

***Busana: A Material
Culture Study
of Malay-Islamic
Civilisation
- pg 04***

***Tatreez:
Reclaiming Palestine
through Embroider
- pg 08***

***Ottoman Hilye
- pg 12***

Jan- March 2026

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia recently opened its latest exhibition, 'Busana: Traditional Costumes of the Malay World'. From 12 December 2025 until 12 April 2026, visitors will be able to see textiles, accessories and full Malay traditional attire brought together to offer a profound exploration of Malay material culture and its intrinsic ties to the wider Malay-Islamic civilisation.



Director's Message

Dear All

As is appropriate for our first issue of 2026, I would like to wish you a very Happy New Year. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia sincerely thanks you for your unwavering support of our institution. We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to all our newsletter subscribers who have stood by us throughout our 28 years of operations.

In conjunction with the Visit Malaysia 2026 nationwide campaign, IAMM is proud to present a series of dynamic, textile-focused exhibitions throughout the year. The first, *Busana: Traditional Costume of the Malay World*, which opened in December 2025, celebrates the vibrancy and craftsmanship of Southeast Asian textile traditions. Following this, *Tatreez: Reclaiming Palestine through Embroidery* is to be launched in June 2026. The highlight of this important and very topical exhibition is a wide-ranging selection of thobes drawn from the museum's extensive permanent collection.

Through these two visually striking and culturally rich displays, the museum hopes to enrich visitors' appreciation of the significance, symbolic meaning and philosophies embedded in textile artistry—universal attributes, no matter where these traditions originate, and regardless of the communities that have shaped them.

In the first quarter of this year, Muslims around the world will be observing the holy month of Ramadan 1447 AH. In keeping with our museum's long-standing tradition, IAMM will once again be hosting its annual Tadarus al-Qur'an (Qur'anic recitation) programme throughout Ramadan. This year marks the 19th edition of the programme and we warmly invite returning participants and newcomers to join us in honouring this blessed month of the Muslim calendar.

The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia also welcomes all visitors to explore our current exhibition, *More than a Day as a Tiger: The Legacy of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1761–1799)*, which has been extended until 29 March 2026. Our permanent galleries also feature a number of newly acquired artefacts that are now on display for visitors to discover and enjoy.

Syed Mohamad Albukhary
Director
Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia

Contents

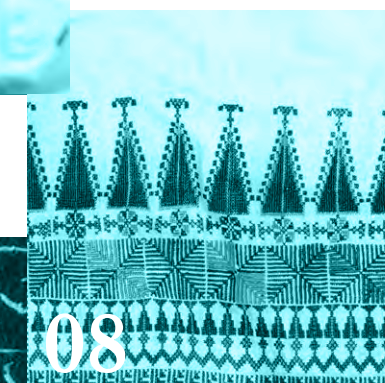
**Busana: A Material Culture Study
of Malay-Islamic Civilisation**
- pg 04

**Tatreez:
Reclaiming Palestine through Embroider**
-pg 08

Ottoman Hilye
- pg 12

**Invisible Threads:
Exhibiting Malay Splendour**
- pg 16

**What's New, What's Next
Learning, Culture & Discovery**
- pg 20



Busana: A Material Culture Study of Malay-Islamic Civilisation

By: Hariz Ahmad Kamal

The term *Busana*, rooted in ancient Sanskrit, signifies the high sophistication of attire across an historical realm that spans modern-day Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and parts of Thailand and the Philippines. The exhibition explores this region's rich sartorial lexicon.

The tradition of Malay costume is intricately linked to the extensive history of maritime trade in the Malay Archipelago. Along the maritime corridors that connected the archipelago to Arabia, India and China, the movement of cloth mirrored the movement of ideas. The region clothed itself in the languages of trade, faith and artistry. It absorbed these influences not by imitation, but by interpretation. The influences translated motifs, techniques and materials into a textile tradition that exudes elegance and adaptability as well as devotion.

