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Dear Friends,

By the time you read this summer will be well upon us and Cultural Season 14 will have come to a close. I think we can all agree that the 2008-2009 season was outstanding, with several successful new additions (like the new exhibition space in the Al Americani Cultural Centre). While it’s premature to go into too much detail about Cultural Season 15, I can tell you that it promises to be even more exciting. The DAI will be expanding its programme to include more local activities. Details of this will be emailed to all our Friends shortly, but for now, I suggest you pencil DAI in on Wednesdays as well as Mondays.

Have a great holiday and a Ramadan surrounded by friends and family. See you in October.

Bader al-Raijan

Kuwait’s Ambassador to Russia Nasser al-Muzayen, Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Saltanov, Director of the Kremlin Museums Elena Gagarina, and co-sponsor Rosbank Deputy Executive Manager Igor Antonov were among the Moscow-based guests at the opening.

While speaking at a press conference in Moscow, Sheikha Hussah said that Russian history demonstrates a true affinity for culture. She referred to several famous Russian artists, orientalists and historians and included former lecturer, author and friend of the DAI, Prof. Grigori Bondarevsky in that group. She noted that TOW continued to build cultural bridges between Kuwait and Russia and added that the subject matter also disseminate knowledge about the arts and culture of India.

This sentiment was echoed by Elena Gagarina. She said that such exhibition helps enrich cultural life in Moscow, presenting an exquisite look at the famous al-Sabah collection of Indian jeweled objects. At that time she predicted that the exhibition would be very successful and the numbers show she was right.

Treasury of the World: Jeweled Arts of India in the Age of the Mughals moves to St. Petersburg, Russia next. It will open at the Hermitage Museum on 7 August 2009 and be on exhibition there until 8 November 2009. From there, it will move on to Asia.

TOW at the Kremlin Museums
Pictures at Another Exhibition

Modest Moussersky’s composition, Pictures at An Exhibition is a ten-movement piano suite inspired by an exhibition of more than 400 pieces by artist and architect Viktor Hartmann in 1874. Hartmann was a friend of Moussersky who was so moved by the experience that he was able to capture in music a tour of an art collection. Friends of the DAI gathered for the opening of TOW at Moscow’s Kremlin Museums. We don’t yet know what they’ve been inspired to do.
9. From left: Sue Kasouki, director of Kremlin Museums, Elena Gagarina, deputy director Zelfira Tregulova and Nicole Salinger from the Louvre

10. Sheikha Amal Al-Sabah and Maryam Masoudi

11. Elena Gagarina, Russian Minister for Communications and Media Igor Shigolov, and Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid, Kuwait Minister of Information.

12. Manuel Keene, Sheikha Ake, and Sheikh Paula

13. Getting a closer look ...

14. Sheikh Paula Al-Sabah, Dr Fardos Al-Habib and Sheikh Maryam Al-Nasser

15. Touring ...

16. Zelfira Tregulova, Sue Kasouki, and Hima Sherbaji
Celebrating National Day in Moscow

Ambassador Nasser Al-Muzayen and his wife Ms. Jihad Al-Tukhaim hosted a National Day celebration for all the friends of Kuwait, including the DAI team. Guests enjoyed brief speeches, thoughts of Kuwait, and the chance to relax a bit and talk about the trip.

The Kremlin and Beyond

As exciting as the Kremlin TOW exhibition was, Sheikha Hussah made sure her guests had the opportunity to explore some of the other cultural and historic aspects of Moscow, including exhibitions in other Kremlin museums. Outside the Kremlin, the group visited The State Tretyakov Gallery, which consists entirely of Russian art and artists who have made a contribution to the history of Russian art or been closely connected with it. They also explored the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, the largest museum of European art in Moscow. The lively arts were well represented by the Bolshoi Ballet’s performance of A Legend of Love. Of course, no trip to Moscow is complete without a visit to Red Square, with stops at St. Basil’s Cathedral and GUM, the famous department store (now a mall) on the edge of the square. The ubiquitous Matryoshka dolls or Russian nested dolls, often designed to follow a particular theme - from peasant girls in traditional dress to Soviet leaders - proved to be popular souvenirs.
DAI in the News

