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Franziska Kabelitz | 2021
MA History of Art | Discourses on Modern and Contemporary Art of the Middle East
Annotated Bibliography of Selected Course Readings

Week 1: *The Problem of Terminology*

Flood, Finbarr Barry. "From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art." Originally published in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions* edited by Elizabeth Mansfield, pp. 31-53. London: Routledge, 2007

Flood's highly political article addresses problems of terminology within the broader context of the academic field of Islamic art history. In particular, he explores the discursive situating of modern and contemporary artistic production of Islamic geographies. Here, the author critiques conceptualisations which regard Islamic art as having concluded in the early nineteenth century in the wake of the emergence of nationalism and colonialism (e.g. Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom). Flood argues for the broadening of the concept of Islamic art to include post-1800 artistic production and for a reexamination of the assumptions that have informed said exclusion. Specifically, he challenges notions claiming a lack of artistic authenticity as well as art historical discourses which lean towards binary compartmentalisations of the contemporary versus the historical or of the religious versus the modern. Flood expresses further urgency by examining ways in which both Islamists and neoconservatives across the globe, in order to advance their respective agendas in a post-9/11 narrative, have contributed to the stereotypical division of Islam into general arts and Islamic arts. By proxy, this implies a division into an authentic pre-nineteenth century period and a non-authentic modern and contemporary period, neither of which should constitute a decisive factor for assessing artistic merit.

Week 2: *Contextualising Historiography*

Lenssen, Anneka and Sarah A. Rogers. "Articulating the Contemporary." In *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture,* edited by Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, pp. 1314-38. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017

The authors expand on Flood's attempt to locate post-nineteenth century art from Islamic geographies. In this, they engage with the challenges of defining the frequently and broadly used term "contemporary Islamic art." Tracing the career and production trajectories of selected artists and movements from the Middle East region as case studies, Lenssen and Rogers explore the past and present underlying global structures of exhibition, curation and reception that shape the discourse on the differentiation between contemporary and modern art. Ultimately, they argue for a conceptualisation of the contemporary as a contingent rather

than a strictly temporal or geographical category, one that is always in flux and therefore requires to be revisited and redefined periodically. Moreover, the authors analyse the significant roles of various art world operational mechanisms, suggesting contemporary art may be defined in terms of the interplay of multiple international and regional infrastructures, such as biennials, funding institutions, prizes and art markets.

Week 3: *Alternative Modernism: Avant-Gardism vis-à-vis Cultural Authenticity*

Daftari, Fereshteh. "Another Modernism: An Iranian Perspective." In *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, edited by Lynn Gumpert and Shiva Balaghi, pp. 39-88. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002

Daftari discusses the meaning of modernism in an Iranian context based on specific artistic case studies. She chronologically traces the development of modernism in Iran beginning with its inception as a form of Western realism initiated by the nineteenth-century painter Kamal al-Molk, who revered Old Master paintings yet at the same time strongly supported the technique of careful copying, which for centuries had constituted a cornerstone of Persian artistic training. This experience is contrasted with the adoption of local themes expressed through Western forms and, eventually, the search for an articulation of an authentic national art through reinvention of Iranian heritage's form and content. Consequently, Daftari determines that modernism in Iran developed asynchronously from European modernism, manifesting itself in both realist and abstract forms. Ultimately, as a culturally specific endeavour, it was primarily concerned with the notion of identity rather than form, continuously negotiating and renegotiating the dual claims of global and local identities.

Week 4: *Harmonising the Dichotomy of Past and Present*

Naef, Silvia. "Reexploring Islamic Art: Modern and Contemporary Creation in the Arab World and Its Relation to the Artistic Past." *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (Spring 2003): pp. 164-174

Naef's article examines how modern and contemporary art productions in Arab countries relate to themes in history, defining Islamic art as the artistic output of the pre-nineteenth century Arab world. She argues that while Islamic art originally had a religious or functional purpose, it morphed into a question of identity following social and political changes such as the emergence of Arab nationalism and the entrance of Western art into many Arab geographies throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To underscore this, Naef focuses on the example of hurufiyya, a movement that spotlighted the Arab letter as a stylistic element from the 1940s onwards, thereby reinventing heritage in a formal and intellectual manner and removing it from the traditional aesthetics of calligraphy (which, in her understanding, formed part of "Islamic art") which preceded it. Through challenging perceived incompatibilities in Islamic art with modernity, Naef demonstrates how

Arab artists began to explore elements of their heritage in order to create common expressions of a locally specific Arab modernity. Here, she analyses the contemporary Arab letter as an epiphenomenon, claiming that rather than having been reactivated while still in existence, tradition has been reinvented following its prior complete disappearance.

