

Abstracts and biographies

Dr Charlotte Bank, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

Reclaiming History: Reflections of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Art of the MENA Region and its Diaspora

This paper examines the work of a group of contemporary visual and performance artists from the MENA/SWANA region, now living in the diaspora. Their works articulate diverse expressions of gender and sexuality and by referring to Islamic aesthetic traditions, such as poetry and miniature painting, create a cross-temporal dialogue with historical practices of the Islamic world. These works coincide and occasionally directly reference recent scholarly production that sheds lights on the diversity of pre-modern expressions of gender and sexuality in the historical Islamic world. The link to historical practices of same-sex relations and fluid expressions of gender allows us to read these works as a way to locate contemporary queer subjectivities in the historical fabric of Islamic culture and Muslim societies. This is especially important for diaspora artists, who are often facing intersectional hostilities from their hosting societies for whom “queerness”, “homosexuality” and “Muslim” are mostly imagined as irreconcilable.

Charlotte Bank is an art historian and curator. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Art and Society, University of Kassel/ documenta Institute. She holds a PhD in Arabic Culture and Language from the University of Geneva and has held academic positions and fellowships at the Universities of Bamberg and Geneva, the Orient Institute Beirut and the Museum of Islamic Art Berlin. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary art in the MENA region in its historical context with a special focus on the role of art in the processes of decolonization and national emancipation and the representation of artists within the global art scene. Her monograph, titled The Contemporary Art Scene in Syria: Social Critique and an Artistic Movement (2020). She is currently working on a research project entitled Queering Islamic Art: Gender Diversity and Critique of Sexual Normativity in Contemporary Art.

Dr Isabelle de le Court, Independent scholar

Echoes of Beirut: Navigating Art, Trauma and Memory

To the Lebanese singer, Fairuz, Beirut is both her past and future, despite the persistent conditions of loss, violence, destruction that have plagued the city since the 1970s. Fairuz’s song, *Li Beirut*, released in 1984, captures the essence of this struggle, turning personal and collective grief into a poignant artistic expression. The lyrics, reflecting on the transformation of Beirut from a place of beauty to one marked by fire and smoke, echo the sentiments found in many contemporary artworks. This paper embarks on a journey through several artistic practices, spanning time and geography. It will examine a range of artistic responses to the city’s history, starting with Mounira al Sohl’s installation at the 2024 Venice Biennale, *Phoenicia (A Dance with her Myth)* and continuing by Lamia Joreige’s *Uncertain Times* (2022), Marwan Rechmaoui’s *Gallery 6.08.2020* (2020), Gilbert Hage’s *Reality in the Real* (2021), and Abdul

Rahman Katanani's *Olive Tree* (2015 & 2017). Through their respective mediums, these artworks navigate themes of memory, identity, and the lingering effects of conflict, providing a nuanced perspective on the complexities of traumatic layers and resilience in Beirut.

Isabelle de le Court is an art historian and independent scholar with a background in academia, gallery management and advisory services. She completed her PhD in Art History at the University of Leeds and was Assistant Professor at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) in Beirut between 2013 and 2016 before establishing her advisory company. Her monograph, Post-Traumatic Art and the City: Between War and cultural Memory in Sarajevo and Beirut, was published by Bloomsbury in 2020 and re-edited in 2022. Her research interests centre on the analysis of the form and circulation of visual messages in the cultural contexts of modern and contemporary art.

Professor Hamid Dabashi, Columbia University

History, Memory, and the Uncanny: Portrait of the Artist as the Invisible Subject