The activities related to the cultural season dominate the recent media coverage. That, of course, is a good thing since it means CS14 is not only a DAI success, but also incredibly newsworthy.
We started with a short tour in Casablanca’s lively market area in the Medina (old fortified city). We then took a walk along the Boulevard Victor Hugo that leads to the Royal Palace in the Alahbas district. From there, we set off to Mohammed V Square. The highlight of our time there was the water vendors, who were all dressed in bright red outfits, and wore fringed hats with brass ornaments hanging from them. A very delightful sight!

We were quite lucky to arrive at the Hassan II Mosque in time for the weekly Salat Aljumaa (Friday Prayer). The mosque is world’s third-largest and has one of the world’s tallest minarets.

Rabat, our second stop, is the home of the Royal Family and the administrative capital of the Kingdom of Morocco since its independence in 1956. It is a vibrant city with a lively mixture of ancient Islamic history and modern cosmopolitan culture, strikingly similar to many European cities.

Our first stop was the Royal Palace. With its Andalusian gardens, elaborately ornamented gates, and colourfully-dressed guards, this is a truly bewitching palace. Next was the very serene Mohammed V Mausoleum, the burial place of the current King’s grandfather, father and uncle. The Mausoleum is on the same grounds as the 44-meter Tour Hassan, a skyline-dominating minaret that is the only remaining structure of a vast mosque that was built circa 1200 and destroyed by an earthquake in 1755.

Next, we went to see the Kasbah Aloudaya (Aloudaya Fortress). Kasbah is home to Rabat’s oldest mosque; the Kasbah Mosque (built circa 1050). Walking through the Kasbah’s narrow, winding but remarkably clean alleyways was an enchanting experience. Sitting on the other spacious terrace of a local café with a spectacular view of the Atlantic Ocean, we sang and drank the famous Moroccan green tea and (liberally) enjoyed the house’s specialty: divine traditional almond sweet cookies. We concluded our visit with a relaxed walk through the lush Aloudaya gardens.

Later, we took a stroll in Rabat’s old Medina; a compact town surrounded by the sea, the Bou Regreg river and Andalusian walls. The souq reflects authentic Moroccan identity with its extraordinarily colourful and exotic merchandise: incense, handicrafts, poultry, snails, produce, turtles, old French comics ... you name it!

Meknes, situated in the Middle-Atlas mountain range, was our next stop. Meknes was built by the legendary Sultan Moulay Ismail of the Idrissid dynasty in the 11th century, as capital of his empire. The most striking attractions of Meknes are its majestic gates, which bear witness to the Meknes grandeur as an ancient imperial city of the Kingdom of Morocco. An example of this architectural splendour is the massive gate of Bab Al-Mansour, also called Bab Al-Eulj (the Gate of the Renegade). It is widely held that it was built by a Christian prisoner who then converted to Islam.

We then visited the Ismaïlian capital, Moulay Ismaïl (27 km from Meknes). Admiring the lavish wall decoration inside, we had the pleasant surprise of spotting the symbols of the three Abrahamic faiths worked into the mosaic artwork of some of the panels; the Muslim octagon, the Christian cross and the Jewish Seal of Solomon (i.e. Star of David). This is considered a post mortem message sent by Moulay Ismaïl, from his grave, of the importance of embracing religious tolerance.

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Bareed ad-Dar 7

Declared a protected monument on UNESCO’s World Heritage map, the Volubilis Excavations and ruins date back to the 3rd century BC and are Morocco’s most well preserved ruins. Most of us found the most spectacular monument to be the arch de triumph which was erected in the honour of the Roman Emperor Caracalla.

