hajj.

Similarly, Moharrak, a defiant and accomplished mountaineer, could be found atop peaks dotting the globe, which meant her mother, father and the older siblings whose teasing she credits for her thick skin were frequently in the dark about her whereabouts.

"I've calmed down significantly now, but I had a streak of no one having any idea where on earth I was."

When Moharrak's exploits as the first

BELOW *AramcoWorld* featured trailblazing mountaineer Raha Moharrak in 2017 not only because of her accomplishments but her outreach to young women across the globe. "You are capable of wonders," Moharrak said. "Feed your bravery, and it will overcome your fear; never feel that your dreams are too far from reach."



Raha Moharrak

Saudi-born woman to reach the so-called Seven Summits—the highest peaks in the world—were profiled in a 2017 *AramcoWorld* story, she joined the pages that began enlightening readers about her tongue-in-cheek namesake since 1961.

For 75 years, *AramcoWorld* has brought characters from the ancient and modern worlds alive with profiles that demystify notable people and celebrate their influence and achievements. Since its beginnings as an intracompany newsletter bridging cultures between New York and Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, an emphasis on positive portrayals has been paramount.

For John Mulholland, a longtime reader, the blend of ancient and modern, Middle Eastern and global, has kept the magazine interesting and informative.

"I have found the profiles of important figures in (mostly) the Arab world published in *AramcoWorld* magazine illuminating. These were not just explorers but teachers, scientists and others as well," Mulholland says.

That includes many stories about Ibn Battuta, especially one with hand-drawn illustrations that Mulholland viewed as particularly enlightening.

"These vignettes allowed the reader to become acquainted with various parts of the 14th-century world that few sources could," he added.

The fact that Ibn Battuta is featured in so many stories across the magazine's history reflects both his influence and standing as the archetypal *AramcoWorld* figure. A product of the Arab world (Morocco), he didn't limit himself to it, daring to cross cultures with an open mind, spreading knowledge and contributing to broader global understanding.

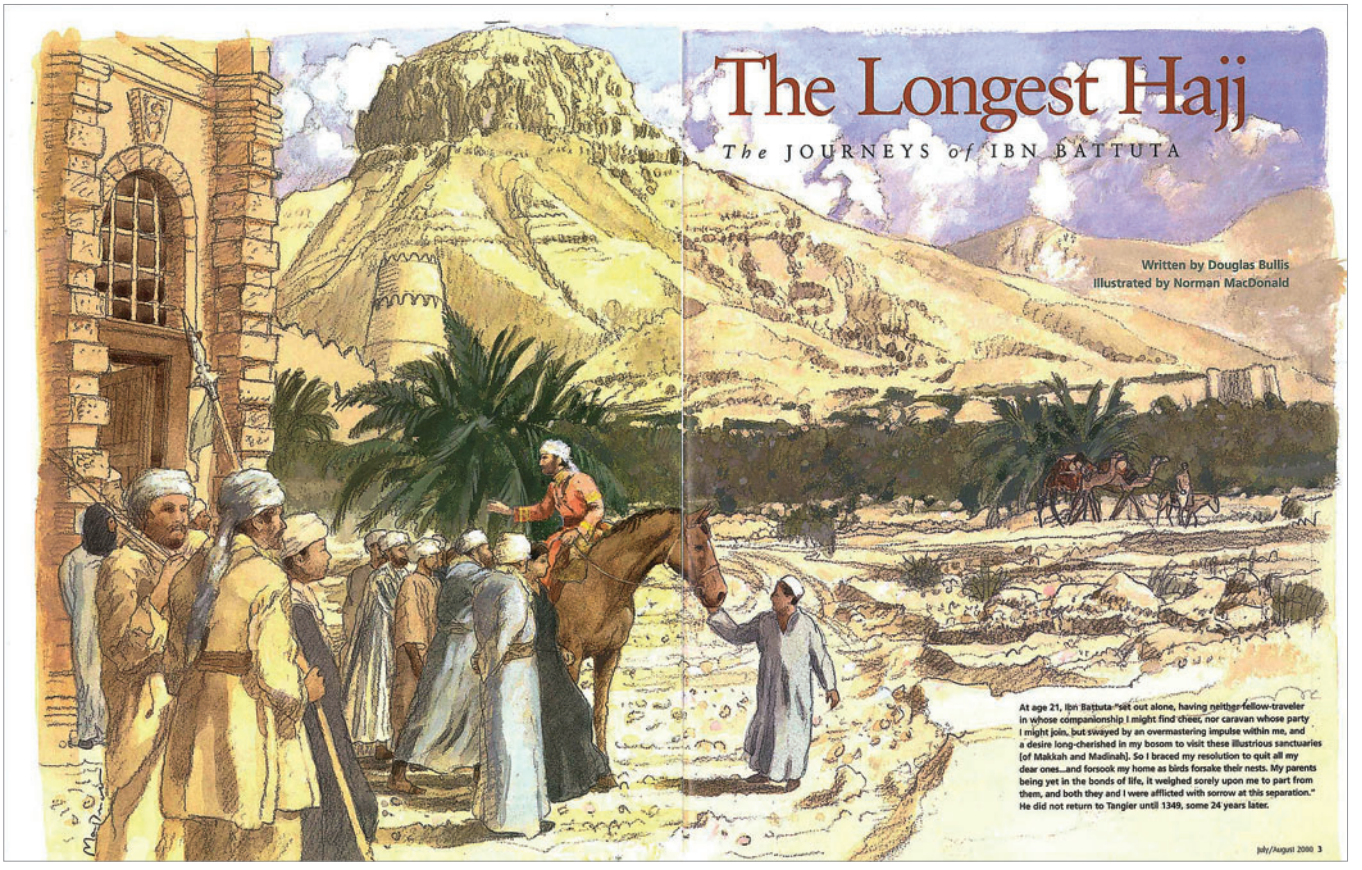
The same ethos has driven writer Tom Verde's engagement with the magazine over many decades. A prolific book reviewer and feature writer, Verde has relished the opportunity to reexamine historical figures and draw out connections that show cultures in collaboration rather than conflict.

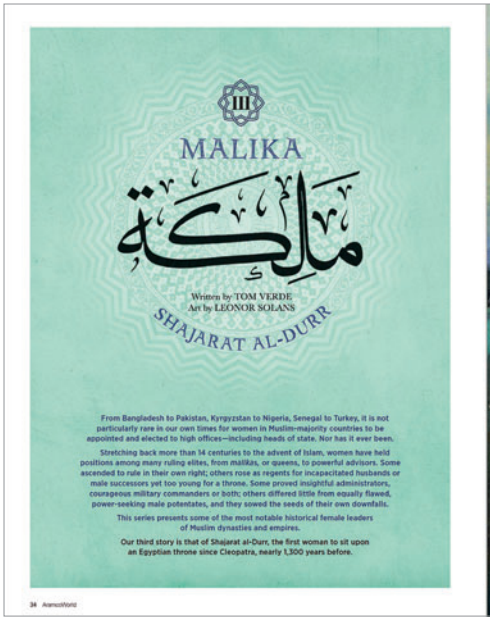
"I really enjoy tracing the history of ideas as they move from one part of the world to the next," Verde says.

That includes telling the story of the first Muslim landowner in the colonial outpost of New Amsterdam in "The New York of Anthony Jansen van Salee" and the history of pasta, which may have emerged from Italy's engagement with the Middle East. He also uncovered the story behind "Egyptology's Pioneering

John Mulholland

Long-time reader John Mulholland said *AramcoWorld* played a key role in his career as a cultural connector and as the former chairman of the board for the nonprofit National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. He credits stories like 2000's "The Longest Hajj: The Journeys of Ibn Battuta" for expanding his knowledge.





Tom Verde

Over the years, contributor Tom Verde has introduced *AramcoWorld* readers to impactful characters from across history. His 2021 series "Malika" ("Queens") presented six historical female leaders of Muslim dynasties, empires and caliphates, and he is now expanding his research into a book.

Giant," Giovanni Battista Belzoni.

These "still lifes," as Verde's wife {NAME} has called them, are not news-driven but instead are a "look under the hood, a different angle" on subjects that can span centuries.

One landmark series sticks out as a testament to *AramcoWorld*'s ambitious appetite for unexpected profiles. While Verde was reviewing a book, he came across the story of Shajarat al-Durr, a 13th-century ruler who became the first woman to claim an Egyptian throne since Cleopatra. While researching and discussing the prospect of a story with former editor Richard Doughty, Verde learned about other impactful female rulers whom he felt had never gotten their historical due.

"It wasn't long before I realized that there was no way we were going to do justice to one, let alone six, in a 3,000- to 4,000-word story," Verde says.

The Malika ("queen") series, a yearlong exploration of these prominent women and their historical contexts (one each across the magazine's six bimonthly issues) was born, starting with the stories of Khayzuran, a slave turned queen in Baghdad who birthed two caliphs, and her niece and daughter-in-law, Zubayda, who grew up in luxury but carried on a tradition of spreading the empire's wealth through public works projects that earned her centuries of acclaim. The series culminated in a look at Sayyida al-Hurra, the ruler of the Moroccan city-state of Tétouan, who provided a haven for Muslim and Jewish émigrés in the wake of the fall of al-Andalus to Christian Spain.

