

# Geometry and Colour: Decoding the Arts of Islam in the West 1880–1945

International Conference, Zurich, May 14-15, 2020

Organizers: Sandra Gianfreda (Kunsthaus Zürich), Francine Giese (Universität Zürich), Ariane Varela Braga (Universität Zürich) and Axel Langer (Museum Rietberg Zürich)

Venue: Museum Rietberg Zürich / Kunsthaus Zürich

## *Call for Papers*

Deadline for submission: May 31, 2019

Keynote Speaker: Rémi Labrusse (Université Paris Nanterre)

The art and architecture of the Islamic world had a decisive impact on the development of decorative and fine arts from 1880 to 1945. Many leading artists such as Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, masters of decorative arts such as Émile Gallé and Max Laeuger, and architects Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier took inspiration from the rich Islamic language of forms and ornamentation. They were inspired by the mathematical principles and unusual harmonies of colours in Persian miniatures and rugs, stained glass windows or Iznik tiles, and punched metal works and ceramics from the Near East, North Africa and Moorish Spain.

While only some of them actually visited the Islamic world and studied its art and architecture *in situ*, many discovered it through exhibitions and publications. Following on from Paris (1893/1903), Stockholm (1897) and Algiers (1905), Munich set new standards in 1910 with the exhibition “Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst” (“Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art”). Museums, art dealers and private collectors from a number of countries contributed some 3,600 works, including valuable carpets, ceramics, metalwork pieces and Persian miniatures. The exhibition marked a turning point not only for the academic studies of the time, but also in terms of the reception of Islamic arts. Matisse, Albert Marquet and Hans Purrmann travelled from Paris especially to see it, and it was also visited by Kandinsky, Franz Marc and Le Corbusier.

In the Western fine and decorative arts of the 19th century, the “Orient” conjured up motivic imagery heavily influenced by the colonialist perspective, whereas the artists of early Modernism investigated Islam’s stylistic devices in depth, transposing them to their own environment through a process of artistic internalisation. In combination with their own traditions and their respective times, it was this very internalisation that instilled motivating creative processes, out of which artists developed countless new forms of expression.

The international conference, which is being held in conjunction with the planned exhibitions at the Vitromusée Romont (2020) and Kunsthaus Zurich (2022), aims to cast new light on the effort by Western artists to study a foreign but inspiring culture. The main points of discussion will be as follows:

- Colour and geometry in Islamic arts and architectural ornamentation
- Western studies on the principles of Islamic ornamentation

- Bringing Islamic arts to the West: exhibitions and international art fairs
- Translations and reinterpretations of Islamic colour and geometry in Western arts
- The Islamic contribution to the renewal of Western decorative and fine arts, and architecture

Papers will have a duration of 20 min. Conference languages will be English, French and German. Abstracts of no more than 300 words, together with a short CV, should be sent to: [conference@transculturalstudies.ch](mailto:conference@transculturalstudies.ch)