In this talk, I will start with Palestinian artist Tarek Al-Ghoussein and conclude with another Palestinian artist, Mona Hatoum – while in between, I visit an Iranian (Ardeshir Mohassess), an Egyptian (Inji Aflatoun), an Iraqi (Dia Azzawi), and a Saudi artist (Ahmad Mattar). The key issue in my thinking is the untranslatability of the sense of loss embedded in the word *Nakba*. Yes, it has been translated as “Catastrophe” – which is fine in a compromised way to convey an unending trauma to the world but leaves much behind in the hearts and minds of the original Arabic and those who live and suffer it. The key to its untranslatability is that even in its Persian cognate *Nekbat*, it flaunts it from a neighbouring linguistic distance. We must turn to “28 Mordad” as the Persian marker of the CIA-MI6 coup of 1953 in Iran to feel its resonances – the same with the Hebrew word *Shoah*, which “Holocaust” does not fully encompass. Contemporary art of the MENA region today is the domain of the historically traumatising but narratively untranslatable, where artists are rendered as *Gong-e Khab-dideh* – as the proverbial Persian poem puts it. The result is the aesthetics of the untranslatable, where the artist becomes an invisible subject, mirroring the Palestinian figure of the Present Absentee, a defining moment for the aesthetic imagination of a people condemned to the internally displaced acronym of being from MENA.

Hamid Dabashi is the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University where he teaches Comparative Literature, World Cinema, and Postcolonial Theory. He has taught and delivered lectures in many North and Latin American, European, Arab, and Iranian universities. He is a founding member of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, a founding member of Center for Palestine Studies at Columbia University, and he has chaired the Columbia College Committee on the Core. Professor Dabashi has authored more than two dozen books, edited four, and contributed chapters to many others. He is also the author of over 100 essays, articles and book reviews on subjects ranging from Iranian and Islamic Studies,

comparative literature, world cinema, and the philosophy of art (trans-aesthetics). His books and essays have been translated into many languages. Among his most recent books are Iran without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation (2016); Iran: Rebirth of a Nation (2017); The Shahnameh: The Persian Epic as World Literature (2019); On Edward Said: Remembrance of Things Past (2020); and The Future of Two Illusions: Islam after the West (2022).

Professor Iftikhar Dadi, Cornell University

An Avant-Garde Take on the 1947 Partition of South Asia

For the avant-garde to arise in a specific context requires either the persistence of academic cultural forms that carry congealed forms and meanings that could be critiqued for their lack of alignment with current sensibilities, or institutional or sedimented understandings of history and society. In South Asia the visual culture associated with contestatory events such as the Partition have by now assumed a kind of representational veracity, even as the historical causes of such events remain unsettled. Many contemporary artists have consequently developed work that critically re-examines the visual “truth” of the Partition. The artist Imran Channa’s engagement with the photographic archive of the Partition unearths key issues in the remembrance and narration of history. Central concerns of Channa’s extended investigation revolve around the question of historical truth associated with the photograph, and how our understanding of history remains malleable to ideology despite the ostensibly stubborn veracity of photographic evidence.

Iftikhar Dadi is John H. Burris Professor and Chair of Cornell University’s Department of History of Art. He researches modern and contemporary art from a transnational perspective, with an emphasis on intellectual history, and a focus on South and West Asia. He has authored Lahore Cinema Between Realism and Fable (2022), Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia (2010) and edited The Lahore Biennale Reader 01 (2022) and Anwar Jalal Shemza (2015). He has co-edited Art and Architecture of Migration and Discrimination: Turkey, Pakistan, and Their European Diasporas (2023); Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space (2012); and Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading (2001). Co-curated exhibitions include Pop South Asia: Artistic Explorations in the Popular (2022–23) and Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space (2012–13). As an artist, Iftikhar Dadi collaborates with Elizabeth Dadi to make work that explores questions of identity and borders, and the capacities of the informal urban realm in the Global South.

Dr Hamid Keshmirshekan, SOAS

Haunted Narratives: Reinterpretations of History in Art Practices of Post-Revolutionary Iran

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida posits that hauntology is a philosophy of history that challenges linear time progression, suggesting the present is haunted by both past and future. By unveiling diverse approaches to historical narratives and cultural memories and challenging the notion of a “correct history,” this concept manifests itself in recent Iranian art practices. These practices explore ideas linked to temporal incoherence and

the persistence of the past. This paper examines how artists navigate and contest an ideologically structured history imposed by the political system, which prioritises abstract ideals and marginalises alternative perspectives. It explores central strategies such as irony, fantasy, intertextuality, and deconstruction, revealing how these artists critically retell a past that continues to haunt the present. It investigates how these art practices grapple with social, cultural, and political issues, including censorship, transforming these challenges into critical tools for a multi-faceted aesthetics of resistance. I adopt a hauntological interpretation to analyse the artists' works, as it corresponds to their recurring references to the past, invoking an unsettling vision of an imagined future.

