

ART IN THE ARAB WORLD FROM REVOLUTION TO REVOLUTION (1880-PRESENT)

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Course Description

Since the end of the nineteenth century, nearly every corner of the Arab world has experienced a revolution. Some of these interconnected, overlapping breaks from the past took the shape of independence movements, military coups, and popular uprisings, while others manifested in subtler but no less radical shifts in popular culture and national consciousness. With the collapse of colonial governments and the rise of new regimes, art practices and exhibition cultures assumed new roles as well as new forms, playing an integral part in decolonial nation-building and networks of transnational solidarity. This course explores some of the stylistic and thematic developments that have arisen over 140 tumultuous years, providing an introduction to the modern and contemporary art of Arabic-speaking societies in the Middle East and North Africa through the lens of revolution.

Focusing most closely on the visual cultures of Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Morocco, this course centers primary documents in order to help students understand how changing approaches to the visual arts related to their dynamic cultural contexts. Each module's reading assignment begins with contemporary articles, manifestos, correspondence, and artist interviews in translation, helping students develop analytical historical skills and providing a window into the burgeoning field of modern and contemporary Arab art history.

This course is divided into four sections, which are arranged in roughly chronological order. The first section, "Revolutionizing Culture," asks how Arab artists and intellectuals navigated Eurocentric concepts of "modern culture" during the early years of the twentieth century, exploring sea changes around questions of cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and gender relations. The second section, "New Regimes," considers modern art in the early years of Nasser's Egypt, Baathist Iraq, and decolonizing North Africa, examining its role in defining or contesting national identities and negotiating concerns of innovation and cultural heritage. Section 3, "Art Between the Bourgeois and the Revolutionary," looks at aesthetic and philosophical tensions surrounding the Naksa, or "setback," of 1967, as well as the friction between Beirut's contemporaneous commercial art scene and the visual culture of the Palestinian Revolution that called the city its capital. Deepening our exploration of art's transnational role in decolonial politics, it also considers the afterlives of Pan-Arabism in art and exhibition culture. Finally, "The Art of Protest" looks at artistic practices surrounding the Palestinian intifadas (1987-1993; 2000-2006), the Arab Spring (2010-2012), Lebanon's Cedar and October Revolutions (2005; 2019-), and popular resistance in the Gaza Strip (2006-).

Class Structure

Note: This course is designed to accommodate [both graduate and undergraduate students](#), who will learn the same material but complete different assignments. When considering the assignment and evaluation outlines below, be sure you're reading the appropriate one!

Skills Learned or Improved Upon:

- **Undergraduates:** visual analysis, using primary historical documents
- **Graduate students:** writing and presenting a conference paper (optional, see below)

Class Structure for Spring 2024

- **Lectures:** Lectures are in-person and are the backbone of this class, providing information necessary for the completion of all quizzes and assignments. Lecture slides will be made available on the course website by the end of the week in which they're presented. Students can miss up to 2 classes without explanation or penalty.
- **Reading responsibilities:** Reading for this class is flexible and varies based on students' individual goals and capacities. Each week, students will be assigned between 2 and 6 short primary source documents as well as several longer articles or chapters, but will only be required to engage with one of each type of document (primary or secondary) in a weekly analysis. Additional reading will enrich the student's understanding of the subject matter, but will not be necessary in order to pass the class.
- **Writing responsibilities:** Undergraduates will be expected to write 300-500 words a week in response to a prompt, and may also write an optional term paper due at the end of the semester. Graduates will write approx. 500-words a week in addition to either a conference or seminar paper. More information on these assignments below.
- **Tests:** Undergraduate students will complete a series of self-scheduled take-home quizzes instead of larger midterm/final exams. More information on these below.

