Under the high patronage of

Mr. Jacques CHIRAC  
President of the French Republic

HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa AL-THANI  
Emir of Qatar

From Cordoba to Samarkand  
Masterpieces from the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar

March 30 to June 26, 2006  
Musée du Louvre - Richelieu Wing

Exhibition sponsored by the state of Qatar
Press kit

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From Cordoba to Samarkand
Masterpieces from the New Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar

As a foretaste of the marvels to be exhibited at the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Louvre presents forty-two masterpieces of Islamic art from the national collection of Qatar, which comprises several thousand treasures from the Islamic world, originating in cultural centers extending from Cordoba to Samarkand.

The extraordinary works selected by the curators of the Louvre exhibition are among the most representative pieces in this collection. They bear witness to a rich and varied cultural history, spanning three continents and thirteen centuries, from the 7th to the end of the 19th century.

The museum destined to house this entire collection, the realization of a resolutely innovative architectural and museological project, as revealed by two models presented in the Espace Richelieu, was designed by Ieoh Ming Pei and Jean-Michel Wilmotte and is currently nearing completion.
In the Auditorium du Louvre
“Musée-Musées” Symposium
Wednesday, March 29 from 12:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Exhibiting Islamic Art: The Doha Museum Project

Concerts: Music from the Islamic World
Thursday, March 30 at 8 p.m.
Iran: Classical music and Sufi songs from Khorasan

Saturday, April 1 at 8 p.m.
Turkey: Sufi songs and Ottoman instrumental music

Monday, April 3 at 8 p.m.
Music of the Abbasid period

**Forty-two masterpieces of Islamic art**
The works exhibited at the Louvre, most of which have never before been presented to the public, reveal the extraordinary imagination of the artists of the Islamic world, whose creativity found expression in the arts of the book as well as in a wide variety of materials: ceramics, metals, glass, ivory, textiles, and precious stones.

Rather than privileging a strictly chronological or geographical presentation, the organization of the exhibition is guided by an aesthetic appreciation of these objects, a reflection on their decoration, on matter and form. The very beautiful bronze doe probably originates from one of the fountains of Madinat al-Zahra near Córdoba, evoking the splendor of Spanish art of the 10th century. Among the examples of the Islamic arts of the book presented in the exhibition are an Ottoman imperial decree from the 16th century bearing the emblem of the sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and several other exceptional manuscripts. A selection of remarkable metal objects illustrates the importance of metal in the Islamic arts, including one of the most astonishing surviving astrolabe specimens of the Islamic world (dating from the 10th century), an encrusted chest, and an Iranian kashkul (Dervish alms bowl) from around 1550, inscribed with a Shiite prayer.

A 9th century bowl from Basra, a model of restraint, bears the inscription, in ornamental Kufic calligraphy, “what was done was worth the trouble”. Other ceramic pieces, such as the Iznik plate decorated with a leopard dating from 1600–1610, suggest the breadth of creativity and accomplishment of Islamic artists. Exceptional glass objects such as a Mamluk mosque lamp and the famed Cavour Vase, show the interest of Qatar’s collection in this area.

The textile depicting two birds facing each other, probably from India, resurrects in the 13th or 14th century a tradition prevalent under the Sassanids in Persia. The other textile objects include a 17th century silk velvet piece depicting very graceful feminine forms. Objects made of precious stones in the exhibition include an Indian emerald amulet dating from 1695 and an Indian nephrite and jade hookah decorated with lapis lazuli dating from around 1700.

**The new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar**
Exhibition visitors viewing the objects assembled at the Louvre are certain to gain an appreciation of the exceptional interest of the full collection at the museum in Doha, due to open to the public soon, in an innovative presentation privileging a unique approach to the museum-going experience. This museum is only one of an entire group of cultural projects, including a national library as well as other museums and galleries, entrusted to world renowned architects, which will make Qatar a premier cultural and architectural destination.

