This summer, the Harvard Art Museums present the story of the rich cross-cultural artistic connections that took place over 300 years between the Dutch, the Flemish, and the Islamic world. The exhibition *Imagine Me and You: Dutch and Flemish Encounters with the Islamic World, 1450–1750* challenges the persistent notion that war—in particular, religious war between Christians and Muslims—dominated their interactions. In reality, the Habsburg, Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires were all multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-faith societies. Prompted by the rich diversity of these empires, *Imagine Me and You* explores the myriad cultural, diplomatic, and mercantile interactions that took place either in person or through the exchange of objects, art, and ideas.

*Imagine Me and You* is on display May 18–August 18, 2024, in the three adjacent University Galleries located on Level 3 of the Harvard Art Museums. A range of programs offered over the summer will...
begin with a lecture on May 21 that brings together four distinct scholarly voices to reflect the multicultural representation visible throughout the exhibition; other highlights include an evening of music on May 24 inspired by the art and culture of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, a weaving workshop on July 13, and several gallery talks and exhibition tours. A digital resource, available through the museums’ website, accompanies the exhibition and provides deeper research into the core exhibition themes and some of the works on display. Additionally, an activity brochure geared toward children ages 8+ is available in the exhibition galleries.

*Imagine Me and You* was curated by Talitha Maria G. Schepers, the 2022–24 Stanley H. Durwood Foundation Curatorial Fellow in the Division of European and American Art at the Harvard Art Museums. She worked closely with a range of museum colleagues in curatorial, conservation, programming, and other departments to develop and implement the exhibition.

“My main hope is that visitors will explore the exhibition, either in person or through the accompanying digital tool, and encounter something new and meaningful about the cultures represented, or something that inspires them to see their own culture through fresh eyes,” said Schepers. “I encourage visitors to consider how cross-cultural interactions have shaped and enriched who we are as a global community not just in recent times, but for centuries.”

*Imagine Me and You* unveils the vibrancy of multi-cultural exchange between the Low Countries (roughly modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands), then part of the Habsburg empire (1282–1918), and the Islamic world, in particular the Ottoman (1285–1923), Safavid (1501–1736), and Mughal (1526–1858) Empires that concurrently controlled much of Central and Southeast Europe, North Africa, and South, West, and Central Asia. European artists experienced multiple and diverse encounters with the Islamic world through travel, trade, war, and diplomacy. These interactions varied in level of contact: aside from in-person interactions, Netherlandish artists could also encounter the Islamic world visually, through works on paper that circulated across Eurasia and reached the Low Countries.

The approximately 120 objects in the exhibition include drawings, prints, paintings, textiles, and more. In addition to sumptuous textiles and striking wool carpets from Türkiye (Turkey) and intricate album paintings from the Ottoman and Mughal periods, there is a range of drawings and prints from Netherlandish, Flemish, Dutch and other artists, including Margaretha Adriaensdr. de Heer, Haydar Reis, Pieter Coecke van Aelst, Melchior Lorck, Nicolas de Nicolay, Lucas van Leyden, Jacob Marrel, Rembrandt, and many more.

More than 75 of the works are drawn from the permanent collections of the Harvard Art Museums. Loans have been generously provided by the Maida and George Abrams Collection, the Tobey Collection, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the following Harvard University collections: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Houghton Library, and Fine Arts Library.

By bringing together works from these different collections, the exhibition provides a new way of understanding the museums’ permanent holdings within a global context. It explores how Netherlandish representations of the Islamic world were meant to be understood at the time. Artists from the Low Countries increasingly refined their techniques to create ever-more lifelike representations, but lifelikeness should not be mistaken for reality. The majority of works on display are not accurate representations of events, but imagined renderings created by highly skilled artists, many of whom never visited the Ottoman, Safavid, or Mughal Empires.

The exhibition consists of eleven sections across three gallery spaces that guide the visitor thematically and chronologically through the narrative of cross-cultural encounters. Highlights include:
• A dynamic display of nine delicate drawings by various Dutch artists of tulips, along with texts that discuss the period known as Dutch Tulipomania, when tulips—traded through diplomatic relations with the Ottoman court—became a highly sought-after luxury commodity in the Netherlands in 1634 and bulbs fetched exorbitant prices in a speculative market that crashed three years later.

