

Doris Duke's Shangri La: Architecture, Landscape, and Islamic Art

September 7, 2012 - February 17, 2013



Afroz Amighi  
"Heart Axe" (detail), 2011  
photo courtesy of the artist



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# WELCOME

Dear Educator,

We are delighted that you have scheduled a visit to *Doris Duke's Shangri La: Landscape, Architecture, and Islamic Art*. When you and your students visit the Museum of Arts and Design, you will be given an informative tour of the exhibition with a museum educator, followed by an inspiring hands-on project, which students can then take home with them. To make your museum experience more enriching and meaningful, we strongly encourage you to use this packet as a resource, and work with your students in the classroom before and after your museum visit.

This packet includes topics for discussion and activities intended to introduce the key themes and concepts of the exhibition. Writing, storytelling and art projects have been suggested so that you can explore ideas from the exhibition in ways that relate directly to your students' lives and experiences.

Please feel free to adapt and build on these materials and to use this packet in any way that you wish.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students to the Museum of Arts and Design.

Sincerely,

Cathleen Lewis  
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Lessons written by Petra Pankow, Museum Educator, in collaboration with the Museum of Arts and Design Education Department.



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THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN has been functioning as an international resource center for craft, arts and design since 1956. Through its collections, exhibitions, programs and publications, the Museum serves as a forum for critical debate concerning the nature of craftsmanship and the engagement with the process that links materials, techniques, forms, patterns and concepts in all creative work.

## HOW DOES A MUSEUM WORK?

**ADMINISTRATION:** The team led by the Director of the Museum determines the programs, plans and philosophy of the Museum. It also raises funds to realize the Museum's goals and works directly with the Board of Governors, which guides the Museum's functions.

**CURATORIAL:** This is the team, led by the Chief Curator, that works together to decide which exhibits will be shown, how they will look, what artwork is to be included, and how they are to be interpreted.

**REGISTRATION:** Led by the Registrar, this team arranges the safe handling of art to be placed in an exhibition and maintains the permanent collections acquired by a museum.

**EDUCATION:** This team provides the interactive interpretation of the objects on view through the educational programs designed for children, adults and families who visit the Museum.

**FACILITY MAINTENANCE:** This is the team that allows the day-to-day operations of a museum to continue: from the lights being turned on, to the safety of all who enter the building.

**SECURITY GUARDS:** This is the team most often seen in a museum, because its main task is to protect the artwork from harm so that in the future people will be able to see the same objects as seen in a museum today. They also are helpful to visitors who have a variety of questions.

Museums are places where we can learn about the past, present, and future of the world around us. The diversity of knowledge is endless when the habit of museum exploration is formed at an early age. We look forward to welcoming your group into our galleries.



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## HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOUR MUSEUM VISIT:

*"I try, when I go to museums, to do two things. One, to appreciate what I'm looking at, just to see it, but then to isolate a few pieces that I really look at in detail. I study and I draw not with any purpose in mind. I mean, I don't go looking for specific things. I just try to be open-minded and keep my eyes open. It's interesting that every time I go back to the same place, I see something different."* Arline M. Fisch (1931- ) Brooklyn, New York

While visiting the exhibition try to use all your senses. Notice the way the pieces are displayed. Are there any specific groupings of pieces you can distinguish? If you enjoy looking at one piece more than others can you explain why?

Here are some questions and suggestions to think about as you move around the exhibition:

### *I. What can be objectively observed?*

- a. *What is the physical description? Measurement, weight, materials used, articulation of materials...*
- b. *What iconography, if any, is used? Designs, words, diagrams...*
- c. *What are the object's formal design characteristics? Lines, shapes, forms, color, texture...*

### *II. What would it be like to interact with this piece of art? How would you handle, lift, display it?*

- a. *How would the piece of art feel, move, and sound?*
- b. *What does the piece do? Does the piece have a function? How would the figures move if they were alive?*
- c. *What is our emotional response to this beaded figure? Fear, joy, indifference, curiosity, revulsion, excitement...*

### *III. What is in the mind of the artist? What are the viewers thinking and feeling? Use creative imagining and free association.*

- a. Review all of the above information and consider what was going on in the world when the work was produced to develop possible interpretations of the piece. (Theories and hypotheses)
- b. *Do the figures tell a story? Does the piece have underlying political or social meaning? (Understanding and visual thinking)*
- c. Develop a program to investigate the questions posed by the material evidence. (Program of research)

### *IV. Brainstorm about an event or situation that is happening in your life at the moment which you could animate into one scene which could be made into your very own figurative sculpture. (Design themes)*



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# DORIS DUKE'S SHANGRI LA: LANDSCAPE, ARCHITECTURE, AND ISLAMIC ART

September 7, 2012 – February 17, 2013



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## INTRODUCTION:

Inspired by her honeymoon trip around the world in 1935, heiress and philanthropist Doris Duke (1912-1993) set out on a lifelong project of collecting Islamic art, eventually amassing some 3500 objects from throughout the Muslim world, which are permanently displayed at and integrated into the design of her spectacular Honolulu home, Shangri La. The 14,000-square-foot house, perched on a magnificent 5-acre site overlooking the Pacific ocean includes a series of interlocking rooms and suites and is complemented by a playhouse, gardens, terraces, courtyards, and a pool. Taken together, the estate and the collection it houses present a stunning combination of modern architecture, tropical landscape, and Islamic art.