**The future Department of Islamic Art at the Louvre**
The creation of the Department of Islamic Art at the Louvre (by government decree dated August 1, 2003) was accompanied by a major rearrangement project for the Museum’s collections, calling for the construction of new exhibition spaces in the Cour Visconti, but also by an ambitious program of cultural events. This exhibition provides a glimpse into the rich and varied collections of the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha and is therefore perfectly in keeping with the Louvre’s mission.
Foreword, by Henri Loyrette.

As a premiere to the opening of the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Louvre is proud to welcome a selection of masterpieces from the beautiful collection of the State of Qatar encompassing the entire geographical and temporal range of Islamic art ‘from Cordoba to Samarkand’. The exhibition will also include a presentation of Ieoh Ming Pei and Jean-Michel Wilmotte’s architectural plans for the museum, two architects whose names are inseparable from the adventure of the Grand Louvre. This show demonstrates the artistic vitality of a country which has shown a commitment to culture and knowledge, especially through the construction of a number of museums.

This event is part of a policy of re-deploying the Louvre’s Islamic art collection in the large exhibition spaces to be built in the Visconti courtyard in order to better highlight the immense artistic richness and diversity of the Muslim world. The establishment of the new department of Islamic arts in the very heart of our museum testifies to our desire to better acquaint our millions of visitors with the artistic heritage of Islamic civilisation and its age-old relations with the other cultures represented at the Louvre.

The presentation of the Doha collection and the museum that will soon house it constitutes the beginning of what we hope will be a rewarding relationship of collaboration and interchange between our bicentenary museum and this new and promising institution.

Henri Loyrette
President and Director of the musée du Louvre
The organization of the exhibition

1) Celebration of life

From Cordoba to Samarqand, from earthenware to luxury silk, the visual language of Islamic Art speaks with a recognisable vocabulary.

By 715 the Muslim world spread from Spain to Central Asia, embracing a myriad of ethnic, linguistic and historical differences and within the art of Islam, rich variations flourished but the new vision transcended geography; the living rhythms of Islamic culture also concerned people other than Muslims; Copts in Egypt, Jews in Spain, Christians in Syria. Differences were united by a force of spirit which gave birth to a distinctive aesthetic.

Muse on the beauty of these objects: A bronze hind from whose mouth cascaded waters, reverberating in the 10th century flourishing gardens of Cordoba, a lustre-painted femme-oiseau from the twelfth century, the secret of a jade amulet from Mughal India, the wisdom of poetry eternally calligraphed on tenth century ceramics, an exuberant imagery celebrating life.

Hind, fountain head
Spain, mid-10th century. Bronze, cast and engraved
With a peaceful stance and an inward look in the eyes, this beautiful hind probably stood originally in one of the tenth-century Andalusian palaces with water cascading from its heart-shaped mouth. A closely related stag was found among the ruins of Madinat al-Zahra (near Cordoba) and both might have enhanced the same courtyard fountain, as the lions enhance the fountain in the court of the lions in the Alhambra – fountains being a very significant feature in Islamic palaces. A fountain with a hind and a stag would have high symbolic meaning, as the combination of male and female deer in mystical thought represents the unity of men and women in their spiritual journey. The sculptural quality of this hind, particularly of its head, is stunning. Its abstract shape encapsulates the essence of the animal without being life-like. Details such as the alert movement in its ears are endearing.

Of highly stylised form, its abstract quality is emphasised even further by an overall arabesque design: stems swirl to create a regular pattern of encircled half-palmettes. The arabesque covering the hind ends in a border similar to textile tassels. The suggestion that the hind is dressed with an adorned garment, and accoutrements like the rosette on its head and the little plait of its mane emphasise the ceremonial aspect of this noble creature.
2) Expression and transformation

As the language of the Quran, Arabic and consequently calligraphy are given a special significance and the word occupies a central place in the arts of the Muslim world. But the figurative is also widely used in all media and all periods. Figurative representation was forbidden only in mosques but was prolific in secular space. Calligraphy, geometrical motifs, the arabesque and the figurative, all inform this visual language but extensive ornament often associated with 'Islamic Art' existed side by side with minimalist styles.

