

***It Comes in Many Forms: Islamic Art from the Collection*, Oct. 23, 2020 - Dec. 18, 2021**

This exhibition presents textiles, decorative arts, and works on paper that show the breadth of Islamic artistic production and the diversity of Muslim cultures. Throughout the world for nearly 1,400 years, Islam's creative expressions have taken many forms—as artworks, functional objects and tools, decoration, fashion, and critique. From a medieval Persian ewer to contemporary clothing, these objects explore migration, diasporas, and exchange.

What makes an object Islamic? Does the artist need to be a practicing Muslim? Is being Muslim a religious expression or a cultural one? Do makers need to be from a predominantly Muslim country? Does the subject matter need to include traditionally Islamic motifs? These objects, a majority of which have never been exhibited before, suggest the difficulty of defining arts from a transnational religious viewpoint.

These exhibition labels add honorifics whenever important figures in Islam are mentioned. SWT is an acronym for subhanahu wa-ta'ala (glorious and exalted is he), a respectful phrase used after every mention of Allah (God). SAW is an acronym for salallahu alayhi wa-sallam (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him), used for the Prophet Muhammad, the founder and last messenger of Islam. AS is an acronym for alayhi as-sallam (peace be upon him), and is used for all other prophets before him.

Tayana Fincher
Nancy Elizabeth Prophet Fellow
Costume and Textiles Department
RISD Museum

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Spanish
Tile, 1500s
Earthenware with glaze
13.5 x 14 x 2.5 cm (5 5/16 x 5 1/2 x 1 inches)
Gift of Eleanor Fayerweather 57.268

Heavily chipped on its surface, this tile was made in what is now Spain after the fall of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada (1238–1492). Almost 800 years of Muslim rule ended when the Christian Crown of Castile conquered the Iberian Peninsula, but many Islamic influences remain in the region today. This includes the *cuerda seca* (dry cord) technique, adopted from Central Asian ceramicists in the 1300s. Artists create geometric patterns by painting thin lines of resistive wax, which prevent colored glazes from running together during the



RISD MUSEUM

firing process. This tile would be grouped with identical ones to create an *alicatado* (mosaic), admirable both up close and from a distance as decoration on palace walls and ceilings.

Ottoman (Turkey)

Cheragh (Oil Lamp), early 1700s

Tin and copper

11.5 x 29 x 21 cm (4 1/2 x 11 7/16 x 8 1/4 inches)

Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 43.337

This oil lamp's external engravings include floral patterns, the Persian word *cheragh* (lamp), and a series of Arabic names that may reference the four Sunni leaders of the Rashidun Caliphate (632–661 CE). One of these names, Haydar, is associated with 'Ali, who is depicted in a Shi'a context on the opposite wall. The interior of the object is inscribed with the opening *āyāt* (verses) of the Qur'an. Text rounding from the spout includes "In the name of God, Most Gracious. . . . Guide us on the right path," while the center praises Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Prior to the 1920s, the Ottoman Turkish language blended Arabic and Persian.



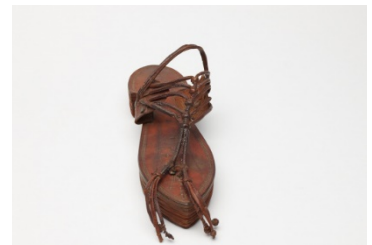
Nubian (Sudan, Egypt)

Shoe, late 1800s

Leather

Length: 27.9 cm (11 inches)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph K. Ott 79.077.16



Indian

Sandals, 1800s

Leather

27.9 cm (11 inches) (length) sole

Bequest of Lyra Brown Nickerson 16.203



These three sandals feature leatherwork from opposite sides of the Indian Ocean. They share stacked leather panels and straps made of knotted cords, with a linear design running from near the heels to each of the toes. These design similarities potentially document artistic exchange between East African and South Asian Muslims.

RISD MUSEUM

Old museum records claim the Nubian shoe belonged to a Dervish—a derogatory term used to describe a Muslim. Notes also suggest the shoe's owner died in northeastern Africa in a battle between Mahdist Nubian forces and the Anglo-Egyptian army. The Nubian shoe is greatly dulled by heavy wear, particularly compared to the Indian pair.

