



Carpet Exhibitions, Research and Conservation in the Museum for Islamic Art, Berlin



**Museum für
Islamische Kunst**
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Carpet Exhibitions, Research and Conservation in the Museum for Islamic Art, Berlin

The museum aims to present its permanent collection in a manner reflecting current attitudes related to the museum's interests including art history, sociology, cultural studies, and museology. No model exists for this kind of approach, and while recent reinstallations of Islamic art in other museums have made significant efforts in addressing current contextual concerns, all continue to uphold the classic, scientific approach to Islamic Art.

Through its display, graphics, media and interpretative content, this museum intends to engage the visitor and to make the visual and material cultures of Islamic societies accessible to all visitors.

The Carpet Galleries were set up in 2001 as part of the reunification of the former West Berlin and East-Berlin Collection. The elegant way of displaying the carpets – chosen by the architects – made it impossible to change the carpets on display. In the long-term this is harmful for the carpets and limits the design of new exhibitions for the visitors.

So in 2018 we took the opportunity to improve the preventive conservation, by modifying the hanging system. Since 2001 this gave us for the very first time the chance for a completely new redisplay and interpretation in the exhibition galleries.

Preventive Conservation

The understanding of carpets as works of art is essential for the way they are displayed in the Museum für Islamische Kunst. They are hanging on the wall to be admired like paintings but also to have a better view to see each detail. In terms of conservation the vertical hanging system offers several advantages: the well thought after mounting system distributes the weight of the carpet evenly and prevents it as good as possible from distortion. But most of all the carpet is prevented from huge dust accumulation caused by the several hundreds of thousands of visitors per year. With the installation from 2001 one major disadvantage was set up: The inflexibility to change or rotate the carpets. This is essential as natural fibers are sensitive to light. Damages caused by light are accumulative and irreversible. Therefore a change was overdue.

The decision was to remove the framing wooden passepartouts and show the mounted carpets directly on the wall, giving all the freedom to change the carpets easily whenever needed.

By enlarging the distance of the objects to the wall an interesting interplay of light and shadow enhanced a subtle dynamic.

New Interpretation

This huge architectural intervention called for a new concept of interpretation. The concept of 2001 was based on the idea of the “White cube”. The objects stood for themselves with no interpretation or explanation. For the general audience this was not helpful at all.

As the carpet collection is one major part of the Museum für Islamische Kunst and was most relevant for its founding process in 1904 this topic as well as the conservation of this group of works of art seemed most ideal to be contextualized [Gallery 1]. Also the group of Turkish carpets as the biggest group in the collection had to be contextualized in an appealing way [Gallery 2]. All of the topics chosen are most relevant for 2026.

This is an image of the Museum For Islamic Art Carpet room, prior to the most recent re-display. The Carpet Rooms are amongst the most popular rooms in the museum and, although much loved and informative it was time for up-to-date interpretation methods and story-telling. You can see from this image that there are limited opportunities to communicate and deeply engaged the visitors.



2001

Stories of the new Berlin Carpet Collection

The carpet rooms was radically re-hung and re-interpreted

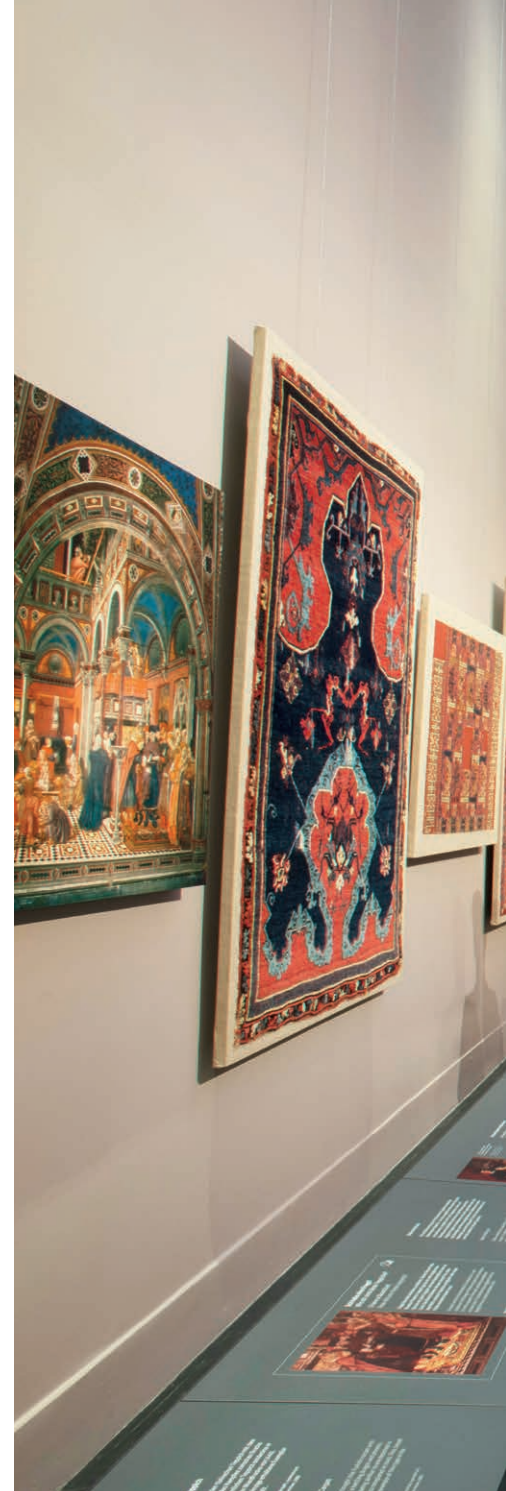
In 2017 and 2018 a new approach was planned for two of the three carpet galleries. Gallery 1 presents a special exhibition within the permanent exhibition. An exhibition was conceived and designed to show the history of the carpet collection, from its foundation in the early 19th century, through the damage caused by the Second World War and to demonstrate the work of 21st century conservation department.