Hamid Keshmirshakan is an art historian, art critic and Research Associate at SOAS, University of London. He was previously Associate Fellow at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and History of Art Department at Oxford University, Associate Professor and head of History of Art department at the Advanced Research Institute of Art (ARIA), Iranian Academy of Arts, and Chief Editor of the quarterly Art Tomorrow – the bilingual (English-Persian) journal on modern and contemporary art of the Middle East and its diaspora. He received his PhD in History of Art from SOAS, University of London in 2004 and was post-doctoral fellow at KRC, Oxford University (2004-5, 2008-9, 2011-13) supported by the British Academy, AHRC and ESRC. Since 1994 he has taught art history and theory in British and Iranian universities, has organised several international conferences and events on aspects of modern and contemporary art of the MENA region, and has contributed extensively to various publications. His latest publications include The Art of Iran in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: Tracing the Modern and the Contemporary (2023) and “Humorous Art Practices in the Contemporary Middle East: Reacting to Cultural Stereotypification” (2024).

Vasif Kortun, Research & Curatorial Advisor, Mathaf, Doha
100 Years

Turkey's battle with its ghosts is dramatically different from others in the SWANA region, as the country never experienced colonisation and instead inherited the characteristics of a late-colonial state. A struggle against a coloniser did not define it; a short-lasting occupation after World War I defined it. Its swift integration into NATO as an anti-Communist frontier country to thwart the Soviets forged a unique atmosphere distinct from the non-aligned experiences of the 1950s. Later, in 1968, the mindset was Kemalist, leftist anti-imperialism rather than decoloniality. This unique predisposition forces contemporary artists, consciously or by association, to pick apart the history of the Republic as an open book to confront its radical and ongoing traumas and singularity on its sojourn from a multi-ethnic, multi-religious ummah to a reductive nation-state with a fibbed story. As the last in a line of successive states, it executes from experience, but if anything holds the culture together, it is an altogether different question.

Vasif Kortun is a curator, writer, and educator in visual art, its institutions, and spatial practices. He was the founding director of research and programmes of Salt in Istanbul. A recipient of the Award for Curatorial Excellence from CCS, Bard College, he curated numerous Biennials. He has taught as a guest professor in

many institutions and served on many juries, such as the Turner Prize, Velasquez Prize, and Belvedere Award, as well as on the juries of biennials such as Venice and Gwangju. He is a board member at the Foundation for Art Initiatives, SALT, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp. Kortun has written extensively on contemporary art and the cultural situation for publications and periodicals locally and internationally. His latest publications include *İpek Duben: The Skin, Body, and I* (Salt & Mousse Publications, 2024), and *30*, the third volume of his collected essays in Turkish (Salt, 2024).

Driss Ksikes, HEM Research Center, LCI Education, Rabat

The Real and the Fictional as An Imaginary Fabric of History

This paper is an epistemological attempt to address a missing link between visual arts, literature, and social sciences. While in the scholarly realm, linguistic and narrative turns allowed for reconsidering the status of fiction and works of art as instrumental sources of knowledge, there is still a reluctance to take seriously the (re)search behind but also the discursive construct – be it literary or artistic – as a form of historical knowledge. This is from far being a general statement but a nuanced one that needs to be scrutinised through a focused inquiry. Hence, the fact that this paper will be mainly based on two creative works of Hassan Darsi, as Moroccan visual artist, and Iman Mersal as Egyptian writer. Both allow us to look more closely through their hybrid works, situated between the real and the fictional, but also half-way between documentation and imagination, into what I suggest calling “an imaginary fabric of history”.