To facilitate a comprehensive understanding, the exhibition is thoughtfully divided into eight sections, showcasing exquisite Malay costumes, textiles and accessories, each

accompanied by evocative pictorials that contextualise this enduring tradition. Central to the display are highly complex indigenous techniques such as *batik*, *telepuk*, *limar* and *songket*. The shimmering *songket*, often referred to as 'the cloth of gold', exemplifies Malay artistry through its meticulous metallic-thread brocade weaving.

Equally significant is the artistry of *limar*, a rare single-ikat technique in which the subtle blurring of motifs reflects its status as a royal textile. Other decorated textiles include *telepuk* (gold-leaf appliqué) and the sophisticated metallic thread embroideries of *tekat emas* (raised gold couching on velvet) and *kelingkan*. These techniques transform simple garments, such as the *baju kurung* and *baju kebaya*, into elaborate signifiers of status and cultural identity. A significant inclusion highlighting this cross-cultural synthesis is the *Kebaya Nyonya* — a sheer, richly embroidered garment emblematic of *Peranakan* Chinese-Malay fusion — which is featured in the exhibition courtesy of a loan from the Yayasan Budi Penyayang.



The exhibition adds another dimension by highlighting the profound impact of Islam on the aesthetic development of Malay textiles. The adoption of Islamic values, particularly the principle of aniconism (avoiding the depiction of living beings), fundamentally reshaped the design vocabulary. This influence is observable in the preference for refined modesty, symmetry and the use of geometric and botanical motifs. Repeated motif units, intricate interlaced patterns, and tessellations are ubiquitously applied to songket, telepuk and *tenun*, representing the symbolic associations with divine unity, the order of creation and infinity.

The highest spiritual expression of this fusion is found in calligraphic textiles. This rare art form challenged artisans to weave sacred texts, including the '*asmaul husna*' (Divine Names of Allah), the Prophet Muhammad and Qur'anic verses, into garments and ceremonial cloths. These pieces function as powerful examples of applied theology, demonstrating how local artistic practice integrated Islamic principles, transforming the act of creation into a spiritual endeavour and revealing the core values of the Malay-Islamic worldview.



By presenting this detailed study of Malay textile traditions, the *Busana* exhibition offers a unique opportunity for the general public, students and scholars alike to engage directly with the historical and artistic depth of the Malay-Islamic civilisation through the lens of Islamic art in textiles. It serves as a tangible introduction to a rich cultural narrative that is both sophisticated and deeply spiritual. This spectacular presentation is also aptly timed, running throughout the Visit Malaysia Year 2026, thereby extending its reach and inviting the world to appreciate the enduring cultural elegance of Malaysia and the wider Malay world.

Tatreez: *Reclaiming Palestine through Embroider* By: Sharifah Shahanaz Syed Mohamed Redzuan

The Islamic Art Museum Malaysia's upcoming exhibition, titled '*Tatreez: Reclaiming Palestine through Embroidery*', is due to open in June 2026. The display provides an introduction to one of the most prominent Palestinian tangible cultures, tracing the visual appeal and variety of the exquisite embroidery called tatreez. Following regional styles from the north to the south, the essential components of traditional dress are shown. From headpiece to hem, everything carries meaning, memory and identity.

For generations, Palestinian clothing and craft practices have been inseparable from the people's long-standing presence in their homeland. These traditions are not static or isolated. They form a living heritage that reflects an enduring relationship between community, landscape and history. Although the region has been known by different names throughout antiquity, including Canaan, Philistia and Jund Filastin, the name Palestine has remained a recognisable and lasting marker of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.



Thobe Ghabani
Jerusalem
20th century
2024.11.5



Festive Jillayah
South of Ramla
20th century
2024.11.4



Silk Wedding Thobe
Ramallah
21st century
2024.1.29

The Palestinian *thobe*, which simply means dress or garment, has far deeper significance than the name suggests. It marks important stages in a woman's life. For a bride, it served as her wedding dress, richly embroidered in vibrant couching and cross-stitch patterns that reflected the motifs of her village. Before 1948, styles varied widely from one region to another, and they continued to evolve as new fabrics and threads arrived from neighbouring Syria, Egypt and Lebanon.