Firstly the exhibition describes the importance of carpets in terms of the founding of the museum and the historic role of the founder and director Wilhelm von Bode. Bode implemented carpet scholarship in Berlin and made the museum the most important center for carpet research.

The conservation and restoration of the carpets is strongly connected with the history and this philosophy is also displayed in room 1 with supporting audio visual presentations. The carpet making-method is presented using a hands-on interactive to explain a variety of knotting techniques.

The story of how the carpets were protected during World War II and how, in some cases, they were damaged is supported with a smelling station to demonstrate the carpets that were burned during the war.

A new way of hanging the carpets is being tested to fulfill modern ways of perception.





← Here we used text and images to explain the history of the Carpet Collection in an informative way.

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Room 1



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The iconic dragon carpet

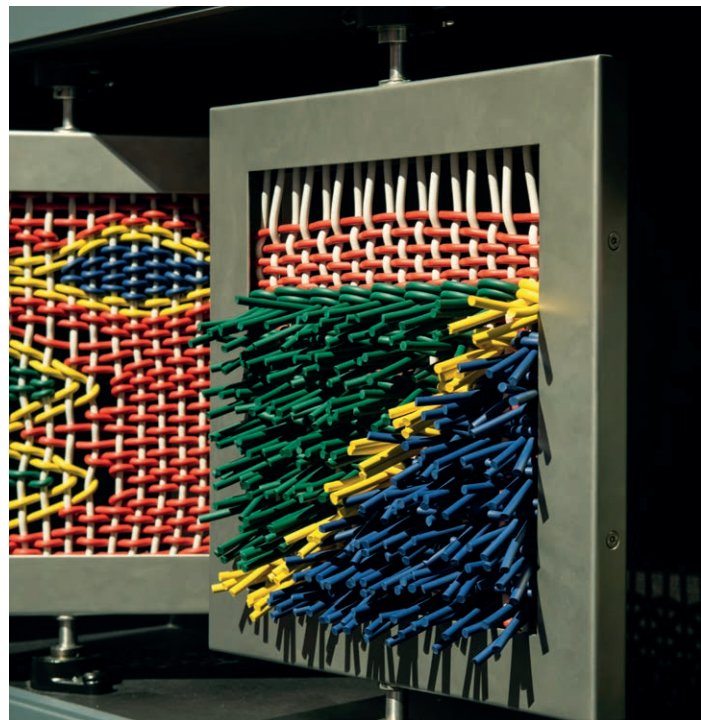
Most spectacularly we introduced on permanent display for the first time the iconic Dragon Carpet takes pride of place [KGM 1881,1018]. This carpet was rolled up and stored in the vault of the Berlin rice coin when it was hit by a fire bomb in 1945. The fire ate its way from the outside inwards into the rolled carpet. The losses are therefore greater on the outside - in the lower part of the carpet - than on the inside. The conservation measures deliberately emphasize the destruction of the burnt dragon carpet.

The Dragon Carpet, permanently on display.

The Dragon Carpet,
permanently on display

Innovative hands-on and Multi-sensory experiences

We have helped visitors to explore the collections by introducing innovative hands-on and Multi-sensory experiences.



Understanding knots-Hands-On



© Milena Schlösser, detail of photo also used on the cover



Audio-Visual Presentation on
Conservation Techniques in
the laboratory (in the Style
of the TV Series 'Crime Scene
Investigators')



© Milena Schlösser



sound weaving



Sound weaving by Szanett Zsirmai

How to engage the visitor, how to open minds:
Sound weaving in the carpet Galleries by Szanett Zsirmai

As an enhancement to the permanent exhibition a temporary sound installation by the artist Szanett Zsirmai accompanied the exhibition from October 2018 until February 2019.