*Driss Ksikes is a fiction and nonfiction writer, playwright, and scholar. He is a professor of methodology and creative writing, and the director of HEM research center in Rabat. He is one of the founders of the reflexive group on decoloniality in North Africa. His main interests as a scholar are media, culture, and various ways of mediation between arts, academia, and the public sphere. Besides analysing relationships between symbolic expressions and institutions, he has been working for the last ten years on various ways of indiscipline through art fabric, knowledge production and public sphere interactions. His book *Le métier d'intellectuel: dialogues avec quinze penseurs du Maroc (The intellectual profession: interviews with 15 Moroccan thinkers)*, co-authored with Fadma Aït Mous, won the Prix Grand Atlas, Morocco's most prestigious book prize in 2015. He was selected among six best African playwrights by National Studio theatre in London (2012), was short listed twice as best francophone playwright (2015 and 2019) and has led a research project supported by AFAC on “Performing arts in the Arab World”. His last non-fiction book, *Les sentiers de l'indiscipline (Ed. En toutes lettres, 2021)* currently under translation into English.*

Dr Zeina Maasri, University of Bristol

Bearing Witness: Palestine in Artists' Books

Especially poignant among Arabic books published during the 1970s and '80s is the increased political enlistment of the documentary and the affective power of the visual. The visual tactics of political activism, a staple of the period's radical print

culture from posters to periodicals, extended to the full-length, in-depth insight of a book. Particularly since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, artists such as Dia al-Azzawi, Kamal Boullata, Mohieddine Ellabbad, Nazir Nabaa and Mona Saudi creatively explored the visuality and materiality of the book to express solidarity with Palestine's liberation struggle and bear witness to the plight of Palestinian refugees. Illustrated books offer both detached visual evidence and emotionally charged aesthetic expression. They mediate testimonies of traumatic loss and everyday experiences of war while also invoking agency, demanding freedom and justice, saluting heroic figures, commemorating martyrs and making their cause visible. In visually emphatic ways, artists' books creatively transform collective memories — especially those that have been suppressed — into public knowledge.

Zeina Maasri is Senior Lecturer in Global Visual Culture at the University of Bristol, UK. She is the author of the award-winning book, Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties (Cambridge University Press 2020). She also authored Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War (IB Tauris 2009) and curated related travelling exhibitions and an online archival resource (<http://www.signsofconflict.com>). She co-edited Transnational Solidarity: Anticolonialism in the Global Sixties (Manchester University Press 2022) and, with Karl Bassil, Akram Zaatari, and Walid Raad, Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography (2002). Maasri currently has a Fellowship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC-UK) working on her new project "Decolonising the Page: The Visual Politics and Poetics of Postcolonial Arabic Publications."

Serubiri Moses, Hunter College, CUNY

The Contemporary Captive: Reza Aramesh's Art After Saint Sebastian

This paper aims to reposition Aramesh's artwork in the space of the individual rather than the collective. The work often looks at male prisoners and their conditions of living, and existing including their daily routines down to items of clothing. Aramesh draws from 20th and 21st century photography for images of captives. The emphasis in Aramesh's artwork is on the contemporary captive often as an individual, he looks to 16th and 17th century Italian and Spanish master paintings including Nicolas Régnier's St. Sebastian (1620), and Tanzio da Varallo's St. Sebastian (1620) for their depictions of the male figure in awe or ecstasy. By referring to what I conceptualise as the artist's strategy of "creative conscription" I suggest that Aramesh rewrites religious awe and ecstasy with elements of homoeroticism thus forwarding a complex and radical strategy that brings to bear aspects not typically associated with victims of war. I aim to reveal how the artist treats contemporary captives not merely as tortured victims and evidence of "stolen life", but through complex strategies that place the viewer in a position of empathy.

Serubiri Moses is a curator and author and an adjunct faculty in Art History at Hunter College, CUNY, and visiting faculty at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. He previously held teaching positions at New York University and the New Centre for Research and Practice (DE/US), Dark Study (US), Digital Earth Fellowship (NL), and delivered lectures at Williams College, Yale University, University of Pittsburgh, The New School, and basis voor actuele kunst (NL), and

University of the Arts Helsinki (FL). As a curator, he has organised exhibitions at museums including MoMA PS1, Long Island City; Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; and the Hessel Museum, Bard College, NY. He previously held a research fellowship at the University of Bayreuth, and received his MA in Curatorial Studies at Bard College, and is an alumni of the Àsikò International Art Programme. He is the author of many book chapters translated to five languages, and serves on the editorial team of e-flux journal.