Outline of Assignments & Evaluation: UNDERGRADUATE

- **Attendance: 20%.** Note that there is not a specific "participation" requirement here; you will receive full credit simply for showing up and writing your name on the sign-in sheet. I understand that attention and participation look different for everyone, and expect you to do whatever you need to do to meet your own learning goals. Everyone is entitled to skip two classes without penalty or explanation.
- **Document and visual analyses: 40%.** Each week, you will be responsible for responding to either a reading-based prompt (a document analysis) or an artwork-based prompt (a visual analysis). There will be one of each prompts to choose from every week, but you must ultimately complete 8 document analyses and 3 visual analyses. Note that this is 11/12 assignments total; everyone is entitled to skip one week's analysis assignment without explanation or penalty. These are due Mondays at 5pm.
- **"Final exam" weekly quizzes: 40%.** In order to accommodate your individual schedules and learning styles, the "final exam" of this course takes the form of 12 self-scheduled quizzes. Each Friday, I will post a quiz based on the previous week's lecture material, which you can complete and submit at any point before the end of the semester (11:59pm on May 14th). You are allowed to take these quizzes open-book. They are designed to take 15-20 minutes each, but they will not be timed.
- **Optional term paper: Instead of their quizzes,** students who wish to do so may write a final paper (2500-5000 words) on any topic related to modern/contemporary Arab art. This is meant to provide interested students with the chance to conduct independent research and gain feedback on their writing, and is especially encouraged of students planning to pursue graduate education in a

related field. Paper-writers will be required to submit a topic and preliminary bibliography for feedback on February 15th and a first draft on March 21st.

Outline of Assignments & Evaluation: GRADUATE

- **Attendance:** Graduate students are expected to attend all lectures, but will not be penalized for missing class under the assumption that they will only do so if strictly necessary. Relatedly, graduate students are not expected to provide an explanation for missing class.
- **Reaction papers:** Each week, you must write a short (~500 words) reaction to the week's readings. This should not be a summary/review of the entire reading, but rather an exploration of a particular point, theme, or issue raised in one or more of the readings that you personally find intriguing. You should feel free to make connections between this idea and your own research or other coursework, should you so desire. Every student is entitled to skip this assignment once per semester, without explanation. These papers are due Mondays by 5pm.
- **Conference/research paper:** In addition to weekly response papers, graduate students are asked to produce a final conference paper on a topic of their choosing (broadly related to the purview of the course). You will first submit a paper abstract (week of 2/15), then a draft (week of 3/21) and finally the completed assignment, which will be due in the form of both a ~2500-word paper and a twenty-minute presentation. This assignment is intended as an opportunity to gain experience in the fickle genre of the conference paper as well as feedback on your presentation style; if you feel this is unnecessary for your personal trajectory and would prefer to write a longer seminar paper (5-10k words) instead, you are welcome to do so. Assignment structure will be the same with the exception of the presentation requirement.
 - No reaction papers will be assigned for weeks when an abstract or draft is due.

Essential Course Policies

- **Required materials:** Students are not required to purchase textbooks or materials for this class. All course readings will be made available for download by the instructor.
- **Late work:** As a neurodivergent scholar, I'm especially aware that everyone has a different relationship to structuring time. I ask that you please submit assignments on time out of consideration for my own grading schedule, but I will not penalize late assignments as long as they are submitted within a 48-hour grace period (by Wednesday at 5pm, no explanation necessary). Work submitted after that grace period will lose 10% per day except under extenuating circumstances, as evaluated on a case-by-case basis
- **Emails:** I will do my best to get back to your emails within 24 hours during the school week. Please note that I don't generally check my work email over the weekend.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Weekly:

- Mondays at 5pm: short document/visual analysis (undergrad) or reaction paper (grad) due for previous week
- Fridays by 9pm: Slides and lecture quizzes for the week on course website

I. Revolutionizing Culture, 1880-1945

Revolutionary events: “Arab Renaissance,” or “Nahda” (1880s-1930s), Great Arab Revolt (1916-1918), Egyptian Independence (1919), Arab Revolt in Palestine (1936-1939), Lebanese Independence (1943)

Key terms: Orientalism, *Nahda*, Islamic art, romanticism, imperialism, mandate government, modernity, cosmopolitanism, surrealism, Eurocentricity, hijab

