



2020 A YEAR IN REVIEW

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The Aga Khan Museum is dedicated to fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of the many contributions Muslim civilizations have made to our common world heritage.





**MESSAGE FROM
PRINCE AMYN AGA KHAN
CHAIRMAN, AGA KHAN MUSEUM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

In the best of times, arts and culture play a crucial role in lifting our spirits, upholding our dignity as human beings, and bringing us together. In 2020, they took on an even greater importance as the world grappled with the challenges and changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Chairman of the Aga Khan Museum's Board of Directors, I am proud of the leadership, resilience, and versatility our institution has demonstrated in this hour of collective upheaval. The Museum exists to "light the way" with its timeless messages of pluralism, the curative power of arts and culture, and the interconnectedness of peoples; it has delivered on its mandate when it has mattered most.

Challenging times call not only for thoughtful action and meaningful dialogue. They also call for introspection and planning ahead. By reflecting on the lessons of 2020 and identifying new opportunities for growth, the Museum is poised to become an even brighter beacon of hope for audiences around the world.



**MESSAGE FROM
DR. ULRIKE AL-KHAMIS
INTERIM DIRECTOR AND CEO**

When the pandemic struck in March 2020, our Museum seized the moment, determined to meet the needs of our audiences everywhere with relevant programming, stories, and experiences designed to bring hope and foster empathy and understanding across cultures. We endeavoured to create spaces where everyone feels they belong and may join in celebrating the existential power of the arts, creative expression, and – most importantly – human connection.

Spurred on by the unwavering passion of our supporters and the ingenuity of our staff, our #MuseumWithoutWalls grew into a virtual sanctuary of art, performances, and learning, reaching more than 5 million people worldwide.

The impact of our exhibitions also grew exponentially through digital innovation. *Remastered*, developed in collaboration with Ryerson University Library, offered audiences ground-breaking, digitally activated windows into the Museum's world-class collection of Iranian, Ottoman, and Mughal Indian manuscripts, and the timeless stories they tell.

These are two examples of how, in the face of the unprecedented disruption of 2020, the Museum focused on new horizons rather than challenges. With the unwavering support of our community, we are now reimagining the Museum for the post-COVID-19 future, our sights firmly set on growing our global impact with programs driven by our pluralistic mandate, which today is more urgent than ever. We hope you will join us on the journey.

LOOKING BACK



The year 2020 brought unexpected changes for so many of us, but the Museum's vision never waned and our direction remained clear. #MuseumWithoutWalls was born out of our passion to ensure that our audience could remain virtually connected to the Museum and to each other through a variety of programming, performances, and family and educational offerings.

When word came that the Museum could reopen, our message was clear – Welcome Back to Where We All Belong. Our focus was on creating a safe space where visitors could enjoy arts and culture again and find refuge and inspiration.





REBUILD 2020

Rebuild 2020 became the Museum's reimagined programming focus to reconnect and reinvigorate communities through the arts. With new programs and social initiatives, our aim was to provide a welcoming, safe haven for people and communities to rediscover the arts as a source of hope in the wake of a global crisis.

RESTORE... our shared sense of safety with new, enhanced measures to ensure the well-being and comfort of everyone who enters the Museum.

RECONNECT... with art, culture, and each other through exhibitions and experiences that stimulate the mind and nourish the soul.

REMEMBER... what we've been through, who or what we lost, and who helped us along the way, with new memorial projects and community-generated art displays.

REIMAGINE... a brighter future for all, with interactive art installations, talks, and more opportunities to express a creative vision for a better world.

It was heartening to see the outpouring of support in 2020 from our virtual visitors, donors, and patrons. We are immensely grateful and confident in moving forward to a brighter and more hopeful future.

EDUCATE

The Museum nourished learners of all ages, either in person or online, with educational experiences that promote diversity and intercultural understanding.



