

Intersection of Japanese art, architecture at Tehran's Silk Road exhibition

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The 'Art and the Space in Between; Iran-Japan' exhibition, running from January 7 to February 7 at the Kamalolmolk Gallery in Tehran, showcases the works of prominent Japanese artists, including three Pritzker Architecture Prize winners. Organized by the University of Tehran's Faculty of Architecture and supported by the Japanese Embassy, the exhibition features the intricate concepts of space and time—encapsulated in the Japanese term "Ma"—while celebrating the artistic legacy of Arata Isozaki and fostering intercultural dialogue along the historic Silk Road. The exhibition features a collection of installations focusing on space, thresholds, and comparative studies of the Silk Road. The exhibition, subtitled 'Journey Along the Silk Road,' features key concepts of Japanese art and aims to enhance intercultural studies, facilitating the exchange of ideas and artistic expressions along the Silk



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Road. It includes works from three acclaimed Pritzker Prize-winning Japanese architects: Arata Isozaki, Shigeru Ban, and Ryue Nishizawa. Majid Montazer Zohouri, head of the Museums and Cultural Spaces Office at the University of Tehran, explained to Iran Daily reporter that the exhibition celebrates the artistic legacy of Arata Isozaki, a renowned Japanese artist and architect. Isozaki originally held this exhibition decades ago, and this event serves as a tribute to his work. Shabnam Torabi, an expert at the exhibition, elaborated that the Japanese terms for

space and time are encapsulated in the word "Ma." This concept forms the core of the exhibition. In Persian, there isn't a direct equivalent for "Ma," but it could be understood as "pause." She noted that "Ma" represents a mental concept inherent in Japanese architecture. While European and Western architectural styles may not emphasize the relationship between space and time, Iranian architecture showcases elements of this idea, such as corridors and entryways in traditional homes that distinguish the boundary between the outside and inside. When en-

tering an Iranian home, one does not step directly into the interior but must pass through a hallway to reach the private space. To clarify the concept of "Ma" in architecture, Torabi explained that various spaces within a home facilitate movement between areas. Each space emphasizes the significance of "Ma," suggesting that empty spaces carry more importance than they appear. To help the audience connect with this concept, the exhibition features nine distinct



another. Each space seeks to convey the idea of interstitial space and transition. The main conceptualizer of this exhibition is the late Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, who passed away in 2022. He



spaces defined through installations and architectural art, illustrating the importance of transitional spaces, such as indoor settings, Japanese gardens, bridges, roads, and light—symbolizing the movement from one point to

originally held this exhibition 47 years ago in Paris in 1978. Now, nearly half a century later, a group of his Japanese admirers, along with an Iranian team, have revived it. Due to the Iranian team's involvement, several con-

cepts have been woven into Iranian culture and thought, including ideas that have traveled from Iran to Japan along the Silk Road, such as the concept of paradise. Plus, the exhibition features images of instruments like the *barbat*, which entered Japanese Buddhist culture through the Silk Road during the Sasanian era and has been played in temples ever since. In this way, the Silk Road not only serves as a conduit for cultural exchange but also resonates with the concept of "Ma" and interstitial space. Torabi emphasized that "Ma" is a complex mental concept that underscores the importance of transitional spaces. For instance, the entrances to Japanese tea houses are often designed so small that visitors must bow their heads in respect to enter. A similar practice can be seen in old Iranian homes, especially in *zurkhaneh* (which literally means 'strength house' in Persian, a special traditional place where men practice heroic sports), where doorways are low enough to require visitors to bow as they enter.

Minister calls for balance to enhance Qur'an exhibition appeal

Arts & Culture Desk

The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between the various dimensions of the International Holy Qur'an Exhibition to enhance its appeal to both general and specific audiences. During the policy-making council meeting for the International Holy Qur'an Exhibition, held on February 4, Salehi acknowledged the challenges they face this year, saying, "We are confronted with several constraints, but limitations

can sometimes lead to the creation of opportunities," according to IRNA. He added the financial constraints as the first limitation, stating, "This year, we have two Qur'an exhibitions, one in (March-April) and another in Esfand (February-March), which only happens once every 33 years. However, the budgetary resources have not been allocated for two exhibitions." Salehi further explained that the venue, Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla (prayer grounds), also presents a unique situation as it



is only available for less than half the duration compared to previous years due to its use for Friday prayers until the end of winter. He added, "The third issue is the change of government and the

appointment of new officials. This combination of factors has created a unique set of circumstances for this year's exhibition, and expectations should be adjusted accordingly."

The minister suggested that these limitations could be turned into opportunities, saying, "The issues related to the exhibition space and budget can lead to prioritizing and eliminating the superfluous elements that have become customary." Salehi continued, "The current situation provides an opportunity for selection and filtering, allowing the exhibition to improve by eliminating unnecessary elements." He emphasized the need to capitalize on these limitations for better balance, filtering, and selec-

tion, stating, "The financial situation also presents an opportunity for further cost-saving measures and requires a new approach to financial management to navigate these new conditions." Salehi then elaborated on the various aspects of the International Holy Qur'an Exhibition, saying, "One aspect is cognitive, dealing with Qur'anic knowledge and teachings. Other dimensions include artistic, technological, international, and media aspects, which should complement each other to collectively enhance the exhibition's appeal."

Over 8,000 works submitted at Fajr Int'l Handicrafts Festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The ninth edition of Fajr International Handicrafts Festival, known as Sarv-e Simin 9, received 8,172 submissions, said the Deputy Minister of Handicrafts at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Maryam Jalali, during a press conference and poster unveiling ceremony held in Tehran. Out of the total submissions, 7,974 are from 4,378 domestic artists, and 198 are from artists representing 20 different countries, IRNA reported.

Jalali highlighted that the highest number of entries, 853, came from the Fars Province, particularly in the wooden and wicker handicrafts category. "In the seventh festival, we focused on women as the driving force, and in the ninth edition, we emphasize generational bonds," Jalali added. "Our mission in this third step is to achieve national unity through cultural diversity." The deputy minister emphasized the importance of the festival as a significant event in the handicrafts in-

dustry. "The festival is one of the many events in the value chain, and we aim to adhere to our goals and ensure coherence. The relevant departments are in harmony, and the festival is an extension of our ongoing efforts," she added. Jalali further explained that the festival serves as a platform to evaluate outstanding works, and they have strived to achieve excellence in both quantity and quality. "While we may not have achieved complete satisfaction, we are committed to continuous growth," she said.

The ninth festival, according to Jalali, is a celebration of authenticity and arts, with the participation of the people and artists at its core. "The cultural, tourism, and support departments have come together to make this exhibition and festival a reality. Our focus is on trade at the exhibition and authenticity at the festival. We have achieved systemic and organizational unity and are now moving towards popular unity," she added, referring to the recent exhibition held in November. Jalali emphasized the



multi-faceted nature of the festival, mentioning the presence of international evaluators who have come to Iran for two purposes: To assess the festival's entries and to

evaluate the traditional jewelry and handicrafts of Yazd for potential UNESCO World Heritage status. Unveiling the festival's poster, Jalali explained its symbol-

ism, saying, "The flowers in the poster bow their heads to symbolize humility for the festival." She further elaborated on the design, adding, "The nine paisley motifs represent the nine steps, and the lines forming a hook shape are a contemporary interpretation, as storytelling takes precedence in today's world. The design, growing from the heart of the seals, signifies our future vision, reminding us to embrace modernity while remaining committed to our authentic roots."