Key artists: Khalil Gibran (Lebanon), Daoud Corm (Lebanon), May Ziadeh (Lebanon), Nicola Saig (Palestine), Mohamed Naghi (Egypt), Kamel Telmisany (Egypt), Ramses Younan (Egypt), Mahmoud Mokhtar (Egypt), Moustafa Farroukh (Lebanon)

Week 1 (1/23, 1/25): The “Arab Renaissance” and the Art of Catching Up

Primary Documents:

- “Taswir, Peinture, Painting,” Butrus al-Bustani (1882)
- “The Fine Arts,” Ahmed Fahmi (1887)
- “Images and Statues, Their Benefits and Legality,” Muhammad Abduh (1904)
- “Something About Art,” May Ziadeh (1912)
- Salama Musa, from “What Is the Renaissance?” (1935)

Secondary source readings:

- Dina Ramadan, “‘One of the Best Tools for Learning:’ Rethinking the Role of ‘Abduh’s Fatwa in Egyptian Art History,” *A Companion to African Art*, eds. Gitti Salami and Monica Blackmun Visonà.
- Kirsten Scheid, “Missing Nikê: On Oversights, Doubled Sights, and Universal Art Understood through Lebanon,” *Museum Anthropology*, September 2009 (online).
- Sarah Rogers, “Daoud Corm, Cosmopolitan Nationalism, and the Origins of Lebanese Modern Art,” *The Arab Studies Journal* (Spring 2016): 44-77.

Week 2 (1/30, 2/1): Gender and Cosmopolitanism

Primary Documents:

- “Letter to May Ziadeh,” Amin Rihani (1920)
- Excerpts from Qasim Amin’s *The Liberation of Women* (1899)*
- Debate between Mokhtar and al-Mazini on *Egypt Awakening* (1928)

Secondary source readings:

- Kirsten Scheid, “Necessary Nudes: Hadatha and Mu’Asira in the Lives of Modern Lebanese,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (May 2010): 203-230
- Malek Alloula, excerpts from *The Colonial Harem* (1986)
- Frantz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled” in *A Dying Colonialism* (1959)

II. New Regimes, 1930 - 1967

Revolutionary events: Egyptian Revolution (1952), Moroccan and Tunisian Independence (1956), Algerian War of Independence (1956-1962), Iraqi Revolutions (1958, 1963), Syrian Coup d’État (1963)

Key terms: Nasserism, pan-Arabism, decolonialism, postcolonialism, nationalism, heritage, craft

Key artists: Inji Efflatoun (Egypt), Mohammad Chebaa (Morocco), Mohammed Melehi (Morocco), Farid Belkahia (Morocco), Andre Elbaz (Morocco), Abdelaziz Gorgi (Tunisia), Baya (Algeria), Ahmed Cherkaoui (Morocco), Safia Farhat (Tunisia), Mahmoud Sabri (Iraq), Jewad Selim (Iraq), Shakir Hassan Al-Said (Iraq), Hafidh Druby (Syria), Fateh al-Moudarres (Syria), Seloua Raouda Choucair (Lebanon)

Week 3 (2/6, 2/8): Art and the Nation in Egypt and Iraq

Primary Documents:

- “Manifesto of the Neo-Orientalists,” Kamel Telmisany (1937)
- Egyptian art and freedom debates, Younan et al (1938-1939)
- “Manifesto,” Baghdad Group for Modern Art (1951)
- “The Renewal of Art,” Jewad Selim (1951)
- “At The Exhibition of the Revolution,” Jaleel Kamal al-Din (1958)
- Saloua Raouda Choucair, “How the Arab Understood Visual Art” (1951)

Secondary source readings:

- Selections from Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group* (I.B. Tauris, 2017)
- Don LaCoss, “Egyptian Surrealism and ‘Degenerate Art’ in 1939,” *Arab Studies Journal* 18.1 (Spring 2010)
- Suheyly Takesh, “Realism and Funerary Processions in Mahmoud Sabri’s Work,” *Rutgers Art Review* 35, 2019

- Olga Nefedova, “Art and Artists Crossing Borders: Untold Stories of the First Iraqi Art Exhibition in the USSR,” *Stedelik Studies* 9 (Fall 2019).

