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Jan - March 2025



*The Islamic Arts Museum  
Malaysia was buoyed by the  
presence of Malaysian Prime  
Minister, Yang Amat Berbormat  
Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim,  
who graced the launch of the  
*Oceans That Speak: Islam and  
the Emergence of the Malay  
World* exhibition on the evening  
of 12th December 2024.*

## Director Message

Dear All

As we move beyond our 25th anniversary, it is a time for consolidation and ensuring an equally bright future. Throughout its 26 years, the Museum has consistently safeguarded its vision and mission, while growing and prospering. We welcome the New Year, full of gratitude for all the things that we have achieved, but also giving consideration to areas that can be improved on.

Returning to the basics of our location, we begin this year with a major exhibition that examines the significance of Southeast Asia within the history of Islamic art. *Oceans That Speak: Islam and the Emergence of the Malay World* was launched in December 2024 and will continue until June this year. The focal point is the importance of this region as a key participant in global trade prior to the intervention of colonial powers. Even with that intervention, the Malay world has made many contributions to artistic and intellectual creativity. Muslim rulers have been especially prominent in preserving the spirit of Islamic belief and the aesthetic output that has come with it.

In the past two and half decades we have held many exhibitions that cover specific aspects of Malay-world art. Our latest exhibition is a rare overview of the entire field. The IAMM has carefully selected representative works from its collection to highlight the diverse skills of regional artisans. These cover a wide range, from marvellously illuminated Qur'ans and manuscripts to woodwork, silverware, textiles and weapons.

The exhibition includes works that have never been displayed before, including two that have been loaned to the IAMM for this event. One of these is acknowledged as being the oldest manuscript with Malay *Jawi* inscriptions. The *'Aqa'id al-Nasafi* is from 1590. The other loaned work is the Tale of Hang Tuah (*Hikayat Hang Tuah*). Dating from much later (1881), it was transcribed for Frank Swettenham, the first Resident-General of the Federated Malay States. Both manuscripts are from the esteemed collection of the late Professor Diraja Ungku Abdul Aziz.

I would like to wish every one of our IAMM Newsletter subscribers a very happy New Year 2025. I appreciate all the support given to us throughout these years. The Museum will continue to work hard and is committed to offering interesting and creative projects, exhibitions and programmes for this year and far beyond.

Syed Mohamad Albukhary  
Director  
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

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## The launching of *Oceans That Speak: Islam and the Emergence of the Malay World*

The exhibition is being held in the Special Gallery 2 and continues until 15th June 2025. The contents highlight the rich cultures of the Malay Archipelago, including the Malay Peninsula, with an abundance of artistic expressions of the region's Islamic art. Over the centuries, there have been waves of people who have reached insular Southeast Asia. This has resulted in intellectual interactions, economic exchanges and cross-cultural connections that have invigorated the region.

Visitors to the exhibition are able to witness the strong tide of Arab and Persian influences that came with the arrival of Islam. Among the greatest changes was language, which eventually led to the development of the *Jawi* script, adopting the Arabic alphabet along with five extra letters to suit the local phonetics.

The Islamic art of the region, however, is not anchored only to Arab and Persian influences; the exhibition showcases how the Malay-Islamic civilisation embraced influences from India, China and later from



Europe, all of which contributed to the spiritual and artistic creativity of the multitude of societies within Nusantara.

The Malay Archipelago is located between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and has long been an essential maritime trade route. The exhibition offers a lighthouse

view of the leading port cities in the region as crucial meeting points which played an important role not only in global history but also in trade. To make the exhibition voyage as informative as possible, it is curated for visitors to enjoy and navigate through six main sections: *the Mapping Routes and Boundaries of the Malay*



*World, Port Cities and Trade in the Malay World, European Colonialism in the Malay World, Networks of 'Ulama: Transmission of Knowledge and Art, A Cosmopolitan Malay World and Tanah Air's Islamic Tapestry and Shared Pre-Islamic Traces.*

The Prime Minister of Malaysia opened the ceremony with inspirational words on the importance of the region throughout history. He urged educational institutions and universities to leverage from the exhibition and increase their educational collaborations. Dato' Seri Anwar added that it is important to delve into the history of storytelling in the region, particularly concerning how the spread of Islam contributed to the formation of a dynamic Malay-Islamic heritage, including its culture and arts.