Among the most recognisable motifs is the cypress tree, often referred to as the tree of life. Standing tall and rooted in the soil of Palestine, it appears repeatedly in the embroidery of different areas, each interpreting the motif in its own style and design. The thobes themselves, whether white or deep black, often carry the blue undertone of natural indigo. This dye was drawn from plants that once grew abundantly in the region, and several historical travel accounts highlight its importance in textile production.

The Palestinian dress has faced periods of cultural misrepresentation, with certain modern designers attributing traditional elements of the thobe to sources other than their original Palestinian roots. In recent years, various initiatives have worked to revive and safeguard these traditions, ensuring that the heritage and craftsmanship of Palestinian women continue to be recognised and celebrated.

In this spirit, IAMM has taken steps to preserve and share this important aspect of Palestinian tangible culture through research, documentation and public education. As the title suggests, this upcoming exhibition highlights the ways Palestinian stories and resilience are expressed through embroidery, an aesthetic tradition that brings with it both beauty and deep historical meaning.

*Cypress motifs embroidered
across the upper and lower
bands
Beit Dajan
20th century
2024.14.21*



Ottoman Hilye

By: Dalia Mohamed

Hilye, originally an Arabic word meaning decoration or ornamentation, is an Ottoman homage to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). When it is said “Hilye of a man”, it refers to physical characteristics. In the sixteenth century, Ottoman prominent, Hakani Mehmed Bey, wrote a poem known as Hilye Hakani, translated as “The Beauty of Hakani”. The poem, praising the life and virtue of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), caught the Ottomans’ admiration that they finely scripted its words, illuminated them on panels, and hung them on walls.

Thereafter, Master calligrapher Hafiz Osman (d. 1698) in the 17th century, inspired by the Hadith of Shama’il, devised the calligraphic composition of this Hilye. Historians believe that his Hilye, dated 1090 AH / 1679 AD, is considered the earliest surviving Hilye to date. Therefore, he is credited with pioneering the design and production of ornamental elements in this manner. It became a model for calligraphers who followed his idealistic style until the end of the Ottoman Empire. Tim Stanley related the Hilye to the influence of Orthodox

Christian icons, due to the fact that Muslims are unaccepting of figural representation of the prophet in their houses. Thus, the prophetic description presented was an ideal replacement. Not contrary to that, it was common to believe in the blessing of this Hilye. It is also noteworthy that the Hilye format exists in folios of Ottoman supplication (Du’aa) manuscripts, such as Dala’il al-khayrat, manuscripts of Du’a, and travellers’ talismanic compendium. (fig. 2 and 3)

Calligrapher’s Illuminated Hilye
Signed by Osman
Ottoman Turkey
Dated 1120 AH / 1708-09 AD
Fig.1 2023.6.6

