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Past, Present, and Future: The Evolution of Museums in the Middle East

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'Paradise'—a word with multiple meanings. For some, it's a place, for some a person, for some it is the heaven that awaits us after our human life comes to an end.

For most people in the art world, paradise is a museum. The window into the past and future.

The word *Paradise* comes from the ancient Persian term *'pairidaeza,'* meaning walled garden.

Persia, first led by Cyrus the Great around 550 B.C., became part of the Middle East after the Islamic conquest of Persia between 632 and 654. Today, we know Persia as Iran.

However, today we will not be focusing on the origins of the Middle East, but rather the expression of its soul through its wonderful art.

For this, let us go back to 120 years ago.

The Birth of Museums in the Middle East

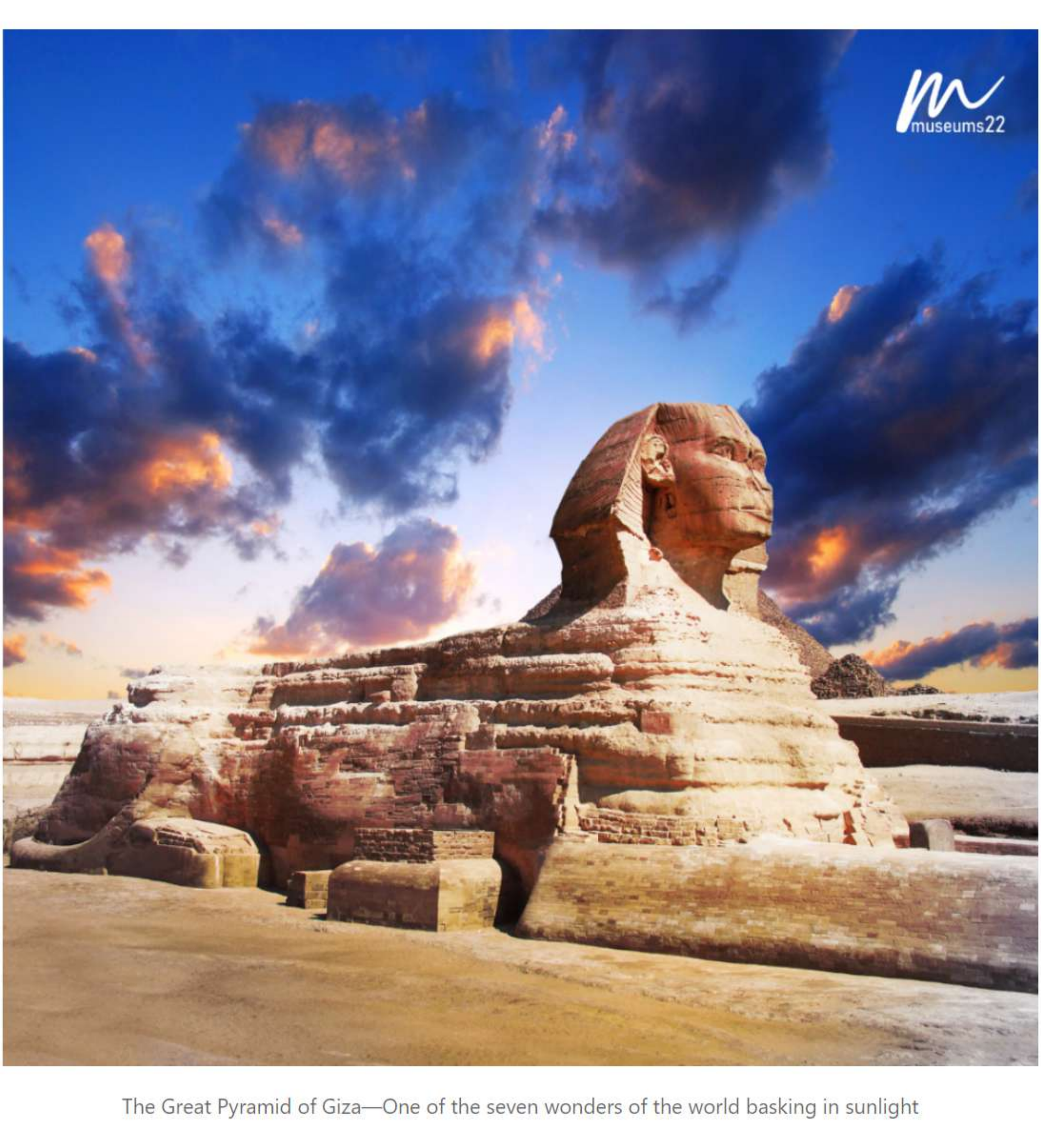
The year was 1895 and we are in the capital city of Cairo.