Dr Ismail Nashef, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

On Nazar: El-Labbad and Visualizing the History of Vision

Mohei al-Din El-Labbad (1940-2010) was an Egyptian artist, cartoonist, graphic designer, and writer. Like his Egyptian contemporaries in the "Sixties Generation," El-Labbad was deeply engaged with the economic, social, and political contradictions of his time, both locally and globally. A prime example of his aesthetic and intellectual engagements is El-Labbad's magnum opus *Nazar*, published in four volumes between 1987 and 2005.

The first three volumes of *Nazar* contain essays on various visual art genres and visual cultures. These essays are built from the interplay of content and formal page design aspects, constructing what could be dubbed the artistic-intellectual work-essay. In most of these essays, El-Labbad traces visually and textually the spatio-temporalities of the basic visual forms and the knowledge about them currently used in creating artworks. In this presentation, I will contend that, in this manner, El-Labbad re-inserts the histories and memories of "nazar" into the present to negate its contradictions and build new possible syntheses for the future.

Ismail Nashef is an associate professor in the Anthropology and Sociology programme at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He has held academic positions at various universities in the Arab world and beyond. In addition to his academic career, he is a literary and art critic, as well as a curator. He has initiated and participated in numerous cultural and academic projects both within academia and elsewhere. His research focuses on materiality, language, and ideology. He explores these topics as they manifest and are expressed in literature and visual arts. His current research is on visual arts and literature in colonial contexts, with special attention to Arab Islamic societies in general, and Palestinian and Egyptian ones in particular. His publications include: A Language of One's Own: Literary Arabic, the Palestinians, and Israel (2023); Ruins: Expressing al Nakbah (2019); Arabic: A Story of a Colonial Mask (2018); June's Childhood: Dar al Fata al Arabi and the Genres of Tragedy (2016); Images of the Palestinian Death (2015); On Palestinian Abstraction: Zohdy Qadry and the Geometrical Melody of Late Modernism (2014).

Professor Silvia Naef, University of Geneva

'Making Images Without Making Them' (Zoulikha Bouabdellah): Creating A Visual Memory Through Script, Ornament, and Gestures

The loss of the homeland, of a city, of one's living surroundings, through war, natural catastrophes, radical social and urban transformations or chosen or forced migration, are a common experience in the Middle East. The creation of a visual memory becomes thus an urgent endeavor, in order to keep a record of what has gone. Besides the use of photography, video and other visual tools, many artists evoke what has been lost in an indirect way, by using elements of the Islamic artistic tradition like script and ornament, but also by reproducing the gestures tied to traditional crafts. In an act of remembering not only places and events, but also long-established skills, often forgotten or neglected, reconceived and reposed through new media and technologies. This paper will highlight some of these experiences and situate them in the more general context of contemporary art.

*Silvia Naef has been a full professor at the University of Geneva since 2006. She has also taught in Tübingen, Basel and Toronto and has been a visiting scholar in Sassari, Göttingen, Paris (ENS) and Beirut (USJ). Her research focusses on modern art and visual representations in the Arab and Islamic world. Her current project explores cultural diplomacy through the study of gifts of MENA region states to the United Nations. She is a founding member of Manazir, Swiss Platform for the Study of Visual Arts, Architecture and Heritage in the MENA Region. She has extensively published on modern Arab art and representations in the Islamic context in several languages. A new updated French edition and an English translation of her book *A la recherche d'une modernité arabe, L'évolution des arts plastiques en Egypte, au Liban et en Irak (1996)* are forthcoming at Zamân Books, Paris.*

Dr Sarah Rogers, Middlebury College

Strategies of Dislocation and Embodiment: Generational Trauma in the Work of Mona Hatoum and Beyond

In a 1999 artist's talk, Mona Hatoum reflected on her 1988 video, *Measures of Distance* as a kind of conclusion to her live work of the 1980s. The piece interweaves aural and visual autobiographical material collected over seven years, which document communication exchanged between Hatoum, based in London, and her mother in war-torn Beirut. In its autobiography intimacy, *Measures of Distance* marked a shift in relationship to her earlier, performance projects and a turn towards a sustained aesthetic interest in materiality and object-based work. This paper takes *Measures of Distance* as a starting point through which to examine the role of both pleasure and generational trauma in understanding the body and language as sites of transgressions against patriarchal power structures in Hatoum's practice as well as contemporary practices more broadly connected to the Arab world.

Sarah Rogers is Visiting Assistant Professor in the History of Art and Architecture Department at Middlebury College and a founding member and president-elect of AMCA: The Association of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey. She previously worked as Director of Research at Darat al-Funun in Amman, Jordan and Curator of Community History at the Arab American Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. She is co-editor of Arab Art Histories: The Khalid Shoman Collection (2014) and Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary documents (2018), and author of Modern Art in Beirut: Drawing Alliances (2021).

Rogers earned her Ph.D. in 2007 from the History, Theory, and Criticism section of the Department of Architecture at MIT.

Professor Siobhán Shilton, University of Bristol
Art, Activism, and the Tunisian Revolution

The revolutions that swept across countries in North Africa and the Middle East from December 2010 – like other revolutions in diverse modern historical contexts – were often articulated, within and beyond the country concerned, in black and white terms of success or failure, liberation or constraint, for or against, friend or enemy. The complex range of perspectives in Tunisia was, for example, at times, reduced to binary perceptions of secularism and religion. Iconic images in the media encouraged such reductive perceptions. They tended to imply that the revolution was a closed chapter. They conveyed a people as ideologically unified in their vision of their country’s future. Yet, art exploring Tunisia in the aftermath of Ben Ali’s deposition has frequently moved beyond icons to reveal alternative narratives. It conveys that the “revolution” is ongoing.

This paper focuses on work by artists such as Hela Ammar and “Ouma”, which conveys the continuing need to change perceptions of Tunisian women and highlights their contribution to the country’s history, art, and identity. It does so, I will argue, through distinctive forms of visual activism that combine photography and physical or virtual space with a woman’s performance between the transnational and the local, between past and present, and between presence and absence.

Siobhán Shilton is Professor of French Studies and the Visual Arts in the French Department at the University of Bristol. She has published on art and the ‘Arab Uprisings’, cultural encounters in photography, video, graffiti, graphic novels, installation and performance art, and twentieth-century literature in French on the themes of travel, immigration and diaspora. She is author of Art and the Arab Spring: Aesthetics of Revolution and Resistance in Tunisia and Beyond (2021), Transcultural Encounters: Gender and Genre in Franco-Maghrebi Art (2013) and co-author (with Charles Forsdick and Feroza Basu) of New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: History, Genre, Theory (2006). Her most recent article is “Art and Decolonial Worldviews: Transcultural Resistance in and beyond the Installations of Hassan Hajjaj” (2024). She also has a forthcoming chapter in the Handbook on Gendering the Cultural Histories of the Arab World: Contemporary Perspectives (eds Hoda Elsadda and Seteney Shami, I.B. Tauris) entitled “Feminist Transcultural Resistance through Art in the Maghreb and its Diaspora.”

Dr Nada Shabout, University of North Texas

Regenerating History from Ruins: Contemporary Iraqi Artists Reclaim their Past

Leading to the 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq was particularly promoted as humanities’ heritage and cradle of civilization, and thus justifying the need to rescue it. Return to ancient heritage to reconstruct the contemporary was the mark of modern Iraqi art

during the twentieth century as artists of the new state tried to understand its existence. Exploring meaning within ancient heritage is equally seen in the work of diaspora Iraqi artists today. Reinterpreting the ancient through the contemporary to investigate the destruction that ensued following the last invasion is equally an act of reclaiming and comprehending the history of cultural destruction through colonial practices. This paper will explore recent projects by two contemporary Iraqi artists, London-based, Hanaa Malallah's *Co-Existent Ruins: Exploring Iraq's Mesopotamian past through contemporary art* and NYC-based, Wafaa Bilal's *In a Grain of Wheat: Cultivating Hybrid Futures in Ancient Seed DNA*.

