

Matisse and Islamic Art: Abstract

France's Henri Matisse ranks with Spain's Pablo Picasso as one of the giant pair whose vision transformed twentieth-century Western art, hence world art. As the century dawned, Picasso's geometric cubism jolted the eye by cerebrally representing a given object, or face, seen from several sides at once, while Matisse's vivid combinations of primary colours startled conventional critics into branding him a "fauve", painting's "wild beast". Both masters seemed impertinently to break with five centuries of European illusionism that had emphasized endless pictorial depth, as if to convince viewers that paintings were imaginary windows, opening through the canvas. Instead, Picasso and Matisse boldly pulled back their art to an avowed magical play upon their canvases' very surface. But while the impact of West African sculpture upon Picasso's creativity has been abundantly attested, much less known is the equally powerful effect, upon Matisse's joy in juxtapositions of brightest colours, of the great traditional arts of Islam - which the French master discovered, with astonished and the most explicitly avowed delight, at exhibitions in Paris in 1903, Munich in 1910, and Paris again in 1912, and through three journeys to southern Spain and Morocco between 1911 and 1913. This talk, accompanied by a rich slide-show, explores in depth this extraordinary aesthetic metamorphosis from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Persian and Turkish "miniatures" and fourteenth-century Andalusian tiles to the innovative masterpieces of one of modern world art's most beloved painters.

Michael Barry Biography

Born in New York City, raised in France and partly in Afghanistan, Michael Barry received his B.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University, his post-graduate diploma in Anthropology from Cambridge University, his M.A. from McGill University, and his Ph.D. from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

Barry has been a Lecturer in Islamic Culture at Princeton University since 2004, and will serve as University Professor at the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul starting in fall 2017. Over the past 35 years, his work in Afghanistan, sometimes in the most dangerous battlefield conditions, has ranged from anthropological research to defense of human rights and coordinating humanitarian assistance in the field for the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights, Médecins du Monde, and the United Nations.

Also a recognized expert on Islamic art, Barry conceived, in collaboration with Dr. Navina Haidar, the reorganization of the New York Metropolitan Museum's galleries of Islamic art prior to their reopening in fall 2011, and has served as consultant to the Aga Khan Trust for Culture on a variety of museum issues and lectures.

Michael Barry has published extensively in both his writing languages, English and French; his academic works have been translated into Persian and half a dozen European languages; and he holds seven literary prizes from France and Iran. In addition to many scholarly articles or chapter contributions to international art exhibition catalogues or to collective academic studies of the great medieval Persian poets, Michael Barry worked for several years with the French publisher Diane de Selliers: in 2012, de Selliers published Barry's study on the illuminations of the "Canticle of the Birds" by the classical Persian poet Attar, based on the the great fifteenth-century manuscript housed at the Metropolitan Museum and other medieval codices, with the original Persian text edited by S. Kadkani and French and English versions by Dr. Leili Anvar and Dr. Richard Davis. This monumental edition includes 400 reproduced manuscript illuminations. In October 2017, as the 25th anniversary book of the publishing house, de Selliers will publish Michael Barry's project, "Shakespeare in Venice", which presents Shakespeare's plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* illustrated with Venetian paintings from the Renaissance.