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Miras

Celebrating Uyghur Culture

17 October 2020 – 27 February 2021

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Photography by Gerrie Mifsud.

The MIRAS exhibition - Miras meaning heritage or legacy - is a celebration of Uyghur culture through a display of carefully curated objects, music, dance, food, costume and poetry.

Fairfield City Museum and Gallery have worked closely with The Australian Uyghur Association (NSW) and the local Uyghur community to develop and deliver this relevant project.

Western Sydney is home to approximately 600 Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim people indigenous to a region formerly known as East Turkistan. Following the occupation of East Turkistan by the Chinese Communist

Government in 1949 the Uyghur people have endured great suffering, oppression and persecution. In recent years, China's grip on the region has tightened and the situation has raised global concerns.

The number of Uyghurs living in Sydney and other parts of Australia has steadily increased over the years through family reunions and more individuals arriving as refugees.

With a passion and determination to preserve and celebrate their ancient and vibrant culture this community exhibition honours the diaspora of the proud Uyghur people.

GW We Are Uyghur



Total population of East Turkistan: approx. 25 million
Total population of East Turkistani's living abroad: approx. 1 million
Total population of Uyghurs living in East Turkistan: approx. 20 million
Total population of the combined 12 indigenous ethnic groups in East Turkista. (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tatar, Salur, Tajik, Dongan (Chinese Muslims), Mongol, Shibe, Manzhu, Russian, and Dagurs): approx. 4 million. ¹

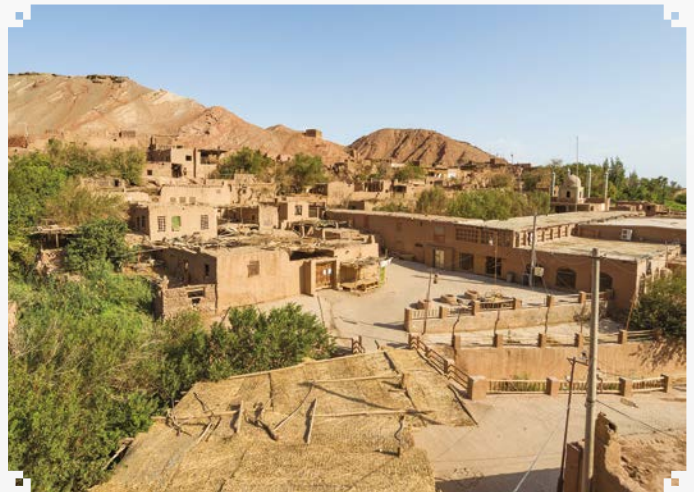


Image: An ancient Uyghur oasis-village in the Taklamakan desert, east of Turpan, known as Tuyuq. Famous for its seedless grapes and a number of ancient Buddhist meditation caves nearby containing frescos.

East Turkistan is a region located within Central Asia that for more than 4000 years has been home to the indigenous, Turkic speaking, Uyghurs (pronounced oiugurr). East Turkistan is known as the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang Province, China with an estimated population of 20-25 million. Xinjiang Province came under Chinese rule in the 18th Century and although briefly an independent state in 1949, now officially part of Communist China's territory.

The history of the Uyghurs stems back as far as the Silk Road, an ancient trade route between Asia, the Middle East and Europe. In the 10th Century A.D., Islam came to be the predominant teaching within Uyghur culture. Influences of Buddhism and Shamanism, and a strong connection to folk religions have create a unique belief system. The Kashgar region in East Turkistan, became one of the world's major learning centres for Islam, sparking a highly valued pursuit of arts, sciences, music and literature and the emergence of hundreds of world-renowned Uyghur scholars.

M Music Song Dance



Photograph by Amber Jamal.

Uyghur traditional music is remarkable for its melodious originality. Song and dance play an important role in Uyghur society, with many regional variations. *Sanam* is a popular folk dance commonly danced at weddings and other festive occasions. Characteristics include distinct head and wrist movements and the dancer is usually accompanied by singing and drumming.

The most highly valued musical tradition is that of the ancient Uyghur *Muqam*. The pinnacle of Uyghur music, *The Twelve Muqam*, consists of 360 sung poetry, stories, dance tunes and instrumental sections. The complete *Muqam* takes around 24 hours from start to finish and was included in UNESCO's list of *Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* in 2005.

Ancient Uyghur Crafts



Image: Atlas (etles) silk weaver

The economy of East Turkistan has largely revolved around agriculture and trade with many towns thriving as hubs along the famous Silk Road. These oases townships and cities have been significant cultural centres where specialist artisans have honed their skills for many centuries. Different regions have become known for different crafts including metalwork, fabric weaving, silk farming, felting, carpet making, currying (leather finishing), musical instruments, pottery and embroidery.

The most highly prized fabric is known as Atlas (or etles) after the Atlas moth and silk worm and is known for its distinctive textile pattern of Uyghur design features. The name, Atlas also refers to the technique of resist dyeing the silk yarn prior to weaving. Atlas patterns are prominent in clothing, carpets, household linen, accessories, musical instruments, furniture and other decorative items.

Food



Photograph by Amber Jamal.

The distinct Uyghur cuisine stems from a long tradition of cultivating crops and raising livestock in the arid landscape of Central Asia, where Turkic, Indian, Middle-Eastern and Chinese influences are combined with unique Uyghur flavours.

Famous dishes include polo (spiced rice, lamb, onion, carrot and other vegetables, cooked in lamb broth), *manta* (steamed dumplings) and *laghman* (hand-pulled noodles topped with lamb, celery, capsicum, chili, radish and spices). Uyghur bread such as the flatbread nan, and bagel-shaped *gizhder* is traditionally cooked in a tanur (oven) of bricks and cement similar to an Indian tandoor.

For many Uyghur families living in Australia, *iftar*, (the first meal after fasting) and *Eid* (the celebration at the conclusion of Ramadan), are times when the community comes together. Dressing in traditional clothing, speaking in language, playing traditional music and eating traditional foods, does more than celebrate a religious holiday: it preserves and protects an ancient and endangered culture that stems back thousands of years.

CAcknowledgements



MIRAS: Celebrating Uyghur Culture would not have been possible without the following community members and contributors:

Mehmet Obul, President of the
Australian Uyghur Association

Gulmire Zunun, President of the Sydney
Uyghur Women's Group and Board
Member of the Australian Uyghur
Association

Dilber Yusuf, Videography and
Photography

Amber Jamal, Photography

Mehmet Celepci

Shohrat Tursun

Billy Bahtiyar

Subhi Bora, Mastura
and Bahtiyar Bora

Mahira Momin, Abliz Ramin
and Azmat

Mahire Dawut

Kamran Kamil, Abulaiti Almire
and Ihsan Zunan

Kalbinur Kerim

Gulnar Timur, Ilham Ablikim
and Aziza Ilham

Dilnigar Alim

Askar Emin

Zeeba and Najla

Richard Petkovich, Cultural Arts
Collective

Gerrie Mifsud



Photograph by Dilber Yusuf

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Fairfield City Museum & Gallery

Open Tues – Sat, 10am – 4pm

Closed Sunday, Monday and Public Holidays

FREE ADMISSION

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