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# Family Guide

Explore Islamic Art  
Dazzling Details



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**Zoom in for a close look at art from some of the many cultures that make up the Islamic world!**

**Use the cards in this guide to find the works of art. Turn the cards over for fun facts and activities.**

This map shows the countries represented by the works of art in this guide.



# Words to Know

**Arabic:** the primary language of a wide region of the world, including the Middle East and northern Africa. It is the language of the Qur'an.

**Calligraphy:** artistic writing admired for its beauty

**Islam:** one of the major world religions. Its belief and practices are based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. It stresses the belief in one God and Muhammad as his messenger.

**Manuscript:** a book or document written by hand rather than typed or printed

**Mecca:** a city in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims pray facing the direction of Mecca.

**Mihrab:** a niche—or space set into a wall—of a mosque showing the direction of Mecca

**Mosque:** a Muslim place of worship

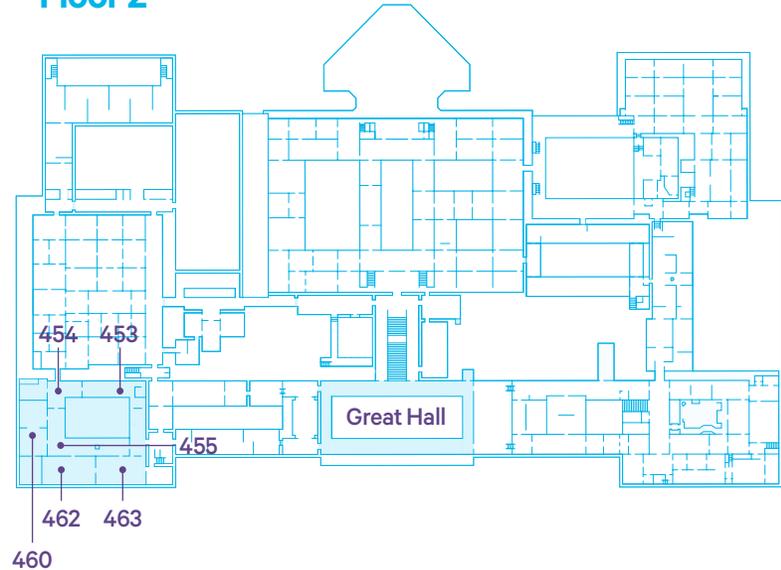
**Muslim:** a follower of Islam; in Arabic, literally meaning “one who surrenders”

**Qur'an:** the holy book of Islam

**Sultan:** a title for a ruler used widely in the Islamic world

## Galleries for Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia

### Floor 2



Please keep in mind!  
Sometimes we have to move works of art or even close galleries to renovate them or prepare for exhibitions.  
When in doubt, ask a guard for help!

**What is this smiling  
lion holding?**



**Gallery 453**  
**Iran and Central Asia (9th–13th centuries)**

**Eyes wide open!**



**Gallery 462**  
**Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Gallery**

## Eyes wide open!

### Look

Tiny details tell the story of *The Book of Kings* (Shahnama) [shah-nah-MEH]—a famous Iranian epic poem featuring feasts and celebrations of rulers, battles with heroic warriors and mythical beasts, and more. The manuscript includes 258 paintings. Each painting illustrates a scene from the story.

*We change the pages every few months to protect them from too much light. You'll find something new each time you visit!*

### Imagine

You're a character in this scene, climbing through the rocky landscape. What do you hear as you make your way up?

### Did You Know?

Some of the details in a painting like this were so small the artist created them using a brush with only a few hairs from the belly of a small animal, such as a squirrel or rabbit.

### I Spy

Pick a detail from a scene in *The Book of Kings*—the smaller the better! Without telling your family or friends which one you chose, describe its color, shape, and location to help them find it. Switch roles and try to spy the scenes they describe.

## What is this smiling lion holding?

### Look

This sculpture of a lion was part of a group of animal-shaped incense burners made for a prince. The lion's head comes off so that incense can be placed inside, and the neck and body are pierced with holes to allow the scented smoke to escape, filling an entire room with the scent. The Arabic words engraved around the lion's neck and body tell us who commissioned, or ordered, the sculpture, when it was made, and the name of the artist: Ja'far, son of Muhammad, son of 'Ali.

### Imagine

You are in a palace. Scented smoke floats from the lion's smiling mouth. What does it smell like? Think about your favorite smells and the places, memories, or people those scents bring to mind.

### Did You Know?

Like a modern-day air freshener, this lion once contained charcoal and incense, a mixture of plant materials that is burned to give off a nice smell.

### Create

At home, invent your own fragrance by gathering spices, flowers, and herbs. Which combinations smell good and which smell bad?

**Can you show me the way to the holy city?**



**Gallery 455**  
**Iran and Central Asia (13th–16th centuries)**

**Did you see that flicker?**



**Gallery 454**  
**Egypt and Syria (10th–16th centuries)**

## Did you see that flicker?

### Look

Over seven hundred years ago—long before light bulbs—this colorful glass lamp hung, along with many others, from the ceiling of a tomb in Egypt. The calligraphy on the body of the lamp was left unpainted so that the words appeared to glow when a flame was lit inside. The Arabic writing tells us that the person buried in the tomb held the position of “keeper of the bow” at the royal court. Where do you see pairs of bows on this lamp?

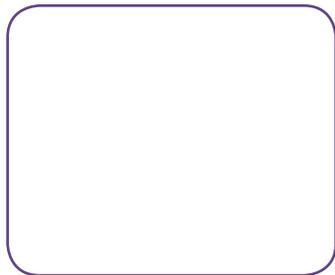
### Imagine

This lamp probably hung near many others just like it, making the room glow and sparkle.

