

## Exhibit of Orientalist art to open in Malaysia



**THE STAR** – More than 100 paintings of Orientalist art are set to go on display at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM) in Kuala Lumpur, the largest-ever exhibition – outside Europe and the United States – of paintings and artefacts that capture the essence of the Orient in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Highlights of IAMM's 'Orientalist Paintings: Mirror or Mirage?' exhibition, which runs from June 3 to Oct 15, include renowned works by some of the most celebrated painters of the era, including Jean-Leon Gerome, Eugene Delacroix, John Frederick Lewis and the remarkable but rarely seen Ottoman polymath Osman Hamdi Bey.

Most of these paintings from IAMM's collection were also shown at the British Museum's high-profile exhibition 'Inspired by the East: How the Islamic World Influenced Western Art' in 2019.

The Orientalist painting collection – more than 300 works – of the IAMM is among the world's largest, and the 'Orientalist Paintings: Mirror or Mirage?' exhibition offers visitors a glimpse of this vast treasure trove.

"The exhibition 'Orientalist Paintings: Mirror or Mirage?' is the latest chapter in a long story. The relationships between Europe, America and what used to be called the 'Orient' were explored by the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia 15 years ago. In a pioneering exhibition we examined these influences, focusing on the decorative arts of East and West. There was one vital ingredient missing then: paintings," said Syed Mohamed Albukhary, IAMM director in a media statement.

The exhibition – curated by London-based Lucien de Guise and KL-based Rekha Verma – takes a thematic look at that vast region in a time of transition.

The display at IAMM is divided into eight sections that follow the artists' different creative callings.

"We follow a path that starts in the Maghreb and Al-Andalus. This was the main gateway that led European artists and other visitors into the Islamic world. The cultures they found have straddled Europe, Africa and Asia for centuries," outlines the exhibition notes.

'Orientalist Paintings: Mirror or Mirage?' is also one of the largest exhibitions ever undertaken at the IAMM, and the works will be displayed over two main galleries.

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# Ancient stone family tombs discovered in Khuzestan



### Arts & Culture Desk

In the vicinity of Izeh, Khuzestan Province, lies the ancient site of Kalchenar, where a remarkable discovery has been made by archaeologists. Several stone family tombs, belonging to the Elymais period, have recently been unearthed, shedding light on a bygone era that dates back over 2,000 years. This period coincided with the Parthian era in Iran, adding to the historical significance of the findings.

The story of this excavation traces back to 1935, when the Bakhtiari tribes, responding to Reza Shah's call, gathered in the region known as Shami. During the construction of their houses, an extraordinary object emerged from the ground—a statue depicting a Parthian or Shami man. This statue gained international acclaim and now resides in the Museum of Ancient Iran. At the time, renowned explorer Aurel Stein, who was hosted by influential ruler Malmir, conducted a week-long excavation in the vicinity of the statue with the assistance of local workers.

Now, after many years, a joint team comprising Iranian and Italian researchers, led by Ja'far Mehrkian and Vittorio Messina, has re-

turned to Kalchenar, not far from the initial discovery site of the Shami man. The results of their recent excavations have been nothing short of astonishing. They have unearthed more than five stone family tombs of varying sizes, with one particularly large tomb that has almost been completely revealed.

The largest tomb, believed to hold a multitude of buried bodies, features an imposing stone door weighing over one ton. The door, mounted on hinges, resembles modern doors with four frames. The ceiling of this tomb, crafted with intricately carved stones, boasts a vaulted design, while the four supporting columns are also made of ornate stonework.

Curiously, the tomb was found already open – a highly unusual occurrence. This suggests that the tomb may have been looted in ancient times. However, in recent decades, it has also suffered from vandalism, with the ceiling destroyed in an attempt to access its contents.

During the settlement planning of the Bakhtiari tribes, the stones from these tombs were repurposed for constructing their houses, creating disruptions that hindered the access to the skeletons interred around

2,000 years ago. Only two skulls were found, one of which was discovered near the entrance, reinforcing the likelihood that the tomb was filled with bodies.

Moreover, a child's skeleton was found outside the large tomb, indicating that this particular tomb did not serve as a new burial site. Instead, it appears that over 2,000 years ago, they resorted to using a stone niche to lay the child to rest. Adjacent to the child's body and the stone door, a large cone-shaped cylinder was uncovered, whose purpose remains unknown to archaeologists.

In addition to the prominently visible largest tomb, the other tombs were underground and were repeatedly opened and closed for subsequent burials. Their ceilings, constructed with sizable carved stone slabs, exhibited vaulted designs. These tombs were found either empty or with scattered skeletal remains outside. Nonetheless, they offer valuable insights into burial practices and rituals from over two millennia ago.

Among the significant findings are platforms discovered alongside the family tombs, likely used for ceremonial purposes during burials. While the exact nature of these platforms remains elusive, it is highly

probable that elaborate rituals took place upon them. Furthermore, a grand staircase has been uncovered, serving as a guide leading towards the central courtyard. Its presence reinforces the hypothesis that the entire site may have served as a sanctuary approximately 2,000 years ago.

Archaeologists have identified more than three distinct archaeological periods within this location. However, these family tombs can be attributed to the Elamite civilization, which emerged following the Elamites' defeat by the Assyrians. The Elamites sought refuge in the mountains, giving rise to this period and its burial practices.

Extensive artifact dispersion has been observed, occupying vast hectares of land, necessitating stringent protection measures. Archaeologists have taken precautions to ensure the preservation of the unearthed artifacts.

Nevertheless, ongoing attention and research efforts are required to maintain these protective measures. Unfortunately, the site has been neglected due to various factors, including the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the non-renewal of the Iran-Italy agreement, and, most significantly, insufficient funding.



## Fluorescent green hue of Venice's Grand Canal demystified

The spectacular transformation of a stretch of Venice's Grand Canal to fluorescent green was due to fluorescein, a non-toxic substance used for testing wastewater networks, local authorities have concluded.

Residents noticed a stretch of Venice's Grand Canal turned bright green on Sunday, prompting police to investigate amid speculation it could be a stunt

by environmentalists, the Guardian reported. But analysis showed "the presence of fluorescein in samples taken", according to the regional agency for environmental prevention and protection of Veneto (Arpav).

The results "have not shown the presence of toxic elements in the samples analyzed", Arpav said, without specifying the origin of the substance.

The change in color noticed by residents raised eyebrows, with police looking into whether Sunday's development could be a protest by climate change activists, according to local daily La Nuova Venezia. It is not the first time the Grand Canal has turned green.

In 1968, Argentine artist Nicolás García Urriburu dyed the waters of Venice's Grand Canal green with a



fluorescent dye during the 34th Venice Biennale in a

stunt to promote ecological awareness.