Now administered by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, the site has been open to the public in 2002. *Doris Duke's Shangri La: Architecture, Landscape, and Islamic Art*, which was organized by the Foundation, now presents both the estate and its collections to a wide audience throughout the U.S. The Museum of Arts and Design is the first stop for the touring exhibition and the only one including works by contemporary artists in response to their artist residencies at Shangri La.

Including a model of the estate, architectural drawings, 100 historical and contemporary photographs, film footage, as well as some 60 artifacts dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the present and ranging from Central Asian textiles, Syrian metalwork, and Mughal jewelry to Ottoman tiles, Iranian painting, and architectural elements from India and Morocco, the exhibition gives a unique perspective on the relationship between house and collection.

Designed by American architects, Marion Sims Wyeth and Drew Baker in 1936 and complemented by architectural commissions from Northern India, Iran, Syria, and Morocco, Shangri La integrates eclectic elements into a striking whole through an approach which exhibition curators Donald Albrecht and Thomas Mellins call "inventive synthesis." Duke's highly personal approach to collecting and display combines traditional forms, patterns, and artisanal practices with a modern design sensibility.

The exhibition is organized into four major sections:

### 1. THE HOUSE AND ITS SITE

This section explores the design, construction, and furnishing of the estate, conceived in 1936 and completed in 1939. Focusing on both the architectural concept as a whole and a number of key rooms, the exhibition aims to evoke a direct experience of the space through an immersive environment featuring full-scale images and film footage.



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## 2. COLLECTING ISLAMIC ART – TRAVELS AND RESEARCH

The second thematic area helps visitors understand Duke's collection in the context of her extensive travels and the various people who shaped her vision, including scholars, collectors, art dealers, and craftspeople.

## 3. THE COLLECTIONS

Duke's collection of Islamic Art, assembled from 1935, the year of her honeymoon to 1993, when she died, is one of the largest private holdings of its kind in the U.S. The third section of the exhibition traces the lifelong evolution of Duke's interest in the arts of the Muslim world from her origins as a New York socialite to the vision of a beautiful home evoking the many places and cultures she loved. The display of objects in this section highlights their specific connection to Shangri La's architecture.

## 4. CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS AND SHANGRI LA

Since 2004, the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art has invited artists and scholars whose work in some way relates to the collection, to participate in a multi-week residency program. Invited to pursue their own work during their stay, six former artists in residence were asked to respond to their experience at Shangri La. The Museum of Arts and Design will display the outcomes, some of which are included in this guide.





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## THEMES FOR DISCUSSION:

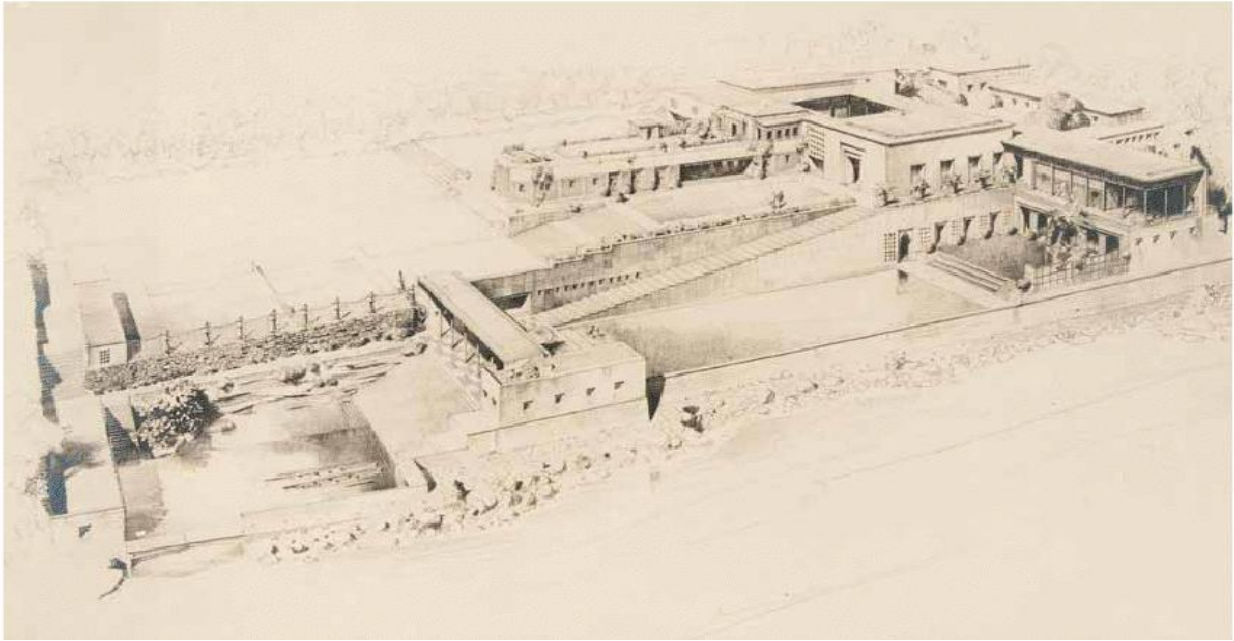
- **Inventive Synthesis:** Shangri La combines many seemingly disparate elements into a surprisingly coherent whole. Look for opposites in the collection (historical vs. modern/contemporary, original vs. reproduction, East vs. West, religious vs. secular) and see how the opposing elements are brought together in the context of Shangri La. Discuss your reactions to this eclectic blend of ideas and artifacts.
- **American Orientalism:** Doris Duke's collection can be seen as an expression of Western longing for a romantically idealized "other" embodied in the cultural and artistic practices of the (Middle and Far) East. Discuss potential problems to such an approach.
- **Religious Art:** Many examples of Islamic Art are deeply rooted in the spiritual practices of the Muslim faith. What happens if these religious objects are displayed in a secular (and Judao-Christian) context?
- **Abstract vs. figurative art:** Figurative representation is prohibited in Islam, a limitation which has led to a stunningly rich vocabulary of patterns, geometrical designs, and calligraphic messages.

