

TREASURES OF THE MAGI

International exhibition
Immersive documentary film

By the director of Uncle Saddam (HBO),
Bin Laden, Dynasty of Terror and the creator
of the Despot Housewives series



MAGOS
FONDATION

MAY "THE WISE" GUIDE US
TO CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
& INTER RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

SUMMARY

A journey around the world, through centuries, religions, and civilizations, to meet the thousand and one lives of these Kings of the East glorified by the West.

For more than two thousand years, millions of anonymous people from all walks of life, believers and atheists, have celebrated the arrival of the Three Wise Men every year. Adored as planetary stars, millions of letters, especially from Spanish-speaking countries, are sent to them by anxious children at the end of the year. Others participate in huge processions or gather around a simple cake topped with a crown. But what do we really know about Melchior, Gaspard, and Balthazar? Who are these wise men from the East, and what is their real story? Were they really three in number or more? What is left of their kingdoms?

CONTENT

This exhibition, initiated by documentary film director, Joel Soler, is conceived as a real immersion in a lively documentary series that explores the life and legacy of the Three Wise Men in the event known to all, the "Nativity". It allows visitors to behold **the still-visible precious footprints** linked to the Three Wise Men, thanks to high-definition audio-visual projections; it offers the possibility of entering improbable places through virtual reality. The impressive collection of the Magos Foundation and partner collections allows visitors to explore, in one place, **works of art or objects** that have contributed to magnifying the legend of the Three Wise Men. **Original creations** will complete this playful and magical adventure based on **the interpretation of the writings** of the greatest historians and theologians of history whose works will be presented.



Tea box in silver plated metal and wood interior. Enamel lid on painted copper signed by C. Fauré (Limoges, early 20th century).
Magos Foundation Collection



Painting on canvas "The Three Wise Men guided by Balaam's prophecy" (Italy, 18th century)
"There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Num., XXIV, 17).
Magos Foundation Collection

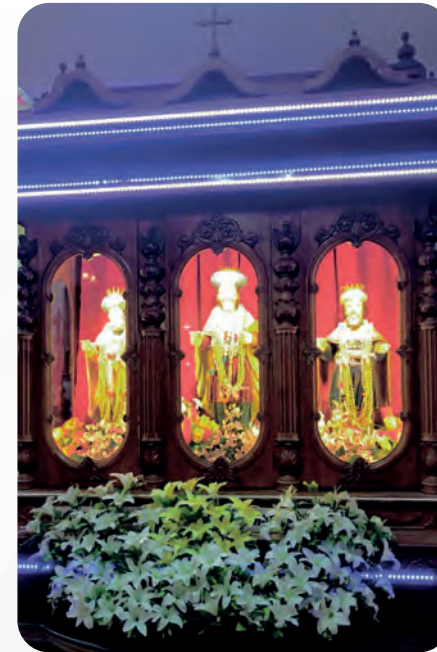
"IMMATERIAL" TREASURES

If these Three Wise Men have had an astonishing influence on our imagination for more than two millennia, it is because **their symbolic functions and the values they transmit are a perpetual source of inspiration**, which will be brought to light during this exhibition. **The treasures left by the Three Wise Men also represent the possible union of peoples and religions despite their differences.**

THE THREE WISE MEN: A SYMBOL OF UNITY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

The journey of the Three Wise Men reminds us of the extent to which the interactions between the East and the West are rooted in our history and is part of the construction of our cultures. This exhibition highlights the contribution of the greatest Eastern theologians and thinkers to our Western rites and beliefs. It reveals how these kings of the East served as a foil to the monarchs and the greatest aristocratic families of Europe. The infatuation of the West with these Eastern sages, whose fervor has not waned in the last 2000 years, is an antidote to communitarianism and inward-looking attitudes.

Wooden door with a carved oak wood applique of the Three Kings (Picardy, 16th century).
Magos Foundation Collection



Reliquary of Piravom, supposed place of the baptism of the Three Wise Men, containing three large statues of the Wise Men in a traditional house (Kerala, India).
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A BRIDGE BETWEEN PEOPLES & CIVILIZATIONS

By offering their treasures to a stranger from a different culture, religion, and social background and traveling across the world to meet someone so different, the Three Kings highlight the importance of bringing people together, regardless of their origins.

