

7) BACKGROUND & READINGS

A Reverence for Words: Understanding Muslim Cultures through Poetry & Song

Background

A Reverence for Words draws on two NEH funded programs created by City Lore and Poets House: *Illuminated Verses: Poetries of the Islamic World*, a series of talks, readings, panels and symposia held in the spring of 2011 in New York City; and *Poetic Voices of the Muslim World* (2012-2014), a project which examines the central role of poetry in the everyday lives of Muslim men and women through three entry points: a website (www.poeticvoicesofthemuslimworld.org), speakers bureau, and exhibit on Muslim poetry which travels to public libraries in six American cities. Programs to date have focused on the following areas: 1) Scholars on Poets and Poetic Traditions (from classical authors like Rumi and Mirza Ghalib to contemporary poets from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey; 2) Scholars on Poetic Forms (i.e. the ghazal, the epic, the qasida); and 3) Thematic Approaches to Understanding the Role of Poetry in the Muslim World, such as poetry and identity; poetry and politics; and women's poetic traditions.

This institute has been timed to coincide with the *Poetic Voices of the Muslim World* exhibit at the Queens Public Library, which participants will attend, and it employs the expertise of humanities scholars who specialize in the cultures featured as well as that of several New York's pre-eminent arts organizations: City Lore, which presents traditional music, art, and ethnographic films in New York along with developing successful models for integrating traditional arts and artists into the core curricula in K-12 schools; Poets House, which presents poetry, both at their site and in partnership with libraries across the U.S. through their Poetry in the Branches program; Teachers & Writers Collaborative, which offers innovative creative writing programs for students and teachers and providing resources to support learning through the literary arts; and Asia Society, a leading educational organization dedicated to promoting mutual understanding and strengthening partnerships among peoples, leaders and institutions of Asia.

Readings

- Preparatory materials: In preparation for the institute, participants are asked to review the *Poetic Voices of the Muslim World* web exhibit found at www.poeticvoicesofthemuslimworld.org and PBS's documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith*, the latter of which will be sent in a packet to accepted Summer Scholars.
- Readings for the institute: Key readings for the institute will be short articles and poems selected by the faculty. Accepted Summer Scholars will receive a packet in PDF format prior to the start of program.