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Rehabilitation plans for Iraq's Daesh-damaged Mosul Cultural Museum to mark memory of devastating attack and its central role in rebuilding community



Image courtesy of Mosul Cultural Museum/SBAH

The launch of this restoration phase also marks the opening of the exhibition *The Mosul Cultural Museum: From Destruction to Rehabilitation*

Restoration plans for Iraq's Mosul Cultural Museum (MCM) and its collection illustrate its importance within architectural and world history, placing the museum at the center of Mosul's cultural and community regeneration.

The museum, the second largest in Iraq after the National Museum in Baghdad, was established in 1952 to tell the story of northern Iraq—a story of global importance that encompasses the very beginning of written history—in galleries dedicated to prehistory, Assyria, Hatra, and Islam.

Following Mosul's capture by Daesh in 2014, artifacts of global significance were looted and destroyed, and the Mosul Cultural Museum—designed by Iraq's leading modernist architect, Mohamed Makiya, at the height of his career—was compromised in a deliberate attack aimed at the erasure of history and culture. Major Assyrian monumental works that were damaged or destroyed during Daesh's attack include a colossal *lion from Nimrud*, two *lamassu* (guardian) figures, the significant Banquet Stele, and the throne base of King Ashurnasirpal II. Over 28,000 books and rare manuscripts were burned.

Since 2018, the museum is gradually being brought back to life through a unique international consortium led by the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), in partnership with the Musée du Louvre, the Smithsonian Institution, and supported and funded by the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH). The partners have been stabilizing the building, starting the restoration of its collections, as well as training and equipping the Mosul Cultural Museum team with the tools required for the site's full-scale

rehabilitation. World Monuments Fund (WMF) joined the consortium in 2020 to define the restoration and rehabilitation program for the museum building and its surroundings.

Once the restoration works are complete, the goal is for the museum to resume its position as a cultural landmark for the citizens of Mosul, and more widely, as a cultural center of the region, with a multipurpose space for social exchange, dialogue, memory, and learning. To that end, urban renewal, sustainability, and knowledge exchange are key features of the project. World Monuments Fund is overseeing the architectural conservation project with a focus on urban renewal, community engagement, and sustainability in museum restoration, security, and maintenance, while the Smithsonian Institution's work is focused on strengthening capacity in museum management and visitor experience.

The Musée du Louvre is working with MCM staff to conserve and reconstruct three major stone sculptures (the Banquet Stele, the throne base and the lion of Nimrud) and fragments of metal plaques recovered from the site of Balawat, so that they can be displayed once again. Objects on display will include many saved from destruction when they were moved to the Iraq Museum, Baghdad, before the start of the Iraq War in 2003. Additionally, gallery spaces will exhibit artifacts from ongoing archeological excavations.

For ALIPH, this project represents its largest and most ambitious to date, supporting the development of the work since the beginning, and financing and accompanying all the partners through each stage.

Over the course of the project, the team will continue to exchange with SBAH architects and engineers and other local professionals in the implementation of the work and in the future monitoring and maintenance of the museum building and its technical equipment.

The reopened Mosul Cultural Museum—referred to as “the identity of Mosul” by locals—will again become a center of culture and education not just for Moslawis, but for Iraqis and international visitors.

RESTORING THE MAIN BUILDING

The restoration phase will honor Makiya's original vision and has been conceived with the SBAH in collaboration with Iraqi and international experts, including London-based Donald Insall Associates, known for UK heritage conservation projects, led by architect Tanvir Hasan. Alterations made in later years to make the building less susceptible to conflict damage, such as reinforcements to the main façade and the closing of two terraces, will be undone to open the building up and increase natural light. Sensitive interventions will ensure that the 1970s building meets modern accessibility and sustainability expectations.

