

Hong Kong Palace Museum Special Exhibition



香港故宮文化博物館
Hong Kong Palace Museum

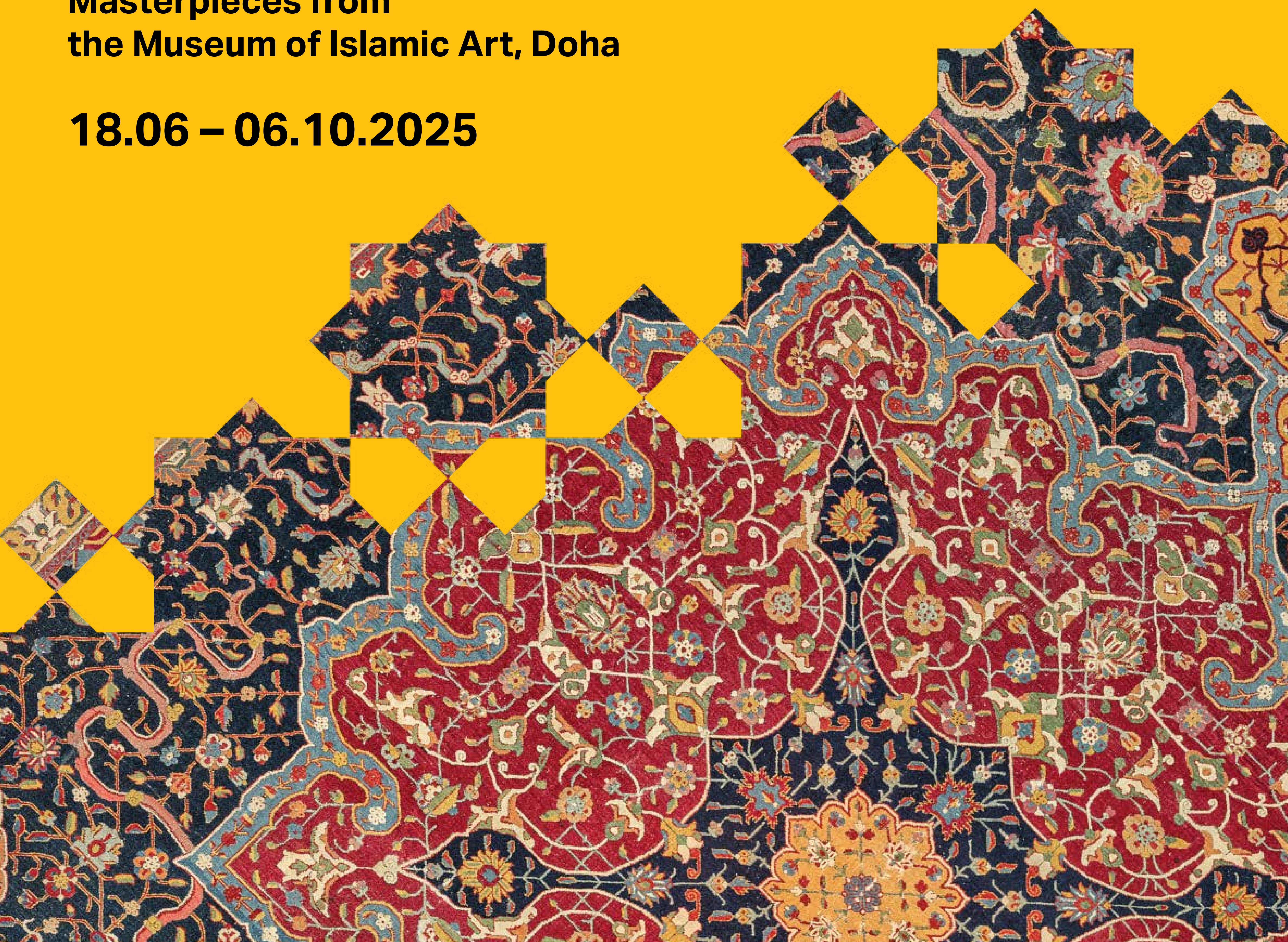


متاحف قطر
QATAR MUSEUMS

Wonders of Imperial Carpets

Masterpieces from
the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha

18.06 – 06.10.2025



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Wonders of Imperial Carpets:

Masterpieces from the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha

18.06 – 06.10.2025

Gallery 9, Hong Kong Palace Museum

The exhibition features carpets from Safavid Iran, Ottoman Türkiye, and Mughal India, the three Islamic empires of the early modern period, along with ceramics, metalwork, manuscripts, and jades from the 10th to the 19th centuries. These exquisite works illustrate the vital artistic exchange, facilitated by trade, migration, and diplomacy, among the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736), Mughal dynasty (1526–1857), and Ottoman dynasty (1299–1923). This exhibition also evinces the inspiration Chinese art has given artists in the Islamic world, and vice versa.