"When I was writing them, I kind of fell in love with each one of them because they were all so interesting," Verde says of the Malikas. "They all shared a sense of self, a confidence and intelligence that enabled them to rise above their situations."

> "I really enjoy tracing the history of ideas as they move from one part of the world to the next."
> —TOM VERDE

Now, eight years later, Verde is expanding and transforming the series into a book that is set to be published perhaps next year, a further ripple effect from *AramcoWorld*'s decision to take a chance on an unproven concept.

Current editor Johnny Hanson says such pieces are evidence of continuity with *AramcoWorld*'s historical focus on upending stereotypes by showcasing cultural contributions.

The magazine, he says, has always been a necessary complement to the broader media landscape, which often neglects stories of great achievement because of ignorance, at best and, at worst, willful neglect and cultural caricaturing.

Especially in its visual depictions, *AramcoWorld*'s "spin" is to highlight the humanity of people often shown only in a context of conflict.

A photojournalist himself, Hanson sees real value in sitting with subjects to truly understand them as people—a luxury *AramcoWorld* affords its contributors.

"From a photographer's perspective, you have a choice at how you're going to represent someone," says Hanson. "Do you choose the frame where someone is smiling or not? Do you show a father talking to their child or embracing them? It's about reflecting people in an honest and truthful way."

Hanson appreciates when this lens, extended to the written word, resonates with readers, as he has seen with stories about Enheduanna, considered the first

known poet; El Seed, the prominent French Tunisian graffiti artist; or other selfless servants who haven't received recognition matching the magnitude of their achievements.

"What I love is hearing back from friends and family who have picked up the magazine and said, 'I was just reading about Edna Adan, and I had no idea that this woman in Somaliland had this much of an impact, not only on maternal care but also on the global practice of nursing,'" Hanson says, recalling the 2018 profile of Adan as "Somaliland's Midwife."

Literary luminaries have also featured prominently in the pages of *AramcoWorld*, in part thanks to longtime contributor Larry Luxner.

A few years after his first story on Morocco's new pavilion at Disney World's Epcot Center in 1985, Luxner was tasked with covering the groundbreaking for a garden on Embassy Row in Washington, D.C., where 30 cedars were planted in honor of Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese American writer who rose to prominence in the early 20th century with the publication of *The Prophet*, his bestselling novel.

Published in 1990, Luxner's story added to the canon of Gibran-focused pieces in a magazine that first mentioned the author in 1969 and dedicated a cover story to his memory on the centennial of his birth in 1983.

For Luxner, the piece on a million-dollar fundraising effort helmed by dignitaries such as former President Jimmy Carter became something of a personal touchpoint after he took the job as news editor for *The Washington Diplomat*.

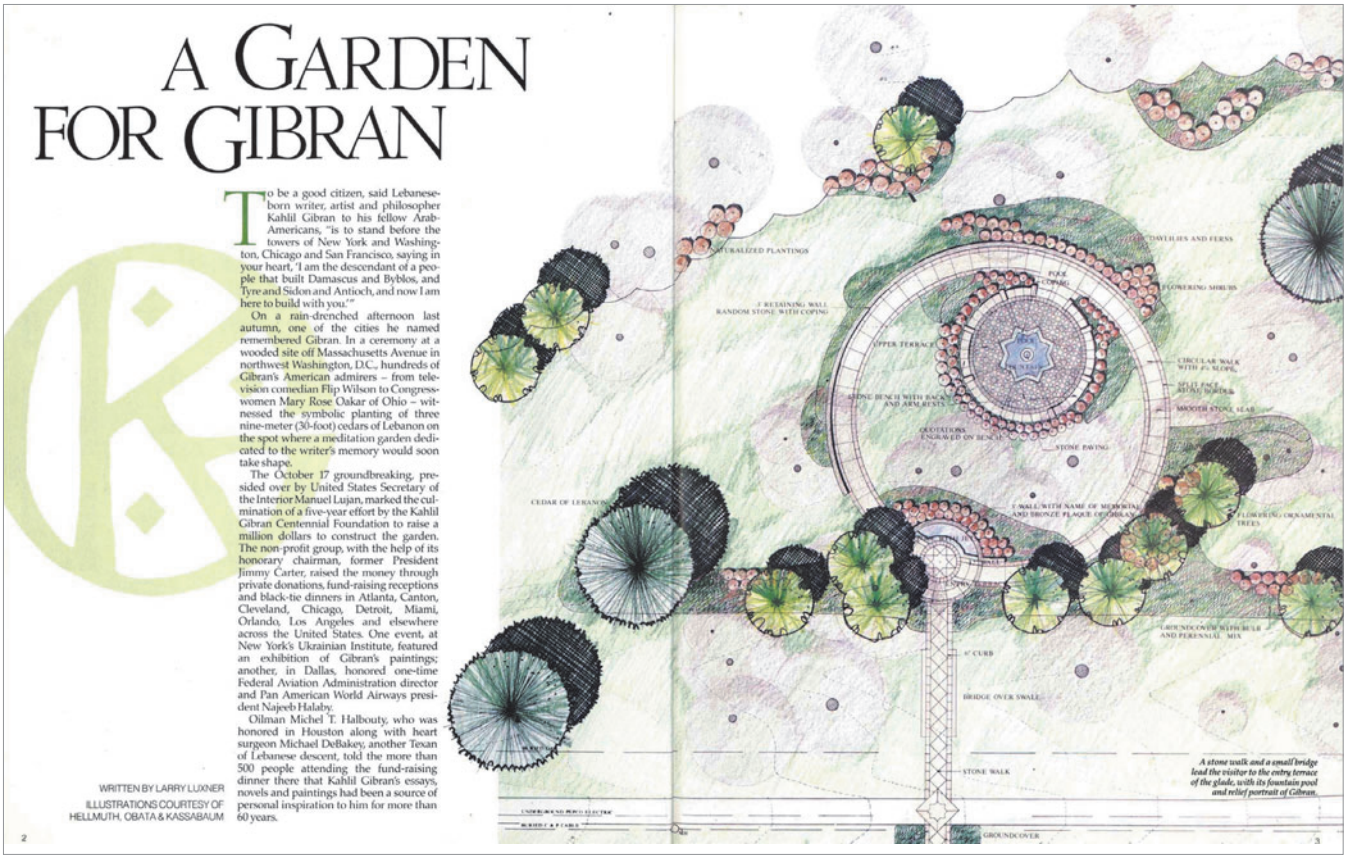
"The garden actually came to fruition," he said, noting that a drive down Massachusetts Avenue occasionally turned into a trip down memory lane. "It's a place to sit and reflect, and it would remind me of that story."

Luxner similarly recalled other stories in which *AramcoWorld* gave him space to explore other writers with Middle Eastern origins who shared Gibran's focus on universal values and the human condition.

A cover story in 1989 allowed Luxner to interview Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who had just won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his monumental portrayals of Egyptian life and explorations of Cairo cafe culture. In 2005, Luxner went to Brazil for a tête-à-tête with Brazilian author Milton Hatoum, whose novel *Dois Irmãos* brings to life

Editor Johnny Hanson says *AramcoWorld* highlights the humanity of people other media often show in a context of conflict. He cites pieces that resonated with readers, including one from 2017 on El Seed, the prominent French Tunisian calligraffiti artist, and a 2018 profile of Somaliland nurse, midwife activist and foreign minister Edna Adan.

Johnny Hanson



A GARDEN FOR GIBRAN

To be a good citizen, said Lebanese-born writer, artist and philosopher Kahlil Gibran to his fellow Arab-Americans, "is to stand before the towers of New York and Washington, Chicago and San Francisco, saying in your heart, 'I am the descendant of a people that built Damascus and Byblos, and Tyre and Sidon and Antioch, and now I am here to build with you.'"

On a rain-drenched afternoon last autumn, one of the cities he named remembered Gibran. In a ceremony at a wooded site off Massachusetts Avenue in northwest Washington, D.C., hundreds of Gibran's American admirers – from television comedian Flip Wilson to Congresswomen Mary Rose Oakar of Ohio – witnessed the symbolic planting of three nine-meter (30-foot) cedars of Lebanon on the spot where a meditation garden dedicated to the writer's memory would soon take shape.

The October 17 groundbreaking, presided over by United States Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, marked the culmination of a five-year effort by the Kahlil Gibran Centennial Foundation to raise a million dollars to construct the garden. The non-profit group, with the help of its honorary chairman, former President Jimmy Carter, raised the money through private donations, fund-raising receptions and black-tie dinners in Atlanta, Canton, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Miami, Orlando, Los Angeles and elsewhere across the United States. One event, at New York's Ukrainian Institute, featured an exhibition of Gibran's paintings; another, in Dallas, honored one-time Federal Aviation Administration director and Pan American World Airways president Najeeb Halaby.

