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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Panel 35

From the art market to the making of collections: the arts of Islam in Western collections

This workshop aims to focus on the Islamic arts market and the formation of private and public collections in Europe throughout the 20th century. Studying the history of the Islamic arts market is relatively a new field, although it began to take off at the turn of the previous century. If it was in Paris - the capital of the world art market before the 2nd World War - that the Islamic arts market was definitively formed, it is especially in Istanbul, Damascus, Tehran and Cairo that the first materials were originally in circulation. It seems then essential to explore the art market and its actors, including private collectors, their acquisition policies and the exhibitions they organized, to better understand the formation of Islamic art collections in the Western countries. Discussing the dealers, collectors and non-European market centers, the contributions of this workshop highlight the formation of private collections which are today at the heart of public collections and museums in Paris, Geneva and the USA. The evolution of the market during the last century and even today, especially after the war in Syria, plays an essential role in the circulation and dispersion of Islamic artworks. This workshop, therefore, examines the political and historical factors that continue to shape Islamic collections around the world.

Person in charge : Habibi Negar (University of Geneva, Department of Art History)

Discussant : Juvén Carine (Louvre Museum, Department of Islamic Arts)

Program

Hénon Judith (Louvre Museum)

Reconstructing the collection of Islamic art of jeweler Louis Cartier (1875 - 1942)

A lover of 18th-century furniture and Asian art, a great bibliophile, Louis Cartier brought together an important collection of Islamic art in the first half of the 20th century. A discreet enthusiast, he did not publish his collections and the pieces he gathered throughout his life; so many were scattered after his death, mainly in the United States. Its collection has been partially reconstructed thanks to the catalogs of the first international exhibitions of Islamic art, the archives of museums and the Maison Cartier (glass plates, stock books, invoices and letters). These precious documents make it possible to draw a picture of the Islamic art market in the first half of the century, where Paris played an essential role. The political context in the Ottoman Empire and Persia at the beginning of the 20th century helped to energize this market by the arrival of merchants and intermediaries ensuring the arrival of a large volume of objects. The discovery of these works of very high quality, especially in the field of Persian arts of the book, is a real «revelation» for many artists of the time who passionately explore these new forms in search of modernity.

Habibi Negar (University of Geneva)

Jean Pozzi (1884-1967): French Plenipotentiary Minister and his collection of Persian paintings

Expert in Franco-Oriental relations and president of the Iran-France Chamber of Commerce, Jean Pozzi was mainly interested in the collection of Islamic and Iranian works of art. He built up his large collection during his long stays in the Middle East from 1907 in Turkey, passing through Tehran in 1934, and in Cairo between 1939 and 1942. Younger than the pioneer collectors of Iranian art such as Georges Marteau, Henri Vever and Louis Cartier, Jean Pozzi seems to profit from their dealer networks, especially in the first half of the 20th century. He published a catalog of some of his masterpieces in August 1928 by Edgar Blochet (1870-1937), among which there are pages of the same manuscripts scattered in other French private collections. Jean Pozzi continued to collect Islamic and Iranian works throughout his life, but we have no written records of his trading activities. By reviewing the works published in his catalog and those which were acquired in the second half of the 20th century, this article aims to better understand Pozzi's acquisition policy, while sketching the centers of the market of the Iranian-Islamic art likely to serve him between two wars and afterward up to his death.

Imbert Isabelle (independent researcher)

From Damascus to New York: reflections on the challenges of the Islamic architectural ceramics trade

In April 2018, Christie's put on sale the collection of the artist Lockwood De Forest, composed of so-called Damascus architectural tiles. A fortune for the time, Lockwood De Forest paid five dollars for individual tiles and more for a complete set in Damascus in the 1880s. In 1972, John Carswell attached the 1,200 tiles in the collection to monuments still in elevation, mostly mosques, without questioning their means of acquisition. This sale ended a lean period for the Islamic architectural ceramics market, caused by the wars in Syria and the looting of archaeological sites by ISIL. In this particularly gloomy context, the Lockwood De Forest collection and its auction raise questions about the enthusiasm of the Christian West for Islamic architectural decoration and its impact on the conversation of heritage. This paper proposes to analyze the ethical issues and questions of the market of Islamic architectural ceramics through the example of Mamluk and Ottoman productions.