## RECURRING QUESTIONS:

- What sorts of designs and compositional strategies are used by the artists? What different patterns, geometrical designs, and other decorative elements do you notice?
- What different materials and artistic practices are represented in the exhibition?
- What are some of the cultural influences that have shaped the particular styles of the works on display? While Shangri La brings Islamic art into a Western context, where can you find Western influences on works which originated in the Muslim world? Which ones?
- Which of the works in the exhibition were made by women, which ones by men? What does this tell us about the societies in which they were produced?



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## LOOK:

Take a good look at the drawing above.

- What sort of building do you think this might be?
- What are its various components?
- How are these components linked with one another?
- What parts of the building are modern? What makes you say that?
- Which of them seem historical? Please explain your answer?
- What would it be like to move across this space?
- What might the functions of the various parts of the site be?

## THINK ABOUT:

The drawing is an architectural rendering of Shangri La by architect Marion Sims Wyeth. Commissioned by Doris Duke to design a seaside estate housing her growing collection of Islamic art, Wyeth and his colleague Drew Baker set out to combine a modern sensibility with allusions to ancient Persepolis, the Alhambra in Spain, the Iranian city of Isfahan, and the Taj Mahal in Northern India.



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- Like many “society architects,” who specialized in a range of eclectic styles to please their well-travelled clients, Wyeth readily incorporated Islamic architectural features throughout the building and its surroundings. Can you see where?
- As the project, started in 1936, evolved, more and more elements characteristic of architectural modernism (e.g. an asymmetrical arrangement of shapes, flat roofs, large windows, clear geometric outlines) were incorporated into the design. Look at the drawing once more and point out where some of these elements are visible.

## DISCUSS:

Curators Donald Albrecht and Thomas Mellins use the phrase “inventive synthesis” to describe how Duke’s collection, the architectural style of the building, and the Hawaiian surroundings work together.

- Why do you think they call it “inventive synthesis”?
- Is inventive synthesis at work in this drawing? Please explain.

## DO :

Form a number of different research teams, each taking on one architectural style that might have inspired Shangri La (the Alhambra in Granada, Spain; the ancient city of Persepolis; Isfahan, Iran, on whose Chetel Sohoon, the playhouse at Shangri La is based; the Taj Mahal, in Agra, India; the modernist architecture of Mies van der Rohe, etc.). Each group should give a 5-minute presentation about your topic, then lead a short discussion about how each respective style influenced the design of Shangri La.



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### Drawing of a scheme for Shangri La's living room

May 1937

P. Vary, S.A.L.A.M. René Martin

18 x 24 ½ in.

Shangri La Historical Archives, Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

## LOOK :

Take a close look at the drawing above.

- What sort of room does it depict? How can you tell?
- Describe the furnishings in the room.
- Which elements are built into room's structure?



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- Which ones are freestanding and moveable?
- How would you describe the general style of this space?
- Where might this room be located? Please explain your answer.
- What geographic area or historical period might it be inspired by? How do you know?
- Do you see any clearly Western or modern features?
- Imagine this was the living room of your house. What might it feel like to move around in it?
- Where might you spend most of your time?
- What would you be doing?

## THINK ABOUT:

This drawing shows the interior design scheme for the living room in Doris Duke's Hawaiian home Shangri La. The general plan for the building and grounds was conceived by American architecture firm Wyeth & King, which specialized in glamorous seasonal homes for the very wealthy. However, Duke commissioned traditional craftspeople in Morocco, Iran, and India to create works adorning large parts of the house. During a trip to Morocco, in 1937, she met Frenchman René Martin, whose company was contracted to supply decorations and furnishings for Shangri La, including custom-made architectural features in wood, stucco, and ceramic.

- Which of these features are apparent in the drawing?
- What do you think might have driven Doris Duke to commission, collect and display works of Islamic Art in her home?