The artist chose the motifs of carpets and transformed them via punch cards into music. A fusion of different sounds was installed in different rooms and was played by the audience. This created a multi layered interactive experience.

The carpet design was not only visualized but accessible by audio. Through this we intended to stimulate all the senses.







Fast Facts: The Story of the Berlin Carpet Collection

- 3960 words of text
- 1 introductory text-panel
- 8 contextual texts
- 10 explanatory infographics on topics such as carpet techniques and connoisseurship.
- 11 object labels
- 6 hands-on-interactives including a Second World War sniffing station, magnifying glasses and carpet knotting examples.
- 2 audio-visual presentations: investigating a carpet and techniques of modern conservation.

Room 2

Istanbul and Ottoman Art in the 16th Century

Commenced June 2018–

Expected Completion November 2019

Room 2 is dedicated to the carpets from the early to the late Ottoman Empire. Istanbul and Ottoman Art in the 16th century focuses on the Ottoman carpets and ceramic tiles. This exhibit shows the development of an Ottoman imperial style in the 16th century in tile design and production of [Iznik], carpets and architecture. The power and influence of the Sultan, Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, promoted a cultural flourishing across the Empire and Mediterranean. This imperial style signaled the Ottoman presence and sovereignty throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Arab World. Istanbul and Turkish history and heritage is a key topic for many Berliners. The influence of Istanbul on the world stage then and now will become apparent to our visitors.

The ancestors of the Ottomans had migrated west as nomads from Central Asia. Some of the traditions lived on in the Ottoman Empire: the preference for carpets, textiles and tents, sitting and eating on the ground and the wide, comfortable clothes essential for this. A closer look at the Ottoman tiles from the city of Iznik reveals that their ornaments resemble patterns on carpets and textiles. The tiles in the wall decoration continue the design of the carpet lying on the floor. In this way, the entire room could be uniformly decorated.

In this specific case showing the carpet lying in a showcase is due to its fragile condition.

The focus in this gallery lies on a new way of labeling, describing and using graphics as tool to communicate. An audio-visual presentation on the shared admiration of carpets in Europe and the Near and Middle East enriches the display. The design of the room is directly related to other newly designed rooms in the permanent exhibition to achieve a comfortable way of guiding the visitor through the whole circuit.



New style of graphic display

Fast Facts: Istanbul and Ottoman Art

- 3980 words of text
- 1 introductory text-panel
- 6 contextual texts
- 9 explanatory infographics on topics such as the Cintamani motif and the Holbein Carpets.
- 24 object labels
- 1 audio-visual presentations



During Installation of
new Interpretation

Some comments from our visitors...

Older lady:

„It's a wonderful atmosphere with the muted light, it wouldn't come across like that with the bright light. The hands-on things are nice to look at. As a young girl I also knotted, of course, but only the asymmetrical knot. I visited the Museum of the Ancient Near East Berlin and the Collection of Classical Antiquities in the 1980s, but wanted to see the museum again... so long as I could walk!“

Geologist:

„'Education' is not only about teaching children. I think it's nice to gain insight into the various knot patterns and the way in which carpets are made. In addition, for me the appreciation for the objects increases when one has a deeper understanding of the production technique. The exhibited objects in the showcase with the magnifying glass and the hands-on models definitely increase my understanding. Great clarity!“

French couple:

„It's nice to be able to touch something in the museum. It helps to understand the different difference production techniques and to be able to see and touch these different types.“

Gentleman from Saxony:

„I can only take my hat off to such craftsmanship – also to the stonemason activities in the Mschatta area. The hands-on demonstrate what was made so filigree in the showcase [with the carpet pieces] and is just right for our coarse hands to understand. Now we have all these machines and still can't do it as delicately as the people back then. It is nice to see that the exhibited objects were not stolen. It is very important to me how the things got into the museum and I like that here in the museum.“



As curator und conservator I would like to thank those individuals and institutions whose invaluable support made possible the permanent exhibition Traum und Trauma and the intervention Soundweaving 7.0.: The Pergamon Edition.

We would like to show our appreciation to Alwaleed Philanthropies who have generously facilitated the development of the museum, a special thank you to Monsieur Hermes for his support of the carpet exhibitions, and gratitude for the continued assistance from the Freundeskreis des Museums für Islamische Kunst im Pergamonmuseum e.V. The English edition of Knots, Art & History [SKIRA 2018], which accompanies the exhibitions was made possible by The Bruschettini Foundation, the Freundeskreis des Museums für Islamische Kunst im Pergamonmuseum e.V. as well as by Dr. Ina Heine, Dr. Peter Heine and Marshall and Marilyn Wolf.

Without the passion and engagement of the mentioned above this would not have been possible.

Anna Beselin, Berlin 2020