Week 4 (2/13, 2/15): Nasserism and its Discontents

Primary Documents:

- “Recollections of Imprisonment,” Inji Efflatoun (1959-1963)
- Hamed Said, “The Freedom of Art” (1958)
- Salah Kamel, Text for the United Arab Republic pavilion (1960)
- Readings from the Plastic Arts Movement – Damascus (1962)

Secondary source readings:

- Anneka Lenssen “Inji Efflatoun: White Light,” *Afterall* (Autumn/Winter 2016)
- Kaelin Wilson-Goldie, “Public/Private: The Many Lives of ‘Rebel Painter’ Inji Efflatoun,” *Afterall* (Autumn/Winter 2016)
- Selections from Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser’s Egypt*, Stanford University Press, 2011
- Selections from Anneka Lenssen, *Beautiful Agitation: Modern Painting and Politics in Syria*, UC Press, 2020

Week 5 (2/20, 2/22): Decolonizing Visual Culture in North Africa

Primary Documents:

- Debates on North African Art, Cherkaoui et al (1967)
- Morocco’s Casablanca School Dialogues, Chebaa et al (1966-67)
- Aouchem Group Manifesto (1967)

Secondary source readings:

- Claire Davies, “Decolonizing Culture: Third World, Moroccan, and Arab Art in Souffles/Anfas, 1966-1972,” *Berlin: Forum Transregionale Studien*, 2015 (online).
- Nada Shabout, “The Arabic Connection in Articulating North African Modernity in Art,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2010
- Jessica Gerschultz, “The Interwoven Ideologies of Art and Artisanal Education in Postcolonial Tunis,” *Critical Interventions*, 2014.

III. Art Between the Bourgeois and the Revolutionary, 1965-1991

Revolutionary Events: Naksa/Six Day War (1967), Palestinian Revolution (1965-1982), Lebanese Wars (1975-1991)

Key terms: Combat art, *naksa*, sectarianism, commitment, calligraphy, *hurufiyya*, biennial, “Third World,” solidarity civil war, proxy war, *intifada*, sectarianism

Key artists: Fateh al-Moudarres (Syria), Ismail Shammout (Palestine), Aref Rayess (Lebanon), Dia Azzawi (Iraq), Rafa al-Nasiri (Iraq), Mustafa al-Hallaj (Palestine), Kamal Boullata (Palestine) Qataiba al-Sheikh Nouri, Shakir Hassan al-Said (Iraq), Fateh al-Mouddares (Syria), Dia Azzawi (Iraq), Mahmoud Hammad (Syria), Ismail Shammout (Palestine) Mona Saudi (Jordan), Saloua Raouda Choucair (Lebanon), Huguette Caland (Lebanon), Etel Adnan (Lebanon), Juliana Seraphim (Palestine/Lebanon), Aref Rayess (Lebanon)

Week 6 (2/27, 2/29): A Revolution In Reverse: Art in the Wake of the 1967 “Setback”

Primary Documents:

- Documents on accounting for the June 1967 War, Soliman et al (1968-1969)

Secondary source readings:

- Anneka Lenssen et al., “Introduction: The Longevity of Rupture: 1967 in Art and Its Histories,” *ARTMargins* (June 2013): 14-18
- Anneka Lenssen, “The Plasticity of the Syrian Avant-Garde,” *ARTMargins* (June 2013): 43-70
- Joseph Massad, “Civilized or Decadent? Time and the Culture of the Arabs,” *Islam and the Orientalist World System* (2008)

Week 7 (3/12, 3/14): Palestine and Revolutionary Art

Primary Documents:

