

Public



Press release

For press materials, please click [here](#).

New Louvre Abu Dhabi Exhibition *Letters of Light* Opens to the Public

From 13 September 2023 to 14 January 2024, Letters of Light displays some of the oldest sacred texts of the three monotheistic religions

Held in partnership with Bibliothèque nationale de France and France Muséums



© Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi, UAE, 12 September 2023: Louvre Abu Dhabi is pleased to announce that its latest exhibition, *Letters of Light*, was inaugurated by H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Louvre Abu Dhabi today. Featuring some of the oldest texts of the three monotheistic religions, *Letters of Light* will open to public on 13 September and will run until 14 January 2024.

Held in partnership with Bibliothèque nationale de France and France Muséums, *Letters of Light* explores the historical context in which the holy books emerged, the way they have been passed down over the years, the scholarly and mystical practices associated with them and their essential role in universal intellectual and artistic history.

The exhibition is curated by Laurent Héricher, Head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department, Bibliothèque nationale de France, and Dr. Souraya Noujaim, Director of the Islamic Arts department, Musée du Louvre, and former Director for Scientific, Curatorial and Collections Management at Louvre Abu Dhabi.

Public

With more than 240 artworks on display, visitors will discover important and beautiful manuscripts of the Quran, Bible, and Torah as well as artefacts from the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Musée du Louvre in Paris and Louvre Abu Dhabi. These pieces include manuscripts, photographs, graphic arts and three-dimensional objects, textiles and paintings from all over the world. Offering a contemporary perspective, the exhibition also showcases a commissioned artwork by Muhannad Shono, *The Unseen*. The thread-based installation by the Saudi visual artist metaphorically connects the threads of the three religions through a contemplative experience.

Manuel Rabaté, Director, Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "*Letters of Light* invites visitors to embark upon a journey of profound reflection, exploring the intricate interplay between creative ingenuity and spirituality. From exquisite texts like the Souvigny Bible to beautiful paintings such as Giovanni Bellini's *Virgin and Child*, and intriguing artefacts like the Key to the Kaaba, this exhibition displays an array of remarkable items to highlight the shared origins of the three monotheistic religions — each an embodiment of beauty and knowledge. As one journeys through this captivating showcase, they'll uncover how these three faiths share profound roots, enriching their understanding beyond personal beliefs."

He added, "We are honoured to have partnered with Bibliothèque nationale de France and France Muséums to curate this exhibition, seamlessly bridging and fostering vibrant cultural connections."

Laurent Héricher, Head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department, Bibliothèque nationale de France, said: "Presenting some of the oldest and most important books and manuscripts, extraordinary illuminated and marvelous calligraphy, this exhibition has been created to emphasise the universality of Quranic, biblical, and evangelical messages, as well as the intrinsic ethical dimension of these three religions and their predominant role in universal intellectual and artistic history. This fully aligns with the universal dimension of Louvre Abu Dhabi, a place open to dialogue that brings together different cultures to shed light on these common stories of humanity, transcending civilisations, eras, and places. We hope that this journey to the heart of the spiritual roots of human history invites visitors into a moment of meditation and aesthetic emotion."

Dr. Souraya Noujaim, Director of the Islamic Arts department at Musée du Louvre, and former Scientific, Curatorial and Collections Management Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "By highlighting episodes and figures that are shared by all three monotheistic religions, we hope to deepen visitors' understanding of these Holy Books, offering a retrospective on the rich history of sacred texts, exploring their forms, their languages, and the texts they contain. *Letters of Light* presents an extraordinary moment to see some of the rarest artworks, monotheist sacred scriptures, and items, displayed side-by-side. These include artefacts such as the Blue Quran, which translates the exhibition's title '*Letters of Light*' in its passages. This almost modern calligraphy, painted in golden letters contrasted by a deep blue background, conveys a reason for contemplation."

Masterpieces from the exhibition include artworks and manuscripts from Louvre Abu Dhabi's collection:

- **Blue Quran folio**, one of the most sumptuous ancient copies of the Quran to have survived to the present day. Consisting of seven volumes, the page was probably produced in Kairouan, Tunisia, in the 9th or 10th century. The dark blue page symbolises the celestial universe and the gilded letters the divine light spread by the word of God. A dedicated passage reassembling six pages of the dispersed *Blue Quran* will be included in the narrative.
- **Palimpsest leaf of a Quran (Hijazi style)**, the script in the leaf on offer is described as Hijazi script. It is known to us from the 10th century Baghdadi writer Ibn al-Nadim as the earliest form of Arabic script. He attributes the script to Mecca and Medina, in the Hijaz region of the Arabian Peninsula, hence the name Hijazi links the script to its geographical origin.
- **Virgin and child** by Giovanni Bellini, an important piece of work that is representative of the early Venetian Renaissance and the art of Bellini. The technique of oil painting was at the time an innovation that distinguished Venice from the other centres of Italian art. The intensity of colour in the piece is

accentuated by the use of a monochrome black background rather than the usual landscape, which was rare for Bellini.