Fez is the oldest and most revered of the country’s imperial cities (founded in 789). A distinguishing feature of this city is its colourful demographics, as it was a refuge for both Muslim Moors and Jews that were driven out of Cordova by the Spanish. A considerable part of Fez is declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The highlight of our tour was the visit to the leather tanneries nearby the AlKaraouine mosque. Armed with springs of mint held by our noses to suppress the overpowering smell, we were led through a leather shop and very bravely climbed the narrow, endless stairs towards the terrace. The sight was breathtaking; the terrace overlooks the world’s oldest leather tanneries. Unchanged since the 11th century, this is a collection of honeycomb-like multi-coloured stone vessels filled with natural dyes, where workers were busy tanning and dying reams of cow and sheep hides, applying the same manual methods that were used centuries before.

Our next destination was Marrakech. The bus journey from Fez took us through many Berber mountain villages, including the town of Ifrane (1650 meters in altitude). Nicknamed Little Switzerland, this charming hill station truly resembles Alpine-style resorts. With ski stations nearby, it was very hard to believe that we were still in Africa!

We started our exploration of Marrakech by touring the 12th century AlKoutobia Mosque and the Saadian Tombs; before heading to the extravagant Bahia Palace which was built in the late 19th century as a residence to Ba Ahmed, one of the city’s grand officials.

One of the most interesting places we visited was the city’s main square; the famous Sahat Jamea Alfana (Alfana Mosque Square). Featuring a fascinating melange of snake charmers, storytellers, musicians, fortune-tellers, dancers, preachers, water vendors, food caterers, street performers, carpet weavers, monkey tamers, poets, jugglers, the place is a patchwork of performing arts and on-going exotic spectacles. UNESCO declared this square a heritage site whose cultural space is a “masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity”.

All in all, our trip was a fascinating experience that truly inspired the mystique ambiance of the Middle East. It is one of these rare places where being lost was a blessing indeed!
Cultural Season 14

The end of CS14 was every bit as exciting as the start. The skill and knowledge of the speakers, the diversity of the subject matter, and, to be honest, the impressive quality of post-lecture questions ensured that Monday night’s at the Al-Maidan Cultural Centre remained a “hot ticket.”

Former diplomat and noted author Dr. Manfred Osten spoke on The great German poet Goethe: Why did he consider himself to be a Muslim? According to Dr. Osten, Goethe was constantly concerned by what he saw as Europe’s evolution into a “velociferous” world driven by progress and future-oriented demons. The word “velociferous” in this context is Goethe’s very own coinage for the modern self-destructive linkage between “velocitas” (the Latin word for velocity and haste) and “Lucifer”, the devil. In contrast, Goethe believed that Islam was the manifestation of an “anti-velociferous” concept due to its religion of “unconditional confidence and devotion to God’s will”.

Dr. Osten expanded on the social, political and academic atmosphere in which Goethe was working, particularly during the periods leading up to and during the writing of The West-Eastern Divan.

Once again Dr. Lisa Urievich, a leading specialist in the music and artistic culture of the Arabian Peninsula, had the audience on their feet as she and a group of musicians and dancers presented “Battle” Song-Dance Forms of Arabia: Women’s Badawi and Men’s Artha. These song-dance forms were regularly performed to display military prowess, raise morale and prepare all for combat, both physically and mentally. Today, these musical performances have been adapted to non-fighting and less competitive venues and through their development have incorporated aspects of regional culture.

Artha, the famous male sword dance and Badawi/Fares a female family dance of unity are two of the most famous “battle” song-dance forms that have survived and are still highly significant today.

Dr. Marina Tolmachëva, President of the American University of Kuwait (AUK), spoke on Africa and Africans in Early Arabic Books. Dr. Tolmachëva laid the groundwork for her subject, discussing the history of trade and commerce between tropical Africa and the Arab world prior to the 15th century. As traders returned home with exotica like ivory, animal pelts, gold, and slaves, Arabs became fascinated with both the African race and the mystery and wonders of the continent. So much so, in fact, that the origin of the African race fascinated the Arabs and images of Black Africans became important in Arab literature and folklore.

