Mosque: Innovation in Object, Form and Function
The Museum at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) is dedicated to supporting the study and teaching of the history, art and architecture of Islamic cultures both in Saudi Arabia and beyond. Ithra also connects colleagues engaged in scholarly and professional activities related to these topics, and provides information about current programs and resources vital to the ongoing development of the discipline.

Consequently, Ithra and the Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture are collaborating to produce a three-day international conference on the study of the mosque in conjunction with the Ithra exhibition Shatr AlMasjid: the Art of Orientation. The conference aims to address the historic evolution, meanings and functions of the mosque.

Ithra’s extensive audience research has showed a strong interest among the Saudi public to learn more about the history and development of mosques from around the world, with a particular focus on the two Holy Mosques of Makkah and Medina. Moreover, focus groups indicated significant interest in aspects of Islamic civilization directly connected to the mosque theme including their multipurpose roles and functions within societies they serve. There was a strong sense that the subject of mosques had been overlooked by museums, both regionally and internationally, and as a result many people know little about their rich cultural and social history. In the view of the art historian Oleg Grabar, the wider contribution of mosques is almost always neglected: “The historian often tends to forget people…. The worshippers are absent from the holy places as presented by the historian; and the changing needs of a dynamic culture are hardly matters of great importance [for the historian].” (Grabar, Oleg. In: The Mosque: History, Architectural Development and Regional Diversity. Frishman, Khan (Eds). Thames & Hudson. 2002, p.245).

As such, this conference and the exhibition it accompanies endeavor to address these gaps and challenges. The question is: how precisely to achieve this? What stories ought to be told and what approaches should be applied in their telling? To address some of these challenges, we invite research focusing on objects that tell the story of the mosque in new and unique ways. With an interest in the cultural context of the mosque, we encourage participants to examine the complex interplay of theological, sociological, economic and artistic factors by looking at objects that relate to or have been housed and used in such buildings. Participants are invited to reflect on questions that address the accumulated experience and needs of the society that led to the introduction and development of forms and objects within mosques. What do tangible objects and forms tell us about the intangible history of such structures including their religious, social and civic functions within the communities they serve?

We wish to hear from applicants who address a range of items, from architectural ornament such as calligraphic and arabesque tiles, to mosque furniture including lamps, prayer rugs, Qur’an stands and manuscripts. It is hoped that through these objects we can glimpse the breadth and complexity of the multifaceted and innovative history of the mosque.
This conference focuses on the introduction and innovation of forms and objects found in and around the mosque, including:

1- Architectural forms: internal and external architectural designs and elements of mosques, including the development and analysis of their composition and morphology.

(The entire structure of the mosque, architectural elements and/or decorative detail)

2- Objects and furnishings: objects used in and around mosques, including their development and analysis both in terms of aesthetic and functional aspects.

(Lamps, windows, furniture, Qur’an stands and cupboards, doors, platforms, fountains, ornaments, calligraphy, tiles, decorations, architraves, carpets, pulpits, prayer niches, etc.)
To provide new and fresh perspectives, we invite a broad range of contributors, including:

- Architects and designers
- Artists and craftspeople
- Poets and writers
- Researchers
- Historians
- Museum curators & archeologists
Research submissions may be selected for their in-depth knowledge about a particular type of mosque, object or theme. Others may be chosen simply for their elegant and thought-provoking insights into more general aspects of pre-modern Islamic culture related to the mosque. We are particularly looking for innovative perspectives on the multifaceted nature of the mosque through objects. Participants may present the object in whatever way they feel works best for them. We are also interested in new applications and creative approaches to these topics through research papers, posters, models and objects as well as audio-visual and digital materials. Our goal is a more insightful and expanded understanding of the mosque.

Following are categories of participation and submissions:

1- Papers
2- Posters
3- Models and objects
4- Audio-visual or digital materials
Abstracts and visual submissions
1- Research papers: Abstract of 250 words in MS Word format, Times New Roman font, letter size 11.

2- Posters: Research statement of 250 words, preliminary images and sketches in PDF or JPEG format.

3- Models and objects: Research statement of 250 words in MS Word format, preliminary images/sketches of model or object and its proposed dimensions.

4- Audio-visual: Research statement and preliminary clip of the material Monday December 28, 2020

Pre-final
1- All applicants shall be informed of the review committee’s decision by Monday February 15, 2021.

2- All successful applicants must complete and submit final materials by April 2, 2021.

Applicants who intend to present models, posters or audio-visual materials will be informed about accepted volumes and size of their work.

Final Papers and Works
1- Final due date for all works Monday May 3, 2021
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Secretary-General
Abdullatif Alfozan Award for Mosque Architecture

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