To confirm his deep appreciation for the Islamic arts of the region, the Prime Minister looked forward to reading the latest IAMM publication — *Oceans That Speak: The Emergence of the Malay World* — published to celebrate this exhibition and filled with numerous guest-writers' essays and an incomparable collection of artefacts.



## *Kurab-a-kulang* Lanao del Sur, Mindanao, Southern Philippines 18th-19th century

Islamic art of the Malay world covers some very diverse material, in keeping with cultures that have spread across a wide region. Certain to catch the eye is the armour of Mindanao. The Spanish colonisation period in the Philippines, from 1565 to 1898, saw continuous armed resistance by the Moro people, the Muslim communities mainly in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. The term Moro was derived from 'Moors', the word used by Spanish colonisers to describe the Muslims they encountered.

Body armour is a highly distinctive type of object used by the Moros that has a clear Spanish influence. It is a tradition not found in the rest of the Philippines, nor in any other parts of the Malay world. Native craftsmen refined the designs of this armour, which had been taken from Spanish prototypes, adding native materials they had to hand, such as carabao (water buffalo) horn. One variation of these forms of body armour is known as *kurab-a-kulang*. Looking as dramatic and unusual as it does, this protection for the upper body is one of the main highlights of the 'Oceans That Speak' exhibition. The uniquely

regional approach to armour consists of layered plates of carabao horn, joined with brass chainmail, with the front closed using hook-and-eye clasps. It was designed to provide flexibility and protection, adapted to the terrain and climate of the region. There are no sleeves or collars.

One of the most striking elements, aesthetically, is the way that the clasps have been shaped into curvilinear motifs. Known as *okir*, these designs are found mostly in the traditional wood carvings of the southern part of the Philippines, including the Maranaos. Inspired by flora and fauna, the *armalis* motif — a combination of motifs such as the fern (*pako*), leaf (*dapal orraon*) and flower (*todi*) of a *katurai* tree (*Sesbania grandiflora*) — decorates each side between the two clasps. The clasps are designed in such a way that when closed, the pattern resembles growing vines. There are four star-like floral motifs on both shoulders. The arrangement of the rectangular plates is similar to the *Baju Lamina* chainmail worn by the Bugis and Taroja.

Beyond warfare the armour was often used in ceremonies, symbolising the warrior's readiness to protect the community and uphold Islamic belief. Today, the surviving examples of body armour serve as cultural treasures that also signify the multicultural identity of the people in the Malay world.



## Exhibitions Conservation: From Storage To Display

Exhibitions can have huge meaning. They allow visitors to connect themselves with the past and with the present when stories are told through carefully selected objects. That sense of connection can, however, also create a situation which entails considerable risks to the museum collections.

Artefacts can be affected by their surrounding environment. For example, light can cause fading of textiles and sensitive pigments on paper; fluctuations in humidity and temperature can lead to structural damage and mould growth; and fumes from newly painted surfaces can damage organic materials like paper, textiles and ivory. The constant handling of these objects, albeit by trained professionals, can also increase the risk of physical damage.

Therefore, exhibitions conservation plays an important role in ensuring that the cultural and historic objects chosen for display will be stable enough to withstand the rigours of exhibition, and that they are protected throughout. This falls under the purview of preventive conservation, which is often overlooked. The focus is more often on object-based treatments, such as



restoration, as many collections are drawn to more immediate and visible results. It is clear that the *gebyok's* vibrant colours after the removal of old varnish stands out in contrast to the invisible stitches on the silk *limar* or the stabilisation of oxidation layers on the 19th-century rifle from West Sumatra. These are all currently on display in the special gallery for the recently launched exhibition, *Oceans that Speak*.

Conservation work for this exhibition began as soon as the list of objects was finalised,

three years ago. It brought together a group of people from various departments. Those involved range from conservators to display managers and mount makers to museum security in the mitigation of preventive conservation strategies without compromising visitor experience and enjoyment. The goal is always to ensure that the objects remain in optimal condition throughout the exhibition.