## DISCUSS:

Furnishing their homes in different ethnic and period styles was a wide-spread practice among the wealthy American upper class, who could afford to collect art from around the world. Seen in this context, Doris Duke's interest in Islamic art could be interpreted as a "social habit." At the same time, it is also an expression of American **Orientalism**, the fascination with and idealization of people, lifestyles, and artifacts from the Middle and Far East by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europeans and Americans. While Shangri La had many modern, even high-tech, features, like the glass wall in the living room, which could be completely retracted into the ground, the Islamic collection suggests a desire to be surrounded by and own exotic and historical objects suggesting pure, timeless beauty.



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- Why might the wish to surround oneself by art from foreign lands and religious contexts be seen as problematic?
- Discuss the pros and cons of commissioning Moroccan craftspeople to create traditional furnishings for an American 1930s home.

## DO :

Imagine you were to decorate the living room of your luxurious vacation home. Like your wealthy friends, you choose a design based on a particular historical period or ethnic style. Will you go for the glamour of Marie Antoinette's castle, the serenity of a Japanese tea house, or the grandeur of a **Mughal** palace? Pick a place and time in history and research its decorative arts and architecture. Then, using a shoe box, colored paper, wood, fabric, and other available materials, make a model of a living room in the period style you choice.



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**Qur'an stand (Kursi)**

Egypt or Syria, ca. 1900

Copper alloy, silver

33 7/8 x 18 1/2 x 18 1/2 in. (86 x 47 x 47 cm)

DDFIA, 54.136.1

L.2012-132.35



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## LOOK:

Look closely at the work pictured above.

- What sort of object is it?
- What materials were used to make it?
- How is it constructed?
- Describe the way it is decorated.
- What sorts of tools might the artisans have used?
- What can it be used for?

## THINK ABOUT:

The object is a **kursi**, which is the Arabic word for a Qur'an stand. Designed to support the scripture while it was being read, it also functions as a place to store the holy book when not in use (notice the small doors at its side).

Made around 1900 in either Syria or Egypt, it is copy of an original version crafted for a **Mamluk sultan** in 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>-century Egypt, now preserved in a Cairo museum. The **kursi** is made from sheets of brass, which were riveted together and was then pierced and engraved. A silver inlay completes the design. Intricate calligraphic inscriptions proclaim the ruler's name and various titles (such as "defender of the borders, slayer of the infidels, sultan of the Muslims", etc.). While the inscriptions are accurately reproduced on the top, the sides, which feature decorative letterforms as well, do not add up to a legible meaning (as opposed to the Mamluk original).

- What do these imperfect inscriptions tell us about the artisans who made the 1900 Qur'an stand?
- What does it tell us about the clients it was made for?
- What might have fascinated Western collectors about such an artifact?

## DISCUSS:

Doris Duke bought this kursi as part of a pair at auction, in 1972. In the photograph below, you see it displayed in the context of Shangri La's living room.







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- What do you notice about the way the Qur'an stands are used there?
- What is your reaction to seeing a religious object taken out of context in this way?
- What questions does this raise about the project of Shangri La more generally? Please discuss.



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**Suzani**

Uzbekistan, Bukhara region

late nineteenth century

Cotton with silk threads

102 1/2 x 67 1/2 in. (260.4 x 171.5 cm).



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## LOOK:

Take a good look at this object. Using colored pencil on white paper, make a detailed drawing of it. Take at least 5 minutes to do this, checking and re-checking your drawing against the original to make sure you have included as much detail as possible. The point of this exercise is not to produce a perfect copy but to practice close observation.

When you are finished, discuss what you noticed about the work with your classmates:

- What is the overall shape of the object?
- What smaller, individual shapes do you notice?
- What is the relationship between these shapes?
- What do you notice about **repetition** (recurring design elements) and **variation** (similar design elements)?
- How would you describe the use of line in this work?
- What do you notice about colors and color relationships?
- What materials is the work made of?
- What **process** might have been used to make it?
- Do you think it was made by machine or hand? Please explain your answer.

## THINK ABOUT:

The object pictured above is a **suzani** (from the Persian word for “needle”). These intricately embroidered **textiles** are made throughout central Asia, both in **nomadic** and urban societies. They are mostly created by friends and family members of young girls for their dowry and the decoration of their homes after marriage. This particular **suzani** dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Purchased by Doris Duke during her honeymoon in India, in 1935, it is originally from Bukhara, Uzbekistan, a long-time center of trade, culture, and religion located on the **Silk Road**.

- What is the function of this object? Please come up with at least 3 ways in which this **suzani** could be used.

Uzbek houses, like many in the Islamic world, are rather plain from the outside and sparsely furnished inside. **Suzanis** are used as bedspreads, table cloths, curtains, or wall hangings.

- How might the display of **textiles** change the mood or atmosphere of a place?



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- In what way might **textiles** communicate the status or wealth of their owners?

## DISCUSS:

The overall pattern for a **suzani** is created by professional draftswomen (*kalamkesh*), who pass on their craft from mother to daughter and are revered in their communities. Distinctive patterns and motifs are arranged according to particular rules of **composition**, which call for a central field surrounded by patterned borders on all four sides.