Indian

Woman Partially Wrapped in a Cloth, 1700s

Ink and color on paper

11.4 x 5.4 cm (4 1/2 x 2 1/8 inches)

Anonymous gift 17.482

There is a common misconception that figural representation, and especially nudity, is not allowed in Islamic art. Produced in India during the Mughal Empire (1526–1857), this painting contradicts that notion and serves as a reminder that art reflects the desires of patrons across different regions and eras. Artistic conventions such as almond-shaped eyes and supple, nude bodies adorned in gold, pearls, and rubies reference South Asian ideals of beauty and natural resources. As seen in the painting to the left with the pre-Islamic hero Rustam, Central and South Asian cultures significantly influenced Islamic painting traditions. Mughal patronage enabled skilled artists throughout the empire's territories to work together to produce realistic *muraqqa*, or picture albums.



Carrie Mae Weems, American, b. 1953

A Place for Him, A Place for Her, 1993

Gelatin silver prints with screenprinted texts

63.5 x 203.2 cm (25 x 80 inches)

Mary B. Jackson Fund 1997.40



Here Weems's text positions Africa as the site of the Garden of Eden (*jannah*), with photographs of the men and women's entrances of Mali's Great Mosque of Djenné emphasizing a gendered reading of Afro-Islamic architecture. Originally built in the 1200s from bricks made of clay collected from nearby rivers, the mosque brings together local and foreign aesthetics. Historically frequented by trans-Saharan merchants, the mosque is decorated with West African icons, such as ostrich eggs and phallic-shaped mounds symbolizing fertility and prosperity. Although some scholarly interpretations call for strict gender segregation in mosques, Djenné presents a more

RISD MUSEUM

nuanced, integrated approach to religious life. Muslim men, women, and children still gather for the building's annual re-plastering.

Ottoman (Turkey)

Side Table, 1800s

Wood with mother-of-pearl, tortoise shell, ivory, bone

25.4 x 25.1 cm (10 x 9 7/8 inches) top

Gift of Eugene L. Garbaty 51.114

This small table presents a convergence of global resources. Seven stars are set with mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell, historically imported from the Indian Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Inlays of African or Asian elephant ivory and bone embellish the archways between the legs. The six-pointed stars are reminiscent of the Star of David and Seal of Solomon—David (AS) and Solomon (AS), ancient kings of Israel, are prophets in Islam. Although this example is tiny compared to the table used as a prop in adjacent photographs, its craftsmanship and inclusion of imported materials would have made it a valuable commodity at the time of its making.



Hausa (Nigeria)

Riga (Gown), ca. 1870

Cotton and silk plain weave (strip woven) with cotton embroidery

114.3 x 226.1 cm (45 x 89 inches)

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1992.024A

The sharp interlacing and bright green motifs on this man's *riga* (gown) derive from Islamic and Indigenous imagery. *Aska takwas* (eight knives), spirals, and abstracted Tuareg crosses signify protection and unity across many North and West African cultures. Originating with the Muslim Hausa group in what is now Nigeria, the *riga* (*agbada* in Yoruba, or *boubou* in Francophone countries) is now worn as a sign of prestige throughout the region by people of various faiths. Its wide sleeves must be rolled up to show the wearer's hands, signaling his ability to afford a garment made with so much excess material. This example was created around 1870, when silk was an especially valuable commodity in sub-Saharan Africa.



RISD MUSEUM

Nuristani (Pakistan)

Jumlo (Dress), ca. 1949

Cotton plain weave with silk embroidery and metal button, mother-of-pearl, and coin embellishment

86.4 cm (34 inches) (center back length)

Gift of Dr. Philip Gould 1998.88



Each *jumlo* is unique, typically handstitched by the woman who wears it. This maker embroidered sun and geometric motifs in silk on the arms and bodice, embedding mother-of-pearl, metal buttons, and coins around them. The silver coins date from both before and after Britain's 1947 Partition of India, a traumatic event in the subcontinent. This *jumlo* was made in what is now northeastern Afghanistan, though the area historically has been part of northern Pakistan and Kashmir. Previously called Kafiristan, the region was renamed Nuristan in 1895 by Pashtun conquerors who converted the people there from age-old polytheistic religions to Islam.