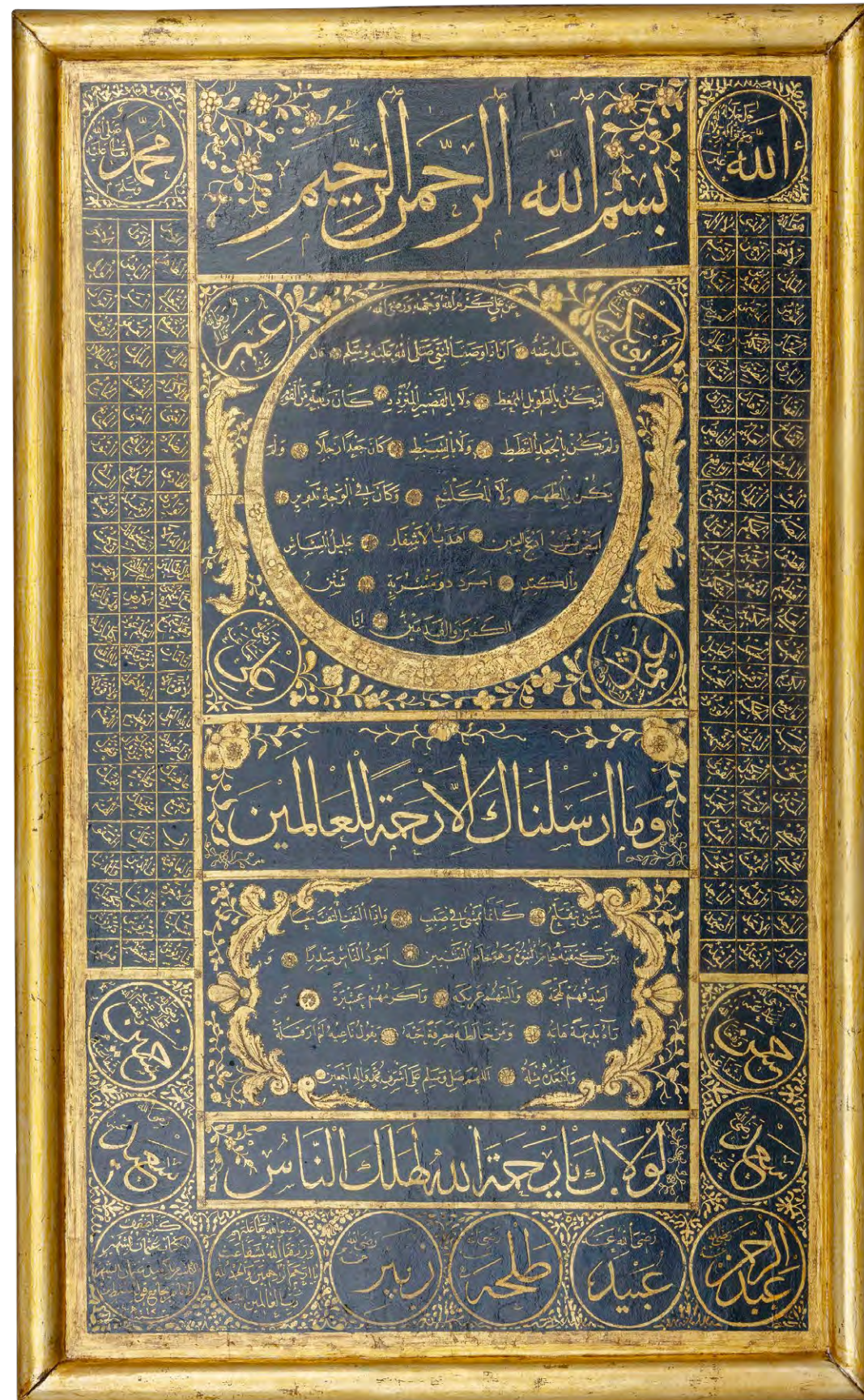


Fig.3 Dala’il Al-Khayrat signed Al-Sayyid ‘Abdullah,
Ottoman Turkey
18th century
2019.4.26



Fig.2 A traveller's talismanic compendium
Ottoman Turkey
Dated AH 1199/1785-86 AD
2018.5.18

The following quote was a script on a traveller's compendium, attributed to Ali bin Abi Talib: "The Commander of the Believers, Ali bin Abi Talib, said: "I have heard that if a worshiper writes this description of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, remains in that house. Whoever reads or listens to it will be rewarded as though they have performed Hajj or freed a slave, and God will protect them from the evils of this world and the Hereafter. If recited over a sick person, it will serve as protection through the blessings of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace." Although the

befall its inhabitants. They will continue to live in joy and happiness as long as the description of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, remains in that house. Whoever reads or listens to it will be rewarded as though they have performed Hajj or freed a slave, and God will protect them from the evils of this world and the Hereafter. If recited over a sick person, it will serve as protection through the blessings of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace." Although the

quote can't be proven to have been said by Ali bin Abi Talib, it surely reflects the belief behind acquiring Hilye in homes.

It cannot be denied that despite falling into obscurity in today's age, Hilye is one of the most beautiful art pieces during the Ottoman empire. It not only represented the love towards the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) but also portrayed him in a respectful appropriate manner that align with Islamic ideals.

