

SHANGRI LA MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, CULTURE & DESIGN

RECREATING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE ONLINE WITH EMUSEUM



Central Courtyard. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai'i. (Photo: Oliver Koning, 2019)

The feelings of awe invoked by stepping into a museum such as Honolulu's Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design, transported to new worlds as you encounter each gallery and its objects, can be indescribable. When a cultural heritage organization aims to recreate online the in-person visit, they extend a gift—a chance for anyone to admire and interact with their collections from anywhere in the world.

The Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design is one such museum to offer both a memorable in-person experience and a virtual reimagining of their galleries. To share their opulent 4,500-object collection on the Internet—sourced from throughout the Islamic World ranging from the Middle East, North Africa, and South and Southeast Asia—they chose eMuseum, the online collections software designed, implemented, and supported by Gallery Systems.

"eMuseum is such a good, flexible product for fitting our needs. Having eMuseum integrated with TMS is a huge benefit for us."

- KRISTIN REMINGTON, DIGITAL ASSETS & COLLECTIONS MANAGER, SHANGRI LA MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, CULTURE & DESIGN



OVERVIEW

- 4,500-object collection sourced from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia



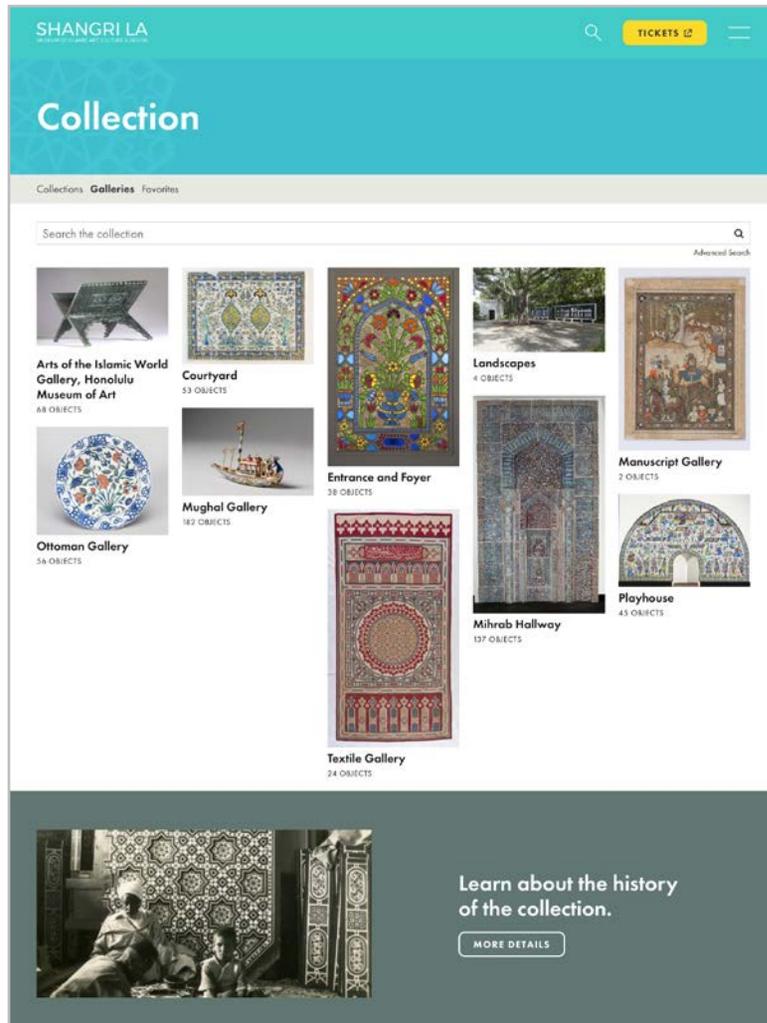
RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Collections objects shared online with the public in searchable, visually dynamic galleries
- Improvement of internal workflow and communication
- Facilitation of collaboration with academics, artists-in-residence, and artists participating in museum exhibitions



PRODUCTS

- The Museum System (TMS)
- eMuseum



Distinguished by being the only American museum devoted to Islamic art, Shangri La believes it has “a responsibility to ensure that access to the collection is available for not only Hawai’i residents, but globally as well,” says Kristin Remington, Digital Assets & Collections Manager. Sharing their collections online has proved to be a simple, wide-reaching way to meet this objective.

