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Bayt wa Balad (بيت وبلد): The Palestinian Cultural Mapping Project
A New Digital Initiative from the Museum of the Palestinian People

Washington, D.C. (September 15, 2025) — The Museum of the Palestinian People is proud to announce the launch of *Bayt wa Balad* (بيت وبلد): The Palestinian Cultural Mapping Project, a digital mapping initiative dedicated to preserving and documenting Palestinian cultural heritage from the diaspora.

The Museum of the Palestinian People is the only museum in Washington, D.C., solely dedicated to documenting, preserving, and presenting the rich cultural heritage and enduring history of the Palestinian people through art and objects. The museum's collection includes artworks, handicrafts, and everyday objects that represent various historical periods in which Palestinian cultural continuity endured. The museum offers a vital space where a wide array of objects come together into a single collection, representing the longstanding heritage of the Palestinian people in the land.

The title of the project, *Bayt wa Balad*, draws from the Arabic words *bayt* (بيت), meaning *home*, and *balad* (بلد), meaning *homeland*. These terms hold layered, fluid meanings for Palestinians in exile. They may evoke a single village or encompass many geographies shaped by memory and displacement. For Palestinians, home and homeland could refer to one, two, or more places, at once due to the condition of exile that has continued for the many generations that have followed the 1948 *Nakba*. The title of the project also reflects the museum's own location and role in the United States, far from Palestine, where it engages in global cultural heritage work from Washington, D.C.

This project integrates technology, historical research, and storytelling to document and visualize displaced and destroyed Palestinian cultural heritage through an interactive map. It includes both tangible and intangible forms of heritage such as dress, embroidery, poetry, oral histories, storytelling traditions, music, dance, theater, culinary and agricultural practices, architecture, passports and other family documentation, archival photographs, calligraphy, and more. Each object is mapped from where it was made, to how it reached the diaspora, providing vital insight into the exile of objects as a way to visualize and learn about the exile of the Palestinian people, and the various paths each person and family has taken.

Bayt wa Balad will begin by mapping the museum's collection, documenting each object within its original geography, maker history, and cultural context, if possible. Over time, the project will expand to map sites and objects of destroyed cultural heritage, contextualizing each through carefully researched history and, when possible, oral testimony. The resulting work, funded by the Mellon Foundation, will be made publicly accessible through an interactive digital platform, with more details to follow.

Executive Director Bshara Nassar states:

"Palestinians have endured generations of cultural erasure. *Bayt wa Balad* builds on the

museum's mission to protect the art, history, and heritage of the Palestinian people by preserving and mapping cultural knowledge across borders. This project offers a powerful tool for future generations of Palestinians in the diaspora to reconnect with their identity, their sense of home, and their homeland."

In alignment with the museum's mission, *Bayt wa Balad* safeguards history for future generations while restoring access to displaced communities. It ensures that Palestinians in exile remain connected to their cultural inheritance and traditional knowledge systems. In resisting the forces of cultural erasure within the United States, the museum also stands in solidarity with Palestinian institutions worldwide, asserting the unyielding spirit of a people whose history lives in art, memory, and the land itself.

The project is led by an interdisciplinary team:

Steve Benzek, Digital Architect

Wafa Ghnaim, Research Lead and Oral History Interviewer

Julia Pitner, Project Manager

In support of the next phase of the project, the team has created a dedicated landing page on the museum website (www.mpp-dc.org/baytwabalad), to share about next steps in the process, connect with community members, and build momentum around this participatory effort. The next phase of the project will include a request for oral histories through a written form linked on this page.

For media inquiries, interviews, or to connect with the project team, please email baytwabalad@mpp-dc.org.