The anatomy of the Hilye format as a stylistic calligraphic design can be presented in this object according to the research by Küpelı, Gülnihal, following the numbers in the outline Fig.4:

1- Baş Makam: Header or place of eminence text, the first verse of the Qur'an called the *Basmalah* (1:1) written in bold *Muhaqqaq* script

2- Göbek (belly): The central square is considered to be the main board, with a circle resembling the full moon or rising sun, as Tim Stanley interpreted, set over the shape of a golden crescent. The text in the circle contains the Prophet Muhammad's appearance and physical description, which depict his character based on hadith accounts

3- Hilal (crescent) göbek is encircled by a crescent moon (*hilal*). It is an optional element mostly found in the earlier Hilye

4, 5, 6, 7- Köşeler (corners): The names of the Rightly Guided Caliphs at four circles in the corners in *thuluth*

8- Âyet or Kuşak (verse or belt): This lower cartouche is usually filled with a Quranic text from those texts related to the Prophet Muhammad, as verse 107 *Surah al-Anbiya* 21

9- Etek (skirt or lower part): Includes continuous attributes of the Prophet found in this Hilye and ends in some cases with the signature of the

calligrapher's *Ijazah*. (fig.2)

10, 11- Koltuklar (armpits):

The decorative areas in the Hilye, according to the calligrapher's taste.

12, 13- The general scheme of the Hilye can also include an inner and an outer frame and "outer frame", two ornamental borders in correct proportion to the text. Consists of the 99 holy names of Allah, as well as additional (*Du'a*) supplications, and the names of descendants of the Prophet (Hasan,

Hussayn), 10 companions promised Paradise, and the Men of the Cave (*Ahl al-kahf*). These additional elements are not commonly found in Hilye. It also contains the calligrapher's signature in the left corner, signed by Osman, who is known as the 'Scribe' among the students of the famous Osman, the imam of Gul Mosque. He is most probably one of Hafiz Osman's students. Dated [1]120 AH (1708-09 AD).

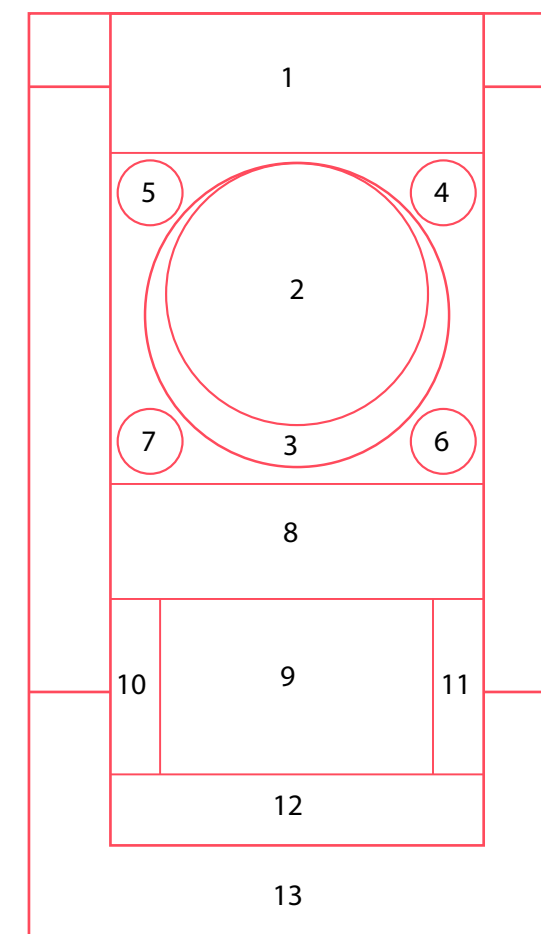


Fig.4 The structural elements of Hilye design

Invisible Threads: Exhibiting Malay Splendour

By: Nur Alifah Ajlaa, Aishah Abd Rahim, Anuar Ridzuan

Malay textiles such as *songket*, *limar*, *telepuk* and *batik* are admired for the richness of their colour, texture and technique. However, their delicacy requires thoughtful conservation to ensure that they can be safely displayed. Conservation is not just repair; it is the careful process of supporting, stabilising and presenting each piece without altering its original character.