Maestro Valentina Maria Baginska, a teacher at Kuwait’s Higher Institute of Musical Art, performed an organ recital labelled ‘Concert for Peace: Pearls of the World’. Her selections included classical composers, including Sawa and Kalejs; and Adul Aziz’z al-Mufarrej’s “Bilady”, arranged for piano by Sulaiman al-Dikan and then arranged for organ by Maestro Baginska.

Dr. Werner Daum, another former diplomat, is a gifted author and has published a number of books and articles. He combined his academic studies and experience as Ambassador in this region to present War & Trade during the Crusades and the Role of the Indian Ocean: Hinterland or Heartland of the Islamic World. Knowing that for most
explained the full extent of the Aegean site and presented some of the magnificent treasures discovered at the site, including wall paintings, golden-ivory couches, splendid armours, gold and silver jewellery and vases-santasaries with royal offerings. She then shifted the attention many, many kilometres east to Ikaros-Failaka Island, where repeating motifs and construction styles have been found – further linking Aegean and Alexander with Kuwait and the Middle East.

In an interesting multi-media presentation, former Ambassador Stuart Laing and senior educationalist Paul Andrews gave an extensive lesson on The Fugue in Western Music. The lecture-recital included the description, narrative, and performances of several fugues. The pair explained the history of the “fugue”, breaking them down to technical construction. Then Laing and/or Andrews (sometimes 2 hands, sometimes 4) played the piece or phrases being discussed.

Dr. Julia Bailey

Dr. Ali Ibrahim Al-Namlah’s presentation, former professor of Paleography and Codicology at Leiden, was the topic of Dr. Ali Ibrahim Al-Namlah’s lecture. The professor of Information and Library Science at the Islamic University of Madinah, presented an article she is preparing for publication on the Islamic World, and Supplements to the Islamic World, and Supplements to the Islamic World, and Supplements to the Islamic World.

The impact of translation, as a great tool of intercultural dialogue, on both Islamic and human scientific and cultural developments was the topic of Dr. Ali Ibrahim Al-Namlah’s lecture. The professor of Information and Library Science at the Islamic University of Madinah, presented an article she is preparing for publication on the Islamic World, and Supplements to the Islamic World, and Supplements to the Islamic World.

Dr. Ali Ibrahim Al-Namlah

Dr. Juan Antonio Souto

13th centuries, making special note of the contribution of the Syriacs. Because of their translation centres, Dr. al-Namlah credits them with introducing much of the world to the achievements of Greek, Persian, and Indian cultures, emphasizing that translation was an important phenomenon in Islamic history.

Prof. Dr. Cesar Franck’s four movement Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major. Prof. Rybak provided both underlying support when the violin was featured and exquisite tone and temperament it was the piano’s turn to take centre stage.

Art historian and chief coordinator at the Genoa Department of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, Ms. Mariza Cataldi Gallo discussed. Pearls and the West: jewels and paintings. Focusing primarily on how pearls were used for personal ornamentation by royalty and the wealthy, the lecture presented many formal portraits to demonstrate the wide variety of uses during the hey day of pearls. A history of pearls, from their discovery to their importance as status symbols was also discussed.

Dr. Julia Bailey, managing editor of Mupamas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World, and Supplements to Mupamas, presented a lecture based on an article she is preparing for publication in Carpets and Textiles of the Iranian World ca. 1400-1700 next year. Titled Kufesque and carpets, the lecture put to rest the many questions raised earlier in the season as a result of the title. She described, in great detail, the “tall-short-tall syndrome” reminiscent of letters written in the Kufic font, that flourished from the eleventh century into the fourteenth in portable media made for secular use, and from the fourteenth century onwards on carpets with kufesque borders. She traced the development of the style in the Iranian world and then its spread throughout North Africa and the Levant.

