

# International Exhibitions | Temporary structures and presentation of national contexts | “The Moresque Town” and the “Cairo Street”

“The entire Orient is before you: don’t look for machines here, or for the practical inventions of the human mind: you are in the domain of contemplative life: the agreeable precedes the utilitarian, and poetry is intricately mixed into the smallest detail of existence.” (Hippolyte Gautier)

The “Moresque” or “Moorish Town” created for the Paris Exhibitions of 1867 at the Champs de Mars and again in 1878 at the Trocadéro, hosted the pavilions for Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. At later exhibitions other facets of daily life and trade in the Arab World were suggested by the combination of these different pavilions. In keeping with the idea of the “Moorish Town”, but with a view to achieving greater historical authenticity, Delort de Gleon and M. Gillet created the first “Cairo Street” for the Paris exhibition of 1889 by reconstructing architectural features largely salvaged from demolished buildings. Mosques and minarets and houses with screened mashrabiyya windows were reproduced accurately down to the tiniest decorative details. Apart from some inevitable issues with proportions, the “realer than real” “Cairo Street” was a huge success with the public. Although it existed within the abstract dimension of a set design, this did not prevent the street from becoming a must-see attraction and a spectacle for visitors at successive International Exhibitions.



**Working Number:** IT2 054

**Name:** Moorish City at the Trocadéro, View from the Pavilion of the Insects [Paris Exhibition, 1878]

**Holding Museum:**

National Central Library

**Date:**

1878

**Materials:**

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**Curator**

**Justification:**

The “Moorish Town” became one of the main attractions at the exhibition held in Paris in 1878 thanks largely to the proportions of the Trocadéro. Here, the Islamic architectural additions surprised audiences when they saw two great towers, inspired by minarets, among an eclectic context of other styles that ranged from Byzantine to Roman, from Greek to Renaissance.



**Working Number:** IT2 067

**Name:** Tunisian Coffee Shop at the Trocadéro [Paris Exhibition, 1878]

**Holding Museum:** National Central Library

**Date:**

1878

**Materials:**

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**Curator**

**Justification:**

A curious and amusing place at the Paris exhibition of 1878 is being reported here: a semi-circular hall has been arranged as an “Oriental coffee shop” where a Tunisian quartet plays instruments typical of the Arab and Ottoman “East”. The coffee shop, like the theatres that put on shows of typical dance performances of the “Orient”, became one of the must-go places for visitors.



**Working Number:** IT2 063

**Name:**

**Holding Museum:** The Tent of the Arabs Sent by the Governor General of Algeria to Guard the Algerian Pavillion at the Trocadero [Paris Exhibition, 1878]  
**Date:**  
**Materials:** National Central Library  
**Curator** 1878  
**Justification:** -  
 The magazine text describes the large tent built in the Trocadéro Park within the area of the Algerian Pavillion. "These Turkish people are very beautiful. ... from the warlike race of Kabili". These people, employed as "living props", were surrounded by the noise of hammers and the continual coming and going of visitors inside the large Algerian tent.



**Working Number:** PD 046  
**Name:** Pavilions of Morocco on 'a street in Cairo', Paris Exposition, 1889  
**Holding Museum:** The Library of Congress  
**Date:** 1889  
**Materials:** -  
**Curator**  
**Justification:** From 1889 the "Cairo Street" represented the perception of an "Eastern" city according to the Western imagination. The street was designed to show-case scenes from daily life, including commercial activities.



**Working Number:** PD 047  
**Name:** Moroccan café on 'a street in Cairo', Paris Exposition, 1889  
**Holding Museum:** The Library of Congress  
**Date:** 1889  
**Materials:** -  
**Curator**  
**Justification:** In addition to shots of the interior spaces themselves, some glimpses into the exhibition buildings highlighted the detail: domes, voluminous drapes, and the elegant, carved wooden panels used to screen windows, known as mashrabiyya.



**Working Number:** PD 040  
**Name:** Woman riding camel on the Street of Cairo section of the Midway at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois  
**Holding Museum:** The Library of Congress  
**Date:** 1893  
**Materials:** -  
**Curator**  
**Justification:** The "Cairo Street" proved such a huge success at the Paris Exhibition of 1889 that it crossed the Atlantic for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. This photo shows the reconstruction of "authentic" facades, with the windows protected by mashrabiyya, and

also one of the more popular activities among tourists: a ride on the back of a camel.



**Working Number:** PD 041

**Name:** Street of Cairo section of the Midway at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois

**Holding Museum:**

**Date:** The Library of Congress

**Materials:** 1893

**Curator:** -

**Justification:** The "Cairo Street" constructed for the Chicago Exposition of 1893 had a mosque and two obelisks; around these were workshops making Egyptian wares, coffee shops, and also a theatre where audiences could watch belly dancers perform.



**Working Number:** PD 042

**Name:** Stereoscopic photograph of the 'streets of Cairo' at St. Louis World's Fair

**Holding Museum:** The Library of Congress

**Date:** 1905 (publication of the photo)

**Materials:** -

**Curator:** This photograph is a souvenir from the St. Louis Universal Exhibition of 1904: it shows two women visitors on the back of a sitting camel.

**Justification:** The women are captured against an "Egyptian" backdrop: the camel's ornate harness and saddle and the mashrabiyya used to disguise the ticket office.



**Working Number:** IT2 053

**Name:** Cairo in Milan. Exhibition 1906

**Holding Museum:** Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation (ICCD)

**Date:** 1906

**Materials:** -

**Curator:** The vogue for the "Cairo Street" continued during the 1906 exhibition in Milan. These postcards are evidence of the attention to detail seen in the architectonic and decorative reconstruction of typical contexts.

**Justification:** The set-like atmosphere of building types, i.e. the mosque, workshop, fountain and house, is emphasised by the lack of people.



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**Justification:** Sometimes in these picture postcards, produced to document the exhibits minus the crowds of visitors, the "Cairo Street" is animated by the presence of "character types" who stand "proudly" outside their designated areas.



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