This philosophy continues into the display process. A sarong, for instance, is a tube-shaped cloth that naturally forms side folds when laid flat. Undoing its original seam is never an option, as this has both historical and structural significance. Instead, conservators attach a half-loop of fabric inside the upper edge to hold a tube for hanging. The tube adds gentle volume, preventing folds and minimising stress along the sides.



Sarong displayed with a hanging tube to ensure correct positioning and prevent damaging stress lines or creases



Not all costumes can fit the standard mannequins, T-armatures allow fragile fabrics to rest naturally



Various styles of headgear are uniformly displayed on acrylic mounts to provide stable, clear presentation

Long textiles such as *limar*, *songket* and *batik* shoulder cloths are displayed using suspended tubes that allow visitors to appreciate the full extent of their motifs. To keep them secure, even when draped close to their full length, a discreet hook-and-loop (Velcro) attachment is added. This prevents slippage while maintaining the natural drape of the cloth.

Textiles often exhibit natural irregularities, such as distorted weaves, uneven edges or varying weight. While alignment is desirable, no textile should ever be forced into a perfectly straight form. Each piece is allowed to drape according to its own structure, letting the object guide how it is to be displayed. Whether hanging a flat textile or dressing a garment on a mannequin, gravity remains the greatest

challenge. Objects are never forced into a standard shape; instead, mounts are carefully customised with padding and internal supports to meet the unique needs of each textile.

Beyond mounting, preventive care plays an equally crucial role. Controlled lighting reduces fibre degradation, while stable humidity and temperature prevent brittleness, mould growth and mechanical stress. It is through this invisible framework of environmental controls, together with customised mounts, that Malay fabric treasures can tell their stories gracefully, authentically and without compromising their future.



Bespoke mounts with extension loops are used to support the trousers' shape, preventing the garment from hanging under its own weight



A custom-made 'floating' head mount is used to highlight the shawl's delicate draping without the distraction of a full mannequin



Wet Treatment for Textiles: a collaboration between IAMM and the Ionian University, Greece

Conservators often rely on a series of tests to determine whether moisture-based treatment is appropriate. When this method is considered to be acceptable, it can significantly enhance both the long-term physical stability of the textile and its visual appearance.

This contributes to the preservation of the textile's cultural and aesthetic value

for the future. Members of the IAMM's Textile Conservation Unit, of the Conservation & Scientific Research Centre, had the opportunity to practise wet treatment for textiles, under the guidance of Prof. Christos Karydis from the Ionian University, Zakynthos, Greece (10-14 November 2025).

A.G.S.

What's New, What's Next *Learning, Culture & Discovery*

By Umi Amalin Zafirah Sakri

Beyond Sight: A Museum Experience for the Visually Impaired

Museums are places of learning, discovery and connection, and we believe everyone deserves the chance to experience history and culture in meaningful and accessible ways. This programme is designed to provide an inclusive, multi-sensory journey in which participants can explore selected artefacts through touch, sound and storytelling. Such narratives are important for sharing the hidden value of Islamic art where it lies within the artefacts.

So far, we have held four sessions. The first was with the Malaysian Association for the Blind, followed by sessions with KL Braille Resources and PERTIS (Persatuan Orang-Orang Cacat Islam Malaysia). On 5 December, we were honoured to host a special session with YABhg. Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali. This programme welcomes all visually impaired visitors aged 13 and above, with a recommended focus on adult participants. Each participant must be accompanied by a companion for support throughout the session.



Discover the Beauty of Geometry through Art – A New Workshop at the Museum

We are excited to introduce a brand-new addition to our museum activities for group visits: the Geometry Pattern Workshop. This workshop is all about the fascinating world of shapes, symmetry and patterns, and how geometry inspires art and design. This hands-on session will let you to explore your creativity while learning geometric concepts.