The garden will be revived by Lebanese-Iraqi architect Dr. Jala Makhzoumi, reestablishing much-needed green space in Mosul and forming a valuable addition to Mosul's green hub, which includes Al Shuhadaa Park and Al Baladia Square. Eventually, this will connect with Al Remah Square and the banks of the Tigris River, contributing to the wider regeneration of the area.

The part of the museum that suffered the most damage during Daesh's attack was the central Assyrian Gallery, where the detonation of a bomb opened a large crater in the floor. The

memory of the devastating attack will be retained, with the footprint of the damage visible when the floor is fully reinforced.

EXHIBITION

Coinciding with today's announcement, the exhibition *The Mosul Cultural Museum: From Destruction to Rehabilitation* opens in the museum's nearby former home, the Royal Hall, and is on view until June 1. The exhibition considers the origins of this important Iraqi institution and presents the vision for its future through never-before-seen photographs, videos, and 3D models. It will bring the local community together around the museum, which has been closed for almost 20 years. For the first time since the liberation of the city, the inhabitants of Mosul will be able to see historic documentation of the museum and the efforts put in place to rehabilitate it.

Curated by Mosul Cultural Museum's director, Zaid Ghazi Saadallah, in partnership with the Musée du Louvre, France, and funded by ALIPH, it follows an extensive research project drawing on the collection, documentation, texts, images, and archives.

The exhibition traces the origins of this institution and what its collections—encompassing a number of major historical artifacts and remarkable masterpieces—illustrated about northern Iraq. Most of these works are sadly missing from the museum today following extensive looting. The largest pieces, largely dating to the Neo-Assyrian era, were reduced to countless fragments.

This exhibition looks back on the rich history of northern Mesopotamia, from its earliest villages to the rise of the city of Mosul. Enclosing the ruins of Nineveh, which was once the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Mosul expanded from the Middle Ages onwards, ultimately overtaking both banks of the Tigris and becoming the city it is today.

The show is being held in the rehabilitated former Royal Hall, which first housed the museum's collections upon its 1952 creation. Open to the public from May 12 to June 1, 2023, the exhibition will subsequently be adapted for display along the museum garden gates, taking the form of trilingual display panels (Arabic, English, and French). A trilingual digital version is available online, allowing content to be expanded upon and for those unable to travel to Iraq to experience it; lastly, a trilingual catalogue is also available. The exhibition is a tribute to all those who have helped this collection survive, and who continue to work towards helping the museum re-emerge from the ashes.

The Mosul Cultural Museum: From Destruction to Rehabilitation

The Royal Hall, Mosul, May 12 to June 1, 2023 (Sunday to Thursday, 8am to 2pm) and online.

The link to the online exhibition will be live to view from May 11:

<https://archeologie.culture.gouv.fr/mossoul-museum/fr>

Images are available to download [here](#).

Full press pack available to download [here](#).

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ENDS

Notes to editors

About Mohamed Makiya

Born in Baghdad and educated in the UK, Mohammed Makiya was a pivotal figure in establishing the architecture profession in Iraq. In 1946, he founded Makiya Associates in Baghdad, later expanding the firm to Bahrain, Oman, London, Kuwait, and Doha. In 1959, he became a founding member of Baghdad University's Department of Architecture, where he helped teach the country's first generation of trained architects.

About the [Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage](#)

The Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) manages the National Heritage Sites and National Museums of Iraq and has a reputation as one of the finest institutions for archaeology and cultural heritage in the Middle East. Its members have collaborated with international institutions and major national projects for many decades and are continuing this tradition of cooperation with both public and private institutions.

The history of SBAH begins in 1924, when the first Law of Antiquities was approved thanks to the efforts of the British scholar Gertrude Bell. After the British Mandate ended in 1932, it was Sati Al-Husri who promoted a new law code, approved in 1936 [Antiquities Law No. 59, with amendments No. 120 (1974) and No. 164 (1975)]. The current Law No. 55 dates to 2002.

