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The Sioux City Public Museum displays the traveling exhibit
Traditional Arts of the Bedouin

For many, the word Bedouin stirs up vivid images of shifting sands, colorful flowing robes, and the long, loping strides of a camel. The way in which the Bedouins learned to adapt advantageously to an environment as inhospitable as the desert is a marvel of anthropological and artistic ingenuity. Drawn from the Nance Collection—the largest collection of its kind outside the Middle East—*Traditional Arts of the Bedouin* introduces visitors to a rich material culture from Saudi Arabia and nearby Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. The traveling exhibition is on display through October 14 at the Sioux City Public Museum.

Traditional Arts of the Bedouin includes approximately 50 artworks and artifacts, from elaborately embroidered textiles and embellished metalwork to ceremonial coffee accouterments and incense burners as well as several photographs depicting Bedouin craftspersons at work. The exhibition reveals the Bedouin to be artists illustrating a legacy of incredible work, not widely known outside their own cultures. The featured jewelry shows each artist's use of obscure techniques, such as crenellation, to produce intricate pieces. Bedouin weaving, still crafted on a stick loom, demonstrates ancient knowledge of natural dyes and fibers, and traditional patterns; while the women who create textiles use native stitches, not known outside the Bedouin world, to embroider meaning into the objects.

The essence of Bedouin culture is understood through its impermanence—with constant movement across the sands of both time and space. Visitors to the exhibition will learn how Bedouin arts and crafts frequently bridge the gap between aesthetic and utilitarian purposes, as well as recognize the unique tenacity of Bedouin traditions in an ever-changing political, social, and environmental landscape.

For instance, the Bedouin can be seen as the world's original "recyclers," for whom each and every medium was something to be used and reused. Examples of this repurposing of media can be seen in jewelry made from coins, or wire repairs on wooden bowls. Bedouin crafts also require the knowledge of natural environment that has developed over the centuries. Animals are bred not only for desert survival, but also for their hair, skin, hoof, and bone, while other natural materials such as clay and acacia wood are used for everything from pottery to writing instruments.

For over a decade, Dr. Amber Clifford-Napoleone has curated the Nance Collection, which is owned and housed by the McClure Archives and the University Museum at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Missouri. Dr. Clifford-Napoleone is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at University of Central Missouri, where she specializes in textile and ethnographic collections, as well as interpretation and ethnography. Her most recent museum publication, "A New Tradition: A Reflection on Collaboration and Contact Zones," was published in the July 2013 edition of *Journal of Museum Education*.

Traditional Arts of the Bedouin was organized by the Nance Collection, McClure Archives and the University Museum at the University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, MO, as part of a tour from ExhibitsUSA, Kansas City, MO.

About ExhibitsUSA

This exhibition is toured by ExhibitsUSA, a national program of Mid-America Arts Alliance. ExhibitsUSA sends more than 25 exhibitions on tour to over 100 small- and mid-sized communities every year. These exhibitions create access to an array of arts and humanities experiences, nurture the understanding of diverse cultures and art forms, and encourage the expanding depth and breadth of cultural life in local communities. For more about ExhibitsUSA, email MoreArt@maaa.org or visit www.eusa.org.

About Mid-America Arts Alliance

Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) strengthens and supports artists, cultural organizations, and communities throughout our region and beyond. We achieve this primarily through our national traveling exhibition programs, innovative leadership development, and strategic grant making. We are especially committed to enriching the cultural life of historically underserved communities by providing high quality, meaningful, and accessible arts and culture programs and services. Each year M-AAA's programs, on average, reach one million people. We believe in more art for more people. Additional information about M-AAA is available at www.maaa.org.

The Sioux City Public Museum is located at 607 4th Street in downtown Sioux City. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is free. For more information, call 712-279-6174 or visit www.siouxcitymuseum.org.

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