

ART POWER + SPACE IN MID EAST

CourseNo: ARCHA4775_001_2015_1

Meeting Time: T 11:00A-01:00P **Meeting Location:** BUELL HALL 300 N

Instructor Information:

[Mario Gooden](#)

Art Power + Space in the Middle East

GSAPP Columbia University

SPRING 2014 SEMINAR

A4775 (Non-Western)

Instructor: Mario Gooden, Prof. of Practice

T: 11AM – 1PM

As Hossein Amirsadeghi states in *New Vision Arab Art in the 21st Century*, "One of the main challenges facing art practice in the twenty-first century Arab world is the persistence of a constructed oppositional binary between 'traditional Islamic' arts and 'new' art. This binary is based on a perceived historical discontinuity between the two... At the heart of this issue is the lack of a written historical context – an art historical context or discourse to place, view, articulate and evaluate this new production. Adding to the complexities the nature of the contemporary production itself. To start with, many of the region's modern historical developments are contested on various levels. Second, contemporary productions reject their segregation as an 'other', as has been the case with Islamic art, and as essentially happened with modern Arab art, which was hijacked by the politics of identity."

Yet the effect of the market on informing or misinforming knowledge of the art production of the region – particularly in view of the absence of a scholarly discourse – is problematic and alarming. All reports about the arts of the region assert the 'booming' state of affairs. The Middle East is seen as 'a vast new source of goodies for the market's limitless voracity', luring the major auction houses – Sotheby's, Christie's and Bonham's – to the region. Needless to say, the market hype has created positive situations for previously unappreciated artists but has equally created false hopes and valuations. In relation to the Saatchi Gallery's recent Middle Eastern art exhibition, Brian Appleyard of The Sunday Times states: 'It would be hard to classify anything in the Saatchi show as great art. But that is not really the point. What matters is the fact that it is art, and that it detonates our simple conceptions of the Middle East.' Are we not to expect good art from the Middle East? He argues instead that the arts may be a sign of a new form of secularization.

So what exactly is the role of 'Middle Eastern' art? The region remains as it was in the early decades of the twentieth century --- beset with wars and colonization in its various guises -from imposed rules by foreign powers to military occupation and now globalization. These conditions do not prevent artists from producing art, but they do, however, influence the parameters of representation and reception of art. The new art boom in Arab countries is due to a confluence of factors: the newly established art organizations, the ambitious plans for art museums in the Gulf [to include Guggenheim and Louvre offshoots], new faculties for art and design, an unprecedented increase in artists' residencies creating opportunities and exposure for Arab artists abroad and for international artists to work in the region, as well as the influences of diaspora artists.

The Arab world with its socio-political tensions and contradictions, and rising conservatism coupled with a chronic political turmoil provides a rich laboratory for such artists. Yet, young Arab artists are looking for answers to the ever more complex trajectories of postmodernity than one might find at these auction houses.

The 'art boom' started backwards in the Arab world. The art market flourished in the oil-rich Gulf states [where only a fraction of the Arab population resides) before the art support systems set in. The 'boom' euphoria spread before school curricula, museums, art critics or even art scholars began to grapple with the relevant questions.

For example, contrary to the common belief, what is new in Arab contemporary art is not just the mediums being employed but rather it is the image in all its forms that Arab artists have subverted while creating spaces for interpretation and engagement with the art.

PURPOSE

The seminar will examine the production, consumption, and dissemination of Middle Eastern art and the subversive strategies of artists to engage in new spaces for social and political critique. The seminar will uncover pedagogies and methodologies for artistic practices to locate new sites of meaning in contested territories and among contradictory landscapes.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Satisfactory completion of the course requires that students actively engage the course content and meaningfully contribute to expand the boundaries of knowledge and spatialize cultural theory.

Course Design:

The course will be divided into three sections:

The first section will present a brief critical overview of contemporary Arab art. The intention is to identify the general parameters of critical discourse in the art world and the roots of the linkages that will be discussed throughout the course.

The second section will entail weekly research seminar presentations by teams of students working in pairs. The presentations will be based upon a given topic and the students will examine the work of artists, curators, and writers and their engagement with new spaces for cultural discourse. The student shall prepare a thorough and detailed analysis of the topic and how the work manifests its agenda. The student should be prepared to lead the class discussion in an insightful manner.

In preparation for the research seminar presentation, the instructor will hold weekly individual tutorials.

The third section of the seminar will be a research paper:

Students will be required to complete a fifteen-page research paper based upon the research seminar presentation topic. The paper should include analyses, visual illustrations, footnotes, bibliography, etc.

Research Seminar Presentation:

40% - Preparation and in-class Presentation

In addition to the in-class presentation, each student will submit a rough draft of his / her research paper (minimum 1000 words) no later than one week following the presentation.

Research Paper:

45% - Including analytical drawings, visual illustrations, etc.

Participation, Progress, Effort:

15%

Seminar Topics

- § Place and Diaspora
- § Representation and Allegory
- § Collective Histories and Personal Narratives
- § Art Production and Display as Nation Building
- § Constructing Modernity: Social, Urban and Natural Environs
- § Identity, Commodity, and Display

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