The exhibition is divided into four sections: the first section introduces the cultural exchanges and mutual learning between the Islamic world and China since the 7th century; the following three sections focus on, respectively, the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman dynasties. The design and creation of carpets and other works

of art are explored in each section, offering insights into the cultural significance of imperial and finely knotted carpets, the transfer of interregional knowledge, and local characteristics.

The exhibition is jointly organised by the Hong Kong Palace Museum and the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, presenting around 100 treasures from the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar, along with precious objects from the collections of the Palace Museum and the Hong Kong Palace Museum.

About the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha

The Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) houses a world-renowned collection of objects from the Islamic world. Opened to the public in 2008, MIA showcases treasures from fourteen centuries of Islamic history in its eighteen newly renovated permanent galleries. MIA's holdings span a vast and diverse geographical area, from the Maghreb of Africa to China and Southeast Asia. They include precious illuminated Qur'ans, richly illustrated manuscripts, magnificent carpets, and exquisitely crafted ceramics, glassware, and metalware. With a simple yet imposing profile designed by the architect I. M. Pei, MIA is more than a museum—it is a defining landmark of Doha's skyline.

Cultural Exchange between China and the Islamic world

Exchanges between China and the Islamic world can be traced back to the Tang dynasty (618–907). The Prophet Muhammad (about 570–632), the messenger of God according to Islam, is mentioned in *Tongdian*, the encyclopaedia compiled by the scholar-official Du You (735–812). Maritime networks linking the Gulf region to the China Sea developed around the middle of the 7th century. Muslim merchants established trading posts up the coast of China, on Hainan Island and in Quanzhou, Guangzhou, and Yangzhou, as well as inland, in Sichuan, and beyond. Their maritime trading activities had an enormous impact on the economy of southern China.

The merchant ships that carried goods between China and the outside world sometimes met with disaster. Both Chinese ceramics and Islamic glass have been found in shipwrecks, reminding us of the historical connections between people oceans apart. Chinese ceramics and other luxury objects fascinated the Islamic world, from the Abbasids (750–1258) to the Ottomans (1299–1923). The motifs and patterns on Chinese art—cloud bands, lotuses, dragons—figure prominently in Islamic art, on paintings, ceramics, and carpets.

Chinese artists and craftspeople, in turn, sought inspiration in metalware, glassware, and textiles from the Islamic world. The cobalt ores from the Kashan region of Iran provided potters in China with cobalt blue, a vital ingredient in the creation of blue-and-white porcelain since the Tang dynasty. In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Chinese Muslim admiral Zheng He (1371–1433) led seven grand sea voyages to the Gulf and beyond, journeys chronicled in Ma Huan's *Grand Survey of the Oceans*. Ming ceramic wares have shapes, motifs, and colours inspired by Islamic art, a vivid reminder of the deep ties between China and the Islamic world.

Silver- and gold-inlaid brass basin

Ayyubid or Mamluk Syria

Mid-13th century

Copper alloy, silver, gold

h. 18.1, diam. 45.5 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, MW.109.1999



Basin with floral scrolls

Imperial Kilns, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province

Ming dynasty, Yongle period (1403–1424)

Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue

h.12.2, diam. at rim 26.6, diam. at base 19 cm

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Ardabil-Sarre animal carpet

Safavid Iran

16th century

Wool and silk pile with brocaded
metal threads

h. 354, w.183 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, CA.43.2002



The Safavid Dynasty (1501–1736)

For 235 years the Safavid shahs ruled one of the greatest dynasties in the history of modern Iran. At the peak of their power, the Safavids controlled all of present-day Iran and parts of Iraq, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Afghanistan, Georgia, and beyond. The most accomplished Safavid ruler was Shah Abbas (r. 1587–1629), who made his country great through successful military campaigns, efficient administration, visionary urban development plans, effective economic revival strategies, and active trade and commercial links with Europe and the Indian subcontinent.

