

PRESS RELEASE

Six years after Daesh attack, the Mosul Cultural Museum is being rehabilitated through the commitment of Iraqi authorities and an international heritage consortium

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The Mosul Cultural Museum in Iraq—both the building and its collection—suffered tremendous damage at the hands of Daesh. Now, the museum is gradually being brought back to life through a unique international partnership between the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), the Musée du Louvre, the Smithsonian Institution, World Monuments Fund (WMF), and the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH). Since 2018, the founding members of this consortium have been stabilizing the building and the collection housed within it, and training and equipping the Mosul Cultural Museum team, to prepare for the full-scale rehabilitation. In 2020, they were joined by WMF to define the restoration and rehabilitation program. The goal is to return this museum to the citizens of Mosul as quickly as possible, and to allow this important cultural landmark to showcase Iraq's rich culture once again.

Six years ago, on 26 February 2015, Daesh released videos on social media documenting the destruction of the Mosul Cultural Museum, sending shockwaves throughout the world. This museum, the second largest in Iraq after the National Museum in Baghdad, housed pre-Islamic treasures from Nimrud and Hatra, as well as Parthian and Assyrian masterpieces. The extent of the destruction was not known by the international community until the liberation of Mosul in July 2017. One year later, in June 2018, the Iraqi Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities requested that ALIPH financially support its project to rehabilitate the museum and its collections. ALIPH approved a first grant of over 1.3 million USD, and the Musée du Louvre and the Smithsonian Institution joined the project to lend their expertise and support the Iraqi teams.

In the fall of 2018, representatives of the Musée du Louvre, the Smithsonian Institution, and ALIPH conducted a mission to Iraq to meet the Iraqi teams. Together, they identified the project priorities and immediate needs. Soon after, the Smithsonian Institution stabilized the building by fortifying doors, replacing windows, and reinforcing exterior fences. A damage assessment of the collection was also carried out, revealing that much of the collection, including a colossal lion from Nimrud, the Banquet Stela, a monumental Lamassu, and a precious wooden cenotaph, had been heavily damaged, not to mention 25,000 volumes in the library had been burned and many artefacts had disappeared. Based on this assessment and another one of the building, an Action Plan released in November 2019 and coordinated by the Musée du Louvre, determined the next steps for the rehabilitation until the museum's reopening.

As the first step in the preservation of the collection, the artifact fragments were painstakingly sorted, documented, cleaned, and stored by the Mosul Cultural Museum team with the experts from the Musée du Louvre. To prepare the restoration of the collections, the Musée du Louvre, in close connection with the Mosul Cultural Museum team, delivered conservation equipment and restoration products. The Smithsonian Institution and the team in Mosul then set up a conservation laboratory for urgent first-aid restoration of the objects on site.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, local teams have continued their work in compliance with sanitary requirement. In July 2020, IT equipment was delivered to the museum staff so that they could follow a complete training program prepared by the Musée du Louvre. The first part of the program focused on conservation and was delivered remotely. The team of the Musée du Louvre recorded 18 applied training videos on stone restoration. The videos include step-by-step guidance in Arabic using real examples, complemented by written documents and practical exercises. Future training courses by the Musée du Louvre will cover topics such as wood

and metal restoration techniques as well as collections management and will include sessions with experts on leading a renovation project of this scale.

In the second half of 2020, the Smithsonian Institution provided additional recovery supplies to the staff and supported further stabilization measures for the museum building, such as stabilizing an outdoor Assyrian tomb exhibit, cleaning out the remaining rubble and debris from the administrative wing in the basement, repairing toilet facilities on site, and clearing out the gardens for better security and to reduce fire hazards. In addition, the Smithsonian staff provided training to complement the Musée du Louvre training sessions. Additional professional development for museum staff is scheduled to continue in the coming months.

WMF joined the consortium in 2020 and has been entrusted with the task of defining the restoration and rehabilitation programme for the museum building and its surroundings. An expert mission it conducted in February 2021 will pave the way for a new stage of this collective effort: the reconstruction and development of the future museum, which is expected to reopen to the public within a few years.

Dr. Laith Hussein, Director of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage

"It is wonderful to see the concerted effort of the international organizations and their fruitful cooperation in the rehabilitation of the Mosul Museum, which preserves the treasures of the Mesopotamian civilization, an important part of global heritage for all humankind.

The peaceful coexistence and cooperation we witness today in Mosul, is a victory of the power of good against the elements of darkness and backwardness. We are very grateful for the excellent work supported by ALIPH and carried out by the Musée du Louvre, the Smithsonian Institution, and World Monuments Fund, collaborating on the rehabilitation of the Mosul Museum".