The generosity and altruism of these Wise Men when they discovered a totally foreign world, partly thanks to a star, teach us how diversity is a blessing. Why does it matter to go towards the unknown? The main thing was to make progress, to let themselves be touched, and to compare their views with others.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGIONS

Tracing the path of these wise men and looking at the roots of their posterity means crossing paths with Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Hinduism, Catholicism, and Islam.

The Three Kings are also present in Buddhism (the Buddha legend) and Hinduism (the birth of Krishna), religions practiced by the Pandyan Kings (India & Sri Lanka), a dynasty to which Gaspard the Magus belonged.



Bronze "Bazen, King of Aksum" alias Balthazar the Magus
(Aksum, 20th century).

According to Ethiopian legend, the Jewish kings of Aksum converted to Christianity in the 4th century.

Thanks to this same dynasty, the first persecuted Muslims found refuge in Aksum in the 7th century.

Bilal, the first Muezzin of Islam is a descendant of the Aksum kings.

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Oil on canvas "The meeting of the Three Wise Men"
by Eugène Delacroix

(France, 19th century).

Based on the prophecies of King David and Isaiah recorded in the Torah.

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Ottoman illumination "Hagia Sophia"

(20th century Turkey).

The relics of the Three Wise Men first found refuge in the Saint Sophia Basilica which later became a mosque. Sultana Mara (XVIth) offered the last relics to Mount Athos.

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MORE THAN 2000 REFERENCES

Master paintings, icons, works of art, stained glass windows, sacred art, chasubles, lithographs, tapestries, fans, chests, jewelry boxes, furniture, sculptures, 1,500 stamps bearing the effigy of the Magi, coins, a collection of books, and reproductions make up the Magos Foundation's collection dedicated to the Three Wise Men and their artistic and cultural world.

Each Empire associated with the Three Kings is well documented and will allow the recreation of the pomp and pageantry of each Magus' dynasty.



**Parthian censer,
Bronze patina**
(1st century BC).
Period of the Persian
Magi king, Melchior.
*Magos Foundation
Collection*



**Oil on canvas, "The
Arrival of the Magi"**
(Italy, 16th century).
Girolamo Da Carpi's
entourage.
*Magos Foundation
Collection*



Byzantine coin
(Constantinople,
7th century)
Emperor Heraclius
with his two sons in a
posture of the adoration
of the Magi.
*Magos Foundation
Collection*



**Crusader's Ring with
the Star of Bethlehem**
(France, XIIth century).
*Magos Foundation
Collection*



Osculatory (Kiss of Peace)
(XVIIIth century Belgium).
Reliquary of a piece of
the supposed mantle of
a magus sealed with the
coat of arms of the city
of Bruges.
*Magos Foundation
Collection*

AN UNIQUE PRIVATE COLLECTION

AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTIONS

Some places that have kept traces of the supposed footprints of the Three Kings throughout the world will be filmed with a refined and contemplative visual aesthetic, sometimes reinforcing the mystical side.



The making of frankincense and myrrh, a method practiced at the time of Balthazar, the Magus of Ethiopia.



"Kalaripayattu", the ancestral martial art practiced at the time of Gaspard, the Magus from India.



Mount Khwaja (Iran) where the Zoroastrian fire worshippers, the religion practiced by Melchior the magus, go on a yearly pilgrimage to await a star that will announce the arrival of a new messiah.



Landscapes through which the Three Wise Men passed: The columns of Hercules (Gibraltar & Jebel Musa in Morocco).

VIDEO WALL & PROJECTIONS



A large mural with three video screens, one for each religion, is dedicated to Prophet Daniel, nicknamed "Balthazar, the Magus of Babylon", sometimes considered the spiritual ancestor of the Three Kings. A video montage of Hebrew inscriptions and illustrations recalls the origin of Daniel, a Jew, deported to Babylon. A succession of representations on another screen shows his importance in **Christianity**. Another screen shows us the mosques, also celebrated by the **Muslims**, erected in his honor as well as his impressive tomb in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) decorated with elements of Koranic calligraphy, 18 meters long. It is said that the Saint's bones continue to grow a few centimeters every year. This wall testifies to the transcendence of religions embodied by Prophet Daniel, alias Balthazar, the Magus, a message of dialogue and respect for religions that will later inspire the Three Wise Men.



VIRTUAL REALITY

Immersive experiences will punctuate this exhibition, thanks to virtual reality headsets, which will offer the possibility to travel to the end of the world and explore emblematic places.



