

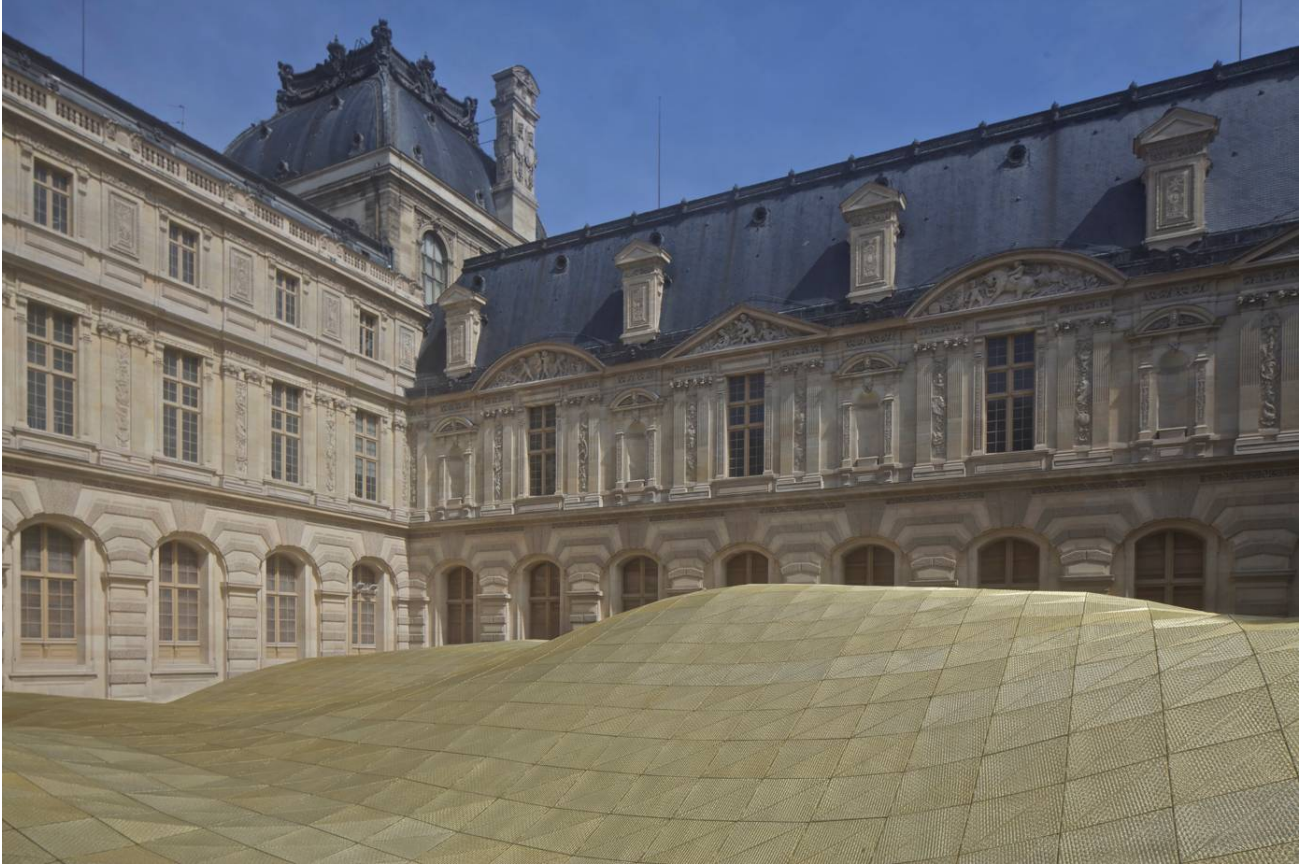
THE LOUVRE INAUGURATES A NEW ARCHITECTURE

Twenty-three years since the inauguration of the pyramid designed by Ieoh Ming Pei, the Louvre inaugurates its second and latest piece of contemporary architecture: the new Department of Islamic Arts built in the Cour Visconti to the **design by Milanese architect Mario Bellini and his French colleague Rudy Ricciotti**. Seven years of work (the international competition was adjudicated in 2005), three years of construction works, 6,800 square metres of new space for the Parisian gallery of which 3,800 dedicated to exhibition and destined to house the prestigious collection of Islamic Arts, up to now exhibited in small, inadequate rooms.

