

EXHIBITIONS

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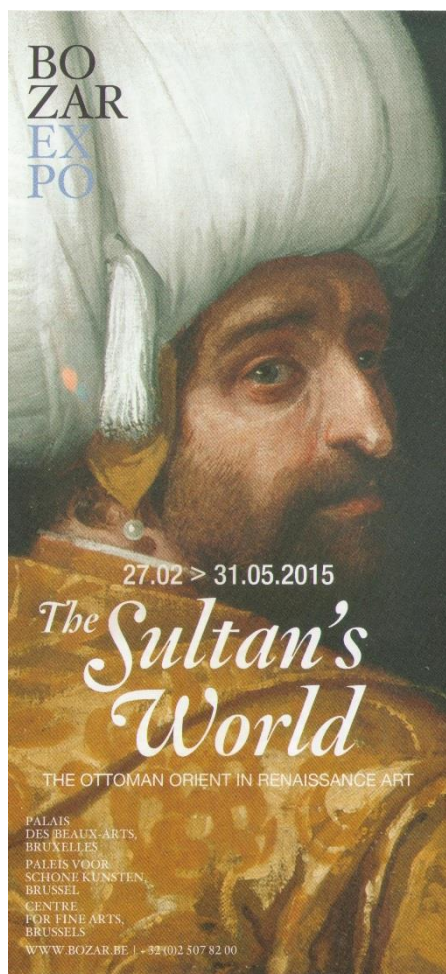
Magnificent Cultural Treasures in Brussels

During the spring of this year two extraordinary exhibitions are held in Brussels: *THE SULTAN'S WORLD – The Ottoman Orient in Renaissance Art* in BOZAR and *GAO XINGJIAN. Retrospective* in Museum of Ixelles. These two exhibitions are presented below.

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THE SULTAN'S WORLD

– *The Ottoman Orient in Renaissance Art* –

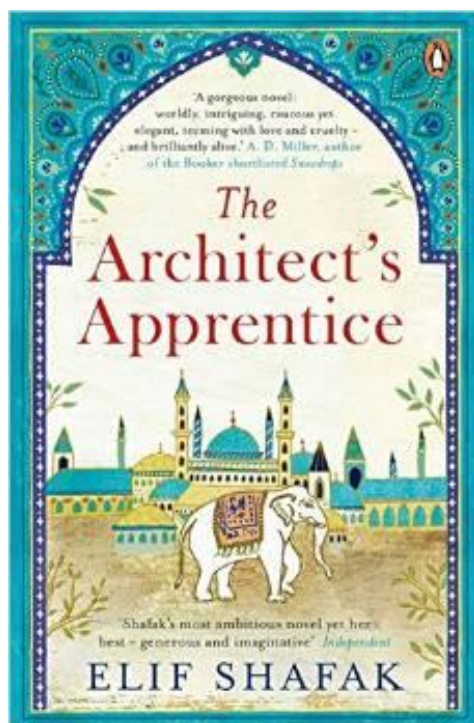


This exhibition is held in [BOZAR](#) (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles / Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussel / Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels) between 27 February and 31 May 2015. The exhibition will move to the [National Museum in Kraków](#) from 26 June until 27 September 2015 with the title *Ottomania – The Ottoman Orient in Renaissance Art* – where it will get a greater Polish focus.

This exhibition is organized in the context of the international project “[Ottomans&Europeans – Reflecting on Five Centuries of Cultural Relations](#)”, which puts the cultural ties between Europe and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey in the spotlight.

Many aspects of arts have a fairly direct relationship to the politics of the day. The exhibition *The Sultan's World* is a prime example of this relationship. During the past 15 years or so Turkey has become a regional (economic) power and the Central-Eastern European countries which joined the European Union in the same period have asserted their position as full members of the European family or nations. The sole existence of the exhibition is a testimony to the first and the widening of the European context, including the Central-Eastern European countries into the mainstream of it is a testimony to the second.