Jean-Luc Martinez, President-Director of the Musée du Louvre

"One of the fundamental missions of the Louvre is to stand by those whose cultural and historical heritage is endangered. Cultural heritage does not simply consist of inert stones; it is the heart of a nation on which a shared future can be built. Its disappearance is not only an offense to the past, but also a mortgage on the future. That is why, as soon as the tragic ransacking of the Mosul Museum occurred in 2015, the Musée du Louvre pledged to collaborate with on-site teams to protect this treasure of universal heritage. The Louvre continues its mobilization, alongside ALIPH, the Smithsonian, World Monument Fund, and Iraqi authorities for the Mosul Museum rehabilitation project. This project has all the more meaning for us as our two museums share Mesopotamian collections that are closely related, and our teams have developed very strong scientific and friendly ties. We owe them our full solidarity!"

Statement Smithsonian Institution: Richard Kurin, Smithsonian Ambassador at Large

"Restoring the Mosul Cultural Museum represents a victory of knowledge over ignorance, respect over intolerance, unity over division, humanity over brutality."

Bénédicte de Montlaur, President and CEO of World Monuments Fund (WMF)

"We are honored to join our esteemed partners in envisioning a future for the Mosul Cultural Museum. Its restoration is crucial for re-establishing a link between the people of Iraq and their extraordinary cultural inheritance, instilling strength and resilience in the aftermath of destruction. This project continues WMF's engagement to steward the country's most significant cultural sites,

beginning in 2004 following the outbreak of the Iraq War and more recently in response to willful attacks on cultural heritage. With our involvement in the Mosul Cultural Museum, we renew our commitment to safeguard Iraq's cultural heritage to ensure the country's contributions to the world are protected and celebrated."

Valéry Freland, Executive Director of ALIPH

"The rehabilitation of the Mosul Museum is an emblematic project for ALIPH: it is a sign of life and hope, a gesture of solidarity between international and local actors, and a magnificent human adventure, which brings together professionals from different backgrounds who are driven by the same ambition."

Download pictures: <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmUuQ7hr>

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About the Musée du Louvre

Following the widescale attack on cultural heritage during the 2010's, the President of the French Republic requested the Chairman and Director of the Louvre Museum, Jean-Luc Martinez, to author "Fifty Proposals to Protect the Heritage of Humanity". The report was published in November 2015 and included the recommendation to create an international fund to safeguard heritage in situations of armed conflict. This idea became a reality at the Abu Dhabi International Conference on Endangered Heritage in December 2016. Created at the initiative of France and the United Arab Emirates in March 2017, ALIPH provides concrete support for the protection and reconstruction of cultural heritage in conflict or post-conflict regions.

Strengthened by the historical ties between the collections of the Louvre and the Mosul museums, the Louvre's teams are contributing their expertise to the restoration of Mosul's martyred collections, as well as to the training and guidance of its teams for the museum's complete reconstruction.

The core of the Louvre's Near Eastern Antiquities presented to the public as early as 1847 was born in large part from the ground-breaking discoveries of Assyrian remains by Paul-Emile Botta, then French Consul in Mosul. The Mosul Museum was created in 1952 to house works inherited from the Assyrian Empire, which dominated the Near East in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. The two museums share a common history as well as archaeological and documentary material, giving event greater coherence to the Louvre's firm commitment to preserving this exceptional heritage in full solidarity with its Iraqi colleagues.

About the Smithsonian Institution

Since its founding in 1846, the Smithsonian Institution has been committed to inspiring generations through knowledge and discovery. It is the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, consisting of 19 museums, the National Zoological Park, education centers, research facilities, cultural centers, and libraries. The total number of objects, works of art, and specimens at the Smithsonian is estimated at nearly 155 million.

Since 2015, the Smithsonian has helped train Iraqi cultural heritage professionals through the Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage in Erbil. The institution subsequently collaborated on cultural recovery work at Nimrud and the Mosul Cultural Museum. Smithsonian efforts in Iraq have been supported by funds from the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of State, Bank of America, the Mellon Foundation, the J. M. Kaplan Fund and Getty Foundation, in addition to the ALIPH Foundation.

About World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's significant cultural places to enrich lives and build mutual understanding. For more than 55 years, working at more than 700 sites in 112 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to the preservation of important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through the World Monuments Watch—a biennial, nomination-based program—WMF uses cultural heritage conservation to empower communities and improve human well-being. In partnership with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF seeks to inspire an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York City, the organization has offices and affiliates worldwide. wmf.org

About ALIPH

Founded in March 2017 in response to the massive destruction of cultural heritage in recent years, ALIPH provides support for the protection and rehabilitation of tangible or intangible heritage in conflict or post-conflict areas. Based in Geneva, ALIPH is a public-private partnership and a Swiss foundation with the status of an international organization. To date, it has committed more than 35 million USD to over 100 projects in 22 countries across 4 continents. In Iraq, ALIPH has supported 28 projects since 2018 with an overall commitment of more than 9.2 million USD for initiatives in this country alone. aliph-foundation.org

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