

Vatican provides majority of pieces for Australian Islamic exhibition

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Fr Nicola Mapelli of the Vatican's Anima Mundi Museum and Manal Ataya of the Sharjah Museums Authority at the launch of "So That You Might Know Each Other".

Dozens of items from the Vatican's Anima Mundi Museum are part of a new exhibition at the National Museum of Australia that seeks to explore Islamic faith and culture.

Almost 70 of the 120 objects in the "So That You Might Know Each Other" exhibition came from the Vatican's vast collection of pieces from around the world.

Most of the Vatican objects that are part of the exhibition were gifts from the Muslim world to Pope Pius XI in the 1920s, when he announced he would be holding an exposition to showcase the cultures of the world.

Fr Nicola Mapelli, director of the Anima Mundi Museum, which means "Soul of the World", was in Canberra for yesterday's launch. He said the Vatican's enthusiasm in supporting the exhibition shows the deep respect the Catholic Church has for other cultures.

"It is very important for us to show our commitment to the dialogue between cultures and the dialogue between religions," he said.

When the items currently in Australia are on display at the Vatican, Fr Mapelli said their place alongside the great Catholic masterpieces from Renaissance masters is a demonstration that "for the Vatican Museum, beauty is a universal thing; it is something that belongs to all cultures".

A similar exhibition featuring a large number of items from the Vatican was held in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, in 2014. The Sharjah Museums Authority has provided more than 40 items for the current Australian exhibition, with another dozen items collated from Australian collections.

Manal Ataya, director general of the Sharjah Museums Authority, said "So That You Might Know Each Other" is a "unique exhibition devised to give a glimpse of the diversity of Muslim material culture, and is intended to foster intercultural dialogue and promote tolerance and peace – among Muslims the world over and between Islam and other faiths".

National Museum of Australia director Matthew Trinca said he believes the exhibition has the power to help bridge a gap in cultural and religious understanding when it comes to Islam and its relationship with other faiths and communities.

“This exhibition wouldn’t happen without this great coming together of traditions and faiths, and peoples from those traditions and faiths, in ways that encourage us all to be the best we can be in creating the world we live in now and the world in the future,” Dr Trinca said.

Fr Patrick McInerney SSC, director of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, said in Australia there is an overwhelming spirit of openness and dialogue between adherents of the world’s two largest faiths, though there remain misunderstandings and even fears about the Muslim community.

“For the little bit of animosity that is around, the best cure, the best antidote is meeting Muslims face to face, getting to know one another, and that’s precisely what this exhibition offers,” Fr McInerney said.

The “So That You Might Know Each Other” exhibition opens today, April 20, and runs until July 22. Find out more about the exhibition go to <http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/so-that-you-might-know-each-other>