



Press release

28 February 2019

For immediate release

Vivid diversity of the Islamic world revealed in new exhibition

- *Departures* explores social and cultural experiences from Morocco to China
- Instagram images juxtaposed with nineteenth-century photography never publicly displayed in the UK before to illuminate a contrasting Islamic world
- Opens at Asia House, London, on 12 April and runs until 3 May 2019
- Press breakfast on 12 April at 09:00

'Departures: A Photographic Journey Through the Islamic World'

The striking diversity of the Islamic world will be powerfully showcased in a major exhibition at London's Asia House this April.

Departures: A Photographic Journey Through the Islamic World draws upon a unique collection of historical photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries alongside a selection of contemporary images from photographers on Instagram to depict social and cultural life in Morocco in the West to China in the East, and from the Balkans in the North to Sudan in the South.

Spanning three centuries, the ambitious exhibition presents a journey of discovery beyond the narrow stereotypes of the region as sectarian, war-torn and culturally bereft.

Organised by Asia House and The Barakat Trust and curated by Tarik Alireza and Richard Wilding, the exhibition will highlight the rich heritage of this region, exploring its ancient urban centres such as Cairo, Istanbul and Damascus, its traditions of travel, trade and artisanship, and its varied styles of costume and architecture.

The exhibition is both a celebration of this historical diversity, and a reminder of what has been lost or weakened by cultural destruction, social change and political upheaval.

'The fruit of travel and enquiry'

The title 'Departures' reflects the eager, observing eyes of travellers who have questioned, courted, and recorded the Islamic world from the earliest days of photography. These images are the fruit of travel and enquiry, made increasingly possible by ships and railways, then the jet engine, television and internet.

The exhibition will also suggest that, despite the advent of these improved forms of travel and communication, the Islamic world has become increasingly alien and misunderstood in the West.

Juxtaposed with the exhibition's historical photographs will be a mosaic of the Islamic world today seen through a curated sequence of images from the social media platform Instagram. These images, taken by talented amateur photographers, will reveal dynamic and diverse cultures – places where a multitude of people live a myriad of ordinary lives.



Young women apply makeup in Uzbekistan. Photographic print in album, photographer and date unknown.



Street scene in Fez, Morocco. Postcard, caption: 'Dans les rues mystérieuses', photographer 'Flandrin', date unknown

Comment

Exhibition curator **Richard Wilding** said:

“The Islamic world has, in its history, produced and sustained a great diversity of cultural identities, including regional styles of costume, architecture and artisanship. These were recorded with great enthusiasm from the earliest days of photography. But today, despite improved forms of travel and communication, the media presents a flattened view of the Islamic world, based largely on stereotypes and limited frames of reference.

In this exhibition, we revisit historical photography from Morocco in the West to China in the East, and from the Balkans in the North to Sudan in the South. These images show a rich and varied culture, and surprising scenes from everyday life, in an era before the more recent homogenisation, cultural destruction and regional turmoil.”

Juan de Lara, Arts Programme Manager at **Asia House**, said: “This remarkable insight into the Islamic world will encourage our audience to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes ever-present in the Islamic world. Now more than ever it is our responsibility to bring to society and our youngsters the tools to better understand the converging elements present in our cultures. And what is more, to recognise, accept, and celebrate its differences.

Asia House seeks to foster engagement and understanding between global cultures, and this exhibition is in line with this mission, serving as a dialogue between past and present, between the diverse cultures and traditions that make up the Islamic world, and between the Islamic world and the West.”

A series of associated talks and guided visits have been organised by Asia House and The Barakat Trust to accompany the exhibition.

-End-

Information

The exhibition is organised by Asia House and The Barakat Trust, and will be held at Asia House, London, between 12 April and 3 May 2019.

Monday-Sunday, 10:00-18:00 (closed for Easter 19-22 April)

Asia House,
63 New Cavendish Street,
London,
NW1 9TZ

Contact

Luke Foddy, Communications Manager, Asia House

E-mail: luke.foddy@asiahouse.co.uk

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7307 5451

About Asia House

Asia House is a centre of expertise on trade, investment and public policy. We drive political, economic and commercial engagement between Asia and Europe.

Asia House supports a vibrant Arts and Learning programme – a creative hub for Asian arts and culture. It is completely unique in the UK in presenting a thought-provoking, pan-Asian artistic and cultural programme.

Our mission is to inspire and engage diverse audiences by encouraging dialogue aimed at finding common ground amongst different schools of thought on how to look at Asia's historical and cultural development. This is done through a dynamic series of live events; from panel discussions to music, dance, performance, visual art, film, food, fashion and literature.

Working closely with arts practitioners, educational specialists and cultural partners we aim to encourage a platform for meaningful cultural engagement with our audiences.

About the Barakat Trust

The Barakat Trust is a British registered charity, established in 1987 to support the study and preservation of the heritage, art, archaeology, architecture and culture of the Islamic world by funding students, conservation digitisation and archaeological projects, academic research, publications, conferences and other initiatives. To date, it has supported more than 600 projects and grantees in over 40 countries. Recently-supported projects include archaeological work in Jordan, Morocco and Uzbekistan, building conservation work in Egypt, manuscript conservation in Ireland, and a large number of travel grants, and scholarships at Oxford University. The Trust counts many eminent heritage professionals and academics in the field among its grantees, and prides itself on the multitude of ways in which local communities have benefited from its work over the past 30 years. More information about the Barakat Trust can be found on its website: www.barakat.org.

Curators

Tarik Alireza

Tarik Alireza, a trustee of Barakat, is an architect based in Jeddah. Alireza has avidly collected historical photographs and postcards of the Islamic world for the past 40 years. He is also a leading authority on the postal history of the Middle East. The material for this

exhibition comes from Alireza's personal collection and the images have never previously been shown publicly in the UK.

Among the exhibitions curated by Tarik Alireza is Hajj Journey Through the Ages, an exhibition of paintings by artist Reem Nazir shown alongside historical photographs and quotes from travellers depicting the Hajj pilgrimage. Hajj Journey has been exhibited at the Royal Geographical Society, London in 2015 and in Jeddah and Madinah, Saudi Arabia in 2014.

Richard Wilding

Richard Wilding is a London-based photographer and filmmaker specializing in the documentation of heritage, cultural identity and costume in the Middle East. He is currently working on long-term projects in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UK.

Wilding's photography has been exhibited at the Courtauld Institute of Art and the Houses of Parliament, London, at the University of Exeter's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies and in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. He has also coordinated exhibitions of historical photography in Jeddah and Madinah, Saudi Arabia. Films he has produced have been screened at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate Britain and the Imperial War Museum, London.

Wilding is currently involved in a pioneering project to film the conservation of medieval minbars in Cairo, using modern 3D printing technology to replicate fragments dispersed in museum collections and reinstate them in their original locations.