CHALLENGE

Like most small institutions, the Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design faces the obstacle of having limited visitor capacity, but for a rather unique reason.

The museum was once the seasonal home of Doris Duke, whose personal collection of Islamic art was foundational to its galleries. Designed according to Duke’s wishes and built from 1936 to 1938, the architecture incorporates Islamic artwork and inspiration from Islamic architectural traditions and aesthetics, with some rooms commissioned from locations as far away as India, shipped overseas, and reassembled in Honolulu. For nearly 60 years, Duke continued to commission and collect works, ultimately forming a collection of thousands of objects spanning many centuries, cultures and regions of the world.

The Shangri La museum stands upon a 4.9-acre property within the ‘ili (subdivision) of Kapahulu in the ahupua’a (land division) of Waikiki, in the moku (district) of Kona, on the mokupuni (island) of O’ahu, in the pae’aina of Hawai’i.

Access to Shangri La operates Wednesday to Saturday under special visitor guidelines, specified by a Conditional Use Permit granted by the City and County of Honolulu. Kristin explains, “Instead of driving directly to the museum, visitors must arrive as a tour group on a shuttle which departs from the Honolulu Museum of Art. These tour tickets often sell out months in advance, and the museum is limited to a maximum number of visitors allowed to access the museum each week.”

With such a remarkable collection of Islamic art on display, the team at Shangri La wanted to grant access to everyone—from intrigued Hawai’i residents and tourists to academic scholars. “We always keep open accessibility in mind,” says Kristin.

SOLUTION

The museum has been sharing its collections online through eMuseum for several years, but a decision to revamp their main museum website inspired them to also reimagine their eMuseum site. The eMuseum team at Gallery Systems was tasked with updating Shangri La's online collections site and with matching the new website's design with look and feel customization.

What the eMuseum team created for Shangri La is an online representation of their galleries that seamlessly melds into the design and navigation of their brand-new website. Kristin says, "It was amazing how Gallery Systems was willing to jump in and help us mirror our main website design so well."

As the museum began adding high-resolution photos of their collections objects, the experience of wandering virtually through the mesmerizing Shangri La museum came to life—from the Qajar polychrome tile panel fireplace to the Lusterware Mihrab and eclectic assortment of hanging lamps, to the mural by Bahia Shehab that greets visitors when they arrive. To tell onlookers about each object, the eMuseum site pulls detailed object data from Shangri La's TMS database, including date, period, medium, and gallery placement.

"eMuseum users can easily find a location where they might have been on the tour," Kristin explains. For instance, if a cut-glass decanter captured a guest's attention in the Ottoman Gallery, that person can easily locate and revisit the same object through the Galleries tab in eMuseum. "Some artworks can be difficult to track-down if sorted by material or date. We wanted that additional layer of orientation for digital users who may be just starting their journey learning about arts of the Islamic world and the Shangri La museum," Kristin says of the eMuseum navigation structure.

For Shangri La, eMuseum provides an online collections database that is as user-friendly as it is visually appealing thanks to its seamless integration with TMS, their collections management system.

"We're always open to rethinking the ways that we can communicate with the public on the digital end," Kristin says, "eMuseum is such a good, flexible product for fitting our needs. Having eMuseum integrated with TMS is a huge benefit for us."

Throughout this project, the collaboration between Shangri La and Gallery Systems has been a generative one. "Everyone excelled at working cooperatively and respectfully," says Kristin. "Gallery Systems was also available at all times and worked well with our parent organization – the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation – and their Information Services department."