Oilman Michel T. Halbouty, who was honored in Houston along with heart surgeon Michael DeBakey, another Texan of Lebanese descent, told the more than 500 people attending the fund-raising dinner there that Kahlil Gibran's essays, novels and paintings had been a source of personal inspiration to him for more than 60 years.

WRITTEN BY LARRY LUXNER

ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF HELLMUTH, OBATA & KASSABAUM

2

A stone walk and a small bridge lead the visitor to the entry terrace of the glade, with its fountain pool and relief portrait of Gibran.

3

In the 1990 story "A Garden for Gibran," contributor Larry Luxner shared the global impact of Lebanese American writer and poet Khalil Gibran through a garden in Washington, D.C., dedicated to his memory.

Larry Luxner

the history of Arab immigration in the Amazonian city of Manaus.

"I like to think that I've brought to the reader an understanding of Arab and Muslim culture in places where they might not have thought about it," Luxner says.

For Mulholland, that has certainly been the case since he first encountered the magazine during a 22-year stint in Saudi Arabia that started with a job there for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1968. He has read *AramcoWorld* faithfully for more than four decades.

"The width and breadth of the articles—from Curaçao to Singapore to California—you travel the world with it," Mulholland says. "Inevitably, when I turn people on to it, they're mesmerized."

For Moharrak, being featured in *AramcoWorld*'s pages proved a surreal seal of approval from a magazine with roots in her country of origin.

"Can you imagine being mentioned in the same pages as my idols? It's insane, it's so special," she says. "You know you've arrived when you're mentioned in the same breath as these people, and you're the go-to for travel and adventure in the region."

"The width and breadth of the articles—from Curaçao to Singapore to California—you travel the world with it. ... Inevitably, when I turn people on to it, they're mesmerized."

—LARRY LUXNER

J. Trevor Williams is a global business journalist based in Atlanta, where he serves as publisher of the online international news site *Global Atlanta* (*globalatlanta.com*). Follow him on X (formerly Twitter) @jtrevorwilliams.

Ryan Huddle is a Boston-based graphic designer and artist whose work appears regularly in the *Boston Globe* and other leading publications.

ON THEIR OWN

African Artists Find Hungry Audience for Their Unique Messages in UK

TERMS

Written by

JACKY ROWLAND

Three imposing figures are standing on the shoreline. Each measuring more than 10 feet tall, they are dressed in elaborate costumes adorned with jewelry, shells and bottle tops. The colorful figures are set against a pale blue sky with wispy clouds, and behind them stretches a cold northern European coastline.

This image of a West African masquerade transplanted into the north of England was created by British Nigerian artist Ade "Àsìkò" Okelarin. Combining photography with mixed media, his work straddles fantasy and reality to explore his experiences of identity, culture and heritage.

"I am not Nigerian, and I am not British," Àsìkò said. "I walk this line of duality, and my work is a representation of that."

The United Kingdom is experiencing a surge of interest in African art that can be traced back nearly 20 years to the Africa Remix exhibition in London. Featuring the work of more than 70 artists from 23 countries, it was at that time the largest exhibition of contemporary African art ever staged in Europe. London now plays host to an annual Contemporary African Art Fair, which in 2023 showcased the work of more than 150 artists from the continent and its diaspora.

The Black Lives Matter Movement has fueled public demand for art of African origin, putting pressure on public institutions, including museums and universities, to decolonize their collections and curricula.

London's Tate Modern commissioned a huge installation in 2023 from the Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui, who is seen as one of Africa's greatest living artists. He is best known for his great shimmering tapestries made from thousands of aluminum bottle tops, stitched together using copper wire. In spring 2024, the National Portrait Gallery staged an exhibition of work by artists from the African diaspora, looking at the representation of the Black figure in contemporary art.

In his Johannesburg studio, South African artist Azael Langa is about to begin a new piece of work. A canvas is stretched on a wooden frame, with a rope attached to each corner. Langa hoists the canvas until he has space to crouch beneath it. Then he lights a candle, holds the flame up to the canvas and "paints" with the trail of smoke.

Like many of his contemporaries across Africa, Langa has invented his own techniques and discovered his own media. This is sometimes dictated by necessity—the lack or cost of traditional art materials—but also by the artist's vision and how best to convey it.

OPPOSITE Members of the stilt-walking group Moko Somōkōw re-create a Yoruba masquerade in Alnwick, northern England, for the lens of artist Àsìkò, **BELOW LEFT**.

ABOVE London's Copeland Gallery put on "Seeing Sounds," an exhibition by House of African Art (HAART), a UK-based arts platform specializing in contemporary art of African origin. **RIGHT** Maryam Lawal founded HAART in 2019. **OPPOSITE** Clockwise from bottom left, artist Azael Langa; Langa's "What the city has offered," 2019, 130x175 cm, smoke and acrylic on canvas; and "As we wait," 2022, 200x150 cm, smoke, acrylic and gold leaf on canvas.

"As I try to control this fire, which moves rapidly with its own intentions and energies, I grasp what it means to attempt to control our individual lives in a world with its own agenda," Langa said.

His subjects are ordinary people in his community, who, through the medium of smoke, take on a spirit-like quality. His work explores social issues such as isolation, exclusion and exploitation.

"I see myself as an activist for those cast out of society's normality," said Langa. "I want to give confidence to Africa and communicate what Africa is to the world."

Langa has found social media to be his most effective tool in communicating that message, particularly Instagram, which is how he came to the attention of Maryam Lawal, a British Nigerian lawyer and art curator. In 2023 she invited him to participate in a London exhibition of works by emerging artists from South Africa and Nigeria.

Growing up between London and Lagos, Lawal was able to compare the limited selection of African art displayed in British galleries with the striking, innovative work being created in West Africa. "I had a growing sense that more needed to be done in the UK to showcase a greater range of African artists and their works," she said.

So in 2019 Lawal launched the House of African Art, a UK-based arts platform specializing in contemporary art of African origin. The aim was to break away from the traditional "white cube" gallery in favor of pop-up exhibitions in flexible spaces where visual artworks could be complemented by poetry and music. To find these spaces, she headed to converted industrial buildings in east and south London.

"I think traditional galleries can be quite elitist and intimidating," said Lawal. "I want to create spaces which are more welcoming and inclusive, where visitors can ask questions about what the artists want to communicate."

> "I want to create spaces which are more welcoming and inclusive, where visitors can ask questions about what the artists want to communicate."
>
> —MARYAM LAWAL

Historically, London has been a beacon for artists from Africa, not only because of British colonial rule but also its world-class art schools. Nigerian painter and sculptor Ben Enwonwu, arguably the greatest African artist of the 20th century, moved to the UK in 1944 to attend the Slade School of Fine Art. Sudanese painter Ibrahim El-Salahi followed in his footsteps 10 years later. Some of these artists stayed and worked in the United Kingdom. Others returned to

PREVIOUS SPREAD: ASIKO (MAIN PHOTO). RAZIA JUKES (INSET); OPPOSITE: IMAGES COURTESY OF HAART; IMAGES COURTESY OF AL STUDIOS

ABOVE Rele Gallery in London hosted Marcellina Akpojotor's "Joy of More Worlds" installation this spring. **RIGHT** The artist makes collages of densely packed fabric pieces to create images of daily life.

Africa, where they helped to shape their countries' cultural identity following independence.

Despite these strong connections, there has been little knowledge of African art in the UK until recently. Art-history courses at most UK universities made no mention of African artists, and the permanent collections of most UK public art galleries were dominated by artists from Europe and North America.

"In Western thought, Europe was a space of modernity; Africa was a space of tradition," said Gabriella Nugent, a London-based art historian and curator. "But this ignores the fact that many African and European artists were operating in the same cities together. I think it's really important to not perpetuate this idea of modernism as a European project."

There is clear evidence that African art had a significant impact on modern art movements including cubism and expressionism. Early-20th-century artists such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse were inspired by the bold lines and geometric shapes of African masks and sculptures.

But many narrow European preconceptions about African art endured into the late 20th century, despite the inauguration of art biennials in several African capitals and the increasingly global nature of the art world.

"African artists in the 1990s were often expected to perform a sense of 'Africanness' in their work, which agreed with Western assumptions about the continent and its people," said Nugent.

> "I'm drawn to the African print fabric because it feels like my community is contributing to my work."
>
> —MARCELLINA AKPOJOTOR

ABOVE Marcellina Akpojotor works on a large canvas earlier this year. **LEFT** The artist's monograph on her "Joy of More Worlds" show.

"And even in our current moment of decolonization, there is not always a parallel undoing of colonial structures of knowledge."

In her studio in Lagos, Nigerian artist Marcellina Akpojotor is surrounded by a sea of scraps of African print fabric, rescued from the cutting-room floor of local tailors. The brightly colored, wax-printed cotton is popular among Nigerian women, from the slums of Lagos to business meetings in Abuja.

Akpojotor collages the fabric pieces densely onto large canvases, creating richly textured portraits of daily life that bridge the past and the present. It is a distinctive artistic process, where the salvaged fabric is not only the medium but also a conduit for collective memory.