Under Shah Abbas, the state-funded silk industry generated vast profits, which subsidised his military campaigns, political plans, and infrastructure projects. It also supported patronage of the arts in his new capital, Isfahan, in central Iran. The extraordinary sheen of Iranian silk gave it wide commercial appeal. Shah Abbas exchanged silk and precious gifts in his diplomatic dealings with Europe in forming alliances against the Ottomans, who had many military conflicts with the Safavids. Apart from raw silk, Europeans also desired Safavid fine products — most notably, carpets.

Carpets with a silk warp and weft were highly valued. To heighten the effect of opulence, the silk threads were sometimes wrapped with metal. In response to the high European demand for Safavid carpets during the 16th and 17th centuries, Iranian weavers developed various strategies to increase efficiency and speed, including replacing silk with cotton in greater quantities, which allowed for fewer knots per square unit. The designs were also simplified, but they remained striking. Safavid carpets were strong contenders in the international market and were highly competitive against the ever-popular Ottoman carpets.

Shah Abbas's investments in international trade also resulted in an influx of Chinese porcelains, especially after 1622, when the Safavids regained control over the Gulf. He also brought hundreds of Chinese potters to Isfahan to share their knowledge with local craftspeople and improve native ceramic production methods. Luxurious Chinese porcelains were not only part of his plan to stimulate economic growth; they were also a means by which the shah showed charity: he donated around 1,000 pieces of exquisite Chinese porcelain to the Safavids' dynastic shrine at Ardabil.



Rothschild medallion carpet

Tabriz, Safavid Iran

Mid-16th century

Silk and wool pile on a cotton foundation

h. 657, w. 363 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, CA.20.1999



Royal Qur'an of Shah Sulayman Safavi

Isfahan, Safavid Iran

1683

Opaque watercolour and gilt paint on paper

h. 34.5, w. 22.2, d. 6.5 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, MS.609.2007



Textile with pink, red, and blue flowers

Safavid Iran

About 1700–1722

Silk thread wrapped with metal

h. 44.4, w. 35 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, MIA.2014.282



Shah Sulayman "hunting" carpet

Tabriz, Safavid Iran

About 1610

Wool pile on a cotton foundation

h. 583, w. 260.5 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, CA.16.1998





Carpet with flowers

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–1795)

Gold and silver threads

h. 346, w. 212 cm

The Palace Museum



The Mughal Dynasty (1526–1857)

The Mughal dynasty, which ruled for over three centuries, unified almost the entire Indian subcontinent. The maternal lineage of Babur (r. 1526–1530), founder of the dynasty, can be traced back to Genghis Khan. On his father's side, Babur was a descendant of Timur. His grandson Akbar (r. 1556–1605) turned the Mughal dynasty into a great power through territorial expansion and administrative reform. Under Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) and Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), the dynasty dazzled the world with some of the rarest diamonds and finest architectural monuments in history.

The Mughals' imperial carpets were also some of the most magnificent works of art ever made in terms of quality, workmanship, size, and cost. At the Mughal court, carpets marked seats of honour in official ceremonies and delineated private spaces for pleasurable pursuits. Akbar, one of the most influential art patrons of his time, supported the development of arts and culture, from painting to carpet weaving. An extensive system of imperial workshops across the Mughal territories flourished with the crucial participation of migrant weavers from Iran.

Pashmina wool from Himalayan mountain goats raised in Tibet formed the pile in the best knotted-pile Mughal carpets, which had a weft and warp foundation of silk. In the 17th and 18th centuries, English, Portuguese, and Dutch traders sold Mughal carpets made in Lahore, Agra, and elsewhere to their elite European clientele; the Dutch brought the carpets to Japan as well. The Mughals also presented carpets as diplomatic gifts. For example, Shah Jahan gave two prayer rugs to the new sultan, Ibrahim (r. 1640–1648), of the Ottoman dynasty.