Object detail view in eMuseum

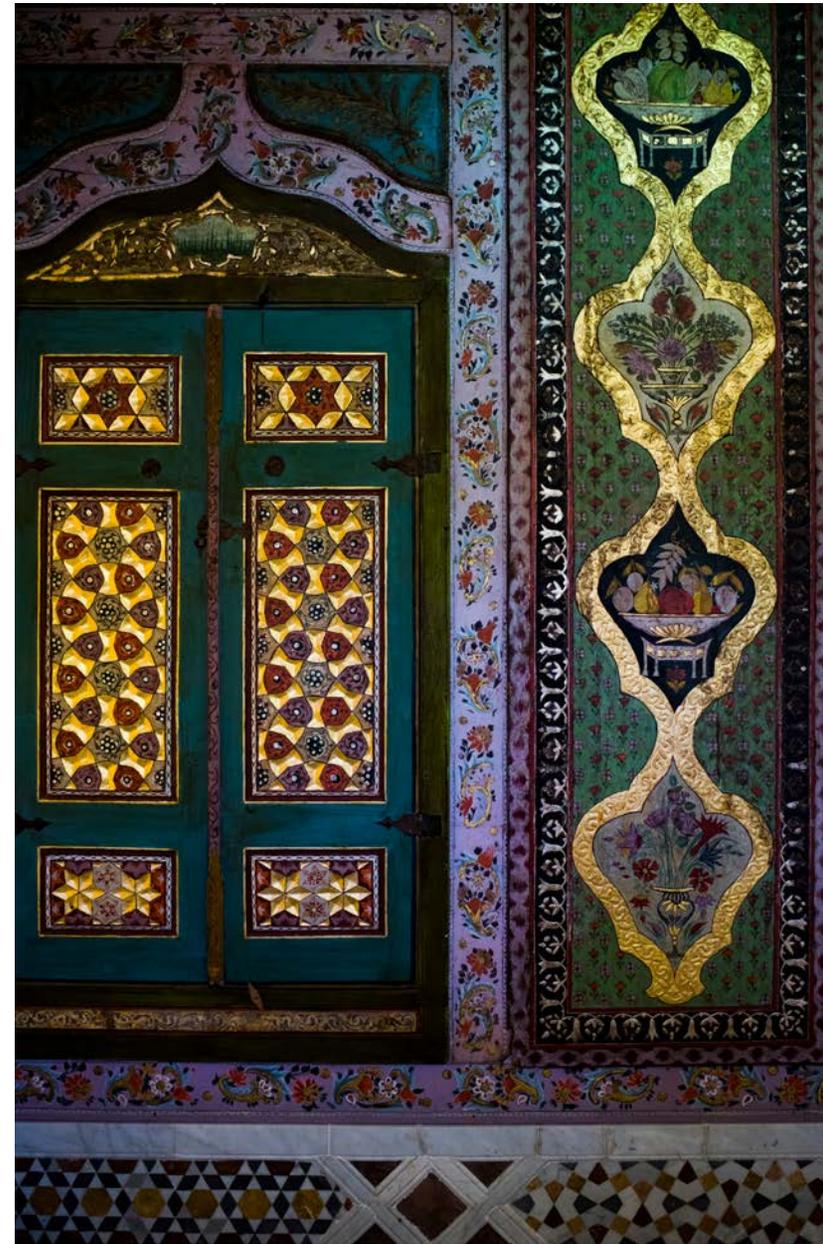
✓ OUTCOMES

With eMuseum, the core benefit for Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture & Design is twofold. Through sharing their collections online, public interest in their museum can be sparked and maintained. Moreover, having an intuitive digital database has facilitated internal workflow and improved collaboration with contemporary artists, who participate in their invitation-only Artist in Residence program.

Shangri La is also creating links between its online collections and Artist in Residence program, hosting visual artist Kamran Samimi from January 1 to December 31, 2020. "We have found a way to use eMuseum to engage with artists by asking them to visit our eMuseum site and choose which collections items speak to them." Kristin elaborates, "Then, we can highlight their selections for future social initiatives as 'artists picks' or in other ways to engage the public."

Kristin summarized how eMuseum is enhancing day-to-day operations at the museum. "It definitely helps internal workflow as much as it benefits the public to view collections from home," she says. "eMuseum improves our communication across the departments. We're so pleased to have a digital tool that functions so efficiently for the way we want to work, with transparent communication both internally and to the public."

One such project, #MuseumTake-Out, came about as Honolulu weathers the global COVID-19 pandemic, which led many museums, including Shangri La, to temporarily close their doors to the public. As an online initiative that grants insider access to the museum, #MuseumTake-Out's weekly menu features items from their digital eMuseum collections and other offerings, including past Artist in Residence interviews, topical films, music playlists, and public lectures.



Ottoman Gallery (detail of 'ajami' woodwork). Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawaii. (Photo: Elyse Butler, 2020)