Persian (Iran)

Rustam Compels Aulad to Lead Him to the White Demon, 1400s

Ink and opaque watercolor on paper

17.8 x 17.1 cm (7 x 6 11/16 inches)

Museum Appropriation Fund 17.398

This manuscript painting illustrates a triumphant trial of Rustam, one of many heroes in the *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi's (940–1020) epic thousand-page poem. Wearing an impermeable tiger-skin coat and snow-leopard helmet, Rustam forces a provincial king, Aulad, to guide him to his own careless *shah* (king), Kai Kavus, who is imprisoned by a white *div* (demon) and other magical beings.

Written in Persian, the *Shahnameh* traces the lineage of Zoroastrian leaders and heroes from creation to the Muslim conquest of Central Asia in the 650s CE. Although this example was painted during the Muslim Timurid Empire, pre-Islamic histories remained popular subjects in art.



RISD MUSEUM

Egyptian

Tiraz (Textile Fragment), ca. 1150 - 1200

Silk and linen tapestry weave

31.8 x 18.7 cm (12 1/2 x 7 3/8 inches)

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 33.020

One of the oldest objects in this exhibition, this textile fragment was until now mounted upside down, making the Arabic inscription appear meaningless. The phrase “success and prosperity” repeats here, with braided bands enclosing animals in red and yellow tapestry-woven silk.

Given as gifts for loyalty to caliphs (religious and civil leaders), *tiraz* were usually sewn onto high-ranking officials’ clothing. Initially, *tiraz* included the names of caliphs, but with the decline of the caliphate structure in the 1200s, embroiderers and weavers began to use this form to convey good wishes instead.



Persian (Iran)

‘Ali with His Sons Hassan and Husayn, early 1600s

Ink, watercolor, and gold on paper

14.1 x 7.5 cm (5 5/8 x 2 7/8 inches)

Museum Appropriation Fund 17.441

Originally an album page, this work depicts ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first male convert to Islam. Across religious iconography, radiant haloes denote important people. As an alternative, some Islamic artists veil holy subjects’ faces. This differs by the country, culture, ethnic group, generation, and time period in which the artist is practicing.

The death of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) created an early schism in Islam, resulting in the Shi’a and Sunni as predominate branches of the religion. ‘Ali is, however, revered throughout the *ummah* (global Muslim community), especially as the husband of Fatimah, the prophet’s youngest daughter and the mother of his male descendants.



RISD MUSEUM

Indonesian; Javanese

Iket Kepala (Man's Headcloth), ca. 1850-1900

Cotton plain weave with wax-resist indigo dye (batik)

Length: 92.7 cm (36 1/2 inches)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.100

Animals and calligraphy decorate this *iket kepala* (man's headcloth), its interior square filled with pseudo-Arabic words and the name Allah (SWT). Encircling the center are four doves and eight medallions, each made up of abstracted, unintelligible words. Patterns of marks resembling small letters float in the background.

Made by applying wax to resist the dye, batik textiles are commonly used as headcloths, sarongs (wrapped lower garments), wall hangings, and furnishing covers. Batiks were traded between Southeast Asia and East Africa long before Dutch colonialism began in the early 1600s. During the 1880s, Dutch traders exported wax prints (see the Malian *boubou* on the opposite side of this case) and other textiles to West Africa.



J. Pascal Sébah

Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

53. *Young Arab Girl* (53. *Jeune fille arabe*), *Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt*, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.38

Pascal Sébah was a photographer catering to tourist markets during the last several decades of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922). Pascal was a Catholic, the son of a Syrian father and an Armenian mother. He and his son, Jean Pascal, photographed extensively throughout the empire's multinational borders, especially in Cairo and their home in Constantinople.



Little is known about the history of the album these images are from, but it also includes photos by European photographers, ranging from ancient Egyptian architecture to staged portraits of Indigenous people posing with objects from their proposed professions. By marketing these images, sometimes with French captions, the Sébahs profited off orientalist stereotypes of this expansive region. The album was probably assembled for personal use by a tourist or collector.