Virtual tour of the tomb of King Bazen alias Balthazar the Magus (Aksum, Ethiopia).



Virtual tour of the fire temples & participation in a Zoroastrian ceremony, a religion practiced by Melchior the Magus of Persia (Azerbaijan).



Virtual tour of the Chapel of the Magi, Medici Palace in Florence (Italy).



Virtual tour of the cave where the Magi rested in Al-Ubeidiya, 8 km from Bethlehem (Palestine).

ANIMATION & COMPUTER GRAPHICS

Based on the richness of artworks that will be brought to life, this exhibition will stage great moments of adventure and emotion in the lives of the Three Wise Men, as well as those of the explorers who set out on their trail. The world of the Magi kings and the mythical places they traveled through will be brought to life through computer graphics.

**ART PIECES ARE SET IN MOTION
& THROW US INTO AN
ORIENTAL ROMANTICISM**



"The departure of the Three Kings",
engraving by Sgap, by H Volet (1896).
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"Balthazar the Magus and Fatime"
by Henri Fantin-Latour (1891).
Magos Foundation Collection



Computer graphics: Jerusalem in the time of Herod.



Palaces & pool of the Queen of Sheba, supposed
ancestor of Balthazar the Magus, in Axum (Ethiopia).

**HISTORICAL PLACES
COME TO LIFE WITH
A STRIKING REALISM**

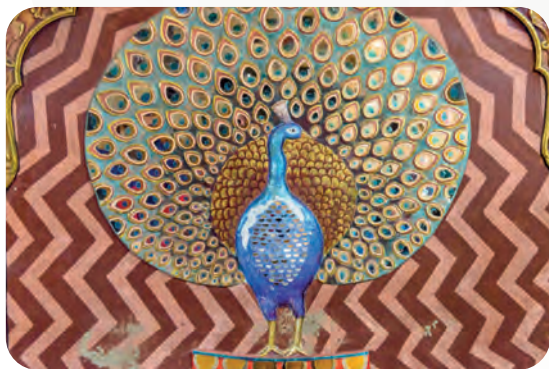
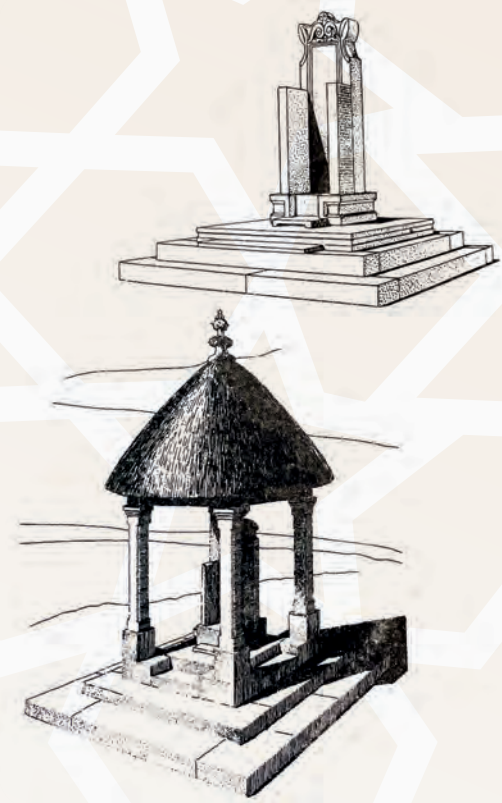


Empress Theodora's dress (Constantinople, 6th century) designed by a great fashion designer. First sovereign to be represented in the posture of the adoration of the Magi, with a tunic embroidered with the effigy of the Magi.



Resin statue of the first Magus officially received in the West. King Tiridate (1st century) will serve as a model of inspiration for the first representations of the Three Wise Men.

Resin reconstruction of the throne of the kings of Aksum, dynasty of the magus Balthazar of Ethiopia.



The peacock - a decorative element of the palaces of the Pandyan kings, dynasty of Gaspard the Magus of India.



Presentation of life-size reproduction of "The dream of the Magi" from the cathedral at Autun. The sleeping Magi are rolled up in the same blanket. We hear them breathe; the blanket moves a little.