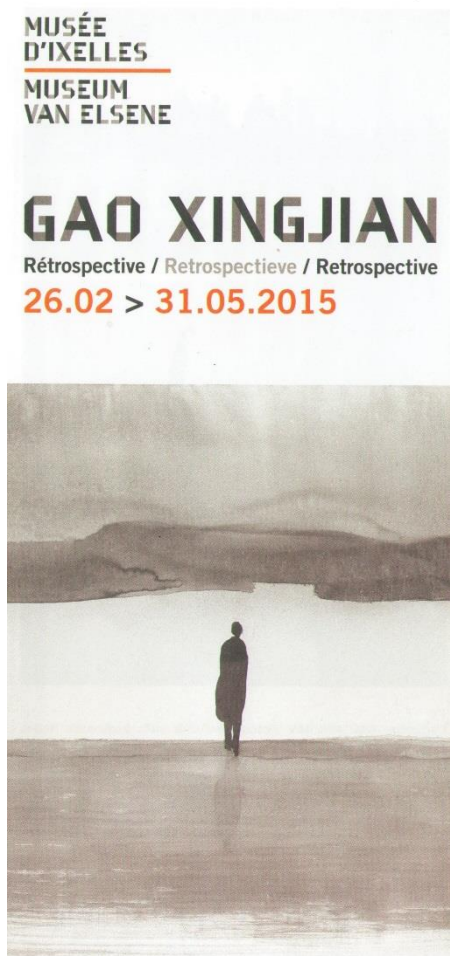
The Ottoman Empire came into existence at the end of the 12th century in Anatolia and achieved its zenith in the 15th. During this period it became the leading Islamic polity, it made deep inroads into Europe, Asia and Africa. A conflict with Europe became inevitable, and due to its different religious background it was easy to paint it as the arch-enemy of Christian Europe. The centuries-long relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Europe though was a complex one and this fact is perfectly reflected in this superb exhibition. Although it tackles the issue of political propaganda in renaissance art it goes beyond the clichés used in it during the period in question and delves into the complex web of Ottoman-European relationships. If one wishes to summarize in one key sentence the main message of the exhibition: it is the unearthing of the long process of discovering the 'Other'. Much attention is paid to the Renaissance portraiture of the Sultans, the discovery of mostly Venetian painters of Istanbul and the everyday life of the Ottoman Empire, the lure of the Orient, trade, the exchange of books, ideas, and many more. Superbly exhibited in the spacious rooms of BOZAR, visiting this exhibition is a real pleasure and a great cultural adventure.



The exhibition opened shortly after the release of Elif Shafak's latest novel *'The Architect's Apprentice'*, which is an ode to the greatest Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan. The author, one of Turkey's leading novelists, is the ambassador to this exhibition who not only wrote an introduction for the hardback exhibition catalogue (available in English, French and Dutch) but she also put together a literary visitor's guide *'Beyond East and West: The Language of Tulips'*. She chose eight exhibited works and wrote a personal commentary to them. One of the selected works is Melchior Lorck's *Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent* (Full-length portrait with a view to the Süleymaniye Mosque), 1573, London, The British Museum.

According to the commentary this picture was the main inspiration for her latest novel. In the forefront a full-length portrait of Sultan Süleyman, and in the background there is an elephant with a mahout and a banner, before the Süleymaniye Mosque. Its unusual imagery captivated her imagination and ultimately led to a beautiful novel. A nice conclusion to the exhibition is a literary evening with Elif Shafak on the 28 May 2015 at 20:00 in BOZAR.

Exhibitions like *The Sultan's World* are invaluable. Paintings, scrolls, coins, carpets, and other artifacts were lent by several dozen musea. It would be close to impossible to see all these in their original places. Therefore it is a great possibility to visit this exhibition, either in Brussels or in Krawków, to better understand our past and to have another view of the 'Other'.

GAO XINGJIAN. Retrospective

This exhibition is held in [Museum of Ixelles](#) (Musée d'Ixelles / Museum van Elsene) between 26 February and 31 May 2015. Usually there are no retrospective exhibitions for living artists. This exhibition is thus a rarity from this perspective, which the artists acknowledges much; he is very thankful to the Museum of Ixelles, which holds the largest retrospective exhibitions devoted to him.

Gao Xingjian was born in 1940 and though he attended the Foreign Language Institute in Peking in order to study French, he pursued simultaneously literature and painting, which was always a long tradition in China, contrary to European tendencies where there was an insistence on concentrating on one area or the other. Actually it was painting that brought him to Europe on a scholarship in 1987 and in 1989 after the events on the Tiananmen Square he sought political asylum in France.

While keeping up with painting he also continued to write in several genres: novels like *Soul Mountain*, *One Man's Bible*, short stories and drama (e.g. *Snow in August*). In 2000 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the first Chinese person to receive this famous prize.

Gao Xingjian's writing and painting exhibit the same characteristics: humanistically subjective, sublime, soul-searching for freedom, independent from any school, free of any constraint of doctrines or -isms. Furthermore, he combines Western and Eastern techniques, traditions in his own artistic pursuit, which is finding the light with an inner vision. For him the dividing line between abstract and figurative is irrelevant, his paintings are suggestive, in the best traditions of pictorial art.

In a brief interview given on the occasion of this retrospective exhibition he reiterated his choice for material usage: he uses Indian ink, but not to make it specifically Chinese. Next to that he paints on canvas, with a frame, which is quite Western. In this sense his paintings are a nod to both the East and the West.

Gao Xingjian. Retrospective is a beautiful and rich exhibition, which allows every visitor to delve in his or her inner self. It is accompanied by a hardback exhibition catalogue in French, in which the exhibited paintings are complemented by beautiful literary commentary.