- Describe the way in which the **composition** in the pictured **suzani** does or does not adhere to these design standards.
- Looking closely at the textile, do you notice any irregularities or imperfections?

**Suzanis** are traditionally made from 12"-wide strips of hand-spun cotton fabric. Tacking several together, the designer draws the design on the fabric. The strands are then separated again to be embroidered by different women. Once all the embroideries are done, the strips are reconnected. Occasionally the individual parts don't match up perfectly, resulting in the sort of misalignments of patterns/ motifs you can see in the center of this Uzbek **suzani**.

- There are several recurring designs on this textile. What might be the symbolic meaning of these designs?

The Shangri La website describes the meaning of individual motifs: "Flowers and leaves are the most common motifs found in suzani designs, not surprising in a region where agriculture is the major economy and many homes have courtyard gardens. Some flowers such as tulips, irises, and carnations, are discernible while other flowers are abstract. Many people believe the floral motifs, as well as paisley and pomegranate motifs, are symbols of fertility and prosperity. Motifs such as chili peppers, lamps, and the distinctive central Asian kitchen knife are thought to have protective powers."<sup>1</sup>

- Can you find corresponding designs in the **suzani** you copied?
- Imagine you were designing a **suzani**. What symbols might you use in *your* embroidery?

## DO:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.shangrilahawaii.org/Islamic-Art-at-Shangri-La/Collection-Highlights/Suzanis/>



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Make up a set of 3-5 simple, decorative symbols for things, ideas, or activities important in your life. Based on suzani design rules (central field surrounded by borders), create a sketch for an embroidered textile on a letter-size sheet of paper. Using markers, fill in your outlines with individual short lines, mimicking embroidery stitches. Draw comparisons between the work of different students using the same or similar symbols.





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### Wedding dress (bindalli)

Turkey, late 19th or early 20th century

Silk velvet, cotton, metallic threads

54 x 18 in. (137.2 x 45.7 cm)

DDFIA, 86.100

## LOOK:

Take a good look at this object and describe it in terms of the **elements of design**:

- What colors do you notice?
- What shapes do you see?
- Describe the sorts of lines you notice.
- How are shapes and lines arranged?

Now, let's look at some of the **principles of design**:

- Do you think a sense of balance or unity is present in this work? How is it achieved?
- Is repetition used in the arrangement of shapes and line? Do you notice any patterns? Which ones?
- Can you find any areas in the design which are symmetrical?

## THINK ABOUT:

Next, we are going to think of the object in terms of its **function**.

- What sort of object is this?
- Who might have worn it?
- What might have been the occasion? Please explain.
- Think of comparable garments you might have seen in books or movies. What historical era would those have been from?

This robe is a Turkish wedding dress from the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Turkish name for such garments, **bindalli** (meaning “a thousand branches”) alludes to the gold-embroidered flower garlands, which stand out on the dark red velvet fabric. Both embroidery designs and tailoring were influenced by European fashions of the period.



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- Picture the dress of a bride in 2012 New York. In what way would it be similar to the **bindalli**? What would be differences between the two?
- What might similarities and differences tell us about the different societies in which they were worn?

## DISCUSS:

In Ottoman society, the most important event in a woman's life was considered her wedding. Girls, who were taught embroidery from a young age, spent years working on their dowries with the help of female family members. Days before the wedding, relatives and friends would decorate the bride's new home with those richly embellished items, including towels, covers, clothes, and sashes. After the ceremony, the bride, dressed in a luxurious **bindalli**, would receive guests, seated amid the textiles which she had worked on for so many years - just for this occasion.

- Do you have handmade objects (by you or others) in your home? Do you feel differently about them than about something that was store-bought? Why?
- Put yourself into the shoes of an ottoman bride. What might it have felt like to be surrounded by so many objects made expressly for this one day?
- What might the guests have thought or said?

## DO:

**Bindallis** were designed with an eye to 18th and 19<sup>th</sup>-century European fashion. Initially, Ottoman flower designs were free-flowing, alluding to flowers as they might be found in a garden or in a field. Under the influence of European Rococo, however, patterns became more stylized, showing arranged flower bouquets rather than individual stems. Using the rough outline of the pictured dress as a template, design your own **bindalli**, featuring bright metallic flower designs on a darker background.



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**Bracelet**

India

late seventeenth–early eighteenth century

Enameled gold with rubies and diamonds





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4 1/2 x 9 in. (11.4 x 22.9 cm)

Photo by Richard Walker

© 2003 Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (PH.DD112) (57.74).

## LOOK:

Take a close look at the object below. Describe its design:

- What colors do you notice?
- What shapes do you see?
- How are these shapes arranged?
- Do you notice any patterns?
- Is the design symmetrical?
- What materials did the artist use?
- How were these materials put together to form a complete final product?
- Take a look at the individual flower shapes. Are they all the same or are they different.
- Can you identify the particular kind of flower depicted here?

## THINK ABOUT:

- What is the function of this object?
- Using your previous observations as clues, what assumptions can you make about what sort of person might have worn it. Be as precise as possible.