SETS & ORIGINAL CREATIONS

OLFACTORY ODYSSEY

"When the Magi are at the gates of Jerusalem, the envoys of the king of Judea meet them: "We have come by order of our king Herod to see you. Since you have been camping here, the smell of fragrant essences has been spreading from your camp and filling our entire city. Are you merchants engaged in great commerce? Or are you powerful lords, acquainted with kings, who have an abundance of refined perfumes of all the precious flowers, which you intend to exchange in some rich country? The Magi responded, "It is not as you think. We have nothing to sell and we only ask for our passage." Armenian Apocrypha (5th century).

Let yourself be captivated by the perfumes, the aromas, the spices of the East, discover the smells of mythical places such as the catacombs of Rome, the Cave of Treasures or the interior of the mausoleum of Balthazar the Magus of Babylon...



Lithography "gifts of the Magi" signed by René Follet (France, XXth Century).
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DISCOVERY OF SOME TASTES & FLAVORS

Awaken our senses by tasting some sweets or drinks already used in the 1st century in the Magi's kingdoms, savor traditional cakes linked to the Magi with different recipes depending on the country and the region, taste some delicacies bearing the effigy of the Magi...

ACOUSTIC TOUR

Be moved by a hubbub in Aramaic on a market in Jerusalem, by the resonance of escorts crossing sand dunes in the desert, by Herod's cries of anger in Hebrew, by the celebrations with the sound of kombu when Gaspard the Magus leaves India, by folk songs, by the sound of camels quenching their thirst at the Magi's well...

INTERACTIVE TOUR

Stretch out Tyrian purple fabrics used for the mantle of the Magi, play in a creative space dedicated to children, climb on a royal palanquin perched on a resin elephant lying on the ground, embrace reproductions of jungle animals typical of the world of the Magi, put your hands around the sacred Zoroastrian fire...



SENSORY IMMERSION

HISTORICAL STANCE

To investigate the true story of Melchior, Gaspard, and Balthazar, we must, first of all, list and find the manuscripts dealing with these Wise Men in the first centuries of the millennium. The numerous Apocrypha, as well as the works of the first Eastern Christians such as Ignatius of Antioch (1st century), Justin of Nablus (2nd century), Tertullian of Carthage (2nd century), and Origen of Alexandria (3rd century), constitute **the first witnesses and messengers of the post-mortem adventure of the Magi. They reveal immeasurable details relating to the Magi.** None of them, however, provides tangible proof of their existence. Paradoxically, it is the commentaries of the Romans, enemies of Christianity until the 4th century, that prove to be the richest in unraveling the threads of a controversial story. They give, in spite of themselves, a real legitimacy to the existence of the Three Wise Men. The texts of Muslim scholars from the period of the "golden age of Islam", for their part, bring a more moderate vision and reinforce the idea of the singular place that they occupy in the imagination because of the plurality of beliefs that they embody and transcend. The New Testament itself, and later the Fathers of the Church, refer us to the foundations of another religion, Judaism, in order to understand the journey of these Kings from the East, thanks to the prophecies of Micah, David, and Isaiah inscribed in the Torah. And it is to Yosef ben Matityahu (Flavius Josephus), a Jew of the first century who was familiar with Herod's entourage, that we owe the most credible text on the existence of the Magi.

In spite of these thousand-year-old testimonies, there is no irrefutable archeological evidence to this day that can certify their existence. **There is, therefore, no history of these Three Kings, strictly speaking, but rather an incredible saga based on the writings and testimonies about these sages from the East.** It is, therefore, this story of more than two thousand years of writings and representations of the Magi that will be told during this exhibition centered around Three Kings whose names have marked the collective subconscious: Gaspard of India, Melchior of Persia, and Balthazar of Ethiopia.



Lithographs from the private collection of King Fernando VII of Spain. "La Adoración de los Magos" stamped with the coat of arms of the Kings of Spain (1832).
Magos Foundation Collection

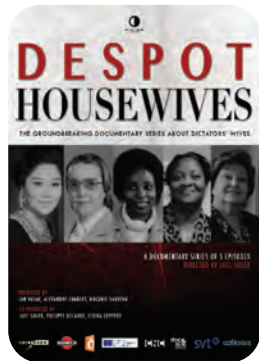


Large mosaic panel by Elo (France, circa 1950).
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Aksum chest carved in painted wood "King Bazen, alias Balthazar & the Magus" (Ethiopia, 20th century).
Magos Foundation Collection

BY DIRECTOR JOEL SOLER



2015 - 2017
Director & Associate Producer of the series "DESPOT HOUSEWIVES", season I & season II, 8 episodes

"This series highlights the roles and responsibilities of dictator's wives."