Workshop Type:
Paper Craft / Pattern Design

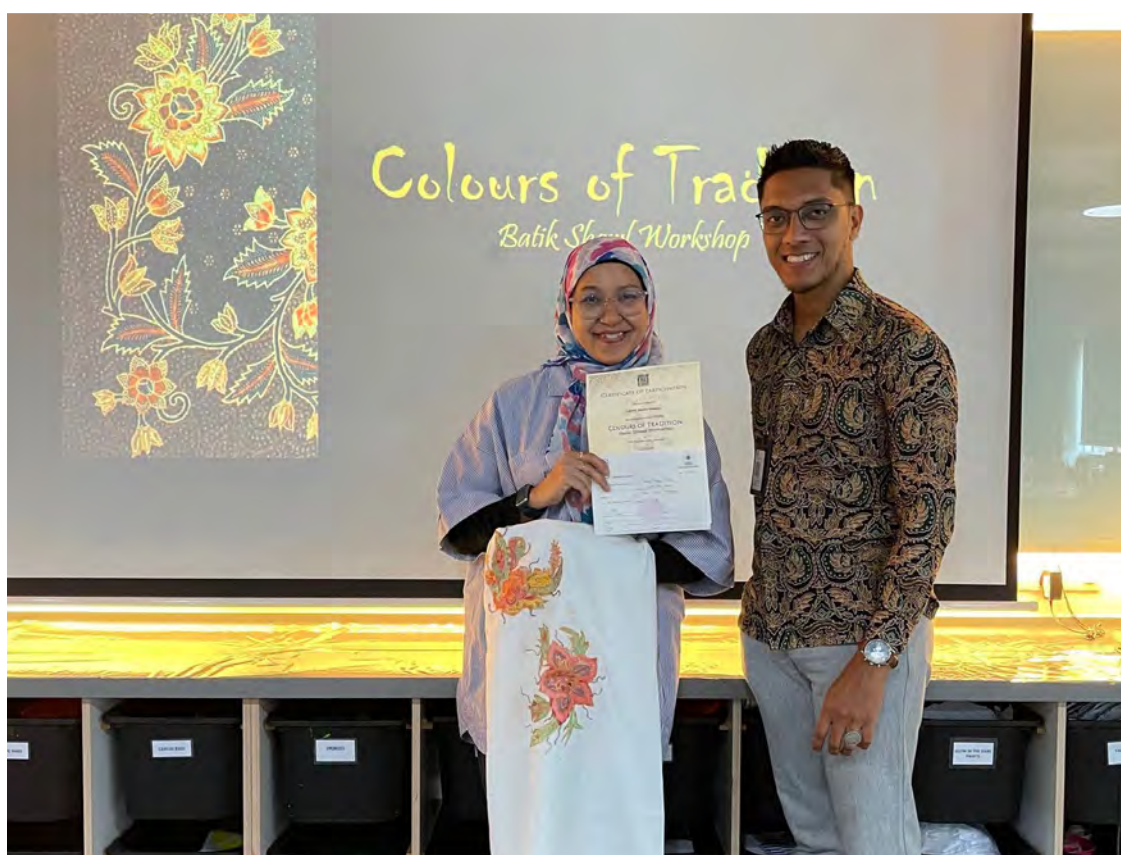
What to Expect:
In one hour and 30 minutes, workshop participants will dive into the fundamentals of geometry—shapes, angles, symmetry and tessellation. Using paper and simple tools, this interactive session blends maths and creativity, as well as enabling participants to leave with their very own custom geometric artwork!



New Exhibition: 'Busana' Traditional Costumes of the Malay World

To celebrate the richness and evolution of traditional Malay dress and craftsmanship, we are proud to share our new range of talks and hands-on sessions. Each will showcase the cultural significance, artistry and symbolism intrinsic to Malay garments and adornments. Participants will explore heritage techniques — from intricate embellishment and natural dyeing to the mastery behind timeless styles. Ultimately, it aims to deepen appreciation for Malay textile heritage and encourage its preservation for future generations. Do look forward to our list of talks and workshops!

Not forgetting our family activities at the Open Space area, which are fun and engaging for all ages. Families can try activities such as matching the names of traditional attire to its silhouettes, colouring using cute stencils, and playing Batik Teng Teng (hopscotch), as well as a textile motifs memory game. Our Busana-in-Colour sessions, that will be held on selected dates, will provide opportunities for everyone to explore traditional crafts.



