A Summer of Brave and Beautiful Art at the Aga Khan Museum

A trio of works by international contemporary artists invite visitors to respond, reflect, and participate

Toronto, May 30, 2018 — Soaring white doves in the atrium, silenced white books in the galleries, brightly coloured portraits in the park – the contemporary works installed at the Aga Khan Museum this summer offer beautiful art and brave ideas. Tackling subjects as diverse as fine art photography, restricted travel, and lost libraries, the three artists who created these works, **Aida Muluneh**, **Manal AlDowayan**, and **Wafaa Bilal**, challenge us to think about freedom in its many forms.

"Museums have an opportunity today – even, I would argue, a responsibility – to highlight the work of artists who respond to issues that are current today," says Henry S. Kim, Director and CEO of the Aga Khan Museum. "Given the nature of the world we live in, it is important that museums help create change, and change is what all three of these artists are seeking."

Reflections of Hope: *Aida Muluneh in the Aga Khan Park*
April 27 to September 3

The Aga Khan Park's reflecting pools are transformed into an exhibition venue for the first time with a free outdoor art installation, presented in partnership with the Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival, consisting of large-scale portraits by photographer Aida Muluneh. Born in Ethiopia, Muluneh spent time as a child in Yemen, England, and Cyprus, before discovering photography as a student at Western Canada High School in Calgary. Since then, she has travelled the world both as a photojournalist and as a fine art photographer, and often finds that the subject matter she explores for media outlets motivates her creative work, which seeks to redress one-sided media representations of Ethiopia with the complexities of the place she calls home.

The 10 portraits in *Reflections of Hope* employ costuming, sets, and make-up inspired by body decoration and craft forms from Ethiopia and other global traditional cultures to explore subjects such as slavery, war, colonialism, and human rights.

Suspended Together, Manal AlDowayan
May 29 to October 1

2018 sees the return to the Aga Khan Museum of a popular work from the Museum's 2015 exhibition *Home Ground: Contemporary Art from the Barjeel Art Foundation*, which featured the work of Arab artists examining how private life is shaped by current political events. A fuller version of Saudi-Arabia-born artist Manal AlDowayan's *Suspended Together, Standing Together* is installed this summer above the courtyard café in the Museum's atrium. AlDowayan's work addresses the Saudi Arabian law that requires female citizens to obtain written permission from a male guardian to travel independently. AlDowayan has created an installation of white doves with copies of women's travel documents imprinted on their wings. Images of these documents were donated by Saudi females of many different ages and social roles. The youngest was six months old, the oldest 60 and among the women are award-winning professionals and active pioneers in various fields in Saudi Arabia, such as science, engineering, journalism, education, and the arts. While the installation gives an impression of movement, the fibreglass doves are motionless, suspended together.

Suspended Together gains new significance this summer as a symbol of hope, because the Saudi government has announced that on June 24, 2018, the law prohibiting women in Saudi Arabia from obtaining driver's licenses will be changed, marking an advance in the struggle to end the male guardianship system.

168:01 A Library Rising from the Ashes, Wafaa Bilal
July 14 to August 19

Wafaa Bilal's contemporary artwork begins as shelves of blank white books. Over the run of the installation, visitors will transform it and change the lives of students and faculty at the University of Baghdad's College of Fine Arts by donating educational texts. In 2003, the College lost 70,000 books to looters who set fire to the collection during the invasion of Iraq, and 15 years later they are still rebuilding.

Iraq has a long history of cultural destruction. During the 13th century, an invading Mongol army set fire to all the libraries of Baghdad. Legend describes the invaders throwing books into the Tigris River, where they bled ink for seven days (168 hours), at the end of which the books were drained of knowledge. 168:01 refers to the first moment when grief is transformed into a call to action.

Visitors to the installation become participants by choosing to purchase and donate an educational text from a wish list compiled by the College, or by donating funds to the *168:01* project through the artist's website. As donated texts replace the white books, the library gains in both diversity of knowledge and chromatic vibrancy.

Because of the installation's ambitious goal, this is a long-term project with multiple exhibition stops. Unique to its run at the Aga Khan Museum will be large reproductions of two images: a 15th-century painting depicting Mongol soldiers on the banks of a book-filled Tigris River, and a 2003 photograph showing the ashes of books in the charred ruins of the Iraqi National Library, which was also looted and burned after the fall of Baghdad.

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The Museum's mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage while often reflecting, through both its permanent and temporary exhibitions, how cultures connect with one another. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto's Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

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FOR PRESS INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Tran Nguyen, Holmes PR
tnguyen@holmespr.com   press@agakhanmuseum.org
416.628.5607   416.858.8735