Abbas II Helmy Bey, the last Khedive of Egypt is working on a special project to immortalize the Pharaonic dynasties of ancient Egypt, the Roman Empire, and the ancient Greek era.

Thus, came about the first-ever museum in the Middle East—**The Museum of Egyptian Antiquities**.

The Egyptian Museum houses approximately 150,000 artifacts capturing both B.C. and A.D. periods.

However, nothing compares to the start of the show: The largest pyramid, the Great Pyramid of Giza. Built as a tomb for King Khufu, who ruled during Egypt's Fourth Dynasty between 3494 and 2623 B.C., it is one of the seven wonders of the world.



The Great Pyramid of Giza—One of the seven wonders of the world basking in sunlight

But, the wonders don't end there. You see, the Middle East is a hotpot of many countries and their rich cultures.

For instance, in 1966, for the first time ever, oil was discovered in Dubai. The first oil shipment took place in 1969, marking the birth of a developed UAE.

But another magnificent event occurred in 1969.

The foundation of the **Al Ain National Museum.**

The story of modern UAE through museums

The Al Ain National Museum, nestled beside the picturesque Sultan Fort houses ancient Mesopotamian pottery, Bronze Age relics, exquisite jewelry, and Iron Age artifacts.

Moreover, a close look at the area's falaj irrigation system reveals the cultural and technological innovations that shaped Al Ain's past.

The history of the UAE on the walls of the Al Ain National Museum

While Al Ain National Museum captured the past of the UAE, another museum recorded the inception of a modern UAE.

The Etihad Museum commemorates the formation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971. Showcasing a vast collection of historical records, photographs, and interactive exhibits, the museum illustrates the nation's political and social evolution toward unification.

Here's where things get even more interesting: A highlight called the "Founding Fathers' Pavilion," lets visitors virtually engage with the visionary leaders who shaped the UAE's future.

The Middle (East) of Tech and Art

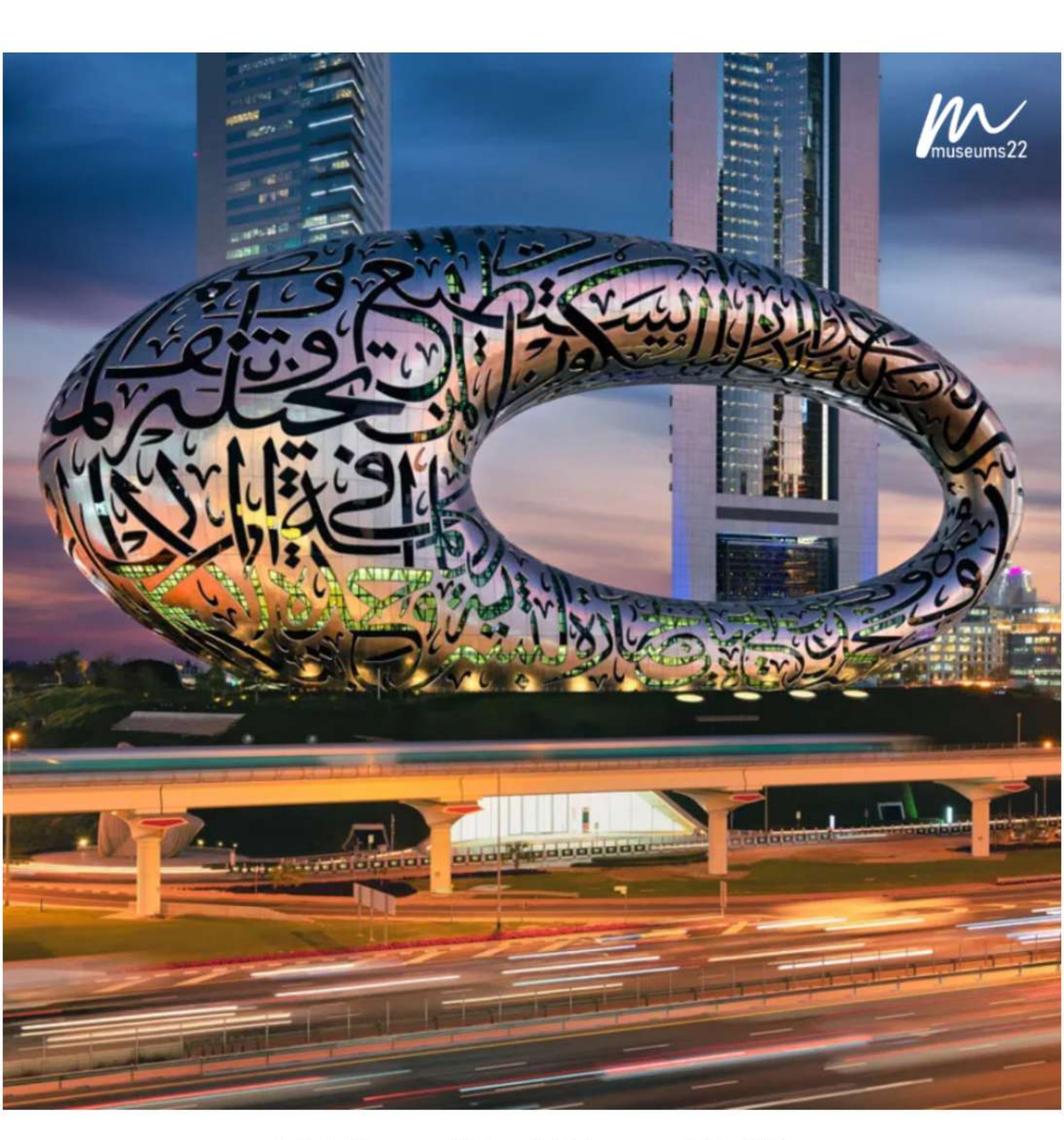
As technology advances, museums have the unique opportunity to bring history to life. And, the Middle East has not disappointed.

