

10:20 - **SATURDAY 14th JULY** – Stevenson Lecture theatre

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Worked as Curator for Qatar National Museum, member of the Project of Museum of Costumes and Textiles, supervised various local and overseas Qatari cultural exhibitions. Currently a curator at Qatar Museum Authority, and a PhD Candidate at University of Leeds, in Museum Philosophy. My research examines the history of museums in Qatar with respect to the first Sheikh Khalifa's aim to preserve the country's culture and history; and the work by his son, the current Emir Sheikh Hamad, to build a knowledge-hub in the country. The thesis further highlights the impact of economic and political growth on the role of museums in Qatar. As such, the way in which the Qatari museums have been used during two different eras demonstrates how museums in Qatar have been politically driven, used to strengthen the country's profile locally, regionally and globally.

Heritage in Qatar: an example of culturally-led economic regeneration

With the development of modern Qatar in the mid 1970s and the end of the British protectorate, there was a new focus on museums and the heritage of the country. This focus on the role of culture has increased rapidly in the last five years, and can be mapped against the wider cultural developments in the Gulf. In the 1970s and 1980s practice in Qatari museums was limited only to the presentation of ethnographic material from the region and local history. There has been a paradigm shift in the country in recent times, which has recognised a much wider and more important role for museums and their collections in Qatar and the Gulf region. This move has been government driven: in a country where the foundations of the political system are still based on the ruling royal family. They have decreed that the previous system of national heritage and historical preservation in Qatar should be critically rethought, with a specific aim being to reflect the country's position both regionally and globally. This has led to the museum authority's focus on building a new museum culture in the country and it has considered establishing seven specialist museums. Such a large museum building programme has required curators to look further afield for suitable collections for display. Qatar has played an interesting role in increasing the price of antiques at auction across the world: particularly for Islamic objects. Qatar is explicitly putting its oil riches into the creation of a museum culture in order to compete in this field on a global scale.

As a former curator at the National Museum of Qatar and currently a curator at Qatar Museum Authority, I have been able to witness these changes first hand. In this paper, I shall discuss the recent establishment of the Museum of Islamic Art. I.M. Pei's building has already achieved iconic status in the country and is the focus of many international visits. Its role is clearly to demonstrate to the local community and the tourist alike a new, modern, globally aware Qatar. From the creation of a new museums culture, the country hopes to develop and diversify economically and thus this case study of Qatar will allow us to look at a specific example of the role of museums in the market.