RISD MUSEUM

J. Pascal Sébah

Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

209. Turkish Lady at Home (209. Dame turque chez elle), Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.39



J. Pascal Sébah

Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

231. Turkish Lady at Home (231. Dame turque chez elle), Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.40



J. Pascal Sébah

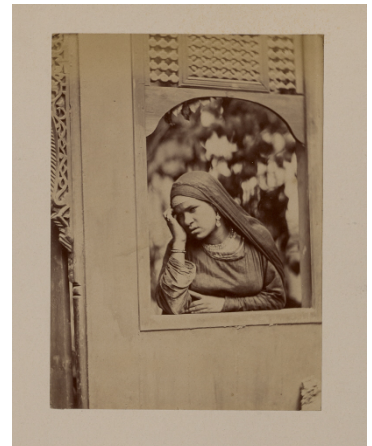
Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

Woman in Door, Window Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.41

(Page of album turned August 2021; no longer on view)



RISD MUSEUM

J. Pascal Sébah

Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

Dame Turque Volée, Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.42

(Page of album turned August 2021; no longer on view)



J. Pascal Sébah

Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

Seated Woman in Harem pants, with Hookah, Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.43

(Page of album turned August 2021; no longer on view)



Costumed Woman - Standing Pose, Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.30

(Page of album turned April 2021; no longer on view)



RISD MUSEUM

J. Pascal Sébah, Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

233. Dame turque chez elle (233. Turkish Lady at Home), Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.29

(Page of album turned April 2021; no longer on view)



Costumed Arab Woman - Profile View - Standing Pose, Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.28

(Page of album turned April 2021; no longer on view)



J. Pascal Sébah, Turkish, fl. 1860-1880

21. Dame turque chez elle (21. Turkish Lady at Home), Album of Photographs of Scenes and People Taken in Egypt, late 1800s

Albumen print

Museum Collection 71.086.31

(Page of album turned April 2021; no longer on view)



RISD MUSEUM

Indian

Equestrian Portrait of a Raja, late 1700s

Ink and watercolor on paper

24.1 x 17 cm (9 1/2 x 6 11/16 inches)

Gift of Catherine and Ralph Benkaim 1986.151.3

This depiction of a man who was probably a Muslim nobleman was painted in Marwar, a region in northwestern India not far from what is now the border with Pakistan. A poem or folk song surrounds the horse and rider, almost mirroring their movement. Deccani Urdu is written above the figures and Hindi below, and although these languages look different, they sound identical when spoken. This bilingual, cross-cultural embrace in a painting more than 200 years old is particularly striking now, given India's violent partition in 1947 and more recent laws to strip Muslims of their right to Indian citizenship, including 2019's Citizenship Amendment Act.



Azzedine Alaïa (b. 1935, Tunisia; d. 2017, France)

Woman's top, ca. 2005

Cotton plain weave with knit trim

45.1 cm (17 13/16 inches) (center back length)

Gift of Paula Granoff 2009.45.7

This top falls gently off the shoulders, its knit bottom clinging tightly at the waist. A keyhole slit at the breastbone and another textured hole at the reverse invite peeks at normally hidden skin.



Trained as a sculptor, Tunisian designer Azzedine Alaïa dominated Parisian couture by clothing the female form with an architectural, anti-establishment approach. Celebrated as the “king of cling,” he showed that culture, comfort, modesty, and style can coexist. Alaïa brought sensitive care to how he worked with models, successfully altering the way Arab Muslim designers interact with the female body.

RISD MUSEUM

Edward Grazda, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1969, Photography)
Taliban at Jadi Maiwand, Kabul, Afghanistan, 1997
Gelatin silver print
Image: 30.6 x 43.8 cm (12 1/16 x 17 1/4 inches)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.30.3



Here, Talib Muslim men are shown outside a mosque in Kabul, Afghanistan, days before the Taliban banned the photography of living things. Deriving their name from the Arabic word for students, the Taliban are a faction of the US-backed *mujahideen* (strugglers) who fought against Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Following the Afghan Civil War, they put a strict interpretation of religious texts into practice.

According to more conservative Islamic scholars, image-making is controversial, because artists do not have the same creative powers as Allah (God; SWT). This usually only refers to images intended for devotional use, but, as seen in manuscript paintings and photographs nearby, the line between allowing and obscuring faces has been crossed many times.