Meet Dubai's **Museum of the Future** (MOTF).

This museum offers you a window into the future—2071, to be precise.

The OSS Hope exhibit envisions a massive space station. Imagine if you could visualize how humanity might live and thrive in space by 2071. Well, now you can.

Beyond space colonization, the museum's Heal Institute, set in 2071, focuses on utilizing cutting-edge technology to reverse the damage caused by climate change—a commitment to both the future and our present.



Dubai's Museum of Future that lets you peek into 2071

There's one more thing you should know about this museum: Their name is Ameca.

It is the world's most advanced humanoid robot, known for its lifelike human face and engaging, humorous conversations.

Ameca has already won the hearts of millions of visitors from 163 countries around the world.

A new study by the **Journal of Positive Psychology** suggested that museums help with stress and loneliness. But, these establishments also support the economy.

The Museum of the Future documented a 20% increase in museum ticket sales during Q2 2022 compared to the previous quarter.

Ankur Thakuria, the one who reported the growth, noted "We expected high numbers in Q4 '21 and Q1 '22, but the results exceeded our forecast. The demand for museums remains strong."

So, dear reader, if you are into futuristic and unique collections, here are some museums that you can visit.

Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), Doha, Qatar

If you plan to pair the Middle East's delicious food with its rich history, you can attend the **Museum of Islamic Art** (MIA) in Doha. The museum's top-floor restaurant, IDAM, offers fine dining by celebrated chef Alain Ducasse. On the lower floors, you can enjoy the variety of Islamic artifacts, spanning over 1,400 years and three continents.

Louvre Abu Dhabi, UAE

You have probably heard about the iconic **Louvre** in the heart of France, but the Abu Dhabi one is another cultural gem you need to explore. Blending the UAE's vision for global art and culture with France's expertise, this architectural marvel mimics a "rain of light," attracting millions of visitors.