• A monumental woodcut by Netherlandish artist Pieter Coecke van Aelst, *Customs and Fashions of the Turks* (1553), which, through seven scenes, depicts a journey from Eastern Europe to Istanbul, to meet Sultan Süleyman. Measuring nearly 16 feet long, the highly detailed frieze of processions of men walking and on horseback constitutes the earliest visual rendering in the Low Countries of a journey to the Ottoman Empire, one that Coecke personally took in 1533.

• An exquisite 18th- to 19th-century Ottoman long silk satin robe, or kaftan, from Türkiye (Turkey), decorated with gold and silver metallic threads in a swaying vine motif, likely worn by a woman. This work, on display for the first time since it was acquired in 1999, was recently studied by Adrienne Gendron, 2022–24 Objects Conservation Fellow in the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies. Her research into how the metallic threads were fabricated before being woven into the robe is shared in the gallery.

• A display case containing 13 historical pigment samples sheds light on some of the materials these artists used, including ultramarine, rose madder, and cinnabar. The case is also being utilized as an in-situ experiment by Celia S. Chari, 2022–25 Beal Family Postgraduate Fellow in Conservation Science in the Straus Center, who is looking into the light-induced color changes of realgar-type pigments, which are made of arsenic and sulfur. Recent technical research on an Ottoman watercolor portrait of Francis I, King of France, by Haydar Reis, has opened up a question: did the artist deliberately use pararealgar—a rare, mineral-based yellow pigment—for the golden portions of the painting, or were they originally painted with realgar, a red pigment which is known to chemically transform into pararealgar when exposed to visible light? Paint outs that contain realgar-type pigments will be exposed to gallery lights throughout the duration of the exhibition to further this investigation.

The accompanying digital resource, available through the museums’ website and via QR codes in the galleries, dives deeper into the exhibition’s core themes of encounter and imagination. A variety of contributions, ranging from short texts focused on a single object to longer technical studies, reflects a multitude of voices from across the Harvard Art Museums and Harvard University. The essays provide more in-depth information about Coecke’s woodcut frieze *Customs and Fashions of the Turks*, the Dutch craze for tulips and watercolor drawings of tulips, depictions of Islamic textiles and Ottoman attire in Netherlandish and French artworks, the hybrid objects in the exhibition that fuse elements from different cultures and styles, the technical studies of the Ottoman kaftan and Haydar Reis’s portrait of Francis I, and much more. The online platform allows for a broader investigation beyond the works displayed in the galleries and extends the life of the exhibition.

A free activity brochure for children ages 8+ is available in the exhibition galleries. Through various activities, children can further explore the clothing, accessories, and cultural traditions of those who lived during the Ottoman Empire.

From May 18 through May 30, 2024, a mural-size collage titled *Reimagined Journey* is on view in the Harvard Art Museums in conjunction with the *Imagine Me and You* exhibition. Created by children ages 5 to 12 at the Community Art Center (CAC) in Cambridge, the collage is inspired by Pieter Coecke van Aelst’s woodcut frieze *Customs and Fashions of the Turks*. Over the course of the project, the children reflected on the woodcut’s themes of cross-cultural exchange and journey and learned about a variety of media and techniques related to 16th-century works on paper. They made paper and cast the pulp
into shapes such as tulips, camels, and donkeys, and then collaged the dried shapes onto large sheets of paper, adding other elements such as drawings with pastels and markers, cut-outs of figures from Coecke’s frieze, and hand-made marbled paper. Their assembled frieze can be viewed in the museums’ Materials Lab, located on the Lower Level, during public hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10am–5pm, and also during the Harvard Art Museums at Night program on Thursday, May 30, 5–9pm.

Public Programming
A range of public programs held throughout the summer months will explore themes in the exhibition. The events listed below are held in-person at the Harvard Art Museums, 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. Admission to visit our galleries is free. For updates, full details, and to register, please click the links below or see our calendar: harvardartmuseums.org/calendar. Questions? Call 617-495-9400.