Pottery and glass are made of simple ingredients but innovative decoration elevates them into beautiful expressions of a refined lifestyle. The potters of 9th century Basra introduced elegant writing in cobalt blue which was to inspire Chinese potters centuries later. Their introduction of lustre-painting to pottery, previously used only on glass, created the effect of gold to further enhance simple earthenware. While the decoration of glass with techniques such as carving or enamel painting transformed it into a rich material.

Bowl Iraq (probably Basra) 9th century Earthenware, with painting in cobalt blue Diameter: 20.5 cm

The minimalism of this bowl is stunning. The single line of calligraphy across half the body is surprising and effective; it floats and the bowl is imbued with a quality of silence created partly by the special place given to the ‘void’.

“ma ‘umila saluha” (“What was done is worthwhile”), says the bowl in cobalt blue. The lively brushstrokes pulsate at the leafy endings of the Kufic letters. The effect is indeed in the words of the scholar Arthur Lane, like ‘ink on snow’.

A fascination with Chinese porcelain in the early ninth century gave Muslim potters the desire to emulate it, and in shape this bowl is very close to Chinese ware. But the ingredients for making porcelain were unavailable in the Near East and the potters of Basra, a centre for fine pottery, had the creative idea to cover the modest earthenware body with an opaque glaze, thus refining its look. The real innovation, however, was the use of cobalt in the decoration of white wares. Ninth-century Muslim potters sowed the seeds for ‘the blue and white’ ceramics that flourished in the hands of Chinese potters centuries later.
3) Islamic aesthetic

Carving workshops in the Mediterranean excelled in **ivory objects**, most of which display a rich exploration of the figurative: figures are carved in relief in vigorous forms and with varied interpretations. In the 11th-12th centuries, the Islamic aesthetic remained in vogue in Sicily, long after it ceased to be an Arab dominion, reflecting how medieval Europe was greatly inspired by Muslim culture. Objects like the impressive oliphant here, are basically European with an Islamic aesthetic.

**Jewels and other precious materials** all speak the same vocabulary of arabesque, calligraphy, geometric and figurative. An arabesque pattern of leaves and flowers wraps around the body of an Indian Huqqa base carved in the workshops of the Moghul Court, half-palmettes and delicate spirals decorate Fatimid bracelets, calligraphy carved into the jade amulet of Shah Jahan makes it all the more precious - the word endowing the object with the blessing to comfort the emperor during his years of mourning for his wife - transforming this amulet into a synthesis of love, life and death.

**Amulet, India Dated 1041 A.H. (1631–1632 A.D. Jade.)**
Smooth to the touch, the white jade has been polished and inscribed. The calligraphy in elegant nasta’liq, voided from white jade, creates a subtle effect of white on white that is barely perceptible, but is present on all three sides, front, reverse and base of the amulet. The inscription comprises Quranic verses, the name of Shah Jahan and his titles as well as the year 1041 (1631–1632 A.D.).
This haldidi, a type of pendant worn to help cure the wearer of heart 'palpitations', was made a few months after the death of the emperor’s wife, Mumtaz Mahal, whose love was immortalised in the Taj Mahal monument.

4) Mixed worlds

In **metalwork**, silver and gold inlay transformed a medium like brass into a precious material and transformation was enhanced by other techniques like engraving and chasing while piercing gave transparency. The extensive imagery in many of these objects creates a rich multi-layered narrative, often its secrets lie in the details, and revealed only at close distance. The space teems with worlds within worlds, a visual narrative similar to The Thousand and One Nights. Looking at 'Islamic Art' is a journey of discovery and rediscovery.