Look up at the ceiling of the room you are in and imagine hundreds of these lamps dangling above you, flickering with light. How would it change the feeling of the space?

### Sketch

Look closely at the other lamps in this gallery. Choose a symbol from one of them and sketch it below. What might this symbol tell you?



## Can you show me the way to the holy city?

### Look

Muslims pray facing the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. A decorated niche—or space set into the wall—shows the direction of Mecca and is called a *mihrab* [mih-RAAB]. The combination of words from the holy books of Islam and beautiful patterns draws the worshiper’s attention.

### Imagine

On a hot day in the dry climate and sandy landscape of Iran, you stumble upon a building covered in tiles like the ones on this *mihrab*, in shimmering shades of blue and turquoise. How do the colors and flowering designs make you feel in this desert environment?

### Did You Know?

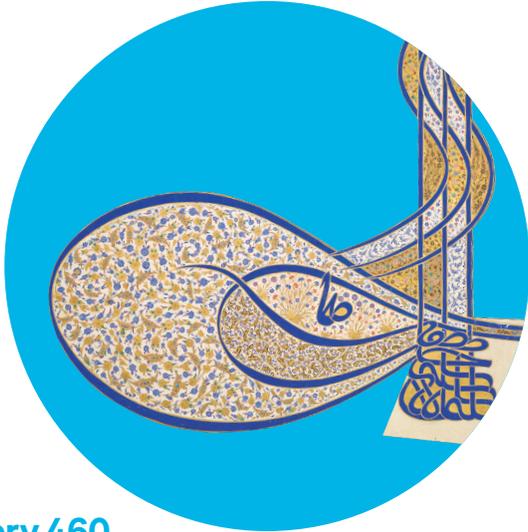
Like a giant puzzle, hundreds of tiles were created separately, then pieced together to form this *mihrab*. Craftsmen cut the tiles on site to make sure the shapes fit properly.

### Create

Complete the design by drawing your own pattern in the blank space.



**Can a logo be  
a work of art?**



**Gallery 460  
Koç Family Galleries**

**Whoa! Are we  
seeing double?**



**Gallery 463  
Mughal South Asia and Later South Asia**

## Whoa! Are we seeing double?

### Look

Look at a carpet from afar and notice the repeated colors and shapes. Get closer and look for smaller details. Talk about what you notice in the border of the carpet, as well as in the center. What repeats and what is different—side to side and top to bottom?

### Did You Know?

If you were to look at any of these carpets under a microscope, you'd see rows and rows of tiny knots—each tied by hand! We display the carpets in very dim light to keep the jewel-like colors from fading. We also change them every few years to protect them from light.

### Draw

Choose one detail from a carpet that repeats to form a pattern and draw it. For an extra challenge, draw how it repeats or changes.



## Can a logo be a work of art?

### Look

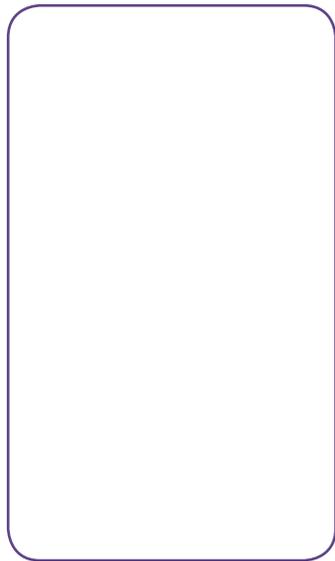
This fancy design is the official emblem, or *tughra* [TUUHG-rah], of a powerful Turkish ruler known as Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent. The *tughra* was not meant to be read but simply to be recognized as an emblem of the sultan, like a modern-day logo. In this *tughra*, bold blue lines surround patterns of plants and flowers, like a fence containing a wild garden.

### Did You Know?

*Tughras* always included the sultan's name, his father's name, and the phrase "forever victorious."

### Design

Create a design out of your initials in fancy letters fit for a king. Fill the open spaces of the letters with designs.



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This guide is made possible by the  
Kathryn Cosgrove Netto Fund and  
the Arora Foundation.

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Cover: Illustration by Rebecca Clarke  
based on **Mihrab** (detail), 1354–55; Iran;  
stonepaste, polychrome-glazed tiles,  
plaster; Harris Brisbane Dick Fund,  
1939 (39.20)

Inside (left to right, top to bottom):

**Incense burner of Amir Saif Al-Din**

**Muhammad Al-Mawardi** (detail), dated  
1181–82; Iran; bronze; Rogers Fund, 1951  
(51.56). **The Book of Kings (*Shahnama*)**

**of Shah Tahmasp** (detail), about 1530–35;

Iran; opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and  
gold on paper; Gift of Arthur A. Houghton  
Jr., 1970 (1970.301.73). **Mihrab** (detail),

1354–55; Iran; stonepaste, polychrome-  
glazed tiles, plaster; Harris Brisbane Dick  
Fund, 1939 (39.20). **Lamp for the**

**mausoleum of Amir Aydakin Al-'Ala'i**

**Al-Bunduqdar** (detail), about 1285; Egypt;  
glass, enamel, and gilding; Gift of  
J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.985).

**Tughra of Sultan Süleyman the**

**Magnificent** (detail), about 1555; Turkey;

ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on  
paper; Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1).

**Carpet with palm trees, ibexes, and**

**birds** (detail), late 16th–early 17th

century; present-day Pakistan; cotton,  
wool; Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan,

1917 (17.190.858)

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