2020 SUMMER CAMPS 1 (HONOURING PETER GEORGE)

Children, ages 6 to 12, lapped up big fun in small groups at the Museum's COVID-19-compliant Summer Camps. A highlight for campers was exploring the *Sanctuary* exhibition and then crafting their own art showing how they found sanctuary during the spring 2020 COVID-19 lockdown.

ISLAMIC ART 101 2

In the fall, more than 1,000 people registered for the Museum's free online course on the art of the Muslim world. Presented by the Museum's curators, the five-week series introduced learners to the materials, techniques, and ideas that have come to define Islamic art.

WESTON GROWING MINDS PROGRAM

When COVID-19 restrictions temporarily put a halt to school field trips to the Museum, we reimagined our school programming to engage the virtual classroom, where students could learn through their screens. With the help of the Weston Family Foundation, we expanded our online learning platform and synchronous experiences by unveiling new tours, live discussions, teacher resources, and curriculum-linked expansion activities that connect cultures through art.



ENCOUNTER

Experiences that inspired curiosity and understanding made an impact. The Museum's *Season of Immigration* celebrated the art and resilience of immigrants, refugees, and global community-builders.





SANCTUARY 1

Woven rugs, designed by 36 leading artists from around the world, including Mona Hatoum, Brendan Fernandes, and Ai Weiwei, reflect the meaning of “sanctuary.” The exhibition, presented in partnership with FOR-SITE Foundation, expresses the diversity of the artists’ heritages, philosophies and histories, many of which include experiences as refugees and migrants.

[Presented with support from Mohammad & Najla Al Zaibak \(Bay Tree Foundation\) and Partners in Art](#)

DON'T ASK ME WHERE I'M FROM 2

This innovative collaboration between the Museum and the Luciano Benetton Foundation’s Imago Mundi, dedicated to fostering dialogue and understanding between cultures and communities, channels the experiences of 15 artists with second-generation backgrounds. All the artists presented in the travelling exhibition used their chosen art forms to explore cross-cultural artistic realities.

[Presented with support from Mohammad & Najla Al Zaibak \(Bay Tree Foundation\)](#)

CHRYSALIS BY OLGA STEFATOU 3

In *Chrysalis*, Greek artist and photographer Olga Stefatou exhibits portraits of 11 women refugees who fled their native countries in search of a better life. The women journeyed to Greece, eventually

crossing paths with Stefatou. As an expression of their individualism, they are shown wearing gold costumes with metallic blankets, each designed in collaboration with Guram Chachanidze. The blankets, which are distributed to refugees, have become a symbol of today’s mass immigration.

AMATA SIRIA 4

On March 6, local musicians debuted Syrian-Italian composer Nahel Al Halabi’s original work for the Museum. Blending Western classical with the vibrations of the kamancheh, *Amata Siria* translated the stories of Syria’s war survivors into symphonic form.

[Presented with support from Mohammad & Najla Al Zaibak \(Bay Tree Foundation\) and Dr. Radwan Khawatmi](#)

BAABA MAAL’S DUNIYA SALAAM 5

During his week-long artist residency at the Museum, Senegalese singer and musician Baaba Maal mesmerized audiences with his soaring melodies and all-important message of world peace.





PARADISE GARDEN: THE WAGNER GARDEN CARPET FROM THE BURRELL COLLECTION, GLASGOW

One of the most famous works of Islamic textile art arrived in Toronto as part of its first-ever North American tour. Museum audiences found both tranquility and joyful delight in the 17th-century Iranian masterpiece’s exquisitely detailed vision of a walled “paradise” garden.

FAIG AHMED: DISSOLVING ORDER 1

This exploration of the work and thought of Baku-based artist Faig Ahmed was envisioned before the

pandemic struck. But when the exhibition opened, its themes of tradition, disruption, and evolution couldn’t have been more timely.