According to the 10th century Muslim philosopher, Abu Hayyan at-Tawhidi, handwriting is jewellery fashioned by the hand from the pure gold of the intellect. **Calligraphers** dedicated their lives to copying the Quran but manuscripts of varied subjects from science to poetry were also produced. Miniatures complemented the text and brought colour to the intimate world of the book.
Imperial Decree, 
Ferman of Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent 
Turkey (Istanbul) 
Dated 966 A.H. (1559 A.D.)
Ink, colours and gold on paper

This decree, in Ottoman Turkish, declares the conferment of a palace in Istanbul by Sulayman the Magnificent to his granddaughter. It begins with an invocation and ends with the signature of the witnesses. The tughra, the ruler’s signature, with its impressive scale and lavish decoration occupies a central place. Originating from the sultan’s hand-sign (thumb and three fingers), tughras evolved from a rudimentary form into a sophisticated abstract configuration.

The tughra of Sulayman the Magnificent (who ruled between 1520–1566) is among the most beautiful. While at the beginning of his rule it emulated his father’s tughra, it eventually gained its own individuality. Here, the letters in ultramarine blue are enhanced with outlining in gold; the confident verticals, curves, loops and interlace introduce a musical rhythm while the different compartments of the calligraphic composition are filled with variegated yet harmonious interpretations of delicate shoots, leafy spiralling branches and small flowers.

The ground of the scroll is sown with large blue dots while lines of gold text or black appear behind a lace of fine gold dotting.

The impressive tughra, the elegance of Divani (the Ottoman chancery script), the use of gold, the substantial size of the scroll, the ample space given to the few lines of text imbue the document with a majestic quality and transform a legal decree into a work of art.

5) Balance and harmony

Textiles were luxury items, robes were given by rulers as a sign of merit. Carpets often provided an indoor garden to be enjoyed in all seasons day and night. The unique chess carpet from Samarqand offers an arabesque field of flowers while pseudo calligraphy runs along its border (letters without literal meaning but symbolically significant). The Arabic letter was woven, traced on paper, engraved in metal, carved in stone, painted on pottery, moulded in three-dimensional form.

In reality, each one of these objects is unique, made by hand, they are imbued with a ‘living rhythm’. Abundant ornament reflecting abundant devotion and a sought triumph over limitations. Repetition and symmetry create a sense of the infinite even with figurative elements. A sense of eternity seems to have regulated the artist's work. The artist himself remaining invisible, rarely signing his name. More than surface decoration, ornament, in its intricate complexity, seeks balance and harmony. Harmony that is no less than an expression of the harmony of Creation.

Textile
Iran (probably Kashan), 1570s, Silk velvet
Length: 164 cm
Width: 70 cm
Works on display

- Bowl
Iraq (probably Basra), 9th century
Earthenware with painting in cobalt blue

- Dish
Nishapur or Samarqand, 10th Century
Earthenware covered in white slip and decorated in brown slip under a transparent glaze

- Architectural inscription
Iran or Central Asia, 12th-13th century
Clay, moulded, with turquoise glaze

- Bowl
Egypt or Syria, 12th century
Earthenware, with lustre-painted decoration

- Bowl
Iran, Kashan, dated Shawwal 611 / February 1215
Fritware, with decoration in lustre

- Water bottle or vase
Turkey, Iznik, 1560-1570
Fritware, with underglaze painted decoration

- Dish
Turkey, Iznik, 1600-1610
Fritware, with underglaze painted decoration

- Chalice
Iraq or Egypt, 9th-10th century.
Clear glass, cut in relief

- Ewer
Iran or Egypt, 10th century
Glass, with wheel-cut intaglio decoration

- Vase (known as ‘The Carvour Vase’)
Probably Syria, late 13th century
Glass, blown, enameled and gilded

- Lamp
Egypt or Syria, 1340-1350 AD
Glass, blown, enameled and gilded

- Bowl
By Ahmad Ibn Shukrallah al-Farsi
Iran, 15th-16th century
Agate, carved and gilded

- Chess Piece (Bishop)
Egypt or Sicily. 11th century
Ivory

- Box
Italy (probably Sicily). 11th-12th century
Ivory, with gilt copper mounts

- Hunting horn
Italy (probably Sicily). 11th-12th century
Ivory, carved

- Amulet
India Dated AH 1041 / 1632 AD
Jade

- Amulet
India Dated AH 1107 / 1695-1696 AD
Emerald (from Colombia), carved (in India)

- Cup
India. 17th century
Emerald (carved) and gold

- Huqqa Base
India. Circa 1700
Nephrite jade, lapis lazuli, dark green jade, black jade, rubies, gold

- Pair of bracelets
Egypt or Syria. 11th century AD
Gold sheet decorated with gold wire, granulation and repoussé

- Cup
Central Asia. Early 14th century
Gold, incised, inlaid with black compound

- Hind, fountain head
Spain. Mid 10th century
Bronze, cast and engraved

- Candlestick
Iraq. 11th century
Sheet brass, worked in repoussé

- Casket
Iran or North-West India. 12th-13th century
Bronze, cast and inlaid with silver and black compound

- Tray-stand
Syria or the Jazira. Mid 13th century
Brass, inlaid with silver and black compound
- **Mosque lamp**  
  Made for the Mausoleum of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars  
  Syria (Damascus). 1277 AD  
  Brass, inlaid with silver and black compound

- **Pen case**  
  Made for the Ilkhanid vizier, Shams al-Din Muhammad Juvaini  
  Western Iran. Second half of the 13th century  
  Brass, inlaid with gold and silver

- **Pen Case**  
  Made for the Ilkhanid vizier, Shams al-Din Muhammad Juvaini  
  Western Iran. Second half of the 13th century  
  Brass, inlaid with gold and silver

- **Candlestick**  
  Iran (probably Shiraz). 1341-56 AD  
  Made by Sa’d Ibn Abdallah for Abu Ishaq Inju  
  Brass, inlaid with gold, silver and black compound

- **Yatagan and Scabbard**  
  Made by Mustafa Ibn Kemal al-akshehri during the reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512)  
  Turkey. Circa 1500  
  Steel with gold inlay; wood and leather

- **Kashkul (Dervish’s begging bowl)**  
  Western Iran. About 1550  
  Brass, cast, engraved

- **Jug**  
  Turkey. Early 16th century  
  Silver, cast, with engraved and gilded decoration

- **Planispheric astrolabe**  
  By Hamid ibn al-Khidr al-Khujandi  
  Iran (Rayy) or Iraq (Baghdad). Dated AH 374 / 984-8 AD  
  Brass, cast

- **Quran volume**  
  Chapter 30  
  Morocco or Tunisia. 12th-13th century  
  Paper

- **Sulwan al-muta’ fi ‘udwan al-atba’**  
  Consolation of the Prince over the Hostility of his Subjects - By Ibn Zafar  
  Syria. 1325-1350  
  Paper

- **Imperial Decree**  
  Ferman of Sultan Sulayman The Magnificent  
  Turkey (Istanbul). Dated AH 966 / 1559 AD  
  Ink, colours and gold on paper

- **Carpet**  
  (The Timurid Chess-Board Garden Carpet)  
  Iran or Central Asia (probably Samarqand). 14th-15th century  
  Silk pile on a cotton foundation

- **Textile**  
  Iran (probably Kashan). 1570’s  
  Silk velvet

- **Textile**  
  Iran (probably Kashan). Mid 17th century  
  Silk velvet, voided, with brocaded gold thread and additional weft loops

- **Textile**  
  Turkey (Bursa). About 1550  
  Silk velvet, voided, with brocaded silver thread

- **Textile**  
  India or Central Asia. 13th-15th century  
  Silk, woven in *samit* technique
Publication

Exhibition catalogue

From Cordoba to Samarkand
Masterpieces from the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha

Edited by Sabiha Al Khemir, chief curator of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. Interviews with Ieoh Ming Pei and Jean-Michel Wilmotte by Philip Jodidio

Photographs by Hugues Dubois

This work is published in connection with the exhibition at the Louvre of architectural models for the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar alongside several of the masterpieces from its collections. The catalogue contains a presentation of the project for the new museum, in the form of exclusive interviews with architects Jean-Michel Wilmotte and Ieoh Ming Pei, a text by Sabiha Al Khemir, chief curator of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, on the arts of Islam and the development of this vast collection, as well as detailed information on the 42 works presented in the exhibition.

