

Britain Hosts Festival of Muslim Cultures

London - Islamic Tourism

Inspiring Muslims and non-Muslim to leave the station of stereotypes and go a journey of discovery through the diverse Islamic world is the aim of the Festival of Muslim Cultures which will host over 200 events - art, music, literature, poetry, drama, film, fashion, food etc - throughout Britain during the next 18 months.



Ramses Wissa Wassef Art Center مركز رمسيس واصف الفني



تحية إبراهيم: النخيل

Taheia Ibrahim: Palm Trees

The festival was launched on January 24th with an informal visit to one of the first events Palace and Mosque in Sheffield by the overall patron HRH The Prince of Wales and the Overseas Patron HRH Princess Haya Bint Al-Hussein. The historical exhibition is drawn from the rich Middle Eastern collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (14 January to 17 April).

Highlights of the first months include the exhibition "Egyptian Landscapes" (woven tapestries at the Brunei Gallery, London, 19 January to 17 March); and "Contemporary Pakistani Printmakers" at Oriol Ceri Richards, Swansea from 14 January until 4 February.

A colloquium on the life of the late Dr Zaki Badawi, a respected Muslim scholar and community leader in Britain who was one of the founder trustees of the festival will also be organised.

Other events range from drama from the Middle East, a conference on Faith and

Identity in Contemporary Culture in Manchester, a Maha Musheira gathering of poets in Bradford and Leeds, a Pakistani film festival in Glasgow as well as a Sufi Festival, Qu'ranic recitation in Leicester, astronomy in Birmingham and an arts programme in Cardiff. Egyptian Landscapes presents a rare opportunity to see a dazzling collection of tapestries from one of the world's greatest schools of weaving, Egypt's Ramses Wassef Art Centre. The centre is the legacy of an experiment in creativity begun in 1952 by Egyptian architect Ramses Wassef. He was convinced that everyone is born with artistic gifts but these develop only through practicing a craft from early childhood. To test this theory he installed looms in a workshop in the village of Harrania, 10 miles from Cairo and invited village children to learn to weave. When they had grasped the basic technique he encouraged them to depict whatever they liked laying down only

three rules: no copying, no preliminary designs, no adult interference or criticism. His experiment demonstrated that any child is able to create works of staggering beauty and skill. More than 50 years later the centre's magnificent tapestries confirm that innate creativity can grow with a child into adolescence and adulthood.

Rafiq Abdulla, Chair of the Trustees emphasised that the festival will be presenting a snap shot of the best art forms in different Muslim countries. "Art has a very crucial role to play in building bridges of understanding between communities as it shares the common experiences of the human condition. It will also re-connect British Muslims with their own culture in the multi-cultural British society which can be enriched by Muslim culture".

For Isabel Carlisle, the Director of the Festival, connecting with the grassroots and working with local councils, arts organisations and Muslim organisations is a priority. She is also encouraging the arts world in Britain to become engaged with Muslim artists. "We are working at the interface between the Muslim and Western worlds and we are eager to promote debate".

One of the festival's main aims is to present an alternative to the negative media image of the Islamic world in which Muslims are portrayed as the perpetrators or victims of violence and to give Muslims in the UK a cultural voice.

The organisation running the festival is a non-political, non-sectarian, non-ideological charity which aims to build cultural bridges and promote expression through the arts by Muslims from all over the world for people all over the UK. This work will continue after the end of the festival in July 2007. ■