

■ The Aga Khan Museum, to open in September 2014



## CULTURAL VALUES

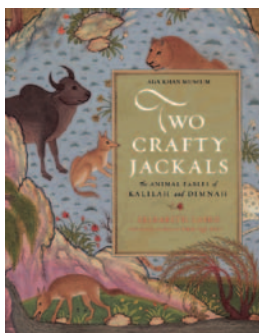
Toronto's Aga Khan Museum spotlights Islamic culture and arts with a new publishing venture

**M**onths before its September 2014 opening, Toronto's Aga Khan Museum is launching a publishing initiative intended to illustrate the diversity of Islamic arts and culture, and garner early publicity for the institution. As part of the museum's educational mandate, titles will celebrate Muslim contributions to literature and science, and promote contemporary works.

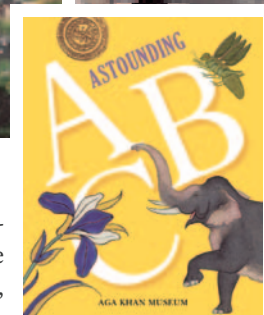
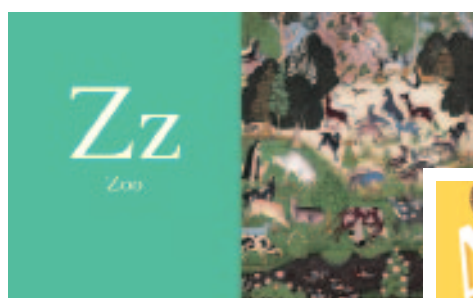
"Unfortunately, the focus [on the culture] is always on the negative interaction through war, and there is a lot that is peaceful and wonderful," says Ruba Kana'an, the museum's head of education and scholarly programs.

The secular museum, run by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, is part of an international network of philanthropic agencies overseen by the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims. Titles will highlight the museum's collections, which contain more than 1,000 artifacts, including paintings, manuscripts, ceramics, and metalwork spanning a millennium of Islamic history.

The first two books, scheduled for release in January, present the Aga Khan's holdings for its youngest patrons. "How do you introduce ideas about art to children?" says Kana'an. "This is something most museums are grappling with."



*Astounding ABC*, the first picture book in a series aimed at children up to five years old, uses symbols of Islamic culture, such as stars and turbans, to illustrate the alphabet. The second title inaugurates a line for middle-grade readers. Written by U.K. author Elizabeth Laird, *Three Crafty Jackals* is a collection of moralistic animal fables, accompanied by illustrations from 16th-century Iranian artist Sadiqi Beg,



with design by Toronto's Ingrid Paulson.

According to Aga Khan Museum publications manager Michael Carroll, one title per series will be published annually, with the next pair scheduled for 2015.

Two guidebooks are also planned for 2014. An alternative to traditionally dense art catalogues, the comprehensive books will focus on specific objects or themes. Although the content will not necessarily be tied to exhibitions, the debut title will accompany a show of historic artifacts signed by their creators.

Launching in 2015, a line of fine art and architecture books will be designed to appeal to a more general audience. In total, Carroll says, approximately six adult titles will be published per year.

Carroll expects future titles will feature more Canadian authors, illustrators, and literary historians specializing in Islamic culture. Distribution will be handled by Carroll's previous employer, Dundurn Press, with marketing and promotion managed in-house. There are plans for outreach to Ismaili councils across North America and annual literary events such as the International Festival of Authors and Word on the Street. Discussions with the Toronto Public Library about future author events are already underway.

For her part, Kana'an senses excitement from Toronto's other cultural institutions, which are honouring the museum's arrival this year with their own Islamic-themed exhibits. She believes the museum will bring a "different, cosmopolitan flavour" to the city.  
—Jamie Bradburn