This bracelet, made in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century in India, was made by using the process of enameling, which involves firing a vitreous (glass-like) paste onto a metal (in this case, gold) foundation. Enameled objects are often quite small, but the precious materials used and the number of different craftsmen involved in make them extremely precious. In some cases, a designer, goldsmith, engraver, enameller, stone polishes, and stone setter might be working on a single object.

- Which of these artisans might have been involved in the creation of the bracelet? Please explain your answer.

## DISCUSS:



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The bracelet was made at the height of the Mughal dynasty's reign over a vast region of South and Central Asia including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, and Northern India. Lasting from 1526-1857, the Mughal Empire was reputed for its wealth, open-mindedness, and a great interest in the arts and sciences. The use of elaborate flower designs is a signature style of Mughal artistic expression. In part, it is inspired by the highly stylized floral arabesques of Indian and Persian stone carvings and carpets. However, a great influence on the artists of the period were traveling merchants from Europe. During their visits they would bring books, tapestries, and paintings, all of whom were closely studied at the Mughal court:

“In particular, botanical books featuring highly detailed, block-printed images of plants are thought to have intrigued Mughal artists. The naturalism articulated in the European botanical studies was adapted by Mughal designers to suit local tastes and from this blending of cultures a brilliant artistic tradition was born.”<sup>2</sup>

- Discuss which of these two styles is prevalent in the bracelet: the idealized natural shapes of Indian or Persian origin, or the highly naturalistic rendering of European models. Please make sure you back up your argument with what you see.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.shangri lahawaii.org/Islamic-Art-at-Shangri-La/Collection-Highlights/Mughal-Flowers/>



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**Woman with a Cat**

Iran, late eighteenth century

Oil on canvas

64 1/2 x 34 3/4 in. (163.8 x 88.3 cm)



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## LOOK:

Take a full minute to have a detailed look at this painting. Go around the class, with every student listing one observation until all of the following questions have been covered.

- What can we tell about the person in the painting (give detailed descriptions of clothes, accessories, posture, facial expression, etc.)?
- What sort of surrounding does she find herself in?
- What is she doing?
- What other objects/props do you notice and what do they tell us about the central figure?

Go around the room again. This time, asking every student to come up with a question about the work. Try to find answers by looking even more closely for any available clues.

## THINK ABOUT:

The image shows an oil painting created in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Iran. It stems from a historical period, the **Qajar** dynasty, when the country opened up towards the West for trade. As a result, **Persian** and European traditions were mixed up within individual works.

- What in this painting strikes you as markedly Eastern?
- In what ways does the work not look like a painting you would expect to have been produced in a Muslim country?
- In what ways might the artist have been influenced by a European style of painting?

## DISCUSS:

The Qajar dynasty is known as a period when painting, especially portraiture flourished in Iran.

- Who might have commissioned this work and why?
- What sort of lifestyle does the work bring across?



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Qajar painters were commissioned by the royal family to depict the lavish splendor of courtly life. The depiction of women, very common in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Iran is very unusual for a Muslim country and at odds with the use of the chador in Persia. Islam religion generally forbids figurative painting of any form. Paintings of the sort depicted here were therefore created not for popular consumption but appealed directly to royal tastes. The woman depicted here was most likely a member of the royal harem.

- Based on the pictures and other objects you have encountered in this collection of lessons, what do you think might have attracted Doris Duke, an admirer of Islamic Art, to this painting?
- Could you imagine that you might want to own this work? Why? Why not?

DO :

Conduct an internet search for “woman with cat painting” and choose one of the images that come up. If you can, print out a copy. Now compare and contrast the painting of your choice with the Iranian work reproduced here. Imagine a dialogue between the two painters in which each of them explains their artistic choices. Why did they render the women in the way they did and what story were they trying to tell? Make them speak from the vantage point of their respective time and place of origin. Write down the dialogue and present it, together with the painting you chose, to your class.



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**Mohamed Zakariya**

*And His throne was on the water (Qur'an 11. 7).*

gold leaf over acrylic, on synthetic canvas

38" x 50"



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## LOOK:

Take a long and close look at the image above; then describe it, imagining you were sharing what you see with someone who doesn't, bringing it alive for them:

- What color is the background of the work?
- What color are the lines on this background?
- What do these colors make you think of? Imagine a place or a time of day when you might encounter these colors in the natural world. When or where would this be?
- Describe the nature of the lines: their thickness, evenness, flow, and how they are arranged on the page.
- What does the overall shape of the arrangement look like?
- Imitate the artist's gestures you think the artists made when creating this work. What might this process have looked like?

## THINK ABOUT:

The image shows a work of contemporary **calligraphy** created by Mohamed Zakariya in the context of his artist residency at Shangri La, in 2005.

- Not knowing the content of his writing, can you nevertheless get a feeling of what mood he was trying to evoke? Please explain.

Zakariya remembers his response to Shangri La and its surroundings as follows: "My first and deepest impression was of the Pacific Ocean—the salt that corroded my steel tools, the energy and vastness of the waves breaking almost in my studio windows. The crash and roll of it, the eternity of it, the fragility of it—all this hit me after I had been there a short while. The way Shangri La rests on the volcanic earth, surrounded by palm and mango trees and overlooking the sea, evoked a Qur'anic landscape/seascape."