Eight times 52 minutes, co-produced by Canal + Group (Planète +), France Television, in partnership with eight European channels and with the support of the MEDIA program of the European Union.



2009
Director & Producer "UNCLE HITLER"
"A documentary about the descendants of the family of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun".

Screened in 15 countries.
 Distribution TVF, London.



2004
Director & Producer "BIN LADEN, DYNASTY OF TERROR"
"Meet the family and inner circle of the world's most wanted man shortly after 9/11."

Screened in 15 countries including ZDF (Germany), RAI Uno (Italy), ABC (Australia), TV3 (New Zealand), Channel 4 (Finland), TV2 (Denmark), VRT (Belgium). Produced with the support of The Fund for Investigative Journalism.



2001
Director & Producer "UNCLE SADDAM"
"A unique documentary on the private life of Saddam Hussein while he was still the president of twenty million Iraqis".

Released in 2001 in theaters in Los Angeles (Laemmle Theatre) for official competition at the Oscars, documentary category. Biggest audience for the American channel HBO/Cinemax for non-fiction in 2002.

Screened in 42 countries including: ABC (USA), HBO/Cinemax (USA), TF1 (France), Channel 4 (UK), ZDF (Germany), RAI Uno (Italy), CBC (Canada), ABC (Australia), TV3 (New Zealand), Channel 4 (Finland), TV2 (Denmark), VRT (Belgium), Antenna 3 (Spain), ORF (Austria), RTL (Hungary), TVB (Hong Kong), TBS (Japan), MBC (Middle East), Telefe (Argentina), SFDRS (Switzerland)

Official selections for film festivals

Amnesty International Film Festival, United Nations Film Festival, Hot Spring Film Festival, Denver International Film Festival, Vancouver Film Festival, Bangkok Film Festival, Florida International Film Festival, Amsterdam Film Festival, Jerusalem Film Festival, Outfest Los Angeles (jury member).

Best Documentary Film Award

Northampton Film Festival, New Orleans Film Festival, Mexico Film Festival, Rai Uno Television.

CINEMA VERITÉ INSTITUTE

Joel Soler founded the "Cinema Vérité Institute" in 2007 with the support of Nobel Peace Prize winners Jody Williams and Wangari Maathai as well as Queen Noor of Jordan. Several social issues were highlighted through the medium of films in events produced in Paris, Geneva, Abu Dhabi and Monaco in which Catherine Deneuve, Jane Fonda, Susan Sarandon, Sharon Stone, Omar Sharif and Carla Del Ponte of the International Criminal Court participated.

www.cinema-verite.org



LETTER OF INTENT

I am the son of Mary, and Joseph, a former seminarian destined to join the priesthood... While my mother now devotes no less than 7 hours a day to prayer, my father serves as a deacon alongside the priest of our small village in southern France. However, to the great disappointment of my parents, it was rather Islam that attracted my attention.

Originally from Andalusia, marked by eight centuries of Muslim presence, some of my "Moorish" ancestors had to convert to Christianity to escape expulsion. My distant ancestor, Cidi Yahia bin Yahia (Don Pedro Granada Venegas), grandson of King Youssuf IV of Granada, preferred to join Isabella, the Catholic, to bring down the Nasrid dynasty he was part of. This genealogy, linked to a line of kings of the East who left treasures like the Alhambra in the West, is certainly not foreign to one of my deep convictions that, beyond the differences of the fertile character of the indispensable meeting between East and West is the union of their peoples and religions.

Having lived for a while in the United Arab Emirates, I learned Muslim prayer and I found myself in the ecumenical and universal figure of Abraham, Ibrahim in the Coran. My attraction to Islam is undoubtedly linked to my fascination for the East. It was in Iraq and Jordan that I shot my first film, "Uncle Saddam". I discovered Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon for my second documentary about Osama bin Laden's family. Even my short detention in bin Laden's father-in-law's village in Yemen did not discourage me from continuing my numerous stay in the Arab world! During the series "Despot Housewives" that I made with the support of Yasser Arafat's widow, I took an interest in the first ladies of Libya, Syria, Egypt, and Tunisia. The East fascinates me, and I have this deep feeling that it is in my DNA.