The new architecture – scheduled for inauguration on the 18th of September in the presence of the French premier François Hollande – is not a building in the traditional sense of the word, nor is it a mere ‘cover’ for the courtyard. “It’s more like an enormous veil that undulates as if suspended in the wind, almost touching the ground of the courtyard at one point, but without totally encumbering it or contaminating the historic facades” explains **Mario Bellini, who also designed the exhibition installation with Renaud Pierard**. The new Department – developed over two floors with access from the pyramid, and occasionally from the Seine through the Cour Visconti itself – will be open to the public from the 22nd of September.



Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Raffaele Cipolletta. Courtesy Mario Bellini Architect(s)



Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Philippe Ruault. Courtesy Musée du Louvre

ARCHITETURAL PROJECT by Mario Bellini and Rudy Ricciotti

EXHIBITION AND INSTALLATION PROJECT by Mario Bellini and Renaud Pierard

The project

“We didn’t draw on any particular aspect of folklore, but a single strategic choice: it would have been far easier to generate a new space simply by covering the Cour Visconti with a classic glass roof, but this would have exposed the art of Islam to an embarrassing cross-contamination with the eighteenth century character of the palace of the kings of France, whereas creating a small new building with several floors in the middle would have meant dispersing the entire collection over various different levels. The solution was a *foulard* that undulates as if suspended in space the wind, almost touching the ground of the courtyard at one point, but without totally encumbering it or contaminating the historic facades”. Mario Bellini

“A delicate gesture, capable of exalting this collection, holding it suspended in a dialogue of semi-transparency – but without incongruous interference – with the eighteenth-century Cour Visconti, its facades and the Parisian sky”. Mario Bellini

“The geometry of the roof, lissom, almost textile, responds to the continuity of the interior space, populated by large displays cases entirely in crystal, freely arranged like fish in an aquarium. Set slightly back from the outer perimeter, glass is again called on to vertically seal the entire roof with the paving of the courtyard. Here the challenge was to achieve this in a totally invisible manner. Under the grand cloak of the roof the space has been kept unitary, fluid and dynamic. A number of “*openings*” in the courtyard paving open the view of the roof and the perception of natural light to the floor below, giving the entire exhibition space an involving sense of integrity”. Mario Bellini

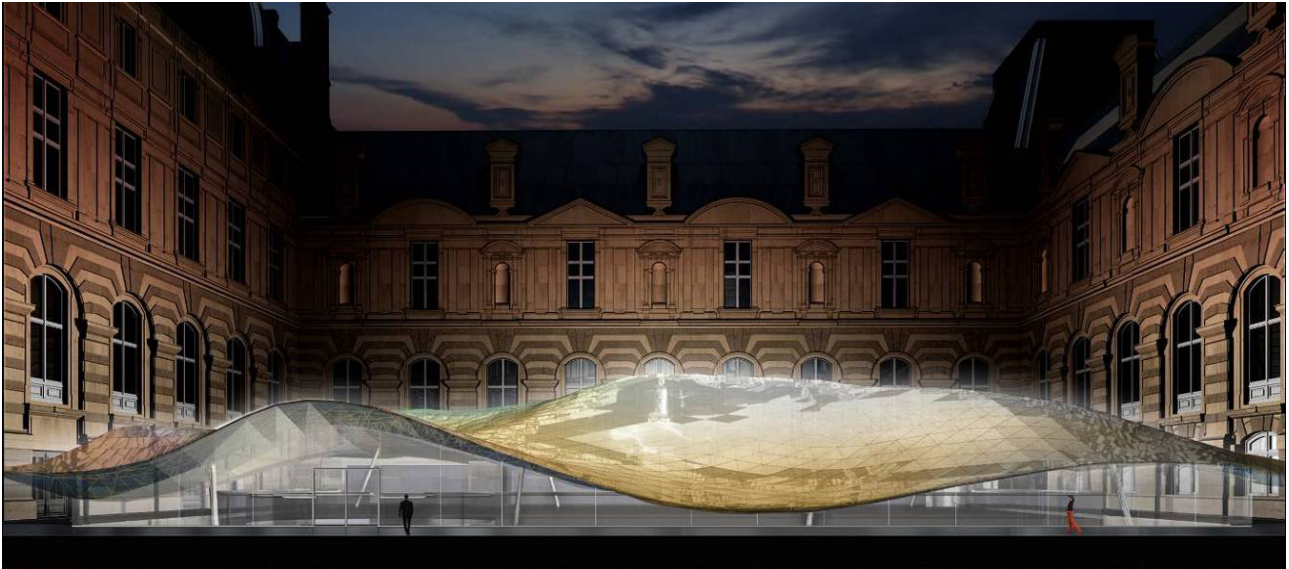
“Obviously, no references to flying carpets, Islamic veils or *musciarabia*: simply a deep respect for the Islamic collection, combined with a personal knowledge (gained during the course of numerous journeys) of its geographical and cultural context”. Mario Bellini