Nada Shabout is a Regents Professor of Art History and the Coordinator of the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Initiative (CAMCSI) at the University of North Texas. She is the founding president of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art from the Arab World, Iran and Turkey (AMCA) and founding director of Modern Art Iraq Archive (MAIA). She is the author of Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics (2007); co-editor, New Vision: Arab Art in the 21st Century (2009); and co-editor, Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents (2018). Notable among exhibitions she has curated: A Banquette for Seaweed: Snapshots from the Arab 1980s (2022-2023); Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art (2010); traveling exhibition, Dafatir: Contemporary Iraqi Book Art (2005-2009); and co-curator, Modernism and Iraq (2009). Major awards of her research include Getty Foundation Grant in 2019, Writers Grant, Andy Warhol Foundation 2018; The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TAARII) fellow 2006, 2007, Fulbright Senior Scholar Program, 2008. She received the 2020 Kuwait Prize for Arts and Literature from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences.

Dr Wendy Shaw, Independent scholar

Wow! Writing the Trace of Virtue in Modern Turkey

In February 2018, President of Turkey Tayyip Erdogan participated in the laying of the foundation of the Museum of Modern Art in the city of Eskisehir by painting the letter "wow" onto a blank canvas. While West-oriented commentators critiqued his pathetic penmanship, conservative memes celebrated the president through common anthropomorphic associations of the letters. Although the Arabic script was discarded in favour of Latin script as part of the modernization programs of the Republic of Turkey in 1928, the letter "wow" continues to evoke both religious and conservative sentiments even among those with limited knowledge of the Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, or Persian languages. This paper will use a historical lens to consider the modern and contemporary frameworks in which alphabet, writing, and text retain the capacity to evoke without legibility. To what extent is this part of the inheritance of the Arabic-script calligraphic legacy? To what extent does it reflect conflicted relationships with the Turkish inheritance of Islamic and modern identities?

Wendy M. K. Shaw (Ph.D. UCLA, 1999) has served as a professor in the United States, Turkey, Switzerland, and Germany. She publishes on the impact of coloniality and Eurocentrism on art-related institutions, heritage and preservation, modern art and pre-modern discourses of perception, and religious thought under secular modernism. Her work focuses on the Ottoman Empire, modern Turkey and

regions of Islamic hegemony. She is author of Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire (2003), Osmanlı Müzeleri (2006), Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic (2011). What is “Islamic” Art: Between Religion and Perception (2019, Honorable Mention for the 2020 Albert Hourani Book Award of the Middle East Studies Association and the 2021 Iran Book Award), and Loving Writing: Techniques for the University and Beyond (2021).

Professor Sarah Wilson, The Courtauld Institute of Art

Najah Albukai with Boris Taslitzky, 2022: from Damascus to Buchenwald

Najah Albukai (born Homs, Syria in 1970) studied successively at the Schools of Fine Art in Damascus and Rouen, returning to Syria where he taught and practised. Between 2012-2015 he was arrested and tortured several times at the Detention Centre Branch 227 and by Syrian intelligence services. Escaping to Lebanon, he made his way back to France. His camp drawings were shown in a contemporary annexe at the major retrospective of Boris Taslitzky (1911-2005) in Roubaix, northern France, in 2022 (where the artist’s Ukrainian descent was revealed). Taslitzky’s drawings made in French transit camps prior to his deportation, his Buchenwald drawings (published 1946) and his major history painting, *Buchenwald*, 1945 – controversial within a Cold War context – were followed by his reportage about French atrocities and domination in Algeria in 1952. Both intersectional personal trauma and that of an ideologically-riven society were already at stake. The conjunction in 2022 with Albukai’s testimony was unexpected. The young artist discovered a shocking confirmation of his experiences; the public were alerted to a searing fold in time.

What lessons for the present?

Sarah Wilson is Professor of the History of Modern and Contemporary art at The Courtauld, University of London following an MA, and a BA in English Literature at Oxford. She was principal curator of Paris, Capital of the Arts, 1900-1968 (Royal Academy London, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2002-3) and Pierre Klossowski, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2006, touring to Cologne and Paris. A close relationship with the Centre Georges Pompidou, and the Sorbonne in Paris has extended throughout her career. Sarah Wilson was appointed Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres awarded by the French government for services to French culture in 1997. In 2015 she was a curator of the 1st Asian Biennale / 5th Guangzhou Triennale at the Guangdong Museum of Art and was awarded the AICA (International Association of Art Critics) prize for her distinguished contribution to art criticism.