The Collection of Historical Arms and Armour in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, brought the days of armour back to life in her lecture Arms Fit for a Prince. The collection, presented some of the magnificent treasures discovered at the site, including wall paintings, golden-ivory couches, splendid armours, gold and silver jewellery and vases-santasaries with royal offerings.
For three days, 22 international students, members of the Babel Initiative at the French university Sciences Po explored Kuwait to gain first hand knowledge of contemporary life here. In addition to meeting with various political and civic leaders, the group met with Sheikha Hussah to discuss cultural opportunities in Kuwait and the evolution of The al-Sabah Collection.

A delegation from The Netherlands, led by His Excellency Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende and Dutch Ambassador to Kuwait Ton Boon von Ochses, visited the collection office recently. There, Sheikha Hussah and her daughter Sheikha Bibi showed the guests pieces from the collection and explained a bit about the history and cultural significance of each.

Dr. Layla al-Musawi, a former DAI staff member, had a rare experience recently when she returned to the collection office with a senior delegation from the UN office in Geneva. The delegation included guests from Burkina Faso, China, Croatia, France, Japan, Kuwait, Russia, Turkey, Uganda, the UK, the US, and Vietnam. During their visit, Dr. al-Musawi proudly showed her colleagues just what she was involved in before working with the UN Compensation Commission.

Finally, KFAS Board Secretary Suleiman al-Awadi came to visit shortly after the TDW opening in Russia. On behalf of the group, he presented Sheikha with a Treasury of the World Kremlin poster signed by all the friends who accompanied her to Moscow.
### Exhibitions at the Historic al-Americani Cultural Centre

Leap in Time, presented photographs by two noted German press photographers, Erich Salomon and Barbara Klemm. Organised under the patronage of the German Ambassador, Dr. Michael Worbs, the photographs included in the exhibition presented a glimpse of life in German – public and private.

Monique Guingard created the second exhibition, The Quest for Water before the Oil Discovery & the Ma’ sabil, a Generous and Symbolic Creation. Opened by the French Ambassador Jean René Gehan, also the event’s patron, the multi-media presentation in Arabic, English and French included narrative panels, photographs, and film.

Students in Dr. Yvonne Wakefield’s art club at Kuwait University participated in a group installation that saw a room full of chairs and no where to sit. Called “The Chair Project”, the students were asked to create a chair that expressed how they would see themselves if they were chairs.

The final exhibition, Mezzari and Mandilli: The Cotton Route from East to West, was organised under the patronage of the Italian Embassy in Kuwait and opened by Ambassador Enrico Granara. Organised by Marzia Cataldi Gallo, a CS14 lecturer, the exhibition presented a stunning collection of 18th and 19th century cotton mezzari and mandilli.
Islamic Carpets: Reflections of an Ideal World

Zarabi is the word for carpets in the Holy Qur'an. It was chosen as the title of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah exhibition of 15th to 19th century carpets at the Islamic Arts Museum in Malaysia in 1999 “...because of the importance of the Holy Words of God in the life of Muslims. Islamic art is, after all, the product of Islamic culture, and the proof of its culture is the Holy Qur’an,” as stated by Sheikha Hussah in her foreword to the accompanying catalogue.

As Walter B. Denny so eloquently said in the introduction to this same catalogue: Islamic Carpets: Reflections of an Ideal World; “Throughout Islamic history, the rich and colourful spectrum of the arts illuminates many aspects of Islamic culture – its diversity of peoples and places, its long and complex traditions of royal and middle-class patronage, its central religious beliefs and shared ethical values, and the deep embeddedness of art in the social and economic order. In addition to the function of Islamic art as the mirror of a real world... it is in the nature of art not only to reflect the milieu in which it was created, but to reflect the views commonly held in the milieu of a more perfect and more ideal world, that serves that culture as a milieu in which it was created, but to reflect the views commonly held in the world...”