The publication of this work is sponsored by Qatar’s National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage
Exhibiting Islamic art:
The Doha museum project

Wednesday
March 29, 2006

“Musée-
Musées” Symposium

12 p.m.
Doha, a new capital of culture and museums
By HE Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed Ali Al-Thani,
Vice Chairman of the Qatar Museum Authority and Henri Loyrette,
Musée du Louvre

12:30 p.m. “From Cordoba to Samarkand: Masterpieces from the
New Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar”
Presentation of the exhibition by Sabiha Al Khemir, chief curator of the
Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar and Francis Richard, Musée du
Louvre

1 p.m. “Qatar’s contribution to the great collections of Islamic art”
By Francis Richard, Musée du Louvre

3 p.m. The urban development and landscaping project for the
Corniche of Doha
By Nicolas Michelin, architect and urban planner

3:45 p.m. The Museum of Islamic Art project
Film screenings: Interviews with Ieoh Ming Pei
Presentation of the project by Jean-Michel Wilmotte

4:45 p.m. Exhibiting Islamic art
Debate moderated by Philip Jodidio, art and architecture critic, with
Sabiha Al Khemir, Francis Richard, and Emmanuel Brelot (Wilmotte and
associates) together with architect Rudi Ricciotti and exhibition designer
Renaud Pierard

5:45 p.m.
Tour of the exhibition
The Museum of Islamic Art, Doha

The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, designed by Ieoh Ming Pei, one of the greatest architects of our times, is nearing completion. Innovative and modern in his outlook, Pei drew inspiration from the essence of Islamic architecture where pure and powerful geometrical forms play a central role, while giving a richness of decorative details to the space within.

With skilful juxtaposition of transparent, translucent and opaque surfaces, Jean Michel Wilmotte creates a sober and warm atmosphere. With his pure and minimalist approach, the giant designer disappears to give generous space to the objects bringing them to float in luminosity. This aesthetic is complemented by a practical hi-tech design, aiding the curator and insuring the welfare of the objects.

The outcome is a state of the art museum, the first in a series of cultural projects which will make Qatar a capital of the arts.
The government of Qatar wishes to establish Doha, the country’s capital city, as a premier cultural and architectural destination. The plan calls for a redevelopment of the Qatar National Museum and the construction of three new museums designed by world-renowned architects, all to be completed by 2010.

Apart from the new Museum of Islamic Art, built on an artificial island at one end of the Doha Corniche and destined to serve as the city’s landmark, the plan also includes the construction of a new National Library. Designed by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki in the shape of an oil platform, this “lighthouse of knowledge” will also rise majestically at another point along the palm-lined avenue that circles the city’s central bay. It will be able to house as many as two million Arabic and foreign-language books, manuscripts, and periodicals. The building will also contain a museum of natural history, exhibiting prehistoric fossils as well as collections of gems and precious stones. The new Photography Museum designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, due to be completed by 2010, will be home to a collection of 15,000 pieces, including nearly 1,600 cameras and 4,500 daguerreotypes. The design brings to mind an eye whose lids open and close to regulate the amount of penetrating light.

The transformation of the Corniche, which includes the portion of the city where these museums will be located, was entrusted to the French architects Jean Nouvel and Nicolas Michelin.
New exhibition spaces in the Louvre dedicated to the Arts of Islam

On 26 July 2005, French President Jacques Chirac welcomed Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, Minister for Culture and Communication, and Henri Loyrette, Director of the Louvre, who presented him the winning architectural proposal from an international competition to develop the Louvre’s department of the Arts of Islam. The design chosen was the work of architects Rudy Ricciotti and Mario Bellini. The department of the Arts of Islam will move into its new space in the Louvre’s Cour Visconti in 2009.