My interest in the Magi Kings started by chance during a trip to Aksum in Ethiopia, the place of the first Hijra, more precisely, where the persecuted family of Prophet Mohammad found refuge with the Christian king. I then discovered that, according to the Ethiopians, Balthazar, the Magus, descended from this same dynasty. The visit to Aksum to the tomb of Balthazar (Bazen for the Ethiopians) will then arouse my curiosity. Having studied the history of the Sumerians in evening classes at the Louvre, I then began to research these Three Kings, called Magi, whose collective imagination readily places them in Babylon. Through art, literature, music, theater, and popular traditions, I understand that the Three Wise Men have become the most celebrated and represented rulers in human history. Not to mention that in many countries, thousands of children are not waiting for Santa Claus but for the three travelers.

The originality of this exhibition, in the form of an immersive documentary, lies in my initial motivation: to discover these kings through the prism of a fascinating and mesmerizing East. My first task was to consult the first writings from Alexandria, Damascus, and Antioch and find hints about these three monarchs among the great Muslim scholars. Armed with all this information, I began the travels which excited me by their sometimes exaggerated pomp: Every year, a village in India, where the Magi were supposedly baptized after their departure from Bethlehem, organizes an incredibly exotic procession in honor of the Three Kings. In the north of Sri Lanka, where Gaspard, the Magus, is said to have come from, folklore brings us back to explosions of color and parades of elephants in full regalia. Persia, the supposed land of Melchior, immerses us in one of the most radiant civilizations. The interior of the Medici palace in Florence transposes the Magi into a marvelous world surrounded by cheetahs, monkeys, and other creatures. In Spain and Latin America, the disproportionate processions

held in homage to these idols, which the children call "Majestad", convinced me of the "grandiose" bias that must prevail.

My travels in Turkey have, however, brought me back to a difficult reality. This stay enlightened me on the capital contribution of the Christian Empire of Constantinople and, more broadly, of the Christian East to both Western and Eastern civilizations. It also opened my eyes to the current suffering of Christians in the East and their heritage. Saint Sophia (Istanbul) is the guardian of the first relics of the Magi, where the sumptuous Byzantine mosaics have been hidden

by sheets since its conversion into a mosque in 2020. The Zuqnin monastery (Diyarkabir), where the most important chronicle on the history of the Magi was translated, is almost completely buried in the ground. Antioch (Antakya), the cradle of the greatest theologians such as Chrysostom, keeps no testimony of those who made this city great fame. The presumed tomb of one of the Magi in the Armenian monastery of Surb Karapet (Muş, Eastern Turkey) was partially destroyed during the Armenian genocide, one of the largest massacres of Christians in the East, and is now used as a manure dump. The methodical destruction of the Christian heritage in Turkey constitutes a cultural



A life-size Magi with a large urn to deposit the letters addressed each year to the "Reyes Magos" (Spain XXth Century).

Magos Foundation Collection

genocide taking place before our eyes with almost total indifference.

This trip made me aware of the importance of the memory of these treasures of humanity in danger and these Christians of the East who, I hope, will be brought to light during the realization of this project.

"When learning about what concerns our planet as a philosopher, you first look to the East, the cradle of all the arts that have given everything to the West," said Voltaire, who himself wrote a lot about the Magi and translated several Apocrypha that offer a precious source of information about them. This exhibition, informed by the greatest theologians and historiographers, reminds us how much Eastern Christianity and Judaism are the architects of many of our beliefs in the West and the Muslim world. Recognizing and celebrating this is also a way of demonstrating that the supposed East/West fracture is historically unfounded and that the sometimes contemptuous view of the West on the East is an aberration.

The great story of the Magi represents, as far as I am concerned, much more than a sacred, mythical, historical, or legendary story of the Christian Gospels.

It embodies the universalism of cultures, civilizations, and religions. It represents a common element that unites people, which I hope to transmit in an underlying way through this exhibition that I will define as enchanting and surprising by the information it reveals.

Joel Soler, director

חוכמה עדיפה על כוח
"Wisdom is better than strength."

Ecclesiastes 16:17

وَعَلَامَاتٍ وَبِالنَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ
"And by the stars (men) guide themselves."

Qur'an, An Nahl 16.16



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magos.infos@gmail.com

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