Threads of Heritage: Spotlights on Traditional Malay Attire

1. Pakaian Melayu Sepanjang Zaman
◆ Talk: 16 December 2025
2. Colours of Tradition: Batik Shawl
◆ Workshop: 25 December 2025
3. Estetika Perhiasan Raja Sehari
◆ Talk: 17 January 2026
4. Malay Natural Dyes
◆ Talk: 4 February 2026
5. Curatorial Session
◆ Talk: 13 February 2026
6. Sulaman Melayu: Seni yang Kian Dilupakan
◆ Talk: 11 April 2026

Scan here to follow our events. Click link in the Instagram bio to register!



More events and a look back at More Than a Day as a Tiger: The Legacy of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore

Mark Your Mark: Craft your own Diwani Jali Calligram | 28 February 2026

We are excited to offer this workshop again as the response was incredible. Participants loved the session, and many requested a repeat, so we're delighted to announce that we'll be organising it again. Come and join us as we explore the beauty of Arabic calligrams — where calligraphy and imagery blend into a single expressive art form. In this hands-on session, you will learn the distinctive Diwani Jali script and design your own calligram under the expert guidance of Mohd Zulfikri bin Mohd Sobri, Head of Department at Yayasan Restu. With over 20 years of experience in Arabic calligraphy, including Qur'anic transcription, royal-decree writing, and international representation, he brings a depth of mastery that will enrich your creative journey into the cultural heritage of the Islamic world. To register, simply email us at education@iamm.org.my



Hands-On Family Activities: An Eco-Conscious Creative Sessions Inspired by Tipu Sultan's Legendary Arms

1. Craft your Warrior Kit: Dagger | 12 October 2025
2. Craft your Warrior Kit: Canon and Gun | 9 November 2025
3. Craft Your Warrior Kit: Bow and Arrow | 14 December 2025

Daily Activities:

Matching Puzzles of the legendary war events in the life of Tipu Sultan and learning to build your own fort! Inspired by his war strategies.

Get to Know Tipu Sultan

Every Sunday through out the exhibition at the Inverted Dome and Special Gallery 2.



Gallery Talk by Our Curator | 12 November 2025

The session highlighted key artefacts linked to Tipu Sultan, focusing on items that represented his leadership. Participants learned how his rule influenced art, craftsmanship and stories of resistance in the late 18th century. The talk also allowed visitors to view the museum's collection more closely and understand the importance of these rare artefacts. Through this session, visitors gained a clearer appreciation of how Tipu Sultan's legacy continues to shape our understanding of Islamic art and history.

Conservation Sharing Session: | 10 December 2025

The sharing session discussed the challenges of preserving these artefacts. Participants learned basic preventive conservation methods to help protect them for the future. The session also explained how conservators carefully manage and preserve these historical artefacts.

Tadarus Al- Quran / Al- Quran Recitation Programme 14 February 2026 – 14 March 2026 | 1447H

As we approach the blessed month of Ramadan, we invite you to join our Al-Qur'an Recitation Programme for 1447 H | (2026 AD). This year marks the programme's 19th year since it began in 2006.

The programme aims to enrich the month of Ramadan with spiritual activities alongside fasting, while helping participants deepen their understanding of the Qur'an. As part of the Museum's commitment to the public and the Muslim community, we hope participants will gain both social and spiritual benefits throughout this month-long programme. For 2026, there will be a tajwid class once a week and two sharing sessions for the participants.

To register, please contact the Education Department at 03-20927032/7033/7038 or email your details to education@iamm.org.my. Participation is free.

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

CONTACT US

Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia
Jalan Lembah Perdana
50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: 603-2092 7070

E-mail: info@iamm.org.my
museumshop@iamm.org.my
Website: www.iamm.org.my



Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia



@IAMM_KL



[islamicartsmuseummalaysia](https://www.instagram.com/islamicartsmuseummalaysia)
[islamicartsmuseumevents](https://www.instagram.com/islamicartsmuseumevents)
[islamicartsmuseumshop](https://www.instagram.com/islamicartsmuseumshop)

