



Supplied picture

Over 90 rare masterpieces showing Islamic calligraphy are on display at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization.

Sharjah museum hosts rare calligraphy show

By Mariam M. Al Serkal, Staff Reporter

Published: May 29, 2009, 23:13

Sharjah: Dozens of exquisite calligraphic works, some dating back to the ninth century, that have gone on display at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization give visitors insights on key periods of Islamic history.

Over 90 Islamic calligraphy artworks are currently on display at the museum, which is located in Al Majarrah area, along Corniche Street.

The exhibition, titled: 'Eternal letters: From the Abdul Rahman Al Owais Islamic Calligraphy Collection,' will continue until September 26 and includes Islamic calligraphy artworks characterised by the angular script known as kufi.

Calligraphy is the highest art form in Islam and traces its roots back to the need to portray the Quran accurately and reflect its divine perfection and beauty in material form. The calligraphers' craft took hours on end of practical training that involved the preparation of writing materials, such as paper, inks, and the perfect calligraphic representation of individual letters (mufradat), as well as words and sentences (murakkabat).

"Islamic calligraphy has always occupied a special place in Arab civilization and culture, and has been acclaimed around the world for its aesthetic and expressive nature," said Abdul Rahman Mohammad Al Owais, UAE Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development. "It is creative, precise and has the same aesthetic value as many of the great masterpieces."

Until the 11th century, kufi remained the predominant Quranic script but afterwards cursive styles were also used, known as naskh, nasta'liq, thuluth, muhaqqaq and riq'a', which are collectively known as the Six

Scripts.

The Six Scripts were first formalised by Ibn Muqla in the 9th century and later refined by Ibn Al Bawwab (1022 AD) and Yaqut Al Musta'simi (1298 AD). After Al Musta'simi's death, his method of writing the Six Scripts spread from Baghdad to Anatolia, Egypt, Syria, Iran and Central Asia.

"Arabic calligraphy has always been intimately linked with Arab and Islamic culture and architecture," said Manal Attaya, director general of Sharjah Museum Department. "It immortalizes Arab Islamic civilization not only with its linguistic value but also for its aesthetic one. We are confident this exhibition will be a common ground for different calligraphers to exchange knowledge and perspective."

The majority of works at the exhibition represent forms of calligraphy used during the Ottoman Empire, and visitors will have the opportunity to inspect a Quran manuscript dating from the 15th century that uses the naskh script and is written in ink and gold that was typically used in Istanbul at the time.

"Calligraphy is a universal language and has played an important role in defining the Islamic civilization. It is the key to the memories and cultural heritage of our nations," Attaya said.

The Turks adopted the Arabic alphabet around the 10th century, and early Ottoman calligraphers continued the Abbasid tradition until Seyh Hamdullah laid the foundation of classical Ottoman calligraphy in the 16th century.

The second classical phase of Ottoman calligraphy was then brought about in the 17th Century, under the influence of Hafiz Osman's unique style. A large number of master calligraphers then built on his tradition.

Timings: Also open on Fridays

Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization Opening Hours:

- Saturday to Thursday: 8am to 8pm
- Friday: 4 to 8pm
- Ticket Price Adult: Dh5 Family: Dh10
- Children: Free