"I'm drawn to the African print fabric because it feels like my community is contributing to my work," said Akpojotor. "The offcuts of fabric that I collect are filled with stories. I do not know those stories, but they have their own energy, and they start a conversation in my work."

The story of African print has many parallels with the story of contemporary African art in its exchanges with Europe. The fabric, a powerful marker of African identity, was in fact introduced to west and central Africa from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. A number of contemporary African artists incorporate representations of the fabric in their work to explore cultural identity and the legacy of colonialism.

Akpojotor brought the fabric from Africa to Europe this year for her first solo art show at Rele, a newly opened, upscale London gallery. Comprising 3,000 square feet of exhibition space over two floors, it is one of a growing number of galleries in London dedicated to African art.

"There have always been amazing African artists," said Alessandra Olivi, an independent art consultant and curator. "What we are seeing now is the collecting world and institutions asking themselves, 'Are our collections representative of what is happening out there?' And actually realizing no, they are not."

African artists, and artists of African heritage, are increasingly choosing to create art on their own terms. While some continue to explore sociopolitical issues in their countries of origin, others are creating more abstract works.

"I think this is important because it allows artists to continue to develop their own distinct visual vocabulary," Lawal said. "It's not all about strife and struggle and having to carry the weight of their nation's history and colonialism. It can be more abstract, more complex. It can be lighter."

One artist creating more abstract work is Ayesha Feisal, a British artist of Sierra Leonean heritage who is represented through the House of African Art's online gallery. Feisal is interested in changing psychological states, which she explores by painting amorphous human forms, using intense and often surreal colors as a way to heighten emotion.

"These artists are broadening perceptions," said Lawal. "Through their work, they are showing that there is a much greater variety and complexity of subject matter than people may have assumed before. They are providing dynamic, fresh perspectives on contemporary art of African origin."

Based in London and Paris, **Jacky Rowland** is an actor, playwright and broadcaster who writes about art, theatre, music and culture. She is a former correspondent for the *British Broadcasting Corporation* and *Aljazeera English*.

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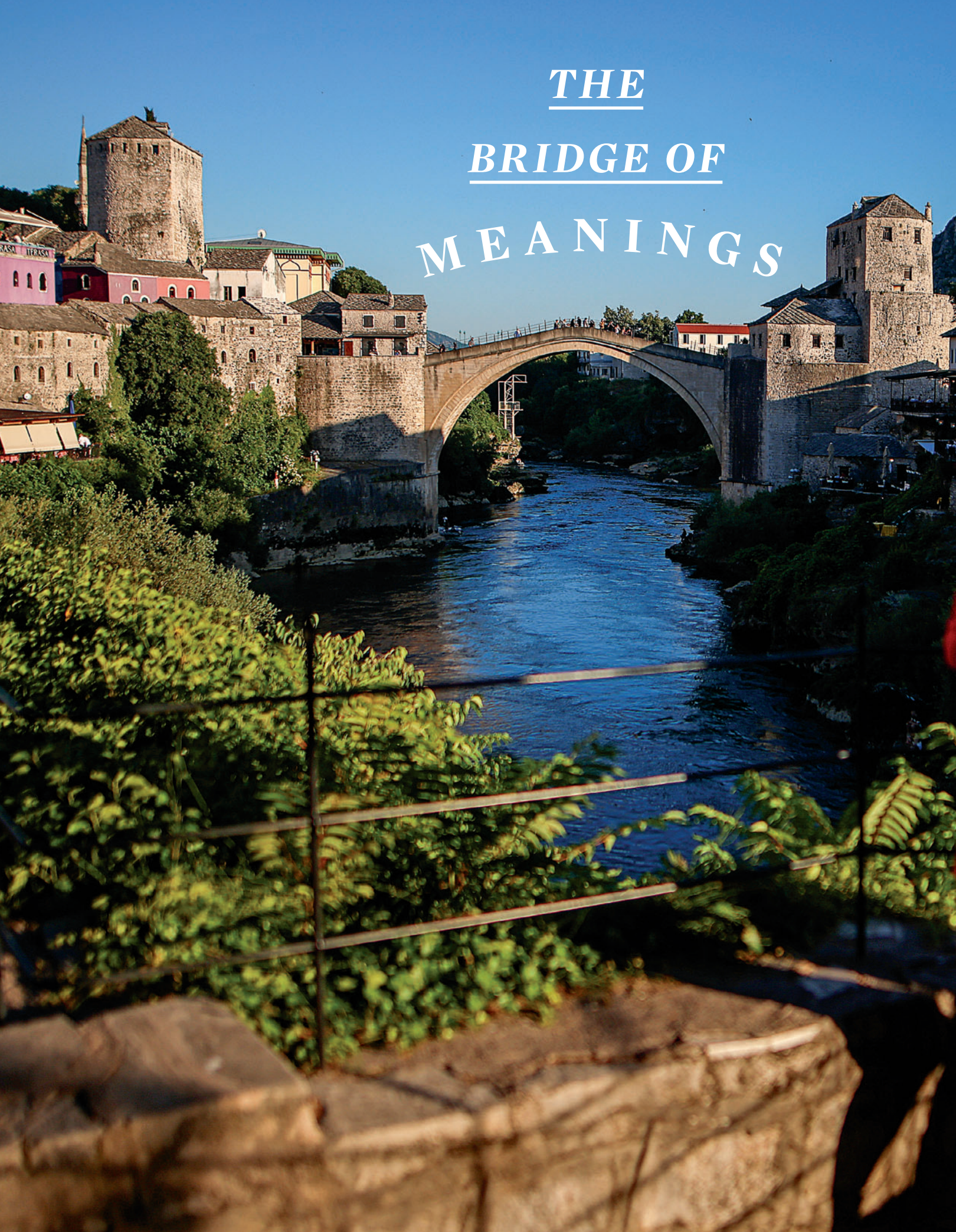
IMAGES COURTESY OF MARCELLINA AKPOJOTOR AND RELE GALLERY



THE BRIDGE OF MEANINGS

Mostar celebrates 20 years since the reopening of its beloved icon

Written by

IAN BANCROFT

Photographed by

ARMIN DURGUT

Throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, various interpretations of Mostar's Old Bridge (or "Stari Most") grace the walls of cafes, restaurants, museums and galleries. Few capture its unique and irregular curvature, a free hand trying too hard, seemingly incapable of mimicking the architect's vision and execution, its aura and significance.

Mostar is synonymous with the Old Bridge. The city's fabric is woven into every piece, its culture and heritage inseparable from the towering arch that transcends the river Neretva. No matter one's connection to the bridge, it imprints itself upon the mind's eye. Its image is arguably the nation of Bosnia-Herzegovina's most famous and iconic.

Tourists from the United Kingdom take pictures of the Old Bridge at sunset in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, this summer. Built in 1566, the Old Bridge was destroyed in the 1992–1995 war, then rebuilt and reopened in 2004.

ABOVE Edin "Dino" Šipković works on a painting of the Old Bridge in the old part of Mostar. **RIGHT** Architect Senada Demirović holds a souvenir replica of the bridge, which she helped rebuild. **OPPOSITE** Tourists watch a diver leap into the river Neretva from the bridge, which draws large crowds year-round.

Craning his neck up at the keystone, Edin "Dino" Šipković, a painter, could almost paint it from memory, were it not for new details that reveal themselves with each glance. "The beauty of the bridge is that it is connected to nature," Šipković tells me. "The stones and the trees—they become one piece." It is this harmony that bestows tranquility upon its surroundings and inspires artists here and beyond.

That sense of peace was shattered during the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia, following the breakup of Yugoslavia.

The moment of its destruction, by some members of the Croatian military in 1993, is engraved upon the memories of those for whom the bridge was so precious. "I couldn't reach anyone—the phone lines were down," says Senada Demirović, expelled from Mostar, ultimately to return to pursue its reconstruction.

There were no real-time technologies through

which news could be conveyed. This distance nourished an "augmented emotion of loss," she says of trying to envisage Mostar absent its defining feature.

What many recalled as "drops of blood" during the bridge's destruction was merely the seeping of red mortar used for waterproofing. Yet such interpretations capture the magnitude of the moment. "We all spoke about how 'Starac' [which locally translates as 'Old Man'] had fallen," recalls Slađan Jakirović, one of the key members of the team tasked with rebuilding this source of Mostar's pride. "It was like losing a family member."

The loss extinguished any semblance of hope within a population that had endured months of shelling—killing what gave Mostar its spirit and sense of self. "We were crying for the bridge

OPPOSITE TOP A historical photo shows the wartime destruction of the Old Bridge and its surroundings. **BOTTOM** Architect Amir Pašić (in gray jacket) supervises the bridge's reconstruction. **ABOVE** The Old Bridge offers a picturesque backdrop for patrons at coffeehouses and shops in Mostar.

in the middle of all that chaos," Demirović reflects. Yet it also inspired citizens' defiance and a push to rebuild their cultural heritage.

