

Turquoise Mountain: Artists Transforming Afghanistan

On view March 5, 2016 – January 29, 2017, International Gallery

Media only:

Jacqueline Corbett, PressAsia@si.edu

Megan Krefting, KreftingM@si.edu, 202.633.0271

Media website:

asia.si.edu/press

asia.si.edu/turquoisemountain

From its critical position on the ancient Silk Road that stretches from Europe to China, Afghanistan absorbed traditions from India, Persia, and Central Asia and blended them into a rich artistic culture. Decades of civil unrest that began in the 1970s nearly destroyed this vital heritage. Many of Afghanistan's artisans were forced to leave their country or give up their craft. The old city of Kabul, once a bustling center of craft and commerce, fell into ruin.

The British non-governmental organization Turquoise Mountain, founded in 2006 at the request of HRH the Prince of Wales and the President of Afghanistan, has transformed the Murad Khani district of Old Kabul from slum conditions into a vibrant cultural and economic center. The organization has renovated historic buildings, opened a primary school and a medical clinic, and rebuilt necessary infrastructure. It has founded Afghanistan's premier institution for vocational training in the arts. Dedicated to teaching a new generation of Afghan artisans in woodworking, calligraphy, ceramics, jewelry design, and other crafts, Turquoise Mountain is reviving the nation's proud cultural legacy.

To share this transformative story of people, places, and heritage in Afghanistan, the Freer and Sackler Galleries will recreate a visit to Old Kabul, transforming galleries into an Afghan caravanserai, complete with artisan stalls and architectural elements, immersive video and large-scale photographs. Visiting artisans from Murad Khani will demonstrate their craft and share their experiences, allowing visitors to experience Afghanistan's rich culture at first hand.

Images are for press and media use only. Please call or e-mail the F|S Public Affairs and Marketing office at (202) 633-0447 or pressasia@si.edu for access to hi-res images for exhibitions or events.



Young artisans are mentored through the first years of their training, are given access to equipment and workspace, and are connected with international markets.

Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



This calligraphy was created by a teacher at the Turquoise Mountain Institute in Kabul. The Institute has trained more than 450 artisans since its founding eight years ago.

Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain

Office of Public Affairs and Marketing
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery



FREER | SACKLER
THE SMITHSONIAN'S MUSEUMS OF ASIAN ART



Turquoise Mountain woodworkers often incorporate traditional styles and techniques, such as *jali* latticework and *nuristani* carving, into contemporary pieces for everyday use.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Born in 1992 in Pakistan, Storai Stanizai comes from an Afghan family with a strong connection to the arts. "In life you must do the things you want," Stanizai says. "I do not see myself as just a jeweler... I am also an artist."
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Applying to the Institute is a highly competitive process, with only 15 students selected in each craft every year. The small class sizes allow students to work closely with the Institute's distinguished master artisans, with one teacher to every four students.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Turquoise Mountain is also committed to providing a sustainable source of income for Afghanistan's young women. Currently over half of Turquoise Mountain's calligraphy and jewelry students are women.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Born in 1988 in Mazar-e-Sharif, Zahir Shah Amin is the son of one of Afghanistan's most renowned tile makers. He joined the first tile-making program of the Turquoise Mountain Institute in 2007, and today he is its head teacher.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Nasser Mansouri (left) fled to Iran at the age of 11. There, he was apprenticed to an Iraqi master of classical wood carving. When he returned to Afghanistan in 2006, Mansouri became a woodwork master at the Turquoise Mountain Institute.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



When Turquoise Mountain started working in the historic district of Murad Khani in Kabul, much of the area was buried under tons of garbage. It was placed on the World Monuments Fund Watch List of the world's most endangered sites. On the verge of collapse, the wall of this building had to be held in place with wooden props.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Today this building houses the Turquoise Mountain Institute dormitory, where visiting students and teachers stay.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Until recently, the Old City of Kabul was buried under several feet of garbage. It had no running water, drainage, or electricity. Its historic buildings were in ruins and were being threatened by modern development.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Turquoise Mountain has transformed Murad Khani, a district of the Old City, from slum conditions into a vibrant cultural, educational, and economic hub.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



During the 1990s rubber shoes were made from tires at this site. Today this grand *serai* is home to the Turquoise Mountain Institute ceramics school.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Since 2006 Turquoise Mountain has worked in partnership with the community of Murad Khani, providing employment, education, healthcare, and a renewed sense of pride.
Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



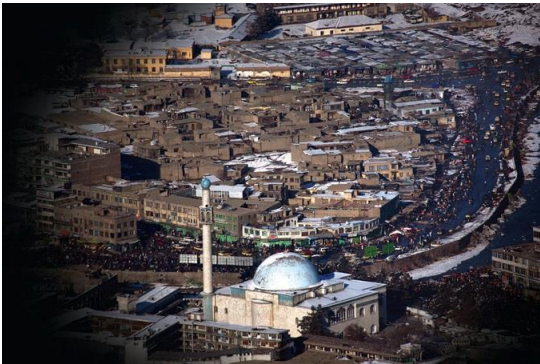
Turquoise Mountain regularly produces pieces tailored to the specific needs of clients, from individuals to museums, hotels, architecture firms, and other businesses.

Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



At the age of 25, Samira Kitman (middle) is running Muftah-e Honar, one of Afghanistan's most successful arts businesses. After spending three years learning calligraphy at the Turquoise Mountain Institute, she secured a prestigious commission from the five-star Anjum Hotel in Mecca in 2014.

Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain.



Afghanistan was once a great center of civilization at the heart of the Silk Road. It inherited the traditions of India, Persia, and Central Asia and over the centuries blended them into a unique artistic culture.

Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Julian Raby, the Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art, leads the Prince of Wales and Shoshana Stewart, CEO of Turquoise Mountain, through the Freer Gallery.

Image courtesy the Freer and Sackler Galleries



Afghan lapis lazuli has been traded for thousands of years. It can be found in Tutankhamen's funeral mask and was ground into powder for the blue pigments used by Renaissance artists in Europe.

Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



British jewelry designer Pippa Small (left) has been visiting Turquoise Mountain since 2008 and has produced eight collections in collaboration with Afghanistan's jewelers. Her firm was named the Ethical Jewelry Business of the Year at the 2015 UK Jewelry Awards.

Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Fakhria Nezami was born a refugee in Peshawar, Pakistan, in 1989. As a teenager she enrolled at the Turquoise Mountain Institute, where she specializes in the technique of *nuqtapardazi*. She uses the tip of a paintbrush to dab thousands of tiny dots that create an intricate design. Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Artisans at the Turquoise Mountain Institute receive an intensive three-year training in their chosen craft, graduating with an internationally recognized City and Guilds accreditation. The Institute is home to the Alwaleed Bin Talal School of Calligraphy and Miniature Painting, the premier school for these arts in Afghanistan. Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Jali is a form of woodworking that uses slivers of wood, held together by delicate joints, to form hundreds of geometric patterns. Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Afghanistan is one of the last countries where carpets are made completely by hand with natural dyes. Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain



Sughra Hussainy trained at the Turquoise Mountain Institute in Kabul. She is the first of 17 Afghan artisans who will visit the US and appear in person at *Turquoise Mountain* throughout the year. Image courtesy Turquoise Mountain