The literal words that are spelled out in the work above are taken from the Quaran and read: "And His throne was upon the water".

- What do you think this quote refers to?
- Going back to the image, in what way is its visual appearance linked to both the quoted verse and Zakariya's description of his experience at Shangri La?



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## DISCUSS:

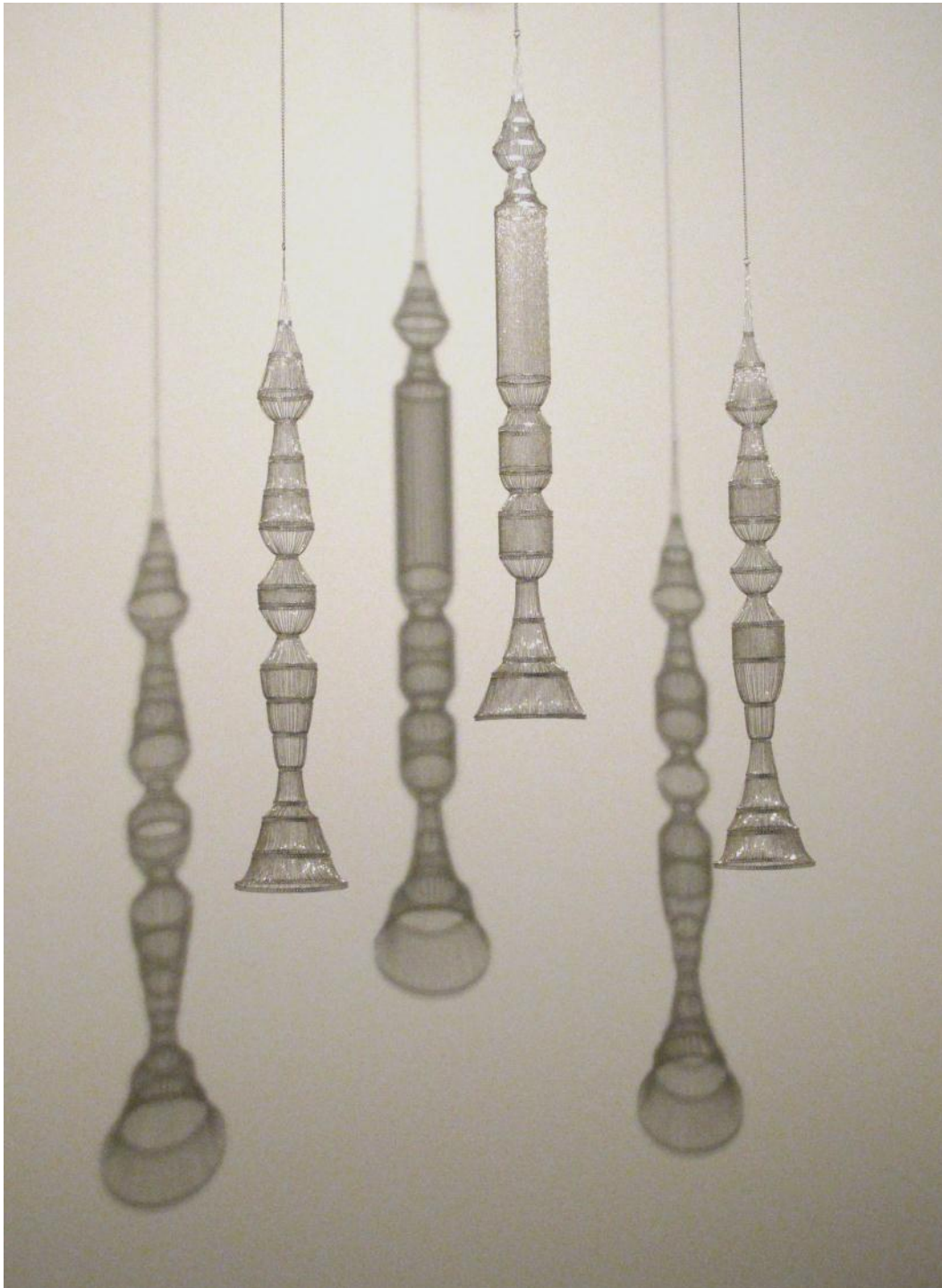
**Calligraphy**, the artistic practice of handwriting, is the most highly regarded form of Islamic Art. Revered as the fundamental means of transmitting and preserving the word of God as expressed in the Quran it is both decorative and deeply meaningful. The Arabic script, used by all Muslims in their religious languages has inspired a wide range of ornamental styles. Calligraphic inscriptions can be found in a wide range of religious contexts, from individual objects and documents to the walls and ceilings of mosques where it takes the place of figurative art, which is forbidden in Islam.

- Why do you think Islam prohibits the visual representation of God in images?
- Islamic calligraphy has been described as “music for the eyes”. Discuss the potential meanings of this phrase and how it connects to Zakariya’s work.