This year the Old Bridge is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its reopening on July 23, 2004. Only a year later, the achievements of those who were committed to seeing it rise again from the waters beneath were recognized with the inscription of the bridge and the surrounding old town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

History of the original

Commissioned by Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the Old Bridge was built in 1566 by a protégé of Mimar Sinan, the renowned architect of the empire, according to UNESCO. Zlatko Serdarević, a local journalist, says that for 427 years it not only spanned the banks of the river but provided a meeting place for promenading couples and prospective friendships.

COURTESY OF PAŠIĆ FAMILY ARCHIVE

ABOVE Architect Tihomir Rozić, who was a member of the Old Town Mostar conservation project, holds the Aga Khan Award given to the team in 1986. **BELOW** Aida Idrizbegović-Zgonić, a professor of architecture, says the bridge's rebuilding enlisted archeological surveys that revealed key clues about ancient construction methods.

At the crossroads of Western and Eastern rule, the Old Bridge has represented the enduring multicultural and multireligious aspects of Mostar that have long defined the city's identity. It survived two world wars, though it was mined with explosives during the latter, Serdarević describes through elaborate diagrams on the back of a napkin.

Something else about the bridge has united Mostar's disparate communities for centuries: diving. Against this breathtaking backdrop flows the adrenaline and glamour of a shared pursuit of excellence and exhilaration. For almost as long as the bridge has existed, every summer there has been a competition to find the most elegant jumper.

> "People who have passed even just once over the bridge never forget it. It never leaves you."
> —TIMOHIR ROZIĆ

"Mostarians live for that," Amir Hanić, manager of the Mostar Diving Club, tanned almost from head to toe, declares. "It is a symbol of love." Schooled in diving from a young age, those like Hanić inherited the pastime from their fathers and grandfathers. They are fearless in their pursuit of beauty as they uphold tradition.

Balancing on the parapets, they woo tourists, whose numbers have grown exponentially, into sponsoring their 24-meter (79-foot) jump into the turquoise waters. Even in the depths of

Slađan Jakirović, one of the key members of the team tasked with rebuilding the Old Bridge, poses with a copy of Amir Pašić's book *Celebrating Mostar*, about the reconstruction of the old town.

winter, they delight the assembled crowds, no matter how small. As the anticipation of a jump builds, so too does impatience. With mobile phones poised, most dives are rarely viewed with the naked eye. Within seconds they are tagged and uploaded, cementing Mostar's place on the virtual map of the world.

An 'architectural wonder'

"It was a unique technological and architectural wonder," proclaims Aida Idrizbegović-Zgonić, a professor of architecture at the University of Sarajevo, "a single span of 21 meters [nearly 69 feet]—grounded on two rocks—with an 83-centimeter [2-foot-8.7-inch] load-bearing arch that is inconsistent in places." Contrary to appearances, it is hollow. "It is constructed from a specific stone, a white limestone, used for most minarets, which is light for its strength," Idrizbegović-Zgonić adds. "It feels chalky to [the] touch but doesn't degrade."

That its reconstruction is today largely taken for granted owes much to the indomitable efforts of the late architect and professor Amir Pašić, recipient of the prestigious Aga Khan Award in 1986 for his pre-war dedication to reconstructing Mostar's cultural heritage. "People couldn't understand why he came back," reflects Tihomir Rozić, one of Pašić's many protégés. "He could have worked anywhere given the accolades he had received." (Pašić's daughter Amra Pašić is the managing editor of *AramcoWorld*.)

From abroad Pašić enacted his dedication to the cause. He traveled across the globe, organizing lectures at prestigious universities and gathering architects for annual workshops to plan the reconstruction. Entitled Mostar 2004, the project started abroad at the time the old city was under daily bombardment in the early 1990s and continued in post-war Mostar.

> "We all spoke about how 'Starac' [a name for the bridge that locally translates as 'Old Man'] had fallen. It was like losing a family member."
>
> —SLAĐAN JAKIROVIĆ

Pašić's standing brought together a disparate group of donors and partners. "The objective was to have a common project that didn't represent one particular country or interest," Rozić explains—an international project, not simply one for Mostar.

Tradition meets modern engineering

The destruction of the bridge allowed for what Idrizbegović-Zgonić describes as an "autopsy of a bridge," with archeological surveys revealing key clues about ancient construction methods. Urban legends that the original had been built with egg whites and horses' hair couldn't be confirmed. There were methodological disagreements and logistical challenges. Meetings with

A tourist in Mostar poses with local children in traditional Bosnian dress near the Old Bridge ahead of this summer's celebration marking 20 years since its reopening.

UNESCO experts, whose approval was required for each decision about the type of mortar to be used, would continue until the early hours.

In the post-war context, this mixed team of architects, engineers and others overcame the perceptions that prevented others from working together elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They became a symbol of reconciliation and, as Serdarević reminds me, a replica of the multicultural workforce that had constructed the original bridge.

Most of the remains of the bridge were too damaged to be reused, despite being heroically recovered by Hungarian army divers. New stone had to be mined locally. The stonemasons were predominantly from Turkey, Rozić recalls, where such skills are still nurtured. Modern machinery would cut to within 5 centimeters (about 2 inches) of the required size before the human hand took over. The individual pieces were numbered and arranged. Metal clamps were prepared.

After the war the mixed team of architects, engineers and others became a symbol of reconciliation and a replica of the multicultural workforce that had constructed the original bridge.

Documentary footage of each jigsaw piece being placed and joined, viewable in a nearby museum dedicated to the bridge's reconstruction, is immensely calming and gratifying. The perfection of measurement, the steadiness of the crane and the concentration of the workers combine to set the stones—1,088 in total. "People don't believe there is no concrete inside," says Rozić. Such was their commitment to re-creating the bridge as it had been.

The masterpiece of the original is further admired by those engaged in its reconstruction. With the stones requiring soaking for softness, the liquid lead that would bind them threatened a volcano of steam unless the individual apertures were sufficiently warmed with a device resembling a hair dryer. Centuries back, Idrizbegović-Zgonić explains, there were no hydroelectric dams to tame the Neretva waters and prevent the rickety scaffolding from being washed away, nor sensors to monitor the movements of individual stones as temperatures fluctuated.

As the final pieces were laid, interest in their endeavor mounted. Keen onlookers found different and novel vantage points, Rozić recalls, eager to catch a glimpse through gaps in the

A celebration of the 20th anniversary of the reopening of the Old Bridge on July 23, 2024.

scaffolding. Previously disinterested local politicians descended upon the bridge, joined by diplomats and foreign ministers seeking a powerful metaphor for reunification. It was a moment with which many, from Mostar and beyond, wanted to be associated.

And Pašić, whose students included Idrizbegović-Zgonić and Demirović, invited his colleagues worldwide to the bridge's reopening.

"People who have passed even just once over the bridge never forget it," Rozić maintains. "It never leaves you."

Triumphant return

Many of Mostar's residents returned to a site they thought they had been deprived of forever. The plethora of relationships with the bridge, whether nostalgic or contemporary, is infused with individual meaning, subject as always to shifting frames of interpretation that change over time, especially in Mostar, where the social fabric has been devastated by war.

For those who spearheaded the reconstruction, their expertise remains a profound resource for the world, especially given the destruction of cultural and religious heritage in the interceding years. Their faithfulness to the ways and means of the initial construction is a powerful commitment to authenticity in an age compromised by quick and often short-lived fixes.

Twenty years ago, Mostar's residents huddled on the riverbanks as fireworks created a blanket of mist over the majestic bridge. Joy and exuberance mixed with relief. Guided by only a single spotlight, divers dazzled the assembled crowd by plunging like sparrows headfirst into the water's embrace. This year, dignitaries and some of those involved in the reconstruction gathered to reflect upon what Demirović describes nostalgically as a chance to be part of history.

"We can be dead, but the bridge can't be destroyed," Jakirović sighs. "We can't get time back, but we can get back on our feet." By reconstructing the bridge, they returned hope to Mostar and its future generations. After all, the Old Bridge is not, and never has been, just an ordinary bridge.

Ian Bancroft is a writer and former diplomat based in the former Yugoslavia. He is the author of a novel, *Luka*, and a work of nonfiction, *Dragon's Teeth: Tales From North Kosovo*. **Armin Durgut** is a freelance photojournalist and a documentary photographer. He is a regular contributor to Associated Press news agency and other publications. His book and an exhibition, "Mrtvare," poignantly documents the footwear of the Srebrenica genocide victims, and his work often highlights significant historical and social issues.

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LATINO MUSLIMS
Reclaiming a NEW WORLD

Written and photographed by JOE CENTER

When ʻAbd al-Rahman built the Great Mosque of Córdoba in what is modern-day Spain around 785 CE, he could never have known its distinctive red-and-white, two-tiered arches would reach from al-Andalus across an ocean.

The arches spanned the columns and capitals borrowed from earlier Roman and Visigoth stonemasons, but their broader architectural influence would stretch across the Atlantic to a continent yet unknown to the Muslim world. They bridged centuries, the ebb and flow of dynasties, cultural identities and languages, and a wholesale change in how the world communicated.