REMASTERED 2

In fall 2020, visitors found respite and inspiration in *Remastered*, a digitally activated celebration of the Museum’s world-class collection of Islamic manuscript paintings. Digital interactives, developed in collaboration with Ryerson University Library, allowed viewers to delve deeper than ever into timeless stories of love, courage, and ethical living.

DISSOLVING INTO THE PLURIVERSE AND ARDOISE 3

We commissioned two composers to each create a new contemporary musical work and an accompanying graphic score based upon an object on exhibit at the Museum. Anoush Moazzeni’s *Dissolving into the Pluriverse* responded to *Faig Ahmed: Dissolving Order*. Isaiah Ciccarelli’s *Ardoise* drew inspiration from a 16th-century manuscript in *Remastered*.





From tradition, to disruption, to evolution.

In the moments they needed it most, Museum audiences found inspiration in timeless stories from the past and the wide-open potential of the future.

2020 BY THE NUMBERS



2

Virtual music festivals



4

Commissioned works of art



46

Countries where online visitors accessed #MuseumWithoutWalls



60+

Online family activities



180+

Artists that worked with the Museum



35,912

Visitors to the Museum



889

New supporters



1,056

Registered for our Islamic Art courses



725K+

Education engagement



5 MILLION

Online visitors (including students and teachers)



60+

Virtual curator presentations

SPARK

Building communities — both global and local — with shared experiences that ignited curiosity, connection, and hope.



#MUSEUMWITHOUTWALLS

Since it opened in March 2020, the Museum's online hub for art, culture, and connection has attracted more than 5 million visitors.

REMIXTOGETHER FESTIVAL

April saw the Museum mount its first-ever virtual music festival. Ground-breaking acts, including santur maestro Sina Bathaie, electro-soul chanteuse Alanna Stuart, and Afro-Cuban pop powerhouse OKAN, thrilled the online audience who tuned in to the show.

REIMAGINE: GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

A changing world calls for new ideas and fresh perspectives. That's why, in 2020, we launched a new online talk series featuring some of the most inspiring and thought-provoking artists, culture leaders, and community-builders from around the world.

DUENDE FESTIVAL 2020 1

The Aga Khan Museum's sixth annual flamenco festival tapped into the tradition's power to transform just about any venue into a hive of soulful humanity – even virtually.



POP-UP AND POCKET PERFORMANCES 2

This series of in-Museum and filmed-at-home performances brought joy to our audiences and, at the same time, provided a much-needed lifeline for musicians, dancers, and poets in the community.

[Presented by TD Bank Group](#)

BLOSSOM TOGETHER COMMUNITY TILE WALL

Everyone who contributed a design to the Blossom Together Community Tile Wall sent a timeless message about the transformative power of the arts to make a difference. Proceeds from the purchase of the tiles went to the North York Harvest Food Bank.

PICNICS IN THE PARK 3

At the Museum's Picnics in the Park in July and September, families savoured sunshine, great food, and being together in the comfort of pandemic-compliant luxury tents.

COURTYARD CONVERSATIONS 4

Speakers from the museum world and beyond opened up about their work and life and how they envision building a better future post-COVID-19.

SUPPORT

During a year unlike any other in the Museum's history, we were inspired, humbled and motivated by the overwhelming generosity of our Donors, Volunteers, and Partners.

We are grateful to those who reached out, offering words of encouragement and asking how they could help. Your support was vital to the Museum's transition online and the creation of the #MuseumWithoutWalls platform, which has brought the Aga Khan Museum into homes around the globe. Thank you!

Together, we raised \$8.2 million in 2020, which funded ongoing projects and new initiatives. We launched innovative, impactful programs that kept our audiences engaged online and onsite. The determination of our supporters has made a lasting impact on the Museum and our community, at a time when we needed each other most. We look forward to the incredible achievements we will be able to continue to accomplish with your support.