About [World Monuments Fund](#) (WMF)

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's most treasured places to enrich people's lives and build mutual understanding across cultures and communities. The organization is headquartered in New York City with offices and affiliates in Cambodia, India, Peru, Portugal, Spain and the UK. Since 1965, our global team of experts has preserved the world's diverse cultural heritage using the highest international standards at more than 700 sites in 112 countries. Partnering with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF draws on heritage to address some of today's most pressing challenges: climate change, underrepresentation, imbalanced tourism, and post-crisis recovery. With a commitment to the people who bring places to life, WMF embraces the potential of the past to create a more resilient and inclusive society.

About the [Musée du Louvre](#)

Following the wide-scale attack on cultural heritage during the 2010s, the President of the French Republic requested the Chairman and Director of the Musée du Louvre, Jean-Luc Martinez, to author what became known as "Fifty Proposals to Protect the Heritage of Humanity." The report was published in November 2015 and included the recommendation to create an international fund to safeguard heritage in situations of armed conflict. This idea became a reality following the Abu Dhabi International Conference on Endangered Heritage in

December 2016 with the creation of the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH). Created at the initiative of France and the United Arab Emirates in March 2017, ALIPH provides concrete support for the protection and reconstruction of cultural heritage in conflict or post-conflict regions.

Strengthened by the historical ties between the collections of the Louvre and the Mosul museums, the Louvre's teams are contributing their expertise to the restoration of Mosul's collections, as well as to the training and guidance of its teams for the museum's complete reconstruction.

The core of the Louvre's Near Eastern Antiquities presented to the public as early as 1847 was born in large part from the ground-breaking discoveries of Assyrian remains by Paul-Emile Botta, then French Consul in Mosul. The Mosul Cultural Museum was created in 1952 to house works inherited from the Assyrian Empire, which dominated the Near East in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. The two museums share a common history as well as archaeological and documentary material, reinforcing the Louvre's firm commitment to preserving this exceptional heritage in full solidarity with its Iraqi colleagues.

About the [Smithsonian Institution](#)

Since its founding in 1846, the Smithsonian Institution has been committed to inspiring generations through knowledge and discovery. It is the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, consisting of 21 museums, the National Zoological Park, education centers, research facilities, cultural centers, and libraries. The total number of objects, works of art, and specimens at the Smithsonian is estimated at nearly 155 million.

Since 2015, the Smithsonian has helped train Iraqi cultural heritage professionals through the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage in Erbil. The institution expanded this capacity building work at the request of SBAH in 2017 to collaborate on cultural recovery work. The Smithsonian pioneered the 'First Aid for Heritage' approach in Iraq, training cohorts of Iraqi professionals in 2017-2018 to stabilize and recover the ancient archaeological site of Nimrud. This methodology was revisited by the Smithsonian with Mosul Cultural Museum staff in 2018 and throughout 2019 the Smithsonian supported the staff in recovering the museum and reestablishing key support elements such as laboratory and storage facilities. Smithsonian efforts in Iraq have been supported by funds from the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of State, Bank of America, the Mellon Foundation, the J. M. Kaplan Fund, and Getty Foundation, in addition to the ALIPH Foundation.

About [The International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas \(ALIPH\)](#)

The International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH) is the main global fund exclusively dedicated to the protection and rehabilitation of cultural heritage in conflict zones and post-conflict situations. It was created in 2017 in response to the massive destruction of cultural heritage over the past two decades, predominantly in the Middle East and the Sahel. ALIPH is a public-private partnership assembling several countries and private donors. Based in Geneva, this Foundation also benefits from the privileges and immunities of an international organization, thanks to the headquarters agreement signed with the Swiss Confederation. To date, ALIPH has supported more than 180 projects in 31 countries - including

about 40 in Iraq. ALIPH finances concrete projects carried on on-the-ground, hand in hand with local partners, authorities, and communities. The ultimate goal is that cultural heritage protection contributes to peace building, sustainable development, and the fight against climate change.