



School of the Arts

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The Fifth Biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art to Examine the Role of Light in Islamic Art and Culture

Palermo, Italy – Scholars from around the world will explore the role of light in Islamic art and culture during the Fifth Biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art, November 9-11, 2013 in Palermo, Italy.

Widely considered the preeminent conference regarding Islamic art and culture, the three-day Symposium, “God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth,” features 13 speakers, all leading scholars in Islamic art and architecture, from around the world whose papers will address the role of light in Islamic art and culture from a wide range of perspectives, from the metaphoric imagery of light in the Qur’an and in the literatures of the Islamic lands to the practical role of light in buildings, paintings, performances, photography, and other works of art produced over the past fourteen centuries. The Qur’an is rich in references to light, and light consequently permeates the culture and visual arts of the Islamic lands; one of the most famous passages in the Qur’an, the Light Verse (24:35) majestically extols God as the Light of the Heavens and the Earth, a metaphor for His guidance and illumination over all creation.

The keynote address, “Contemporary Islamic Art,” will be delivered by the acclaimed contemporary artist Shirin Neshat, an Iranian born artist/filmmaker living in New York. She has held numerous solo exhibitions at galleries and museums internationally, and is represented by Gladstone Gallery in New York. She won the International Award of the LXVIII Venice Biennale in 1999 for two films, *Turbulent* and *Rapture*. In 2006 she was awarded the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize and in 2009 Neshat won the Silver Lion for best director at the 66th Venice Film Festival for *Women without Men*. She is currently working on her second feature film on the Egyptian singer “Oum Kolthum,” which is expected to be released in 2015.

The Hamad Bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art is organized by Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom who have shared the Hamad Bin Khalifa Endowed Chair of Islamic Art at Virginia Commonwealth University since its establishment in 2006. “God Is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth” is sponsored by Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, Qatar

Foundation, Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQatar), Hamad bin Khalifa University and the University of Palermo.

The 12 papers to be presented during the symposium encompass all media of Islamic art as it unfolded over the centuries from its beginnings in 7th-century Arabia to the age of Empires. The speakers include William Graham, *Light as Image and Concept in the Qur'an, Hadith and other Sources*; Elahieh Kheirandish, *Light and Dark: The 'Checkered History' of Early Optics*; Robert Hillenbrand, *The Uses of Light in Islamic Architecture*; Renata Holod, *On Interiors and the Regimes of Lighting*; Anna Cotadini, *Facets of Light: The Case of Rock Crystals*; Oliver Watson, *Ceramics and Light*; Wheeler Thackston, *Light in Persian Poetry*; Barbara Brend, *The Management of Light in Persian Painting*; Abdallah Kahil, *Illuminating the Void, Reflecting the Universe: Spatial Design and Light Furnishing in Mamluk Architecture*; Hakan Karateke, *Illuminating Ottoman Ceremonial*; Susan Stronge, *By the Light of the Sun of Jahangir*; Ali Behdad, *Contact Vision: Reflections on the History of Photography in Qajar Iran*.

Twenty fellows have also been selected for the Hamad Bin Khalifa Travel Fellowships out of over 200 applications. They will be invited to attend special events and will be awarded a Hamad Bin Khalifa Fellowship certificate.

Speaking about the fellowships, the organizers said they were “unique in allowing interested people from around the world the opportunity to participate in this event. We were overwhelmed,” they said, “by the range of applicants, who came from six continents and represent an extraordinary cross-section of teachers, scholars, curators, archaeologists, artists and students. They testify to the broad interest in Islamic art in general and the Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium in particular.”

God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth is the fifth biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art. Symposia were held in 2004 in Richmond, Virginia, in 2007 and in 2011 in Doha, Qatar and in 2009 in Cordoba, Spain. Since 2007, the proceedings of each Symposium have been published by Yale University Press. *Rivers of Paradise: Water in Islamic Art and Culture* appeared in 2007, *And Diverse Are Their Hues: Color in Islamic Art and Culture* was published in 2011 and *God Is Beautiful and Loves Beauty* appeared in 2013. The papers from this symposium will appear in 2015.

About VCU and VCUarts—Virginia Commonwealth University is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located on two downtown campuses in Richmond and a satellite campus in Qatar, VCU enrolls more than 31,000 students in 216 certificate and degree programs in the arts, sciences and humanities. With a distinguished faculty of professional artists and 16 departments, including Craft/Material Studies, Kinetic Imaging, Dance and Choreography, Graphic Design, Music, Painting and Printmaking, Photography and Film, Sculpture + Extended Media and Theatre, VCUarts has been the top ranked public university visual arts and design graduate program in the country since 2003. VCUarts is the number one ranked public graduate arts and design program in the United States, according to *US News & World Report*.

About Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar:

VCUQatar is the Qatar campus of the prestigious Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Richmond, Virginia. Established in 1998 through a partnership with Qatar Foundation, VCUQatar offers students the opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in fashion design,

graphic design, interior design and painting & printmaking, a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history and a Master of Fine Arts degree in design studies.

Through all its programs, research projects and community activities, VCUQatar continues toward its vision of a Qatari society that innovates through art and design. In addition to a comprehensive annual public events program that includes a wide range of exhibitions, lectures and fashion events, the University hosts the biennial international design conference Tasmeeem and the biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Islamic Art Symposium, attracting globally recognized designers, academics and thinkers while fostering sustainable, university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic and cultural vitality of Qatar. For more information please visit www.qatar.vcu.edu

Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organization that is supporting Qatar on its journey from carbon economy to knowledge economy by unlocking human potential, for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Emir, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser.

QF's work encompasses education, research and community development. World-class universities are brought to Qatar to help create an education sector in which young people can develop the attitudes and skills required for a knowledge economy. At the same time, QF builds Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by developing and commercializing solutions through key sciences. The Foundation also works to foster a progressive society while enhancing cultural life, protecting Qatar's heritage and addressing immediate social needs in the community. For a complete list of QF's initiatives and projects, visit <http://www.qf.org.qa>

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