ʻAbd al-Rahman's arches today extend to a home for Latino Muslims in Texas, where they appear in an entry hall that leads to a prayer room oriented toward Makkah as well as an audio-visual production space.

"We envisioned building a place where all people are welcomed, a sort of mosque for non-Muslims. We live knowing our lives are Islam on display," says Sandy "Sakinah" Gutierrez, a Colombian American Muslim. She is the co-founder of IslamInSpanish and the designing mind that brought the arches to Houston.

Her family is part of a distinct minority in the US. Latinos make up approximately 20% of the population, according to the US Census. As Colombians, Gutierrez says, they are a minority among Latinos (4%). As Muslims they are yet again a minority in the US. And while their numbers are growing, Latinos are a minority within Islam.

"We are four times minorities," says Jaime "Mujahid" Fletcher, Gutierrez's husband, also Colombian American. He is co-founder and media executive producer of IslamInSpanish. "We know what it means to be the 'new kid,' so we think about how we can make the first experience inviting and comfortable for people, so everyone knows they are valued here."

According to Pew Research Center, the percentage of Muslim Americans identifying as Latino increased from 6% to 8% in the years between 2011 and 2017, suggesting perhaps the fastest growth segment in the American Muslim community.

But it hasn't always been easy.

Alex Gutierrez, director of program development for IslamInSpanish, wears a ball cap that reads "Los Astros," a reference to Houston's beloved champion baseball team. "When I converted there was some pushback from family and friends. Finally, they had to see I'm still me. I'm still Houstonian. I'm still Latino. I'm still Colombian. We simply have different ways that we understand God."

While firm numbers of Latino Muslims are somewhat elusive, what is clear is the dynamic interaction of Arab and Latino cultures. And this is nothing new.

Lofti Sayahi, professor of Spanish linguistics in the Department of Languages, Literatures & Cultures at the University of Albany, explains a major point of connection for Spanish and Arabic:

"The Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula that started in 711 CE lasted about eight centuries, during which there was a significant amount of bilingualism and language contact. Arabic was introduced as a dominant and prestigious language, which led to its adoption by peoples of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. This led, for example, to the emergence of a linguistic variety known as Mozarabic, from the Arabic word *must'arib*, that

OPPOSITE Sandy "Sakinah" Gutierrez, IslamInSpanish cofounder and designer of its cultural center, shows photos from the book *Andalusia* of the arches in the Grand Mosque in Córdoba, Spain. They form her inspiration for entryway architecture. **BELOW** Elements from the mosque will be incorporated in the prayer room's design.

was used by the Christians who remained in territories that were under Muslim control.

"If we count derivations and toponyms, there are about 4,000 loanwords from Arabic in Spanish, mostly having to do with culture, administration and agriculture."

According to Craig Considine, a sociology professor at Houston's Rice University, "Multiculturalism thrived on the peninsula during the al-Andalus period, with Muslim administrations promoting religious, cultural and academic freedom. Followers of Islam, Christianity and Judaism lived as their conscience and traditions dictated, and the tolerant, cooperative environment led to a golden era of science and medicine.

"Muslim scholars believed it is not enough to talk to one another. We must allow the cross-pollination of ideas to lead to new fruit," says Considine, author of *The Humanity of Muhammad: A Christian View.* "Not merely tolerant, they embraced the diversity and knowledge, regardless of where it came from. It was about moving society forward."

Speaking of Spanish expansion into the Americas after the *Reconquista* in 1492, he says:

"In many ways, the knowledge that the Spanish had seized or adapted—geography, astronomy, sailing seas—was Arab in nature. Muslim scholars had been working in these areas for centuries. Much of European exploration would not have been possible without Muslim scholars cultivating science."

> "Muslim scholars believed … we must allow the cross-pollination of ideas to lead to new fruit."
>
> —CRAIG CONSIDINE

After 600 years of exploration and conquest, revolt and independence, the world now has "Latin America," almost entirely speaking Spanish and Portuguese—from the two countries formed from al-Andalus. Their conversations are peppered with Arabic, their food, sweetened with *azucar.*

"Sugar" in English is *azucar* in Spanish, from the Arabic *sukkar.* And sugar cane is a major Colombian export crop.

Jaime "Abu Mujahid" Fletcher, father of the younger Jaime, is a retired

OPPOSITE Members of the diverse community at IslamInSpanish celebrate *Eid*. The space was decorated with mylar balloons spelling "Happy *Eid*" in Spanish. **ABOVE** For Latino Muslims *Eid* celebrations include taking turns hitting a piñata while blindfolded until its candy spills out for children.

agricultural engineer, having worked with sugar-cane plantations for much of his career in his native Colombia. Today he lives in the US and is the voice for many audio productions of Islamic material in Spanish, including a recitation of the entire Qur'an.

"People would meet me and say they recognized my voice. It had to be from recordings because this was before social media was a big thing."

The voice is a low baritone, smooth and mellowed by eight decades. He talks about there being an order between the sky and the earth, growing orchids and all things to do with agriculture. "You can't have Spanish rice without rice. And it was Muslim agriculture that made rice farming possible on a large scale in Spain. That was a thousand years ago."

Arab settlers in Spain introduced other food crops: artichokes, almonds and figs, date palms, citrus trees and bananas, all important elements of Latin American cuisine today.

A snapshot of cross-cultural pollination could be found on the *iftar* table at a public park in Sugar Land, Texas. The potluck meal came together as members of the IslamInSpanish community brought food from each of their own traditions or personal preferences, all *halal*, or prepared by Islamic standards. Turkey shawarma sat next to pasta salad and fried chicken, figs and sliced fruit. Baklava competed with pink-frosted doughnuts with bright sprinkles. There was Colombian coffee along with other nonalcoholic drinks.

The community was a cross section of Latin America, with attendees hailing from Central and South America, Mexico, the Caribbean and the United States. But the gathering drew from far beyond the Western Hemisphere: All of the world's continents were represented, except Antarctica.

A welcoming spirit spills over into all the activities of this community. And here the greatest cross-cultural connection between the Arab world and the Latino Muslim becomes undeniably apparent: hospitality. The culture developed over centuries of living in a harsh environment—welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, giving the traveler rest—finds a fresh manifestation among the minority within a minority.

Considine invites IslamInSpanish to speak with his class at Rice University each year. "These folks are cultural navigators. They can make the 'foreign' seem 'familiar' and help students learn to look with fresh eyes. For myself, when I began studying what Islam is really all about, I noticed similarities between my faith and Islam. Islam made me a better Roman Catholic. I became better by seeing the way

ABOVE Eveliz Gutierrez, left, supervises as her niece Jaliliah Fletcher works the dough to make *buñuelos*, traditional Colombian fried pastry balls, at a family gathering. **RIGHT** Alex and Eveliz Gutierrez, joined by their daughter, show off their homeland pride via their bilingual IslamInSpanish shirts.

they lived in community, with generosity and kindness."

Dinner at the Fletcher home puts that generosity and kindness on display. Latina women wearing *hijab* prepare traditional Colombian food, the *halal* way. The family atmosphere and the aroma of rice, beans, roasted chicken, fried plantains and yucca are as inviting as the hosts themselves. And *buñuelos,* the traditional fried pastry balls, add the meal's exclamation point.

On a larger, public scale, the gracious hospitality is obvious for the Islamic holiday of *Eid*. Respected elders and babes in arms, men and women, Black, brown and white, Salvadoran, Venezuelan, Nigerian, Puerto Rican, South Asian, Indonesian, Arab—they're all there. Tattooed hands from a former, now discarded lifestyle meet henna-painted hands. Children carry stuffed animals, and mothers help them find their shoes.

It is like many *Eid* celebrations around the world, except this one has a piñata—a classic must-have for a Latino celebration with children—and the sermon is in Arabic, English and Spanish, and is delivered by a first-generation American and convert.

Isa Parada was born in New York after his family emigrated from El Salvador; then they headed to Houston. After converting, he attended the Islamic University of Madinah, and today he serves as imam, educational director and spiritual counselor at IslamInSpanish. Addressing the community on the morning of *Eid*, he asks those gathered to consider a world in need, regardless of languages spoken or foods served.

Or clothes worn, for that matter.

While people may convert when they believe they have found a "perfect fit" in Islam, Jaime "Mujahid" Fletcher says,

ABOVE IslamInSpanish's Alex Gutierrez, left, director of program development, and Jaime "Mujahid" Fletcher, cofounder, prepare to record a Ramadan message. **LEFT** Jaime "Abu Mujahid" and Heddy "Umm Mujahid" Fletcher are still sweet on each other, as their sugar bowl suggests.

that doesn't erase previous expressions of cultural identity.

"It made me a better man. It didn't change my clothes," says Fletcher, who typically wears a polo-style shirt and khaki pants. "I don't dress like I'm from Saudi [Arabia] or Indonesia or Nigeria—that would be cultural appropriation. The clothes that I wear *are* Muslim dress. Because *I'm* Muslim."