In order to achieve this for the latest exhibition, every item on display was carefully assessed, documented and analysed where necessary before deciding on the exhibition requirements and identifying the potential challenges that could arise when objects are exposed to the agents of deterioration commonly found in a museum environment. Due to Malaysia's tropical conditions, a combination of climate-specific environmental protocols and design strategies was put in place. This was based on data collected throughout the year and includes appropriate light intensity and humidity levels for each vulnerable object. Without continuous monitoring, changes in these conditions may go unnoticed until significant damage occurs, leading to costly restoration or permanent loss in extreme situations.

Close collaboration with the Maintenance Department in aspects related to the ventilation and air quality system also proved to be crucial in improving the gallery environment in combination with the use of activated carbon granules for humidity control within the display cases. In addition, display materials were also tested prior to use in order to determine whether they are potentially hazardous to the objects on display, either through direct contact or other means. This provided



the Display Unit valuable information on the selection of safe and suitable materials for display.

On top of all this, continuous and systematic monitoring is essential in identifying changes in these conditions, which otherwise may go unnoticed until significant damage occurs. A consistent schedule was put in place to monitor the overall condition of the artefacts and the gallery environment throughout the exhibition to ensure that the elements remain within safe limits for specific materials. This process involves ongoing analysis

and response that is regularly reviewed and adjusted as needed.

In a broader perspective, exhibitions conservation is not just about keeping the objects from deteriorating. Each artefact, document or painting tells a story. Through conservation, we ensure these narratives remain accessible and authentic. It is a delicate balance between making objects accessible and protecting them from the inevitable wear and tear of being on display.



## Celebrating 25 Years of Cultural Enrichment at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia!

As we mark more than 25 years of cultural enrichment, 2024 was filled with a remarkable array of activities, underscoring our commitment to education, preservation and the arts. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia has continually striven to be more than a place for viewing history. It is also a space where the past, present and future converge— a meeting place that inspires reflection, learning and a deeper connection to the world around us.

The museum has proudly stood as a bridge between cultures and time, preserving the rich tapestry of Islamic heritage while inspiring a profound understanding of its influence on art, architecture and civilisation.

*Special 25th Anniversary Events: The Second Half of the Year*

### Arabic Calligraphy Session with Fuad Koichi Honda: Live Demonstration & Masterclass

As part of our 25th-anniversary celebrations, we had the honour of hosting Fuad Koichi Honda, Japan's leading master of Arabic calligraphy. This event featured live demonstrations of Honda's signature calligraphy style, offering visitors a chance to witness his expertise first hand on 16th November 2024. On the following day he provided a private Masterclass session.

Fuad Kouichi Honda is originally from Tokyo but was not always a renowned Arabic calligrapher. After being dispatched to Arab countries as an interpreter/ coordinator, he learned the basis of Arabic calligraphy from local calligraphers. In 1988,

Honda met Turkish master of Islamic calligraphy Hasan Çelebi and eventually succeeded in acquiring the *Ijaza* (Diploma of Arabic Calligraphy) in 2000.

Honda's works have gained highly esteemed, displayed in key museums around the world such as the British Museum, the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore, and of course the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. In 2006 Honda published his first art book in Japan, titled "The Cosmos of Arabic Calligraphy". In the same year he also set up the Japan Arabic

Calligraphy Association and assumed the presidency of the association to make Arabic calligraphy known more widely in Japan.

The recent event at the IAMM was an unforgettable experience, allowing those present to appreciate the intricate beauty and deep cultural significance of Arabic calligraphy, and to gain insights into Honda's creative process.



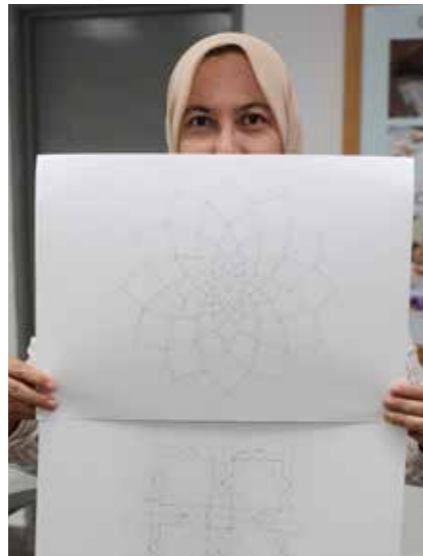


**Islamic Geometric Pattern Workshop: A Journey Through Art and Mathematics**

In conjunction with the 'Arabesque' exhibition, the museum also offered an Islamic Geometric Pattern Workshop, thereby allowing participants to immerse themselves in the fascinating world of Islamic art and design. Known for its precision, symmetry and aesthetic qualities, Islamic geometric design has inspired generations of artists and architects.