A breathtaking view of Abu Dhabi's Louvre

teamLab Borderless, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

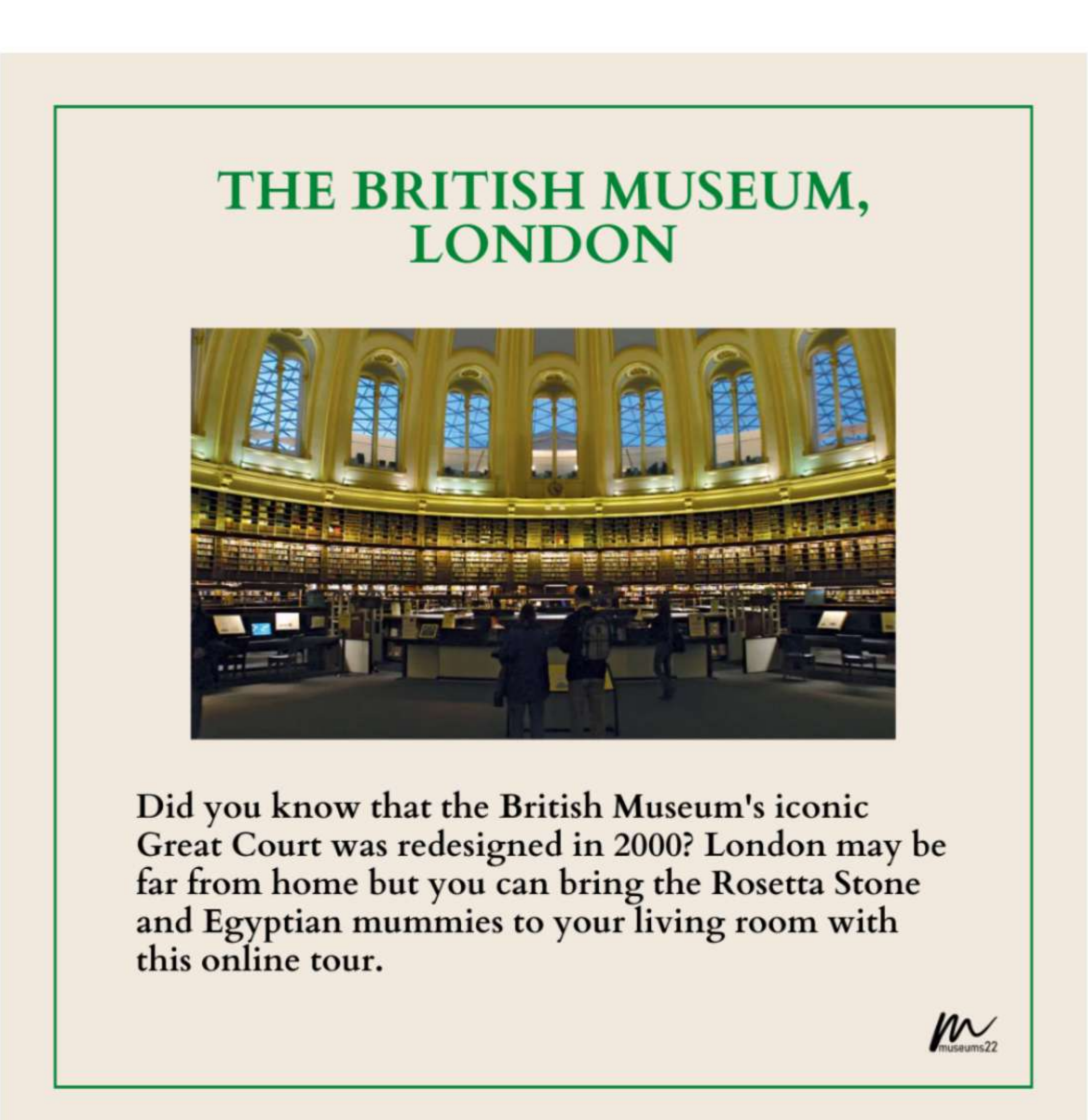
Speaking of mimicking things, nothing does it better than virtual reality. If you are interested in VR, **teamLab Borderless** in Jeddah's Historic District offers an unparalleled immersive art experience.

Opened in collaboration with Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Culture, this museum creates a borderless environment to explore exhibits such as the "Forest of Lamps" and "Athletics Forest."

The list doesn't end here.