Carpet weaving...is found on all levels of society and all levels of artistic production, and carpets themselves are not only created but consumed, on all societal levels. For over seven centuries, Islamic commercial carpets have formed a vital part of the material culture of Europe, inner Asia, and even Japan, and have become recognized as among the most significant ‘artistic ambassadors’ of Islamic aesthetic ideals in non-Islamic cultures. They were given as royal gifts to courtiers and, as an adjunct to diplomacy, to rulers and ambassadors from other lands.

These well crafted wood trays, boxes and coasters use images of carpets in The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, which are enhanced with paint technique and gold leaf and preserved under glass. They too make elegant gifts!

Champlevé is an enamelling technique in which troughs or cells are carved into the surface of a metal object, and filled with vitreous enamel (powdered glass). The piece is then fired until the enamel melts, and when cooled the surface of the object is polished. The uncarved portions of the original surface remain visible as a frame for the enamel designs. Champlevé is distinguished from the similar technique of cloisonné in which the troughs are created by soldering flat metal strips to the surface of the object.

TOW Pendant

This piece is one of the gorgeous pendants included in the Treasury of the World exhibition. The picture on the cover shows it on display at the Moscow Kremlin Museums; the photos below show the front and the enameled back.

According to the Treasury of the World catalogue, the pendant is “fabricated from gold; champlevé-enamelled, set in the Kundan technique with rubies, emeralds and diamonds; with pendant emerald.

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Children’s Art Workshops at the al Americani Cultural Centre

The final session of the Cultural Season 14 (CS14) Children’s Art Workshop saw the children write a play based on Kalila wa Dimma, make all the necessary costumes and sets, act and direct the performance and, finally, perform it for friends and family. The children did an amazing job and the play opened to rave reviews!

The programme, sponsored by McDonald’s, will resume in October 2009. Designed for children between the ages of 8 and 12, the objectives for the workshops remain:

- to expand the children’s awareness of art and Islamic culture, using art from The al-Sabah Collection as a teaching tool
- to make sure the children had fun while creating “masterpieces” every parent will cherish

Some changes have been made in the programme for CS15. At the suggestion of both the participants and their parents, there will be two sessions per month and each session will be two hours. This will allow the children to absorb more information and have more time to work on their projects. Subjects covered this season will include a few new topics (music, textiles, poetry, metal, glass, and modern art), as well as favourites from last year (Islamic motifs, calligraphy, ceramics, and manuscripts).

A programme specially designed for 6 and 7 year olds is also being added. The monthly, one hour sessions will introduce the participants to Islamic motifs, calligraphy, textiles, coins, manuscripts, and music.

Information on both programmes will be emailed to all Friends of the DAI in September. Alternatively you can email americanikids@darmuseum.org.kw and we’ll send you the details as soon as they’re finalised.

Pecha Kucha Night

Most of us think of 20/20 as a reference to vision. Cricket fans will be familiar with the 20/20 concept as the new, short version of the game. However, it takes on a whole different meaning in the context of “Pecha Kucha Night”. The forum was developed by architects Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham in 2003 to create opportunities for creative individuals to present their work in dynamic fashion. Under the rules, Pecha Kucha, Japanese for the sound of conversation, limits speakers to 20 images and allows them only 20 seconds to talk about each.

On 11 March 2009 Kuwait City joined a growing list of cities around the world hosting Pecha Kucha Nights. Held at our theatre in Maidan and organised by Dr. Asseel al-Ragam, Kynn, DAI, and the Kuwait Architectural Student Association (KASA), a full house enjoyed a series of 6 minutes and 40 second presentations with intriguing titles including “The People Are Missing”, “Kindred Spirits Series: Process of the Craft”, and “Where Are All The Architects?”

Pecha Kucha Night Kuwait will happen 4 times a year. For more information on these events, email: pechakuchakuw@gmail.com or visit www.pecha-kucha.org/cities/kuwait-city.