Participants in the workshop had the opportunity to learn how to create stunning geometric compositions, gaining an understanding of both the mathematical principles and artistic creativity

behind these intricate patterns. This workshop was a perfect fit for anyone with an interest in art, design, history or mathematics.



**Meet and Greet: Imam Yahya Ma Yi Ping**

We were also thrilled to host Imam Yahya Ma Yi Ping, a renowned Chinese Arabic calligrapher, for a special 'meet and greet' event. Imam Yahya's live calligraphy demonstrations were a highlight, offering visitors the chance to experience his intricate, masterful works up close. His artwork, available for purchase, was on display throughout the day.

This walk-in event was a wonderful opportunity to engage with a master calligrapher, witness his artistry, and perhaps even take home a unique example of his work.



**Looking Ahead**

As we close this remarkable year of celebrations, we extend our deepest gratitude to all who have supported the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia over the past quarter of a century. We look forward to many more years of exploring, preserving and celebrating the beauty of Islamic art and culture.

For 2026 we promise even more exciting events with our current ongoing special exhibition: *‘Oceans That Speaks: Islam and the Emergence of Malay World’* from 13th December 2024 to 15th June 2025.

**Weekly Activity:**

**Ocean Encounters**

This is a series of interactive sessions inspired by the rich maritime history of the Malay world. Held from 11 am to 12 pm, these hands-on activities invite visitors to explore themes like the spice trade, traditional crafts, and map-making. Designed for all ages, each session offers a creative and engaging way to connect with the cultural treasures of the seas. Drop in, participate and discover something new each time!



**HERE IS THE LIST OF THE PROGRAMMES**

**BICARA SONGKET**  
— EXPERT TALK  
9th January 2025

**Painting in the Tones**  
(A Historical Photographic  
Technique)  
with Kanta Studio  
16th January 2025

**Exploring the Sound of**  
**Kompang Workshop**  
18th January 2025

**Woodcarving Workshop**  
8th February 2025

**Conservation Sharing Session**  
20th February 2025

**Oceans That Speak Catalogue**  
**Review**  
28th February 2025

**Jawi Workshop**  
17th April 2025

**Tekat Workshop**  
26th April 2025

**Ilmu Falak**  
3rd May 2025

**Malay Traditional Boats Talk**  
— Expert Talk  
8th May 2025

**Adventures of Azlan**  
— Monthly Storytelling  
15th May 2025

**Wayang Kulit Workshop**  
10th & 11th May 2025

**Conservation Sharing Session**  
12th June 2025

**School Holiday Weeks:**  
**Family Fun: Build A....**  
**sessions!**

Families can spend quality time together during the school holiday with our Family Fun: Build A... sessions! On selected Fridays, families can collaborate to create their own themed items using recyclable materials provided. Whether it's a model ship, a creative craft or a decorative treasure, these hands-on activities inspire imagination and teamwork. This activity is perfect for all ages, exploring fun in learning and eco-friendly too!

**Monthly Storytelling series:**  
**The Adventures of Captain**  
**Azlan!**

Embark on a journey through the Malay world with The Adventures of Captain Azlan! This is a monthly storytelling series, held from January 2025 to June 2025, following Captain Azlan as he navigates the seas, explores bustling ports, and uncovers the treasures of the region. Perfect for curious minds of all ages, each session brings Captain Azlan's adventures to life, weaving history, culture and imagination into an unforgettable tale. Join us and set sail on an exciting voyage!

#### OPENING HOURS

Monday – Sunday (except Eid ul-Fitri & Eid ul-Adha)  
9:30 am – 6:00 pm  
Last entry at 5:30 pm

#### ADMISSION FEE

Adult RM20.00  
Others (Visitors below 18 years old, Students of Higher Learning  
Institutions & Malaysian Senior Citizens) RM10.00

Children below 6 years old FREE

#### FREE ADMISSION

Museum Shop  
Children's Library  
MOZA Restaurant  
Education Centre


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