

Shezad Dawood Plants Seeds of Optimism in a New Multisensory Exhibition at the Aga Khan Museum

Night in the Garden of Love places audiences at the heart of a transformative conversation between Shezad Dawood and Yusef Lateef's practices, inviting visitors to explore gardens as a space of creation and hope.

TORONTO, CANADA – November 2, 2023 – From November 10, 2023, to May 5, 2024, [Shezad Dawood: Night in the Garden of Love Inspired by and Featuring Yusef Lateef](#), will make its Canadian debut at the Aga Khan Museum. Produced in partnership with Wiels, the Centre for Contemporary Art in Brussels, the exhibition transports visitors into new and imaginary worlds through a unique, multi-layered experience that taps into the senses.

Inspired by African-American Muslim musician, composer, and polymath (Allāmah) Dr. Yusef Lateef (1920–2013) and his cli-fi novella, *Night in the Garden of Love* (1988), contemporary artist Shezad Dawood uses gardens as a starting point for creative, futuristic, and intercultural conversations. Audiences will encounter a series of painted textile works by Dawood of real and imagined plants, original artwork by Lateef, and objects from the Museum's Permanent Collection as they journey through time, navigating a blend of analogue and digital spaces. Nestled amongst Dawood's textiles are costume sculptures designed by London-based fashion label Ahluwalia, integrating upcycled, repurposed vintage fabrics from Dawood's textile archive.

Drawn to the creative potential in technology, Dawood collaborated with immersive film and digital arts production company UBIK Productions to create mesmerizing digital experiences. Together, they developed an enthralling two-player virtual reality environment and a series of Digital Seedbanks — seven algorithmically generated plants responding to a new musical score inspired by Lateef's autopsychic method and performed by several of the late musician's former collaborators and students.

Accompanying the exhibition will be a scent created by Dawood in collaboration with Olivia Bransbourg of boutique perfume label Iconofly, perfumer Nicolas Bonneville, and fragrance house dsm-firmenich. The distinctive fragrance features eight middle notes. While some are recognizable, such as jasmine, others were crafted using artificial intelligence to represent plants that don't naturally produce a discernible scent.

"In a way, this exhibition is a dynamic symphony," says Shezad Dawood. "With objects from the Museum's Permanent Collection joining the conversation as a juxtaposition between Lateef's work and my own, it allows visitors to dive into the many flowerings and expressions of gardens throughout history. It is a cross-temporal treasure hunt, embracing the idea that gardens are temporary experiences of paradise. They are hopeful spaces of transcendence, giving us a sense of empathy and sensitivity."

Centred around scores and rhythms, the exhibition reflects the spirit and musicality of Yusef Lateef's ideas and drawings through Dawood's interpretations, exploring gardens as realms of creation and optimism in the face of the climate crisis.

"*Night in the Garden of Love* is a true reflection of the unexpected and thought-provoking stories we showcase through the arts at the Museum," says Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Director and CEO at the

Aga Khan Museum. “The artists’ visionary practices invite us to imagine futuristic worlds where nature has transcended climate change. Through their powerful visions, we are allowed a unique and rare opportunity to turn concerns and conversations surrounding our current environmental challenges into hope — perhaps the most important impulse in trying to affect change.”

The exhibition holds an additional meaningful layer as it marks the first time Yusef Lateef’s drawings will be displayed in Canada. On behalf of the Estate of Yusef Lateef, Ayesha Lateef says *Night in the Garden of Love* will “create a space for people to appreciate the breadth and depth of his extraordinary legacy. It is a legacy of virtuosity and love.”

Beyond the Gallery, the exhibition will extend into the Museum’s programming lineup. A growing schedule of performances and experiences will complement the exhibition — from a mesmerizing autopsiopsychic performance to a stunning light show created by OCAD University students under Dawood’s mentorship.

The Museum acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

About Shezad Dawood

Shezad Dawood (b.1974) was born in London, where he lives and works. He studied at Central St Martin's, the Royal College of Art and Leeds Metropolitan University. Dawood is a Senior Research Fellow in Experimental Media at the University of Westminster. He is a multidisciplinary artist who interweaves stories, realities, and symbolism to create richly layered artworks spanning painting, textiles, sculpture, film and digital media. Fascinated by ecologies and architecture, his work takes a philosophical approach, asking questions and exploring alternative futures through what Dawood describes as 'world-building' and 'imagineering.' His practice is animated by research, working with multiple audiences and communities to delve into narrative, history, and embodiment.

About Yusef Lateef

Yusef Lateef was a Grammy Award-winning composer, performer, recording artist, author, visual artist, educator, and philosopher who was a major force on the international music scene for more than six decades. Until his passing on December 23, 2013, at age 93, Lateef remained vital and active as a touring and recording artist, composer, and educator. Prolific in the American music genre known as jazz, Lateef went on to introduce instruments and sounds from around the world into his compositions. Notably, Lateef developed a methodology called autopsiopsychic music, a holistic approach to music that centers the spiritual, physical, and emotional self.

About the Aga Khan Museum

[The Aga Khan Museum](#) in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). Through permanent and temporary exhibitions, educational activities and performing arts, the Museum’s mission is to spark wonder, curiosity, and understanding of Muslim cultures and their connection with other cultures through the arts. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto’s Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

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