The exhibition also features highlights on loan from Louvre Abu Dhabi's partners, such as:

- **Souvigny Bible with the representation of Abraham's Bosom, late 12th century;**
- **Dead Sea Scrolls (oldest Hebrew bible manuscripts known), early 1st century;**
- **Gutenberg Bible, c. 1455–56;**
- **Key to the Kaaba in the name of Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir Faraj ibn Barquq, 1399–1412;**
- **Collection of prayers with hexagonal leaves, finely bound together and covered with text that unfolds from the lower binding flaps, 1744.**

Visitors to the exhibition will also view the world's smallest Bible to have travelled across space, the *Nano Bible*, which astronaut Eytan Stibbe brought to the International Space Station in April 2022. In addition, visitors will learn more about a great archaeological discovery, the 'Ras Al Khaimah Hebrew gravestone. Discovered in the 1970s, the stele is engraved with the epitaph of a Jew who passed away in Ras Al Khaimah. It represents the first tangible evidence of Jewish presence in the United Arab Emirates.

As part of the museum's cultural programming, Louvre Abu Dhabi will host a curatorial talk on 12 September from 5 – 6pm, offering insights from Laurent Héricher and Dr. Souraya Noujaim on the work that went into bringing the exhibition to life. A second talk, 'Archaeology and Architecture', will take place from 6:30 – 7:30pm, featuring a riveting panel including Dr. Timothy Power, Dr. Mark Jonathan Beech, and Manal Ataya.

The talks will feature national and international speakers from multiple disciplines, offering visitors the opportunity to delve deeper into seeing and reading the works of artistic and textual heritage selected for the exhibition, in the context of Louvre Abu Dhabi as a universal art museum. The talks will also bring attention to the living traditions of thought and practice that converse with the scriptures and scriptural legacies in contemporary contexts.

More details of the rich cultural and educational programme accompanying the exhibition will be announced at a later date. For more information about the exhibition, and to book tickets, please visit louvreabudhabi.ae or call Louvre Abu Dhabi at +971 600 56 55 66. Entrance to the exhibition is free with the museum's general admission tickets. Admission to the museum is free for children under the age of 18.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Louvre Abu Dhabi's new operating hours

Museum: Open: 10 am – 6.30 pm (Tue - Thurs); extended hours: 10am – 8.30pm (Fri - Sun); closed on Mondays.

Dome: Open: 10am – midnight (Tues - Sun) - last entry 11 pm; closed on Mondays

Museum Café: Open: 10 am – 6.30 pm (Tue - Thurs); extended hours: 10 am – 10 pm (Fri – Sun). Closed on Mondays

Art Lounge: Open: 3 pm – 12 am (last orders 11 pm); closed on Mondays

Fouquet's Abu Dhabi and Marta Bar: Open: 12 pm – 12 am (last orders at 10 pm) (Tue – Thurs, Sun); weekends: 12 pm – 1 am (last orders at 10.30 pm) (Fri – Sat); closed on Mondays

Aptitude Café: Open: 9 am – 10 pm (daily including Mondays)

Follow Louvre Abu Dhabi on social media: Facebook ([Louvre Abu Dhabi](#)), Twitter ([@LouvreAbuDhabi](#)) and Instagram ([@LouvreAbuDhabi](#)) #LouvreAbuDhabi.

ABOUT LOUVRE ABU DHABI

Created by an exceptional agreement between the governments of Abu Dhabi and France, Louvre Abu Dhabi was designed by Jean Nouvel and opened on Saadiyat Island in November 2017. The museum is inspired by traditional Islamic architecture and its monumental dome creates a rain of light effect and a unique social space that brings people together.

Louvre Abu Dhabi celebrates the universal creativity of mankind and invites audiences to see humanity in a new light. Through its innovative curatorial approach, the museum focuses on building understanding across cultures: through stories of human creativity that transcend civilisations, geographies and times.

The museum's growing collection is unparalleled in the region and spans thousands of years of human history, including prehistoric tools, artefacts, religious texts, iconic paintings and contemporary artworks. The permanent collection is supplemented by rotating loans from 21 French partner institutions, regional and international museums.