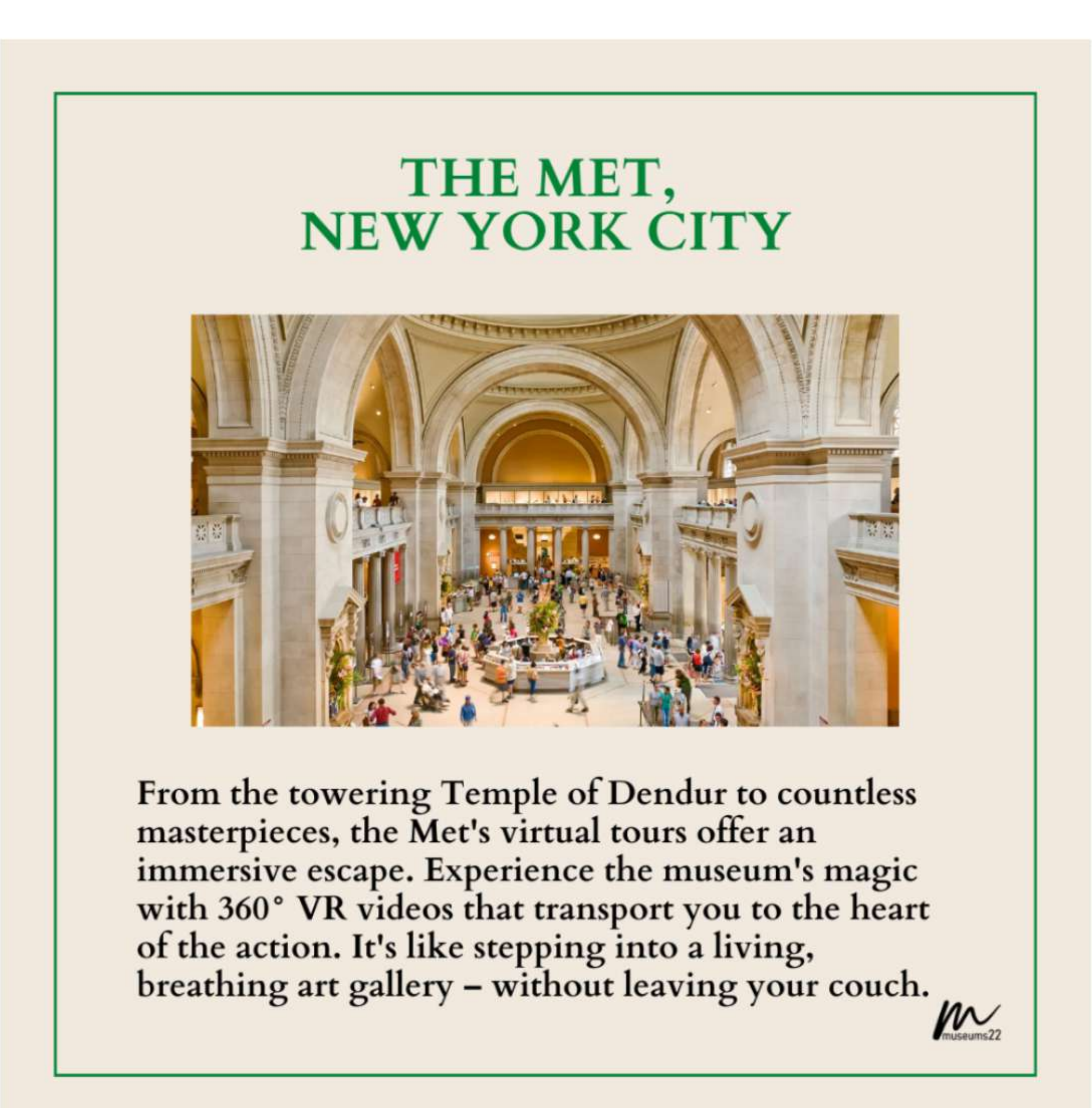
The beautiful thing about VR is that you can experience art and museums from anywhere in the world.

If you are satisfied with your Middle East trip and want to visit The British Museum in London or The MET in New York City, we have a perfectly **curated list** for you on our page.



THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON

Did you know that the British Museum's iconic Great Court was redesigned in 2000? London may be far from home but you can bring the Rosetta Stone and Egyptian mummies to your living room with this online tour.



THE MET, NEW YORK CITY

From the towering Temple of Dendur to countless masterpieces, the Met's virtual tours offer an immersive escape. Experience the museum's magic with 360° VR videos that transport you to the heart of the action. It's like stepping into a living, breathing art gallery – without leaving your couch.

The modern museum has multiple purposes - to curate and preserve, to research, and to reach out to the public. They challenge us and ask us to question our assumptions about the past or the world around us.

-Kate Williams, British historian

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