“Our greatest challenge was to keep the implicit promises of the competition design, without sacrificing its initial tension and impulse:

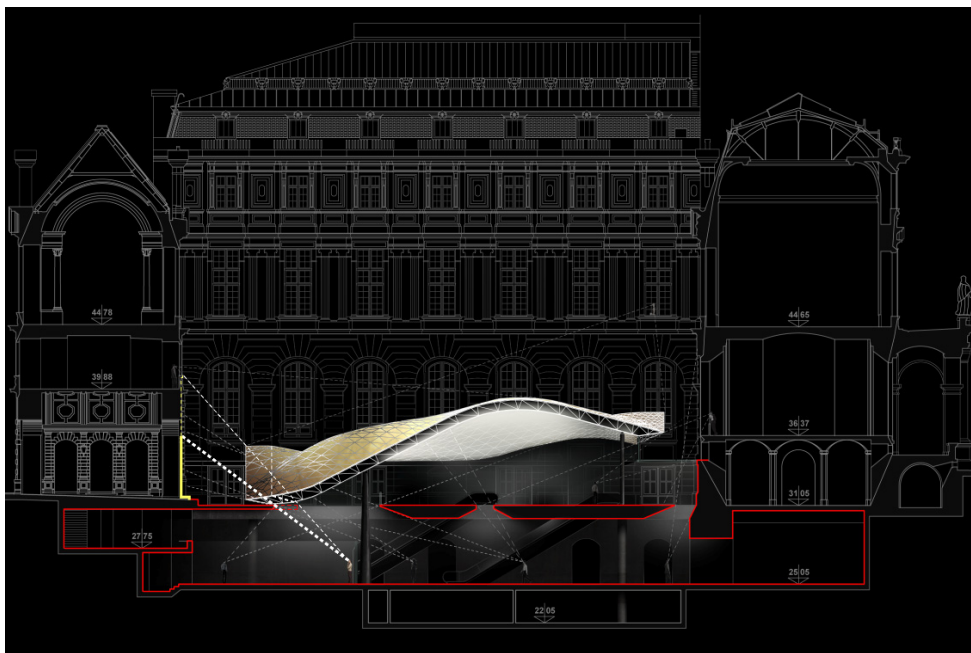
- maintaining the sense of lightness, suspension/levitation of the roof
- controlling and moderating the daylight without losing the ‘open-air’ atmosphere
- developing empathic / dialectic compatibility between the courtyard and the new pavilion
- Connecting the new space dedicated to Islamic art with the customary route of visitors to the Louvre without compromising its singularity”. Mario Bellini

DEFINITIONS OF THE ROOF

“Foulard”
“Veil”
“Bedouin tent”
“Golden dune”
“Golden wave”



Render Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Courtesy Mario Bellini and Rudy Ricciotti



Render Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Courtesy Mario Bellini and Rudy Ricciotti



Detail of the roof © Raffaele Cipolletta. Courtesy Mario Bellini Architect(s)



View of the court from the roof © Raffaele Cipolletta. Courtesy Mario Bellini Architect(s)

How is the roof made?