The French president stated that he was “particularly devoted to developing the department of the Arts of Islam, which will allow the Louvre to give this remarkable collection the exhibition space it deserves.”

A Much-Needed Expansion
The Louvre’s 10,000-work collection is one of the richest and most beautiful Arts of Islam collections in the world. With an additional 3,000 stored works owned by the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, it offers dazzling coverage of the culture of the Islamic world, geographically – from Spain to India – and chronologically, from the 7th to the 19th century.

Until now, its display spaces have been quite limited, with 1,300 works exhibited in an area covering 1,100 square meters (11,840 square feet). The Louvre’s Arts of Islam collection deserves spaces worthy of its significance and designed specifically for it.

A Strategic and Prestigious Space
The Cour Visconti, located in the centre of the southern wing of the Palais du Louvre, has been chosen as the department’s future home. Originally part of a major expansion project for a Nouveau Louvre (“New Louvre”), carried out between 1848 and 1852, it was undertaken during the Second Empire by architect Louis Visconti and completed by Hector Lefuel, who was responsible for the current architectural detail on the façades of the Palais.

The Cour Visconti places the Arts of Islam department in a setting that follows the flow of the collections, installed near the space dedicated to the civilizations of Late Antiquity. The new exhibition spaces will be organized in continuation of the Roman and Coptic Egypt collections, close to the collections from Syria and Phoenicia.

The new spaces will be linked to the Salle du Manège and the Galerie Daru, which lead to the great masterpieces of Greek Antiquity (Aphrodite, known as the Venus de Milo, and the Winged Victory of Samothrace) and on to those of the Italian Renaissance (the Mona Lisa and Michelangelo’s Slaves).

The Arts of Islam will thus be at the heart of the museum’s most heavily-visited areas, which draw nearly seven million people.

A Tailored Pathway through the Exhibit
The new framework for presenting the collections is based on three features: a chronological approach enriched by topical digressions and supplemented by an interpretive area, the “cabinet of keys to understanding”.

The collections will be presented using a more general chronological approach than is currently the case and will not assume that visitors have a sophisticated understanding of the historical context. The project emphasizes notions of fluidity, circulation and exchanges across the regions of the Islamic world. Topical digressions will highlight the powerful and deep-rooted cultural themes like writing – central to the visual unity of the Islamic world –, geometry and the science of numbers, and the art of the book.
The “cabinet of keys to understanding”, a site within the space where visitors will have access to additional information, will provide a critical setting in which to interpret and deepen one’s understanding of the Arts of Islam, the Islamic world and its links to the other civilizations represented at the Louvre.

The Award-Winning Project
Seven teams were pre-selected in the competition. The design of the future galleries was ultimately awarded to Italian architect Mario Bellini, well-known for his museum designs in historical settings, and to French architect Rudy Ricciotti, highly noted internationally for the Stadium de Vitrolles and winner of the design competition for the Musée des civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseilles and, recently, of the competition for the new Cinema Palace in Venice, along with the Italian team, 5+1.

The architects have expressed their firm commitment that “the Cour Visconti will not be covered and will remain visible”.

The collections will be displayed over 3,500 square meters (37,700 square feet) of floor space, on two levels. The first, at courtyard level, will house pieces dating from the 7th and 11th centuries. The second, at lower ground level, will include works from the 11th and 19th centuries and, in particular, a prestigious carpet collection.

The spaces will be covered by a luminous veil floating delicately over the museum area. Inside the new spaces, the courtyard façades will be visible from every angle of the ground floor. Visitors will be able to see the iridescent veil from both floors, allowing them to enjoy the play of folds and dips.

Natural lighting will be used to present a large part of the collections. The veil will refract much of the daylight in a controlled manner. At the height of the summer, the luminous intensity will not exceed levels that comply with sound conservation practices and protect visitor comfort.

