

ART

This 12-foot-tall Syrian mural travelled 10,000 kilometres to get to the Aga Khan Museum

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This Saturday, the Aga Khan Museum unveils its newest exhibition, *Syria: A Living History*, a collection of art and artifacts from across the globe that stretches 5,000 years into the country's past. As one of the first major international art shows to focus exclusively on Syria, it offers Canadian audiences first looks at paintings, sculptures and objects from private collections and major institutions like the Louvre and Met. One of the show's highlights is *Deluge: The Gods Abandon Palmyra*, a 12-foot-tall mural by contemporary Syrian artist Elias Zayat that arrived in a crate from Syria last week. We shadowed the team in charge of its installation to find out what went into getting the piece out of the box and onto the wall.



***Deluge: The Gods Abandon Palmyra*, 2011–2012. Acrylic on canvas. Mural by Elias Zayat**

The mural is a depiction of the Mesopotamian tale of Gilgamesh, which Zayat situated in Palmyra as a way to link Syria’s past, present and future: Palmyra is both an ancient city and a symbol of resistance in Syria’s current circumstances.

The painting is on loan from the Atassi Foundation, an organization in Dubai dedicated to preserving Syria’s creative legacy. When Filiz Çakir Phillip, a co-curator of the Aga Khan’s exhibit, first saw the painting in person, she thought, “No matter what, we have to have it. Raise the ceiling if we must, I don’t care.” The Foundation dismantled it (the painting stretches across five panels), packed it into crates and shipped it nearly 10,000 kilometres to the Aga Khan Museum. A crew began unpacking it last Friday:



After opening the crate, the installation crew removed multiple layers of Styrofoam and tissue that cushioned each of the panels, a process that took 45 minutes:

Senior exhibitions manager Sarah Beam-Borg explains that the Aga Khan was in the dark about some of the mural's specifications until it arrived at their door. "We knew it was painted in sections but we did not know how many or what the dimensions were," she says. "Happily, it proved really straightforward to hang. It's really light—perhaps 12 pounds. It's just a painted canvas on a wooden stretcher frame":