- It has a thickness ranging from 20 centimetres to 1.50 metres, and weighs a total of 120 tons. It has a surface area of around 1500 square metres and is made up of around 2400 triangles measuring approximately 120x120x160 centimetres. Its maximum height from the ground is about 8 metres.
- It is supported by eight light pillars, not vertical but slightly inclined relative to each other to accentuate the sense of lightness.
- It is the product of long studies and research – undertaken for the Louvre – and the result of a sum of materials which, from the outside to the inside, appear in the following order:
 - 1 – double triangular panels in brilliant gold and silver aluminium mesh
 - 2 – insulating and filtering double glazing
 - 3 – welded tubular steel space frame structures
 - 4 – triangular polished aluminium honeycomb panels to refract the external images and diffuse daylight
 - 5 – like the outer skin, double triangular panels in brilliant gold and silver aluminium mesh.

The other materials used

- The **perimeter walls** at courtyard level consist of large sheets of extra-clear, high-thickness glass with invisible joints.
- The **gallery spaces on the lower level** and the long sculptoreal stairway between the ground and lower levels are made entirely using special black waxed concrete.
- The **floors** are composed of dark grey concrete slabs with gold and silver effect metallic inclusions.



Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Philippe Ruault. Courtesy Musée du Louvre



Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Antoine Mongodin. Courtesy Musée du Louvre



Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Philippe Ruault. Courtesy Musée du Louvre



Department of Islamic Arts at Louvre © Foto di Antoine Mongodin. Courtesy Musée du Louvre



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The images of the interiors may be published only after the inauguration of September 18th.



Mario Bellini visiting the Department of Islamic Arts, Louvre © courtesy Mario Bellini Architect(s)

MORE FIGURES

Cost:

40 million Euros approx.: including the exhibition installation.

Areas:

2,200 m² approx. (55x40m): area of the Cour Visconti.

6,800 m² approx.: total area of the work.

3,800 m² approx.: exhibition area.

Large display cases:

Approx. 60: in crystal glass and of various sizes to house the 3 to 4 thousand items (exhibited in rotation) of the precious collection of Islamic art owned by the Louvre, in terms of richness comparable to that of the Metropolitan Museum of New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

THE DATES

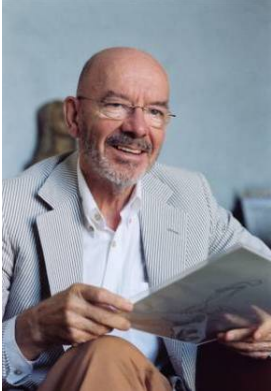
July 2005: Mario Bellini and Rudy Ricciotti are declared the winners of the competition in the presence of president Jacques Chirac

July 2008: foundation stone laying ceremony in the presence of president Nicolas Sarkozy.

January 2009: start of works

August 2012: site handover

September 2012: Tuesday the 18th, president François Hollande inaugurates the new Department of Islamic Art



© courtesy Mario Bellini Architect(s)

MARIO BELLINI

Mario Bellini is internationally renowned as an architect and designer. He has received the Golden Compass Award eight times, and other prestigious architecture awards including the Medaglia d'oro awarded by President of the Italian Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi for furthering design and architecture in the world (2004) and the Ambrogino d'Oro for civic merit awarded by the Municipality of Milan (2011).

He has given talks in many of the world's great cultural centres and was the editor of *Domus*. He has 25 works of his in the permanent design collection of the New York Museum of Modern Art, which dedicated a personal retrospective to him in 1987.

He has had countless exhibitions in his name in Italy and abroad.

From the 1980s onwards, he has designed projects such as the Portello Trade Fair quarter Milan, the Villa Erba Exhibition Centre, the Tokyo Design Centre in Japan, the Natuzzi America Headquarters in the United States, the Trade Fair in Essen Germany, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, the headquarters of Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt, the Museum of the History of Bologna and the Verona Forum complex.

Projects getting underway at present include the new Cultural Centre in Turin, and work has just started on the renovation of the Brera Pinacoteca in Milan.

Projects under construction at the moment include:

- The Erzelli Science and Technology Park complex in Genoa;
- The new Milan Convention Centre, the largest in Europe;
- The Casa Altra Office Building in Düsseldorf.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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www.mariobellini.com

Visit the site of the Department of Islamic Arts at the Louvre:

<http://www.louvre.fr/le-nouveau-departement-des-arts-de-l-islam>

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