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**Afruz Amighi**  
*Rocket Gods*, 2010  
Aluminium sheet metal and base metal chain  
150 x 23 x 23 cm each



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## LOOK:

- What is the first thing you notice about this work?
- What else do you see?
- Offer a general description of this artwork by focusing on color, shape, line, etc.
- Imagine looking at the 3 objects from far away, only gradually moving closer. How does your perspective change what you see?
- What is revealed about the material the work is made of?
- Imagine you were creating objects like these from sheet metal and aluminum chains. How would you construct them? What individual steps would the process of making consist of?
- Hanging sculptures often evoke thoughts of movement. Do you think this is the case here, as well? Please explain.

## THINK ABOUT:

Iranian-born, New York-based artist Afruz Amighi made this work in response to her two-week stay at Shangri La as an artist-in-residence, in 2010. Think about what the experience of temporarily living and working at Doris Duke's estate, surrounded by Islamic art and architecture and the Hawaiian landscape, would be like.

- How might this experience have found expression in the artist's work?
- Browse the images in this guide. Do you see any objects, which might have inspired the artist to create her hanging sculptures? Please explain.
- What title would you choose for Amighi's artwork?

## DISCUSS:

- Amighi called her sculptures *Rocket Gods*. Why do you think she chose this title?
- Just like its name, the work is full of contradictions – beauty and horror, fragile form and violent content, light and shadow are all inherent in it. Can you think of a reason why the artist might have wanted to highlight these oppositions?

In a statement about the works created in response to her time at Shangri La, Amighi recalls the conflicted emotions caused by the beauty and magical appeal of the estate



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on the one hand and the persistent awareness the simultaneous economic crisis and reliance on military force as American realities more generally on the other. The artist mentions that annual military spending in Hawaii, at \$12 billion dollars, makes up 18%

of the state's total expenditures. At the same time, weapons manufacturing is a source of immense wealth for some individuals. In the artist's words:

"The juxtaposition of violence and opulence is the theme that dominates my work for this exhibit. Missiles and rockets rendered in aluminum and silver chain mimic chandeliers and lanterns. These forms, associated with the arms manufacturing industry are masked in a veneer of decadence, highlighting their function as the mainstay of wealth in our economy. The work alludes to an underlying menace, creating a realm in which violence and tranquility collide."<sup>3</sup>

## DO :

Form teams of 4-6 students each. Brainstorm social and political issues that interest you and settle on one. Using wire and string, each student makes one hanging sculpture, which in your mind embodies or illustrates the issue you chose. Arrange your individual artworks into a compelling group display (hanging them up in the classroom). Discuss each group's work.

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<sup>3</sup> Catalog,



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## LOOK:

- What is going on in this photograph?
- Describe the darker backdrop of the image.
- What sort of place is it? Be precise.
- Describe the superimposed design. What colors, patterns do you see?
- What do these colors and patterns represent? Can you make sense of the overall shape?
- What elements does the figure consist of?
- How did the artist create this work?

## THINK ABOUT:

The photo above depicts an installation by Shahzia Sikander. Inspired by her artist residency at Shangri La in 2008, she created a series of images which she projected onto the estate's luxurious surroundings at nighttime, literally presenting it in a different light.

- In what way does Sikander's intervention bring out new aspects about building and landscape?
- What sort of new ideas does about the space does it evoke?
- Focusing on space, both physical and more philosophically, the installation also brings in a fourth dimension. How does the idea time figure in the work?

Here is how Sikander described her intentions for the work: "Light and shadow take center stage, highlighting the textures, colors and geometry of the space into a theater of light, evolving into a dimension that is sculptural, illusionistic and temporary; fleeting like the movement of wind and stars captured in the slow exposures".

## DISCUSS:

Sikander studied art in her native Lahore, Pakistan, before obtaining an MFA in the U.S., where she now lives. Trained in traditional Mughal and Persian miniature painting, she has become known for the way in which she brings together this ancient art form and contemporary themes. Her repertoire of subjects ranges from personal history to political concerns including colonialism, religious tensions between Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, and Western stereotypes about Muslims (especially women). Recurring motifs are the veil worn by women in Islam and many-armed female figures inspired by Hindu goddesses.



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Growing up in Pakistan surely resulted in a deep-seated familiarity with Islamic art and architecture.

- Imagine the perspective on Duke's project of taking Muslim artifacts out of their native contexts and surrounding herself with them on her Hawaiian estate. How might it differ from the viewpoint of someone who didn't grow up around such objects?

Sikander said in a statement that "Doris Duke was how [she] grasped the stunning site. Her presence was everywhere, permeating her collections, her house and its extension into nature. The projection of the multi-armed female form is a metaphor for Doris Duke herself."

- Why do you think Sikander chose this metaphor? What does it mean?
- Do you think it is an apt way of describing/evoking the heiress?

This is how Sikander' described her image of Duke: "Mythical, majestic, monumental, rising from the Mughal suite, looming over Shangri La, overlooking the formidable pacific, where her ashes were sprinkled. The paradox of Shangri La is omnipresent. With its American orientalism, stunning craftwork and collections from many Muslim cultures, it is engaging while full of contradiction.