Lecture — Imagine Me and You: A Conversation across Cultures
Tuesday, May 21, 4:00pm
The opening lecture for Imagine Me and You will begin with an introduction of the exhibition by curator Talitha Maria G. Schepers. She will then be joined by three guest speakers who will each take a close look at a group of objects on view. Bringing together four distinct scholarly voices, this lecture aims to reflect the multi-cultural representation visible throughout the exhibition.
Speakers: Talitha Maria G. Schepers, Stanley H. Durwood Foundation Curatorial Fellow, Harvard Art Museums, and exhibition curator; Ayşin Yoltar-Yıldırım, Norma Jean Calderwood Curator of Islamic and Later Indian Art, Harvard Art Museums; Stephanie Schrader, Curator of Drawings, The J. Paul Getty Museum; and Yael Rice, Associate Professor of Art and the History of Art and of Asian Languages and Civilizations; Chair of Architectural Studies, Amherst College.
Free admission, but seating is limited and registration is required.

Performance — Imagine Me and You: A Musical Encounter with the Islamic World
Friday, May 24, 6:30pm
An evening of music inspired by the art and culture of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Empires (1450–1750). Performances will be led by musicians from Harvard University and the New England Conservatory.
Musicians: Nima Janmohammadi, New England Conservatory Faculty Member; Masoud Ariankhoo, Ph.D. candidate, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University; Tulaib Zafir, Ph.D. candidate, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University; Jamail Khan, M.T.S. candidate, Harvard Divinity School; Arzu Eylul Yalcinkaya, Visiting Scholar, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University; and Volkan Efe, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Harvard University.
Free admission, but seating is limited and registration is required.

Harvard Art Museums at Night
Thursday, May 30, 5–9pm
An evening of art, fun, food, and more. This evening will feature short Spotlight Tours of the exhibition Imagine Me and You, as well as an origami tulip-making activity with marbled paper in the Materials Lab throughout the night. It will also be the last chance to see a mural made by children at the Community Art Center (CAC) inspired by a monumental woodcut frieze in the exhibition.
Free admission. Advance registration is encouraged, but walk-in visitors are welcome.

Materials Lab Workshop — Weaving with Texture, with Emily Auchincloss
Saturday, July 13, 10am–4pm
Learn about the fibers and dyestuffs used to make Turkish carpets and textiles and the basic techniques of plain weave, simple pile knotting, and finishing to create mini wall hangings out of hand-dyed silk, wool, and mohair fiber. Led by fiber artist and educator Emily Auchincloss.
$15 materials fee. Registration is required and space is limited. Minimum age of 14; no previous experience required.

Gallery Talks
Thursday, May 23, 12:30pm
Friday, May 24, 12:30pm
Sunday, May 26, 12:30pm
Wednesday, May 29, 12:30pm
Saturday, June 8, 12:30pm
Tuesday, July 23, 12:30pm
Wednesday, August 7, 12:30pm
Additional dates forthcoming for June–August
Thematic 30-minute talks focused on select artworks in the exhibition Imagine Me and You, led by various scholars. Talks are limited to 18 people and are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Exhibition Tours
Saturday, May 25, 12:00pm
Saturday, June 29, 12:00pm
Additional dates forthcoming for June–August
Hourlong, in-depth explorations of the exhibition Imagine Me and You, with exhibition curator Talitha Maria G. Schepers. Talks are limited to 18 people and are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Credits
Support for Imagine Me and You is provided by the Stanley H. Durwood Foundation Support Fund and the Melvin R. Seiden and Janine Luke Fund for Publications and Exhibitions. Related programming is supported by the M. Victor Leventritt Lecture Series Endowment Fund.

Exhibition Webpage

About the Harvard Art Museums
The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, comprising three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and three research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes Western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on art from Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Together, the collections include over 255,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States. The Harvard Art Museums have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies. harvardartmuseums.org

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.
Hours and Admission
Open Tuesday–Sunday, 10am–5pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is free to all visitors. For further information about visiting, including general policies, see harvardartmuseums.org/visit.

For more information, please contact
Jennifer Aubin
Assistant Director of Media Relations
Harvard Art Museums
617-496-5331
jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu