



For Immediate Release

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Illuminated Verses: Poetries of the Islamic World

A Series of Events Organized by Poets House and City Lore and Presented in Conjunction with the Asia Society and the Borough of Manhattan Community College

New York, NY, March 21, 2011 — Join **Poets House**, **City Lore**, **the Asia Society** and the Borough of Manhattan Community College for *Illuminated Verses*, a series of programs that explores some of the rich and varied poetic traditions of the Islamic world. Organized by Poets House and City Lore, this series continues a partnership from the two organizations' years of co-presenting the groundbreaking People's Poetry Gathering, which explores humanity's shared poetic legacy and the celebration of poetic traditions from around the globe.

Illuminated Verses considers the form and style of centuries-old verse traditions in the Islamic World, from Sufi and Golden Age Arabic poetry to modernist and contemporary poets across the Muslim world. Programs will include panels and performances on improvised poetic forms, celebrations of ancient and venerated work including Rumi and Hafez, poetry used in conflict resolution and contemporary literary poetry in settings ranging from Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, North and West Africa. The series concludes on May 7 with a day-long forum and an evening performance.

Presented in conjunction with the Asia Society & Borough of Manhattan Community College, *Illuminated Verses* is made possible through a special Bridging Cultures grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The program schedule is as follows:

From Tablet to Pen: the Literary History of Islam: A Seminar with Reza Aslan

Thursday, May 5, 7:00-9:00pm

Internationally-acclaimed writer and scholar of religions Dr. Reza Aslan gives an overview of the literary history of Islam and the different languages and poetic traditions in the Islamic world.

Location: Poets House, 10 River Terrace

Admission: \$10, \$7 for students and seniors, free to City Lore Members and Poets House Members

Bridging Cultures: Day-Long Panel Discussions and an Evening Celebration Saturday, May 7

9:00am-6:15pm

Admission Free

BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center - 199 Chambers Street

A series of panels and readings on themes including the Arabic Golden Age; the Sufi tradition and lyric poetry in the Middle East and Persia; the Urdu tradition from Mughal courts to modern Pakistan; 20th century literary revivals in North Africa; poetry and nation building; the relation between early forms of the blues and the Islamic call to prayer.

Participating Scholars and Poets

Najwa Adra, Ammiel Alcalay, Kazim Ali, Reza Aslan, Kaveh Bassiri, Clarissa Burt, Steve Caton, Sylviane Diouf, Syed Akbar Hyder, Pierre Joris, Persis Karim, Khaled Mattawa, Jawid Mojaddedi, Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, Stefania Pandolfo, Frances W. Pritchett, Michael Sells, Mahwash Shoab, and Suzanne Stetkevych.

Detailed Schedule

9:00-9:15am

Welcome by Poets House Executive Director **Lee Briccetti** and City Lore Executive Director **Steve Zeitlin**

9:20-9:55am

Illuminated Verses: the Poetries of the Islamic World

An opening panel setting up large questions and contexts with **Reza Aslan** and **Michael Sells**

10:00-11:00am

Origins and Orality

An examination of the poetries of the Arabian Peninsula from the Golden Age to contemporary oral tribal poetry. With anthropologists **Najwa Adra** and **Steve Caton** and literary scholar **Suzanne Stetkevych**.

11:30 am-12:30pm

Versifying Expressions

A discussion with readings of the lyric traditions of Persian and Iran such as Sufi poets **Rumi** and **Hafez** as well as modern Iranian poets **Ahmad Shamlu** and **Forugh Farrokhzad**. With scholars **Jawid Mojaddedi** and **Persis Karim** and poet/translator **Kaveh Bassiri**.

Lunch Break

1:15-1:25 pm

Yemeni Music and Procession In Yemeni culture, the zaffah, or wedding march, is a musical procession of bendir drums, pipes, horns, and the ceremony's male guests. The march traditionally begins at the house of the groom and winds its way through the village to the mosque. During the procession, men chant in a chorus in a poetic form known as a zamil. Mohamed Hayel will lead a troupe to reenact a zaffah.

1:25-1:30 pm

Comments by Chairman Jim Leach of the National Endowment for the Humanities

1:30-2:30pm

Tradition and Modernity

A panel with readings examining the role of the word in the Moroccan and Egyptian vernaculars, constructing modern nation states in the Middle East, and cross-cultural encounters with European forms. With scholars **Stefania Pandolfo** and **Clarissa Burt** and poet/translator **Pierre Joris**.

2:45-3:45pm

From Romance to Resistance

An examination of the Urdu tradition in South Asia from the earliest days in the Mughal courts to the role of poets like **Muhammad Iqbal** in modern Pakistan. With scholars **Frances W. Pritchett**, **Syed Akbar Hyder**, and scholar/translator **Mahwash Shoaib**.

4:30pm-5:30pm

Feet in Two Worlds: the Poetry of Muslim America

A panel with scholar Sylviane Diouf and poets Kazim Ali, Khaled Mattawa, Rashidah Ismaili AbuBakr and Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore.

5:45-6:15pm

Closing Remarks by Ammiel Alcalay

8:00pm to 10:00pm

Verses Illuminated: A Celebratory Reading and Performance

A multi-artist celebration of the poetic forms of the Islamic world featuring readings by participating poets and performances by Lebanese poetry duelists, the Iraqi group **Safaafir** singing songs from the cafes of Baghdad, vocalist **Kiran Ahluwalia** performing classical and contemporary ghazals, Rumi singer **Amir Vahab** and much more.

Poets House is a national poetry library and literary center that invites poets and the public to step into the living tradition of poetry. Poets House – through its poetry resources and literary events – documents the wealth and diversity of modern poetry and stimulates public dialogue on issues of poetry in culture. Founded in 1985 by poet Stanley Kunitz and arts administrator Elizabeth Kray, the over-50,000-volume library has created a home for all who read and write poetry. For more information about events and Poets House in general, visit www.poetshouse.org, and join us on Facebook and Twitter.

Founded in 1986, **City Lore**'s mission is to foster New York City – and America's – living cultural heritage. We work in four cultural domains: *urban folklore and history, preservation, education, and grassroots poetry traditions*. City Lore was inspired to create the *People's Poetry Gathering* with Poets House in 1999 to bring folk, ethnic, inner city, and literary poets together under one roof. The *Gathering* evolved into the *People's Poetry Project* and City Lore has continued to explore global and New York City poetries with *The Poetry Dialogues*, *The Poetry Dinners*, the forthcoming *POEMobile* designed to project poems on to walls and buildings in tandem with live readings, and *Illuminated Verses: Poetries of the Islamic World* with Poets House as our longstanding partner.

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