In 1636, a successful invasion by Shah Jahan increased the Mughals' power over the Deccan Plateau in the south. By the late 1680s, when his son Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) conquered Golconda — at the time, the only place in the world where diamonds could be mined — a distinctive Mughal-Deccani style of painting had developed. The style also influenced carpet designs. The presence of diverse cultures in the Deccan is seen in the eclectic visual language of the Deccani courts, which counted Chinese porcelains and silks among their sources of inspiration.

Bowl with acanthus leaf handles

Mughal India

17th century

Jade

h. 8.2, diam. at rim 17.7, diam. at base 7.3 cm

The Palace Museum





front



back

***Sarpech* (turban ornament)**

Mughal India

19th century

Gold and silver alloy with diamonds, spinels,
emeralds, mother-of-pearl, enamel

h. 26, w. 17, d. 1.5 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, JE.211.2008



Kevorkian Hyderabad carpet

Deccan region, Mughal India

17th century

Wool pile on a cotton foundation

h. 1596, w. 325 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, CA.17.1997



The Ottoman Dynasty (1299–1923)

The Ottoman dynasty, named after its founder, Osman (r. 1299–1324), lasted for over 600 years and, at the peak of its power, controlled one of the largest territorial expanses in world history. By the 15th century, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481), the Ottomans had become strong and ambitious enough to capture Constantinople and topple the Byzantines. Ruling from the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul as many of his predecessors did (and successors would), Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), the tenth Sultan, oversaw the most glorious days of his dynasty.

The workshops of the Ottoman court created extraordinary art for royals and the highest officials. Textiles were among the best-known products manufactured there, especially brocades, satins, and velvets. Textile guilds in Istanbul supplied fabrics for domestic consumption, export, and diplomatic gifts. The lucrative international textile trade contributed to the many Ottoman-Safavid wars. In war or peace, encounters with Iran left a mark on Ottoman art, most famously in the medallion carpets of Ushak, a carpet-making hub in western Anatolia.

Carpets, used to furnish palaces, mosques, and mansions, were a significant part of the Ottoman textile industry. The best Ottoman carpets were produced by the imperial workshops, and among the best of the best were prayer rugs. Often combining silk and wool, imperial carpets tended to be woven with asymmetrical Persian knots to create intricate designs like those that decorated ceramics and illuminated manuscripts. Outside the capital of Istanbul, as far as away Anatolia and the Caucasus, Turkish symmetrical knots were used to create geometric patterns and motifs with stylised animals.

Motifs from Chinese art also appeared in Ottoman art, from carpets to the Iznik wares fired in northwestern Türkiye. Cloud-band, lotus, and peony motifs were adapted from earlier Yuan- and Ming-dynasty (1279–1644) porcelains and silks, beloved among the upper classes of Ottoman society. Chinese porcelains, a status symbol, were used as tableware on important occasions, such as weddings. In China, potters at Jingdezhen produced wares for the Ottomans that were sometimes embellished with jewelled mounts in imperial workshops in Istanbul.

Inlaid wooden chest

Ottoman Türkiye

18th century

Wood, mother-of-pearl

h. 27.5, w. 64.5, d. 33.5 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, WW.1.1997



Tureen with lid and plate

Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–1795)

Porcelain with dark blue glaze and overglaze polychrome enamels and gold

Lid: h. 5, diam. 31 cm; bowl: h. 13, diam. 30 cm;
dish: h. 6, diam. 40 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, PO.298.2004



Lantern jar

Iznik, Ottoman Türkiye
About 1520–1530
Fritware with underglaze painting
h. 28.6, w. 18 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, PO.1108.2012





Çintamani prayer rug

Selendi or Ushak, Ottoman Türkiye
Late 16th–early 17th century
Wool pile weaving
h. 151, w. 97 cm

Discover and Get Involved

For the General Public

Visit the website to download key exhibition texts in Simplified Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, and Korean. Learn more about Islamic art and culture through talks, docent-led tours, and audio guides. Visit our “Carpet Studio” learning corridor at the end of this exhibition.

[Details](#)

For Families

Go on the “Magic Carpet Adventure” family trail and sign up for our magic carpet-themed stop-motion animation workshop.

[Details](#)

For Students and Teachers

Download our teachers’ kit and sign up for our popular school group visits.

[Details](#)

For Community Groups

Discover our special tours and workshops tailored for registered charities and non-profits.

[Details](#)

The Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong is the community partner of this exhibition.