Alex Gutierrez agrees but on an even broader scale. "There are many subculture Muslim groups, like South Asian or African or Arabs, and everybody has their own way of living into it," he says. "As new Muslims, we studied from historical sources to help us establish what is culture and what is Islam. We value any opportunity to fix misconceptions, so it's a great blessing to be able to be kind of a cultural bridge."

The co-founders of IslamInSpanish see themselves as blessed to have found Islam. Jaime says: "My life was very troubled before becoming Muslim. Gangs, violence. It wasn't good. Now I know what it means to have a high-level, universal product. And to really value it because I found it when I had nothing.

"Our task now is to make sure our daughters always cherish what they have. They were born into Islam. They didn't have to find it. But even though it is their birthright, so too is their history, where they came from. And they will always honor and value both, never take them for granted."

Joe Center is a Houston-based photographer and writer. His mantra is "Notice. Appreciate. Acknowledge."

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OPPOSITE TOP: ALFONSO GODINEZ; OPPOSITE LEFT: ALAMY; ABOVE AND RIGHT: MATTHIEU PALEY

Forging a new path

Hikers on a recently opened section of the Transcaucasian Trail, which is set to be completed by 2030, are discovering the majestic beauty and ingrained hospitality of rural Azerbaijan. But one step at a time: What tangible cultural connections will visitors and the Caucasus country gain from the project?

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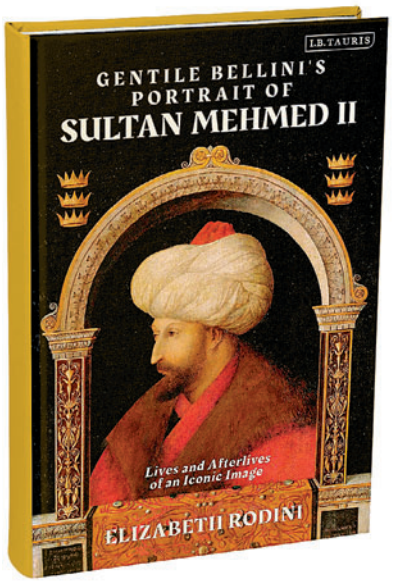


"Appropriately, this Venetian picture of an Ottoman collected by an Englishman was increasingly suited to the interests of an interconnected, late-twentieth-century world."

—From *Gentile Bellini's Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II: Lives and Afterlives of an Iconic Image*

Gentile Bellini's Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II: Lives and Afterlives of an Iconic Image

Elizabeth Rodini. I. B. Tauris, 2020.

In 1479 Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II—renowned for his 1453 conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul)—asked Venetian officials to send him a skilled painter. Artist Gentile Bellini spent two years in the Ottoman capital, resulting in a famous portrait with a colorful history, as art historian Elizabeth Rodini's detailed study recounts. After Mehmed II's death, the painting returned to Venice, disappearing until1865 when Sir Henry Austen Layard, one-time British ambassador, spy and archeologist, bought it on a dark Venetian canal. Through Layard's bequest, the painting slipped past German World War I submarines, reaching London in 1916, as the Ottoman Empire itself was headed for defeat. Heavily damaged and restored, the painting is on loan in the Victoria & Albert Museum, but in modern-day Turkey, it appears on stamps, advertising and school textbooks—an afterlife that neither Bellini nor the Sultan could have foreseen when they met more than 500 years before. —CHRISTINA RIGGS

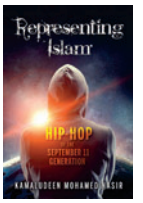
Without endorsing the views of authors, the editors encourage reading as a path to greater understanding.

No Ordinary Assignment: A Memoir

Jane Ferguson. Mariner Books, 2023.

Veteran TV war reporter Jane Ferguson's poignant memoir illustrates the courage and compassion required to tell human-centered stories from the frontlines of the world's direst conflicts. Having grown up in 1980s Northern Ireland during the sectarian strife known as The Troubles, Ferguson had already lived with the toll of war when she started reporting from conflict zones in the late 2000s. This fast-paced narrative, with expertly set scenes and vivid characters, tracks her decade-plus of broadcast dispatches for Al Jazeera, CNN and PBS from Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan and beyond. Ferguson also interrogates how her drive to shed light on war's forgotten victims interweaves with a personal search for peace and meaning. As civilians die while politicians dither, Ferguson ponders whether her work makes a difference. Ultimately, her account shows how empathetic reporting confronts world leaders with the on-the-ground effects of policies made half a world away.

—J. TREVOR WILLIAMS



Representing Islam: Hip-Hop of the September 11 Generation

Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir. Indiana University Press, 2020.

Is hip-hop, commonly associated with edgy lyrics, violence and disregard for authority, compatible with Islam? For the "Sept. 11 generation," the globalized Muslim youth growing up during a time of backlash against their faith, the answer booms "yes," writes Mohamed Nasir, a Singapore-based sociologist studying Muslim youth culture. Beyond describing how beats and instruments have crept into traditional *nasheed* music, this read shows how Muslim hip-hoppers have deployed the genre for both religious outreach and grievance-based activism. Nasir illuminates how various groups wield hip-hop as a tool for social change. Global in scope, the book showcases how hip-hop's digital diffusion links young activists transnationally to decry colonial legacies and human rights abuses, and how listeners and artists alike negotiate conflicting identities and theological dissonance.

—J. TREVOR WILLIAMS

The First Great Powers: Babylon and Assyria

Arthur Cotterell. 2019. Hurst.

Noted historian Arthur Cotterell brings the long and complex history of Mesopotamia to life in this survey of one of the first great civilizations. This history begins in the fourth millennium BCE on the Euphrates River with the founding of the world's first city, Uruk, in Sumer, where it is thought Sumerians began to inscribe symbols on tablets, thereby creating cuneiform, the earliest form of writing. Progress in the sciences, particularly mathematics and astronomy, soon followed, paving way for the rise of Babylon and later Assyria, which used both respectively to control their economies and to foretell the future. Cotterelle states the roles played by kings and gods throughout Mesopotamian society and how advances in warfare allowed some nations to advance and, over time, create power centers capable of successfully administrating large tracts of land and bringing diverse peoples together into a unified whole—thereby creating a civilization not so different from our own. —JANE WALDRON GRUTZ

The Seed Detective Plumbs the Fertile Crescent and Beyond

Written by DIANNA WRAY

Seeds represent possibilities and the future, but seeds are also history, Adam Alexander reminds us in *The Seed Detective*, an engaging exploration of his own story as a seed collector and that of the endangered, antique and heirloom vegetables he has been seeking out around the world for decades.

Alexander, a United Kingdom-based documentary film producer, started growing his own food as a kid in Devon, England. After briefly trying to hawk red Brussel sprouts and other unique vegetables in the 1970s, he fell back on making documentaries movies when his vegetable stand didn't take off. He might have been content with simply growing his own produce had it not been for a fateful encounter with a pepper.

While working on a TV project in Donetsk, Ukraine, in the fall of 1988, Alexander encountered a tennis ball-sized sweet pepper native to the region. Intrigued, he saved some seeds to cultivate back home in the UK. "Little did I know … that this moment was to mark the start of a journey of discovery that fundamentally changed the way I looked at and came to understand the often-visceral relationship we have we can have with what we grow and eat," he recalled.

His mission started out personal—he just wanted to discover old forgotten varieties of tomatoes and peppers, and other veggies to grow and enjoy. Gradually, Alexander started looking for seeds from vegetables that stood to be wiped out completely. Along the way, he also began delving into the histories of produce.

So, he traveled the world, discovering new varieties and learning everything from the earliest documented domestication of peas in the Fertile Crescent roughly 8,500 years ago to how Afghanis were growing purple, yellow, white and black carrots more than 5,000 years ago.

Much of the history he compiled is proffered in this slim, readable volume and broken down into chapters devoted to specific vegetables. For each entry, he connects the roots of vegetable history stretching back millennia to his own stories of discovery.

He also takes readers along as he comes across a local type of Syrian fava bean featured in a salad he enjoys at a restaurant in Palmyra, Jordan, in 2011 or persuades an increasingly irritated elderly woman at a farmer's market in Laos to sell him a bag of pea pods.

Alexander, who is also now a "seed guardian" for the UK-based Heritage Seed Library and has two refrigerators in his Wales garage packed with 499 seed samples, as of his book's publication, also prompts introspection about where the origins of the food we eat. If you find yourself digging your own garden once you've gulped down the final chapter, don't say we didn't warn you.

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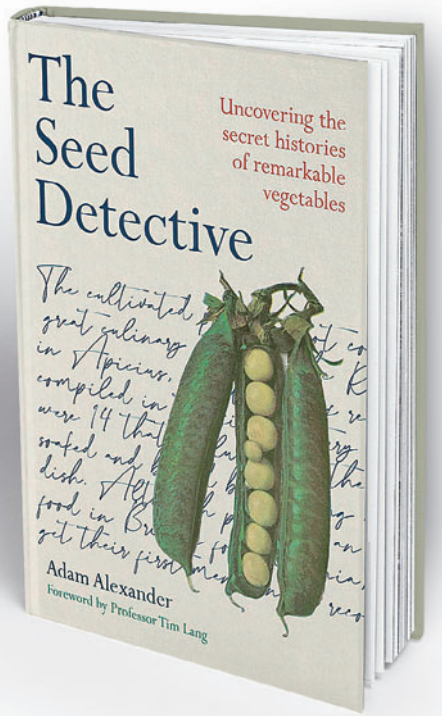

The Seed Detective: Uncovering the Secret Histories of Remarkable Vegetables

Adam Alexander
Chelsea Green Publishing, 2022.