VIRTUAL PATRONS' LOUNGE

As a new way of engaging Patrons and building a global community, we launched the Virtual Patrons' Lounge and brought a dynamic and vibrant lineup of events to supporters, welcoming a total of 582 attendees from nine countries. Patrons engaged with acclaimed artists, performers, curators, arts professionals, and Museum leadership from Canada, the United States, South Africa, and the UK. Many of you have appreciated this new way to connect from afar and we hear you! We will continue to hold virtual events as part of our Patron programming and include in-person opportunities, once we are able to.



GLOBAL PATRONS' PROGRAM

The Patrons' programs in the UK and Gulf and South Asia (GSA) adeptly shifted to virtual events for our supporters in the regions as well as Patrons from around the world. We are deeply grateful to GSA Steering Committee Chair Sarah Hashwani, UK Steering Committee Chair Faaiza Lalji, committee members, and staff for their tremendous efforts, which resulted in a vibrant program of artist and curator talks, podcasts, social events, and curated news from across the Muslim art world.



LAPIS DIGITAL BENEFIT

On Thursday, September 24, 2020, the Aga Khan Museum held its first-ever Lapis Digital Benefit – a reinvention of our annual signature gala, emceed by Canadian comedian Ali Hassan, with additional hosting by award-winning broadcaster Ziya Tong. Inspired by the theme “*Lighting the Way: The Museum as a Cultural Sanctuary*,” the event celebrated diversity and pluralism, featuring 15 artists, performers, and acclaimed speakers.

Thanks to our sponsors, the event was free and accessible to anyone who wished to tune in to the Museum’s inaugural digital benefit. We reached more than 17,000 viewers from over 40 countries, and through the generosity of our sponsors and donors, raised \$868,560 in support of *Rebuild 2020* – a series of Museum initiatives aimed at helping people heal and reconnect during the pandemic through the arts. Stay tuned for information on this year’s Lapis Digital Benefit, which will be held on September 30, 2021.

“Last night’s gala was a beautifully constructed broadcast event – wonderful in technology, artistry, wisdom, and diversity. I found the panel discussions so wide-ranging and diverse in perspective. And the performances offered experiences that were entirely new to me.”

-Michaele Robertson, Viewer

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It is with deep gratitude that we wish to acknowledge the following individuals and institutions, who generously supported the Museum in 2020. Thank you! Your unwavering commitment was a beacon of hope in a challenging year and allowed us to continue our work in pursuit of our mission.

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Riyaz and Azmina Virani

Gulshan Virji

Yasmin and Zulfikar Walji

Anonymous (18)

VOLUNTEERS

We extend our greatest appreciation to all our volunteers for their continued support and encouragement this year.

Volunteers have been able to remain connected to the Museum by meeting virtually. Here is what the Museum community means to them:

“Volunteering at the Museum has provided me with an opportunity for personal growth – enhancing my knowledge of Islamic arts and, at the same time, broadening my reach both locally and globally.”

-Zeenat Lalani

“The Museum has a gift for growing its community, and the closure has amplified rather than diminished efforts to ensure we feel connected, valued, and inspired. We can hardly wait to get back to our Museum family, and yet we never feel that we are far away from each other.”

-Wendy Jang

“We volunteers may not have met in person, but the Museum puts us in a wonderful relationship by heart.”

-Laila Panjwani

“Caring and sharing changed my outlook and helped me to learn and connect more with diversity. Sharing lovely smiles with everybody gives me hope for tomorrow. The best is yet to come.”

-Dr. Dilshad Karim

“As volunteers we have an overarching responsibility as connectors to create opportunities for our Museum. The pandemic has simply shifted the execution of this role to a virtual mode of communication. This year, I worked on making such connections.”

-Mohamed Bhanji

“I miss the visitors from all over the world showing their excitement and in awe of the splendour, beauty, hospitality, and the inspiring history behind the Islamic artifacts.”

-Namoona Juma



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WELCOME
BACK TO
WHERE WE
ALL BELONG



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CHARTING OUR NEW DIRECTION

Introducing the five Signature Initiatives at the centre of the Museum's historic transformation.