Eliza Squibb, American, b. 1987, (RISD BFA 2013, Textiles)
La Compagnie Malienne de Textiles (COMATEX), Malian, manufacturer
GAIA Vaccine Foundation, est. 2001, commissioner
Sikoro Community Health Center, Malian, collaborator
Pants of Grand Boubou Ensemble worn by Mamadou Niaré, 2015
Cotton plain weave with industrially printed pattern
Gift of Mamoutou Niaré and designer Eliza Squibb 2017.68.1b



RISD MUSEUM

Eliza Squibb, American, b. 1987, (RISD BFA 2013, Textiles)
La Compagnie Malienne de Textiles (COMATEX), Malian
GAIA Vaccine Foundation, est. 2001
Sikoro Community Health Center, Malian
Boubou of Grand Boubou Ensemble Worn by Mamoutou Niaré, 2015
Cotton plain weave with industrially printed pattern
Gift of Mamoutou Niaré and designer Eliza Squibb 2017.68.1a



Yellow uterine motifs encircle red and orange virus molecules on this colorful outfit, which belonged to a Muslim council member in the Sikoro neighborhood of Bamako, Mali. A collaboration between a community clinic, a public-health foundation, and RISD-educated designer Eliza Squibb, this textile design was produced to raise awareness about reproductive health. Village leader Mamadou Niaré shared the Bamana proverb *BanakunbEn ka fisa ni banafurakE ye* (Meeting the illness is better than treating the illness). This phrase is also included in the design, aligning this *boubou* with West African traditions of storytelling and literally imbuing it with proverbial meaning.

Sara Alahbabi, Emirati, b. 1994
Shaikha Al Ketbi, Emirati, b. 1995
Brooks Hagan, American, b. 1974, (RISD MFA 2002; RISD Faculty, Textiles)
Textile Length, 2017
Cotton warp with rayon, metallic polyester, and cotton-blend weft;
jacquard woven on Dornier loom using Stäubli technology
Length: 139.7 cm (55 inches)
Gift of RISD Textiles Department 2017.66



In this weaving, four identical lines of women wear *battoulah*, metallic face masks common in the Persian Gulf. The women at the center of each row look at the viewer. By examining veiling, Alahbabi and Al Ketbi highlight the limited but growing role and status of Emirati women.

This textile was made while the artists were visiting RISD through a joint program with the Salama bint Hamdan al Nahyan Foundation in Abu Dhabi. Although they usually work in photography, Alahbabi and Al Ketbi collaborated with Brooks Hagan in RISD's Textiles Department, harnessing computerized technology to weave this black, gold, and silver length.

RISD MUSEUM

Tunisian

Bridal Veil, early 1900s

Silk twill weave with metal strip embroidery and pulled work

39 x 57 cm (15 3/8 x 22 7/16 inches)

Transfer from RISD Textiles department: gift of Mae and Gene Festa from the Mae Festa Textile Collection 2017.45.34

This veil was made for a Bedouin woman's wedding ceremony. Figurative and geometric patterns shine in metal atop orange silk on one side and green on the other, complicating the sheer fabric and concealing the bride's face from onlookers. Birds and fish along the edges symbolize fertility, and below each fleur de lis in the top corners is an abstracted *khamsa*, or hand-shaped symbol. This ancient protective motif is shared by Islam, Judaism, and pre-Abrahamic religions across North Africa and West Asia. The metal embroidery technique used here was once unique to Jewish populations around the Mediterranean Sea, but within the last century it has become more widely adopted.



Uyghur (Xinjiang, China)

Veil, late 1800s - early 1900s

Cotton openwork

31 x 38 cm (12 3/16 x 14 15/16 inches)

Transfer from RISD Textiles department: gift of Mae and Gene Festa from the Mae Festa Textile Collection 2017.45.15

Woven in northwestern China, this veil is decorated with embroidered openwork. The black band rested under the wearer's eyes, across the bridge of her nose. The solid central patch protected her mouth from blowing sand. Paired with a hijab or headscarf, only the wearer's eyes would be visible.



This textile was likely worn by a Uyghur woman. Descending from Mongol and Turkic peoples, the Uyghurs have been Muslim for more than a thousand years. Like many other minorities who inhabit resource-rich land, they have long been the target of a government wanting access to those resources. In 2018, the United Nations estimated that the Chinese government was detaining one million Uyghurs in "re-education" camps.