SHUTTERSTOCK

EVENTS

Highlights from aramcoworld.com

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CURRENT / SEPTEMBER

Perfumes of the East explores the deep-rooted connection between the Arab world and perfume. Visitors are invited to embark on a sensory adventure, encountering the distinctive scents of the East and discovering the age-old traditions that imbued perfume with social significance in the Arab world. Featuring more than 200 archaeological items as well as contemporary artworks, the exhibition is structured around three sections, offering visitors the opportunity to explore different timeless themes. The exhibition progresses through diverse settings: from the raw beauty of nature to bustling town streets and into the intimate setting of a private home. The National Museum, **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**, through September 14.

CURRENT / OCTOBER

Ancient Sculptures: India Egypt Assyria Greece Rome aims to bring great works of art from other cultures to Mumbai, India, to deepen and enrich the study of world history in Indian schools and universities. Not only is the exhibition coinciding with the commemoration of 75 years of Indian independence, it is a transcontinental endeavor that brings together long-standing partners—the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), The J. Paul Getty Museum, the British Museum and, for the first time, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, along with museums from India, to showcase magnificent works of art from the ancient world. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), **Mumbai**, through October 1.

CURRENT / JUNE

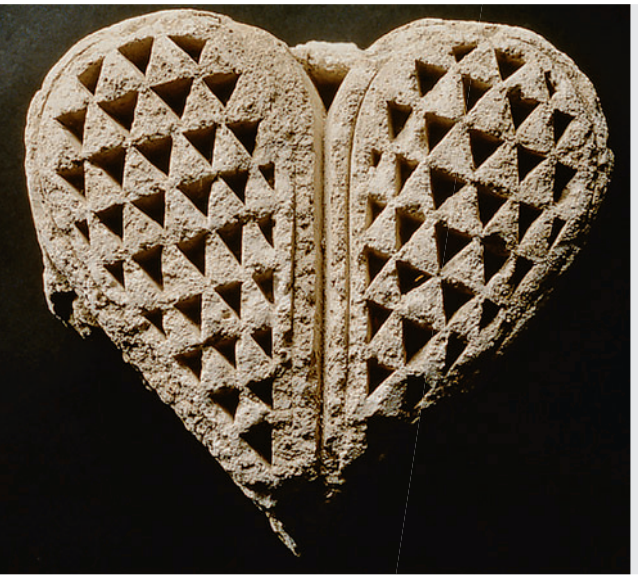
From Asia to the World: Ancient to Contemporary Art celebrates more than 100 years of collecting and exhibiting Asian art at the Toledo (Ohio) Museum of Art, featuring superb examples from antiquity to the present. The exhibition includes sculptures and blue-and white-porcelain, celadon and enamel ceramics from China, Korea and Japan that highlight trade among Asia, Latin America and Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Works by contemporary artists engage these histories. **Toledo** Museum, **US**, through June 29.

COMING / NOVEMBER

The Great Mughals: Art, Architecture and Opulence will celebrate the extraordinary creative output and internationalist culture of the Golden Age of the Mughal Court (about 1560–1660) during the reigns of its most famous emperors: Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London**, opening November 9.

COMING / APRIL

Art Dubai is the Middle East's leading international art fair. The fair drives meaningful engagement with the rich cultural heritage and contemporary art practices of the MENA region and extends to territories across Southeast and Central Asia, the African continent and Latin America through presentations across its gallery sections. In its role as talent incubator, Art Dubai has been the launchpad and development platform of the successful careers of artists, curators and art professionals, and continues to celebrate art excellence through its extended fair programming and initiatives. Art Dubai also works closely with its partners in producing innovative art programming and supporting the cultural community. Madinat Jumeirah Conference & Events Centre, **Dubai**, April 18-20.



Baghdad: A Journey Back to Madinat al-Salam, With Assassin's Creed Mirage sheds light on a captivating historical period, a key geographical area and a brilliant civilization. Numerous exquisite artifacts from the Abbasid period are presented, some of which have not been seen for more than 20 years. The objects are showcased amid content from *Assassin's Creed Mirage*, the latest video game in the series by the company Ubisoft. Together, they form an exhibition that reveals the splendor of a global city in its golden age. For centuries, this city stood as a political, scientific, cultural and commercial power before it was razed by the Mongols in 1258 CE. The exhibition attempts to answer what the lost city could have been like by connecting historical facts and objects from the Institut du Monde Arabe's collections with content from *Assassin's Creed Mirage*: concept arts, video and audio extracts, images of historical characters and places featured in the game and more. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through November 10.

Fragment of a carved stucco facing panel from a palace in Samarra, Iraq, ephemeral Abbasid capital from 836 to 892 CE, Museum of the Institut du Monde Arabe.

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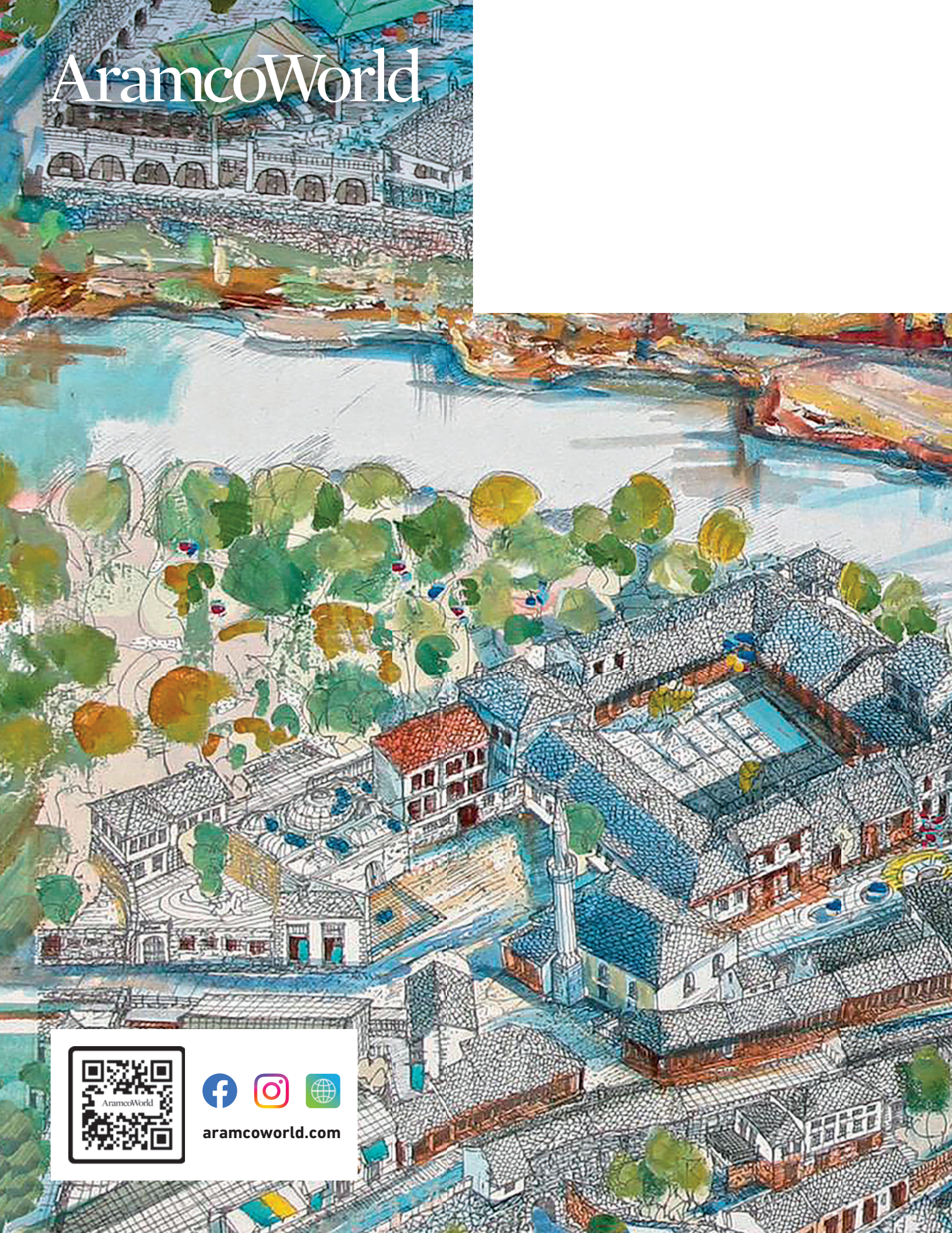

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