Week 5: *Conceptualism and New Media*

Rogers, Sarah. "Out of History: Postwar Art in Beirut." *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007): pp. 8–20

Focusing on contemporary Lebanese art production, Rogers investigates the impacts of the intersection of the Lebanese civil war (1975-90) with the art market's global turn (which has often been linked to the 1989 Paris-based *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition). In this context, she argues that the shift towards conceptualism and mixed media in contemporary Lebanese artworks could be defined as proto-institutional in the sense that it directly resulted from Lebanese postwar culture's active engagement with identity narratives and negotiations. Rogers points towards the importance of memory being highly contextual for many postwar Lebanese artists, especially with reference to the civil war. This has led to the production of a large body of work that seeks to process memory within a framework of social reconciliation, often with an inclusion of reappropriated archival aesthetics. Furthermore, Rogers links contemporary Lebanese art projects to the global neo-conceptual context and discusses its intellectual engagement with postmodernism.

Week 6: Reading week

Week 7: *Contemporaneity vs Specificity*

Winegar, Jessica. "Cultural Authenticity, Artistic Personhood, and Frames of Evaluation." In *Creative Reckonings, The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt,* pp. 88-130. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006

Winegar explores conceptual discourses of cultural authenticity in the context of the postcolonial Egyptian art scene, maintaining that the concept of cultural authenticity came to have a double meaning: as a useful analytical framework as well as a burden requiring artists to explore self-identity through the local specificity of their Egyptian heritage. From the 1970s onwards, Egypt experienced various social and economic reforms related to nationalism, socialism, anti-colonialism and commercialism, out of which discussions over ideological dichotomies developed, constructing narratives of East-West, local-global, traditional-modern, centre-periphery, authentic-imported, amongst others. Within this context, artists positioned themselves along two opposing political and aesthetic perspectives, which Winegar explores

in depth: *asala* artists, who retrieved their subject matter from thematic references to Egypt's past, which they deemed to be pure and thereby culturally authentic, and *mu'asira* artists, who actively sought to incorporate notions of contemporaneity into their practices, arguing that cultural authenticity would naturally be conveyed by their Egyptian nationality.

Week 8: *Global vs Regional/ Local Discourses: Identity Politics*

Dabashi, Hamid. "Trauma, Memory, and History." In *Contemporary Art from the Middle East, Regional Interactions with Global Art Discourses*, edited by Hamid Keshmirshekan, pp. 17-36. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015

Dabashi expands on the concept of exhausted geographies, which had previously been proposed by Irit Rogoff, arguing for a radical reconceptualisation of the geographies upon which our current processes of knowledge acquisition both in academia and in the political sphere are based. Specifically, he examines the notion of fragmented archives and maintains that it is crucial to acknowledge the fact that complete archives remain forever unattainable - a fact that has been obscured in the recent past by increasing commodification and institutionalisation of art. Dabashi proposes to instead conceptualise artworks as ruins, remnants and intercepted allegories that do not have to be distorted by curators in order to attract corporate support or follow commodified narratives (as is currently the case). Rather, the author suggests, the works should be taken out of their institutionalised context so that they may reconstitute – albeit with gaps - pasts on their own terms directly linking to historical contemporaneity/ contemporaneities.

Week 9: *Middle Eastern Diasporic Art*

Malik, Amna. "Surface Tension, Reconsidering Horizontality Through the Practices of Contemporary Iranian Diaspora Artists." In *Identity Theft: Cultural Colonisation and Contemporary Art*, edited by Jonathan Harris, 109-34. Liverpool: Tate Liverpool and Liverpool University Press, 2008

Critiquing Rosalind Krauss' theory of horizontality as a point of departure, Malik explores and responds to the reception of three female Iranian artists living and working in the "West" (Shirin Neshat, Shirana Shahbazi, Maria Kheirkhah) with a particular focus on the limitations posed by Western assumptions of Islam as foreign. Malik argues that Western exhibition contexts have often defined Iranian diasporic works as either Western or other (e.g. by celebrating the work's links to Persian heritage) thereby not only establishing a hard binary and denying the possibility of confluence of Western and non-Western identities, but also reinforcing the cultural hegemony of Western institutions. Yet Malik argues that the three artists have countered this threat of categorisation by establishing a non-normative response to Western minimalism: a horizontality that moves across the grid, locally and temporally specific to the context of post-Khomeini Iranian cultural politics.

Week 10: *Regional Artistic Events and Museum Infrastructure*

Ali, Atteqa. "The Rise of Art Institutions in the United Arab Emirates and its Impact on Contemporary Art in the Extended MENASA Region." In *Museums in Arabia: Transnational Practices and Regional Processes*, edited by Karen Exell and Sarina Wakefield, pp. 167-80. London: Routledge, 2016

Tracing the chronologies of Sharjah Biennial and Art Dubai, the author explores recent shifts in art market infrastructure within the Arab Gulf region and their impact on the significance of regional versus international art centres. Ali argues that both Sharjah Biennial and Art Dubai (in addition to other high-profile institutions in the region) have developed into crucial regional, targeted art platforms that attract international audiences and – e.g. by means of a relevant and approachable engagement, dialogue and education programme - function far beyond the business dimensions originally ascribed to art fairs in a Western context. These opportunities, Ali concludes, constitute a paradigm shift in the production, exhibition, and reception of contemporary art, as artists from the Middle East, North Africa or South Asia no longer need to rely on former contemporary art centres located exclusively in Western nations. Instead, they may launch and nurture a global career from a regional platform, thereby transcending the dichotomy of cultural specificity and international reach.