RISD MUSEUM

Persian (Iran)

Ewer, ca. 1100 - 1300

Earthenware with glaze

16.5 cm (6 1/2 inches) (height)

Gift of Robert Lehman 49.137

Fantastical animals are found throughout Islamic art. This turquoise ewer is encircled in black, cobalt, and red winged sphinxes, or griffins, referencing ancient Egyptian and Turko-Persian styles. The line of creatures, which also includes a person and a large bird, is surrounded by repeated bands of stylized geometric marks resembling Kufic, or early Arabic, inscriptions.



This work was made during the last years of the Seljuk Empire (1037–1194) or soon after. Spanning what is now Iran to northwestern China, the Seljuks brought many Asian cultures and artistic practices together.

Fazal Sheikh, American, b. 1965

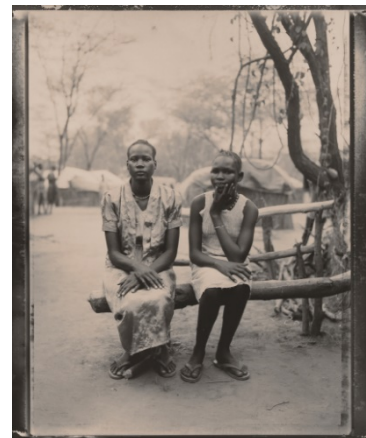
Rachel and Ochol, Family Section, Sudanese Refugee Camp, Lokichoggio, Kenya, 1992-1993

Toned gelatin silver print from a Polaroid negative

Image: 29.5 x 24.3 cm (11 5/8 x 9 9/16 inches)

Gift from the Roy and Elizabeth Zimmerman Collection 2014.43.12

Displaced from their home, a mother and daughter are photographed in front of a refugee encampment. Refugees flocked to Lokichoggio during Sudan's civil wars, which initially stemmed from conflict when Christian and Indigenous groups sought autonomy from the majority-Muslim government.



Like his subjects here, photographer Fazal Sheikh was also shaped by migration. His Muslim grandfather fled northern India during Partition in 1947 and resettled in Kenya, where the photographer's father is from. Born in New York, Sheikh does not identify as Muslim, but values parts of the faith and culture that construct his perspective.

RISD MUSEUM

Yemeni

Ornaments, ca. early 1900s

Silver

9 x 2.5 x .3 cm (3 9/16 x 1 x 1/8 inches)

Gift of Mrs. Fulham Rogers 77.064

This intricate silver jewelry, probably once part of a headdress, was likely created by Jews in southern Yemen in the early 1900s. Chain-link examples like these drape a woman's head and hang beside her face, the many jingling baubles producing sounds thought of as protective. This style was once solely produced by Jews, but today Yemenis of many backgrounds make and wear similar ornaments for weddings and special festivities.



Yemen is now majority-Muslim, but Arab Jews dominated the area prior to Islamic conquest in the 600s CE. After Palestine was controversially divided and Israel formed in 1948, most Yemeni Jews immigrated there.

Malick Sidibé, Malian, b. 1936

Untitled, 1973

Gelatin silver print with cardboard, tape, and string

17.9 x 13 cm (7 1/8 x 5 1/8 inches)

Walter H. Kimball Fund 2003.29

Here two Muslim men dressed in *boubous*, garments associated with West Africa, pose proudly against patterned fabric. Malick Sidibé was a popular Malian photographer in the decades after 1950, and his studio was frequented by customers of all ages and backgrounds. Mali has been Muslim-majority for centuries, and is still home to ethnic and Indigenous groups, such as the Bambara, Fulani, and Tuaregs. Sidibé's subjects thus wore styles from traditional garments to trendy bell-bottomed pants and flaring skirts. Recent Malian history is marked by both cultural tolerance and political upheaval. After French colonization ended in 1960, Mali's leaders instituted a range of governmental systems, with some groups now pressing for nationwide Shari'a law.



RISD MUSEUM

Persian (Iran)

Joseph Being Sold into Slavery, ca. 1580

Ink, watercolor, and gold on paper

16.5 x 9.8 cm (6 1/2 x 3 7/8 inches)

Museum Appropriation Fund 17.435

This painting's gilded margins appear off-center, seemingly favoring the right side of the page. This is because early American and European art dealers tore single pages out of *muraqqa* (bound albums) for sale to collectors. As a result, specific information about manuscript artists and subject matter has often been lost.