On the lower level, the veil will be visible at several spots, thanks to openings created at the corners of the courtyard that allow it to maintain its role in unifying the collection.

The proposal avoids fragmenting the space in favour of a continuous flow designed to avoid creating unnecessary visitor traffic.

A low bench, an unbroken design element whose form evokes the vestiges of an ancient city, defines the sequences along the pathway through the exhibition. It often surges to reach table height, allowing the gaze to rest there, where the structure can participate in serving the needs of the display. At those points where it becomes a mediating structure or moulding, it constitutes a guide, leading the visitor calmly through the exhibition. It also serves as a point of reference and source of information.

Financing and an Unprecedented Gift
The French government is financing €20 million of the project’s €50 million total budget. The project has been fortunate to receive an extraordinary contribution of €17 million from Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, president of Kingdom Holding Company. This is the largest private contribution in French history. The Total corporation has announced that it will provide €4 million and is currently working to identify other French companies to match that gift.

New Space Scheduled to Be Opened in 2009
Construction work on the museum spaces and technical areas is expected to begin in January 2007, preceded by restoration of the façades of the Cour Visconti, which will start in 2006.

The new spaces will be opened in the first quarter of 2009.

This project highlights the universal mission of the Louvre, its worldwide influence and its place at the heart of diversity and exchanges among cultures.
Press visuals for the exhibition

« From Cordoba to Samarkand
Masterpieces from the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar »
March 30 to June 26, 2006
Musée du Louvre, Richelieu wing

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Bowl
Iraq (probably Basra)
9th century
Earthenware, with painting in cobalt blue
Diameter: 20.5 cm

Candlestick
Iraq
11th century
Sheet brass, worked in repoussé
Height: 30.6 cm

Hind, fountain head
Spain
Mid-10th century
Bronze, cast and engraved
Height: 48.1 cm

Planispheric astrolabe
Hamid ibn al-Khidr al-Khujandi
Iran (Rayy) or Iraq (Baghdad)
Dated 374 A.H./984–985 A.D.
Brass, cast
Diameter: 15 cm

Amulet
India
Dated 1041 A.H./1631–1632 A.D.
Jade
Width: 5.1 cm

Dish
Turkey, Iznik
1600–1610
Fritware, with underglaze-painted decoration
Diameter: 30.1 cm
Huqqa Base
India
1700 ca.
Nephrite jade, lapis lazuli,
dark green jade, black jade,
rubies, gold
Height: 18.4 cm

Lamp
Egypt or Syria
1340–1350
Glass, blown, enamelled and
gilded
Height: 27.8 cm
Diameter: 25.9 cm

Kashkul
(dervish’s begging bowl)
West Iran
1550 ca.
Brass, cast, engraved
Height: 7.4 cm
Length: 38 cm

Imperial Decree,
Ferman of Sultan Sulayman
the Magnificent
Turkey (Istanbul)
Dated 966 A.H./1559 A.D.
Ink, colours and gold on paper
Length: 2.9 cm
Width: 59.5 cm

Textile
India or Central Asia
13th–15th century
Silk, woven in samit technique
Length: 80 cm
Width: 24.5 cm

Textile (probably Kashan)
Iran (probably Kashan)
1570s
Silk velvet
Length: 164 cm
Width: 70 cm

Textile
Iran (probably Kashan)
1550 ca.
Silk velvet, voided with brocaded
silver thread
Length: 83 cm
Width: 63 cm

Textile
Turkey
1550 ca.
Silk velvet, voided with brocaded
silver thread
Length: 83 cm
Width: 63 cm

Textile
Iran or north-west India
12th–13th century
Bronze, cast and inlaid with
silver and black compound
Height: 17 cm

Casket
Iran or north-west India
12th–13th century
Bronze, cast and inlaid with
silver and black compound
Height: 17 cm

Kashkul
West Iran
1550 ca.
Brass, cast, engraved
Height: 7.4 cm
Length: 38 cm