

Louvre Abu Dhabi's Stories of Paper is the biography of a versatile medium

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Lotus Sutra, courtesy RMN-Grand Palais.

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Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, inaugurated Louvre Abu Dhabi's second international exhibition of the year, Stories of Paper, on April 20. Set to run till July 24 and organized by Louvre Abu Dhabi in partnership with Musée du Louvre and France Museums, it discovers the extensive variety of artistic expressions of paper, with the purpose of encouraging richer knowledge of the familiar and versatile material.

About 100 artworks and objects from 16 museums, cultural institutions and private collections are on display. They include books, manuscripts, drawings, a reproduction of a house and 13 contemporary artworks and installations made of paper. The exhibition takes visitors on a journey through time to discover the various ways in which paper was utilized across cultures. Visitors can also enjoy a diverse public programme of wide-ranging cultural activities.

Stories of Paper spans 12 themed sections, all of which highlight the key qualities and varied use of paper across centuries, with immersive scenography.

The themed sections include Plant Origins, An Affordable, Widely Used and Multipurpose Material, Movement, Colour, Transparency and Translucency, A Versatile Material, a Substitute Material, A Support for Reproducing Works, Fragility and Resistance, A Space, A Possibility of Collecting, A Space of Annotating, of Associating Comments and Images, a Trace and a Malleable Support.

Visitors can understand the tools and mechanisms used to create paper, and also explore different textures of paper, through mediation devices.

Manuel Rabate, Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "From books, manuscripts and drawings to contemporary art works or installations made of paper, Stories of Paper retraces a chronological history of this single universal medium.

“We are also very pleased to invite prominent Emirati artists to be part of this shared dialogue — with works on display by Hassan Sharif, Abdullah Al Saadi and Mohammed Kazem, all of whom are considered pioneers of Emirati conceptual art.”

Laurence des Cars, Director of Musee du Louvre, said: “Stories of Paper exhibition fuses contemporary works from Arab and European art scenes, such as Labyrinth by the great Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto — a piece which confirms paper’s perpetual importance to mankind.

“This is precisely where the essence of Louvre Abu Dhabi lies — in its ability to bring together diverse collections that would probably not have had the opportunity to interact anywhere else but in Louvre Abu Dhabi.”

Curators Xavier Salmon and Victor Hundsbuckler said: “Stories of Paper is exhibited in parallel to the UAE’s great appetite for contemporary creation and innovative technologies, with the ambition to create curiosity for this familiar material at a time when digital technology is permeating all aspects of our daily lives.”

Dr. Souraya Noujaim, Scientific, Curatorial and Collections Management Director at Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: “Paper has, without a doubt, served a purpose in every aspect of society throughout history. There is already nostalgia for the material and its many familiar uses in our daily lives. However, time is not up for paper. It is still strongly rooted in our practices and its charm has not faded. This is evident in the artworks on display at Stories of Paper.”

A cultural and educational programme accompanies Stories of Paper, offering an array of events. An online talk and a recorded podcast by the exhibition’s curators is available on Louvre Abu Dhabi’s website and mobile application, for the public to explore the exhibition. A series of educational activities has been prepared for adults, families and youth, including an Express Tour of the exhibition, a creative masterclass using paper and print focusing on an abstract representation of ideas led by an Emirati artist, and a Make and Play activity, where children can experiment with different kinds of paper to make a paper portrait and other objects. A Young Visitor’s Guide offers the opportunity to learn about the properties and stories of paper throughout history. An online papermaking masterclass with Emirati artist Taqwa Al Naqbi teaches participants how to make their own handmade paper, inspired by the Qur’an commissioned by Sultan Abdullah II Al Sa’adi, and Make a Plant illustration activity is hosted for the family. The exhibition catalogue is available in Arabic, English and French.

Stories of Paper includes a selection of loans from Musee du Louvre, Musee Guimet, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Centre Pompidou, Bibliotheque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg, Bibliotheque Sainte-Geneviève, Sharjah Art Foundation, Zayed National Museum and Goesan Museum, as well as works from the permanent collection of Louvre Abu Dhabi. The Louvre in Paris opened in 1793, during the French Revolution, and from the very beginning was intended to provide inspiration for contemporary art.

Courbet, Picasso, Dali and many others came to its hallowed halls to admire Old Masters, copy them, immerse themselves in masterpieces and improve and fuel their own art. As an ancient royal residence, the Louvre is inextricably linked to eight centuries of French history. As a universal museum, its collections, among the best in the world, span many millennia and miles, from the Americas to Asia.

Over 38,000 artworks are grouped into eight curatorial departments, including universally admired works such as the Mona Lisa, the Winged Victory of Samothrace and the Venus de Milo. With 9.6 million guests in 2019, the Louvre is the most visited