We do know that Joseph (AS) is presented here, a fiery halo marking his prophethood and significance. The Qur'an details his narrative from his abandonment, enslavement, and imprisonment to his ascension as a high-ranking administrator for the *malik* (king) of Egypt. Islam was founded last of the major Abrahamic religions, after Judaism and Christianity, and Joseph is an important figure in all three.



American

Embroidered Picture, early 1800s

Silk plain weave with silk and metallic thread embroidery and hand painting

40.6 cm (16 inches) (length)

Gift of Nancy Walker Collins 1993.098

Here a turbaned woman holds "al coran" (the Qur'an). At left is an Egyptian pyramid, and at right an Indian soldier and *howdah* (carriage) sit atop an elephant. These are all orientalist stereotypes drawn from countries considered to be Islamic.

Between the 1700s and late 1800s, embroidered pictures and needlework samplers were recreationally produced by young girls and women in the United States and parts of Europe. In this example, the skin and the sky are painted, but everything else is embroidered in silk. Around this time, Islamic miniature paintings, early photographs, poems, and stories gave American and European audiences a glimpse at pictorial depictions of West Asia.



RISD MUSEUM

Gujarati; Indian

Ghagra (Drawstring Skirt), 1800s

Silk plain weave with silk and cotton embroidery

80 cm (31 1/2 inches) (length)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.298

Probably made by a Rabari woman in Gujarat, western India, this *ghagra* (skirt) is embroidered with ovals in yellow, green, black, and white. The Rabari people are an Indigenous group from South Asia, now along India and Pakistan's shared border. Although currently settled in urban areas, they were originally nomadic and agriculturalist, with embroidered patterns referencing traditional parts of life. The top line of interlaced designs is called *bavaliyo*. This motif symbolizes local babul trees that shaded Rabaris from the sun and fed their herds. Other patterns include flowers that resemble abstracted *boteh*, a tree-of-life motif from Central and South Asia.



Amazigh (Morocco)

Lebba (Necklace), late 1800s-early 1900s

Silver, glass and silk

40 x 20 x 1 cm (15 3/4 x 7 7/8 x 3/8 inches)

Museum Appropriation Fund 31.367

This *lebba*, or necklace, was crafted in Morocco by an Indigenous Amazigh maker. *Lebba* like this one were symbols of high status in North Africa, worn by Jewish and Muslim Amazigh brides and upper-class women in celebrations. Here nine hanging pendants are set with red, blue, and green glass beads. The horned triangular shape topping each pendant resembles an abstracted *khamsa*, a protective hand motif, and is followed by rosettes and crescent shapes encapsulating droplets. Across many cultures, these symbols are used to ward off evil. The flowers and seedlings inlaid in sparkling beads symbolize fertility and growth.



RISD MUSEUM

Edward Grazda, American, b. 1947, (RISD BFA 1969, Photography)
Mazar-i Sharif, Afghanistan, 1997
Gelatin silver print
30.6 x 43.8 cm (12 1/8 x 17 3/16 inches) (image)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.30.1



Two women and a child are pictured walking past the Shrine of Hazrat 'Ali, also called the Blue Mosque. The central woman wears a *chadari*, or burqa, with an embroidered face panel and long pleats. The other woman is partially veiled, wearing a chador and smiling broadly. The Taliban imposed dress restrictions on Afghan women in the mid-1990s, making the *chadari* required in public.

Previously, veils of all types and colors were sometimes worn according to individual belief, social status, and geographic background. Mazar-i Sharif—a cosmopolitan city near Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—was for centuries home to overlapping cultures, ethnicities, and religions.

Ganzeer, Egyptian, b. 1982
Of course, Emad, 2014
Color screenprint on paper
Image/ sheet: 63.5 x 48.3 cm (25 x 19 inches)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2015.14.4



Sheikh Emad Effat smiles widely, his laughter lines visible behind a layer of red Arabic text translating to "Of course the army protected the revolution." This print ironically comments on Egyptian military violence against protestors during Arab Spring, the anti-government protests that took place in North Africa and West and Central Asia in the early 2010s. Ganzeer, an Egyptian street artist and graphic designer, created political graffiti that led to this print series depicting people who were abused or martyred for their participation in the revolution. Sheikh Emad was a Sunni Muslim scholar based in Cairo's Al-Azhar Mosque, associated with the second-oldest university in the world.