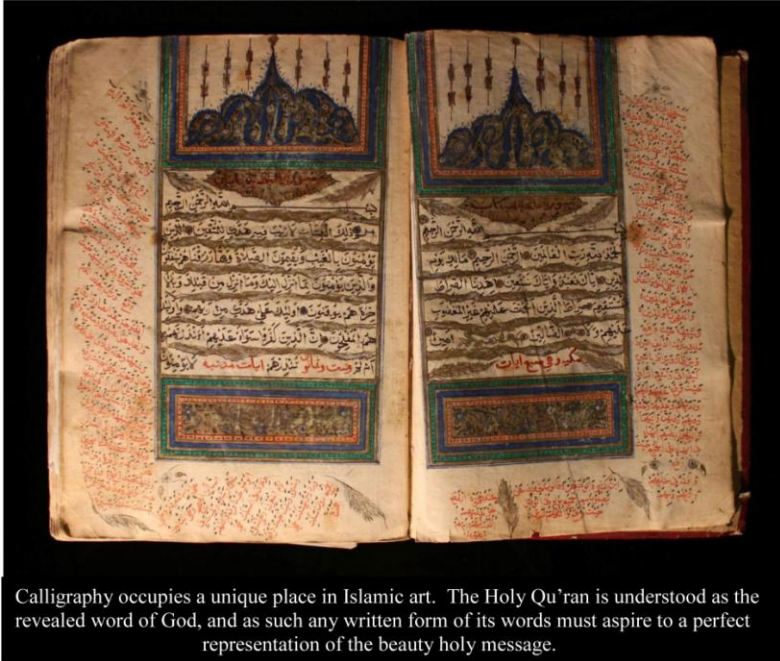


THE ART OF ISLAM FESTIVAL



Calligraphy occupies a unique place in Islamic art. The Holy Qu'ran is understood as the revealed word of God, and as such any written form of its words must aspire to a perfect representation of the beauty holy message.

Over the six months from March 24 to September 24th, the County Museum at Aylesbury brought talent and funding together from many sources to mount this superb programme of over 100 events that have been taking place across Bucks. It was the biggest exhibition of Islamic works of art ever held in the County. Treasures on display included carpets, paintings, furniture, metalwork, jewellery and splendid calligraphy from across the Near East, Pakistan and Muslim India. Visitors cannot have failed to be impressed by the superlative quality of the craftsmanship and artistry on display, especially the intricate inlay work, and the bright and lively imagery and calligraphy in the written pages, and the gracefulness and elegance of so much of the metalwork.

Islam is an ancient and venerable civilisation that sadly is much misunderstood in the West. In these fraught times after the horrors of war and violence that have too often dominated the news bulletins, it is so important that Muslim and non Muslim are able to see in each other the positives of their cultural and social background and heritage. An appreciation of the fine and exquisite products of Islamic art can only make different communities aware of their shared creative impulse and their shared



Glass Mosque Lamp
Highly skilled workers in glass were producing
fine ware in the 14th century

humanity. In Aylesbury and Wycombe especially, there are large communities of Pakistani and Kashmiri origin, who themselves may not be fully aware of the riches produced by the civilisation to which they are heirs. Exhibits were borrowed from the British Museum, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery and the Horniman Museum. The Bodleian Library, Oxford, loaned iconic 15th century paintings collected in the 1700s at the Mughal Royal Courts by a Bucks resident. A key attraction was the private collection of Razwan and Sarya Baig who have assembled the core of the exhibition from a lifetime of collecting from their home in High Wycombe. Razwan Baig himself is a renowned scholar, collector, and researcher. He has particularly promoted the art of calligraphy by running workshops and presentations in different cities across the UK. He is strongly motivated towards the improvement of relations between the Islamic and the Judaeo Christian traditions in Britain.

On 29 April, around 150 guests thronged the County Museum's special exhibitions gallery to hear the Kuwaiti Ambassador, Mr Khaled al Duwaisan, formally launch the Art of Islam festival in Bucks. The museum mounted traditional Muslim hot food with naan breads and a variety of meat and vegetable dishes. Guests enjoyed a performance, sponsored by the Luton-based Al Khayaal theatre group, of a 12th century story by Spanish born Ibn Tufail that was the template for the Robinson Crusoe story and for the Enlightenment philosophers such as Hobbes and Rousseau. Richard de Peyer, Museum Director said: "We were really pleased with Friday's event which seemed to go down very well with all the guests. We are very proud because this major exhibition is helping to build links between people and is emphasising the quality and beauty of Islamic civilisation."

Michael Ghirelli