

# The Heart's Desire

at Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO

From 3 Octobre 2026 to 12 September 2027

Inaugurated on 28 September 2024, the Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO (MACS MTO) is the only museum in the world dedicated to the principles and artistic expressions of Sufism. As a spiritual path within Islam, Sufism is explored here through its universal values, as embodied by a collection of works and objects spanning from the Achaemenid era to the present day.

The museum is distinguished by its annual exhibitions, which create a dialogue between contemporary artistic creations and the Sufi collection.

The fourth exhibition at the Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO, "The Heart's Desire," explores longing in all its forms, without judgment and regardless of whether its object may ever be attained. Rather than a feeling to be repressed or overcome, this deeply human quality can become a generative force across creative, emotional and spiritual realms.

"The exhibition hopes to tap into something fundamental and deeply relatable: the perseverance and hopefulness of the human spirit, held within this state of yearning."

Jessica Cerasi, guest curator

## Sufi Context: The Concept of Longing

Longing (*shawq* in Arabic) runs deeply through Sufi thought, expressed in stories from Layla and Majnun to the Rose and the Nightingale, and in the poetry of such teachers as Rūmī, Ibn Arabī, and Rabia Basri. Rūmī's celebrated parable of the *ney*, the reed flute cut from its reed bed and crying out for return, captures the Sufi understanding of separation as the very condition that awakens love. Far from a melancholic state, *shawq* is described by Sufi masters as a fire that burns away attachment and illusion, animating the path toward union with the Divine.

## Collection Highlights



The exhibition draws on the museum's permanent collection. Among the highlights is a 19th-century Qajar prayer tunic from Iran, hand-painted on cotton with verses from the Quran, its symmetry, white ground and boteh (paisley) motifs reflecting the garment as a symbolic mirror of the wearer's spirit. Also featured is a 16th-century Safavid combination padlock: four rotating brass bands engraved with Arabic letters, opened only by the precise alignment of a four-letter password. The object resonates with the Sufi metaphor of the heart as a locked space whose access requires inner transformation.

## Contemporary artists and their works

The exhibition brings together six international contemporary artists, each producing new works in dialogue with the museum's collection.

**Rand Abdul Jabbar**, born in 1990 in Baghdad, lives in Abu Dhabi

An Iraqi-Canadian artist, winner of the Richard Mille Art Prize, and a Columbia-trained architect, Rand Abdul Jabbar reimagines archives, narratives, and artifacts to explore themes such as memory, mythology, and material culture. For *The Heart's desire (Le désir du cœur)*, presents new works from her *Earthly Wonders, Celestial Beings* series alongside new ceramic sculptures developed for the museum's garden, exploring the garden as cosmos, image, and site of longing

**Burçak Bingöl**, born in 1976 in Görele, lives in Istanbul

Burçak Bingöl has exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Frieze Sculpture, and the Istanbul Biennial, and has developed a practice based on processes of tracing, copying, and reformulating to deconstruct familiar motifs. Following extensive research, she stages an indoor rose garden ceramic installation referencing 16th-century Ottoman Iznik plates, the MACS MTO garden, and the foundational Sufi parable of the Rose and the Nightingale, central to the Sufi narrative of longing and unattainable love.

**Sarah Brahim**, born in 1992 in Riyadh, lives in Paris

A visual artist and performer trained in both medicine and dance, Sarah Brahim has been named a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters and has exhibited at the Louvre Abu Dhabi as well as at the Lyon Biennale.

Her work, rooted in bodily experience, explores questions of embodiment and the language of gesture. Alongside two film works and her Lexicography polaroid series, the artist presents two new bodies of work exploring longing through prayer and letter writing.

**Han Mengyun**, born in 1989 in Wuhan, lives in London

An artist, filmmaker, and poet, she has received the ArtAsiaPacific Artists of the Year award. Her interdisciplinary practice weaves together Eurasian intellectual and visual traditions, ranging from Persian and Indian manuscript painting to Chinese woodblock printing. She presents a miniature work derived from her *Mirror Pavilion* series, enriched with new drawings from *Scattered Pearls* in dialogue with manuscripts from the permanent collection.

**Faissal El-Malak**, born in 1988 in Windsor, lives in London and Dubai

A Palestinian artist, singer, and designer, Faissal El-Malak has exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Lisbon Architecture Triennale, and has collaborated with Hermès. His work, at the intersection of visual arts, textiles, performance, and care, explores memory, identity, and healing. He presents a reading-room installation interweaving Islamic garden and Parisian decorative references, united around the Sufi concept, '*Healing of the hearts is meeting the Beloved*'.

**Haroon Mirza**, born in 1977 in London, lives in London

Haroon Mirza received the Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale and describes himself as a “composer of electricity”. His “adisciplinary” practice explores the tensions between sound, light, and electric current to awaken the viewer’s consciousness. He creates a sound-and-light environment within the museum’s *gonbad* (dome) and adjoining niche, remixing vocal recordings by Mina Deris, alongside a contemporary *kashkūl* sculpture engraved with the '*ein stein*' infinite pattern.

## The guest curator

**Jessica Cerasi** is an independent curator, and Head of Programme at the Bagri Foundation. She curated *Shezad Dawood: Skin of Dreams* at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation (2026), and co-curated the Saudi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2024. She served as a curator at the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi project from 2020 to 2024, following key roles at the UK Government Art Collection and the 2019 Venice Biennale.

## THE MUSÉE D'ART ET DE CULTURE SOUFIS MTO

The Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO is housed in a 19th-century mansion in Chatou, on the banks of the Seine across from the Île des Impressionnistes, a twenty-minute RER ride from downtown Paris. Its collection spans from the Achaemenid era to the present day and includes ceramics, textiles, manuscripts, calligraphic works, sculptures, and everyday objects.

Rather than presenting Sufism as a purely historical phenomenon, MACS MTO fosters a dialogue with contemporary artworks, thereby giving Sufism a modern expression that makes it accessible to both art enthusiasts and the general public.

In this way, MACS MTO's approach transforms the museum into a space of resonance. Sufism is no longer "explained"; it is brought to life through the artworks, and the artworks gain depth through their connection to Sufi thought. The juxtaposition with contemporary art places it within a universal context: that of sensory and emotional experience.

MACS MTO receives support from the philanthropic organizations American Friends of Sufi Arts, Culture and Knowledge® (AFSACK®) and Canadian Friends of Sufi Arts, Culture and Knowledge™ (CFSACK®).

## Visitor information

### Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO

6 Avenue des Tilleuls | 78400 Chatou | France

<https://www.macsmto.fr/> | [contact@macsmto.fr](mailto:contact@macsmto.fr)

Wednesdays, Thursday, Friday, 11am to 6pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10am to 6pm

The garden is open Wednesday to Sunday (free access)

Admission charge: Full price €9. Concessions available.

By train: 30 minutes from the centre of Paris - RER A to Chatou-Croissy

By bus: Lines D and E: Gare de Chatou-Croissy stop

By car: From Paris, take the A14 then A86 motorways. Exit 35a towards Chatou.

Free parking on the street of the museum and the Island of the Impressionists



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