

# Madinah's history showcased in 'Letters and Illumination' expo



The history of Madinah has been illuminated in words and images at a major art exhibition that opened on Tuesday in the city.

Entitled "Letters and Illumination," the exhibition includes displays of calligraphy and photographs dating back to the 19th century.

It is being held in Al-Aqeeq District, about 7 km from the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. It falls outside the haram zone, which allows non-Muslims to visit.

Madinah Gov. Prince Faisal bin Salman opened the event and toured the various sections on Tuesday.

Ayman Hafez, director of the exhibition, told Arab News the exhibition is being held to celebrate Madinah's selection as the capital city of Islamic Culture for 2013.

The art includes the first photographs taken in Madinah by Egyptian Sadeq Bey from 1880 and Indian photographer Mirza from 1881 as part of a chronological photographic essay up to 1920.

These photographs are from the King Abdul Aziz Foundation, the King Fahd Public Library and the archives of noted international bodies including the Royal Geographic Society and the Barakat Trust.

There are also pictures of some Western Orientalists and famous Saudi photographers and young artists.

The exhibition includes the work of various Saudi artists, including Ahmed Mater, Abdel Nasser Algarm, Arwi Naimi, Adel Qureshi, and Faisal Al-Maliki, focusing on the Prophet's Mosque, pilgrims, antiques of the region, natural scenery, and aerial photographs of the city.

Hafez said there has been a significant number of visitors including students, artists and scientists. Prominent visitors included Princess Adela bint Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, Princess Fahda bint Saud, and Princess Haifa bint Faisal.

Several participants in the exhibition are from Jordan, Egypt, Japan, China, Syria, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Kuwait.

All the paintings are original, said Hafez, including a painting from 1825, which includes the names of 18 sites in the Turkish language, and depicts Madinah and the surrounding areas, such as the dome, the five minarets, the surrounding mountains, the agricultural fields and key buildings.

Some of the pictures, shown in a three-dimensional display, portray the history of the area. A statement outlining its meaning accompanies each picture.

The exhibition also pays homage to leading Arab and Saudi calligraphers including Shakir Hassan Al-Said, Ahmad Mustafa, Nassir Al-Salim and the Kuwaiti Farah Bahbahai.

The exhibition showcases a special collection of calligraphers obtained from the British museum including Farhad Mushiri from Iran, Abd Al-Qadir Rayyis from Dubai, Hassan Masoudi from Iraq, and Fuad Kouichi Honda from Japan. This effort was organized in cooperation with two leading galleries, Athr Gallery in Jeddah and Agial in Beirut.

Pictures taken by the Lebanese photographer Carla Salem stand out because she displays a mixture of Japanese and Arabic calligraphy. She produced a picture of the words qamar and shams, Arabic for moon and sun, on the trunk of a tree.

The event will include the publication of “Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah,” a book that presents images from well-known world photographers and edited by the photographer Humberto da Silveira.

The Islamic Education Science and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) selected Madinah as the Capital of Islamic Culture.

— The exhibition is open to the public until March 9 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.

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