Louvre Abu Dhabi is a testing ground for new ideas in a globalised world and champions new generations of cultural leaders. Its international exhibitions, programming and Children's Museum are inclusive platforms that connect communities and offer enjoyment for all.

ABOUT BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

The Bibliothèque nationale de France is the heir to the royal collections built up since the end of the Middle Ages. It preserves a heritage that is unique in the world: more than 40 million documents, including 15 million books and journals, but also manuscripts, prints, photographs, maps and plans, scores, coins, medals, sound documents, videos, multimedia, sets, costumes, to which must be added, since 2006, the billions of files collected as part of the legal deposit of the French web. Through them, BnF preserves and transmits a part of the world's memory. Its encyclopedic collections have been feeding and enriching a constantly evolving thought process for nearly five centuries. A universal heritage made available to all to help them better think about the world, and formed from a network of resources designed to enlighten and create knowledge.

The historic site, Richelieu, reopened last September, allows visitors to discover 900 treasures from the BnF's collections in a new museum and the mythical Oval Room invites the public to consult 20,000 volumes presented for free consultation.

Digital technology is a major challenge for the preservation and dissemination of BnF's collections. Gallica, its digital library, now provides free access to 10 million documents.

As a place of transmission and accessibility to culture, the BnF offers exhibitions, events, workshops, visits, participative events, book editions, online conferences, etc.

ABOUT MUSÉE DU LOUVRE



Formerly a royal palace, the Louvre became a national museum in 1793, during the French Revolution. Its collections, divided among nine departments, encompass over eight millennia of world history. The 33,000 works of art on public display in the museum bring different cultures together, breaking the barriers of time and space and ensuring the Louvre is home to all kinds of artistic creation. Even before the Revolution, many artists had their workshops in the Louvre, and today it continues to welcome the greatest contemporary creators, thereby bringing its collections alive, boosting their contemporary relevance, and opening the museum ever wider to the world.

ABOUT FRANCE MUSÉUMS

Following the intergovernmental agreement between France and the Emirates of Abu Dhabi signed in 2007, France Muséums, a cultural consulting and engineering agency, was created to work towards the creation of Louvre Abu Dhabi and support the project in all its dimensions (strategic, scientific, cultural, building, human resources).

Since the opening of the UAE museum in 2017, France Muséums continues to support Louvre Abu Dhabi in four main fields of activity: the management and coordination of loans from French museums for the permanent galleries of the museum, the organisation and production of international exhibitions, capacity building and training of teams and a wide range of consultancy and auditing assignments in all areas of museum management.

France Muséums mobilises its teams based in Paris and Abu Dhabi and a network of 21 major French cultural institutions and museum partners : Musée du Louvre, Centre Pompidou, Etablissement public des musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Réunion des Musées Nationaux et du Grand Palais (RMN-GP), Château de Versailles, Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet, Musée de Cluny – musée national du Moyen-Âge, École du Louvre, Musée Rodin, Domaine National de Chambord, Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD), Cité de la Céramique – Sèvres et Limoges, Musée d'Archéologie nationale – Saint-Germain en Laye, Château de Fontainebleau, OPPIC (Opérateur du patrimoine et des projets immobiliers de la culture), Musée de l'Armée, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, Institut National du Patrimoine and Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF).
www.francemuseums.com

ABOUT SAADIYAT CULTURAL DISTRICT

Saadiyat Cultural District on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, is devoted to culture and the arts. An ambitious cultural undertaking for the 21st century, it will be a nucleus for global culture, attracting local, regional and international guests with unique exhibitions, permanent collections, productions and performances. Its ground-breaking buildings will form a historical statement of the finest 21st century architecture; Zayed National Museum, Louvre Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. These museums will complement and collaborate with local and regional arts and cultural institutions including universities and research centres.

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM – ABU DHABI

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) drives the sustainable growth of Abu Dhabi's culture and tourism sectors and its creative industries, fuels economic progress and helps achieve Abu Dhabi's wider global ambitions. By working in partnership with the organisations that define the emirate's position as a leading international destination, DCT Abu Dhabi strives to unite the ecosystem around a shared vision of the emirate's potential, coordinate effort and investment, deliver innovative solutions, and use the best tools, policies and systems to support the culture and tourism industries.

DCT Abu Dhabi's vision is defined by the emirate's people, heritage and landscape. We work to enhance Abu Dhabi's status as a place of authenticity, innovation, and unparalleled experiences, represented by its living traditions of hospitality, pioneering initiatives and creative thought.