2020 opened our eyes to unforeseen possibilities and innovative ways to reach new audiences. Building on our successful work to date, we will focus on five priorities to help us reimagine the Museum into the future.

MUSEUM ACADEMY

In-person and digital courses, tours, and resources for learners of all ages

WORLDS UNCOVERED

Riveting documentaries, podcasts, and talks

WYNFORD SITE FESTIVAL

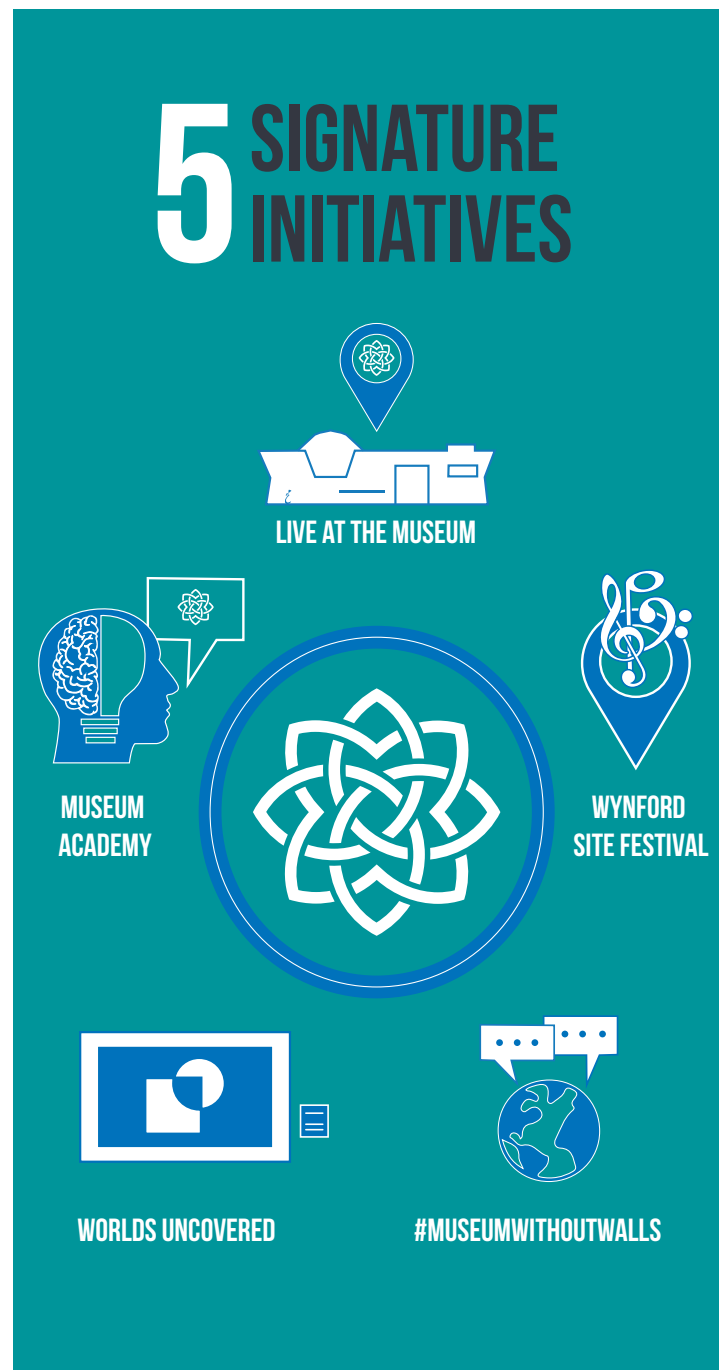
On-site celebrations honouring Toronto's rich cultural diversity

LIVE AT THE MUSEUM

Exhibitions, artist residencies, and showcase performances uniting local and global audiences

THE #MUSEUMWITHOUTWALLS

Free and premium Museum experiences connecting cultures through the arts around the globe



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