- “On Art and Combat,” Tahar Ben Jelloun (1970)
- “Art in the Time of the Palestinian Revolution,” Kamal Boullata (1971)
- “The Palestinian People’s Consciousness and Aesthetic Expression,” Mustafa al-Hallaj (1975)
- “Revolutionary Painting and the Palestinian Revolution,” Mohammad Chabaa (1974)*

Secondary source readings:

- Salim al-Baholy, “The Persistence of the Image: Dhākira Hurra in Dia Azzawi's Drawings on the Massacre of Tel al-Zaatar,” *ARTMargins* (June 2013): 71-97
- Rasha Salti, “Of Dreamers, Ezzeddine Qalaq and Palestine’s Revolutionary Posters,” *Manifesta* (2012), online
- Alessandra Amin, “Introduction to “Revolutionary Painting and the Palestinian Revolution,” by Mohammed Chabâa, and “Palestinian Artists and the Biennial,” from Toni Maraini's “Baghdad 1974: A Summary of the First Arab Biennial of Fine Arts,” *ARTMargins* 12.3 (October 2023), online.

Week 8 (3/19, 3/21) : A Tale of Two Cities: Arts Culture in “the Paris of the Middle East”

Primary Documents:

- “The Opening of Gallery One: The First Art Institution of Its Kind” (1963)
- “Remarks on the Autumn Exhibition: I Am Uncultured!” Jalal Khoury (1964)
- “Light: The Ultimate Material for Art,” Etel Adnan (1973)
- “Proposal for a Cultural Policy,” Janine Rubeiz (1977)
- Exhibition catalogue for the 1978 Exhibition for Palestine*

Secondary source readings:

- Zeina Maasri, “Introduction: Beirut in the Global Sixties: Design, Politics, and Translocal Visuality” and “Art is in the ‘Arab Street’: The Palestinian Revolution and Printscales of Solidarity,” in *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut’s Global Sixties* (Cambridge University Press, 2020)
- Selections from Sarah Rogers, *Modern Art in Cold War Beirut: Drawing Alliances* (Routledge, 2021)
- Selections from Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti, eds. *Past Disquiet: Artists, International Solidarity and Museums in Exile* (University of Chicago Press, 2019)
- Sarah Rogers, “Seriality: Artistic Production during the Lebanese Civil War,” Saradar Collection 2018 (online)

Week 9 (4/2, 4/4): Afterlives of Pan-Arabism: Aesthetics and exhibition

Primary Documents:

- “Statement of the Founding Committee of the Union of Arab Plastic Artists” (1971)
- “Arab Art... and its Position in Relation to the World’s Art,” Mahmoud Hammad (1971)
- “The Arab Artist’s Rights and His Obligations,” Fateh al-Mouadarres (1971)
- Documents on Arab biennial initiatives and critiques, Azzawi et al (1973-74)
- “A Note on the Calligraphic Sign,” Abdelkebir Khatibi (1973)
- Documents on Art and the Letter, Al Said et al (1973)

Secondary source readings:

- Amin Alsaden, “Baghdad's Arab Biennial: Regional Subversions, Global Ambitions.” *Third Text* (2019): 121-150
- Nada Shabout, “Part III: The Arabic Letter in Art,” in *Modern Arab Art: The Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (University of Florida Press, 2007)
- Selections from Charbel Dagher, *Arab Hurufiyya: Art and Identity* (Skira, 2016)

IV. The Art of Protest, 1987-Present

Revolutionary events: First Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993), Second Palestinian Intifada (2000-2006), Cedar Revolution (2005), Arab Spring (2010-2012), October Revolution (2019), Gazan resistance (2006-)

Key Artists: Vera Tamari (Palestine), Sleiman Mansour (Palestine), Nabil Anani (Palestine), Taysir Barakat (Palestine), Seta Manoukian (Lebanon), Mona Hatoum (Palestine), Hani Zurob (Palestine), Taysir Batniji (Palestine), Rula Halawani (Palestine), Ahl al-Kahf (Tunisian group), Alaa Awad and Ammar Abu-Bakr (Egypt), Nermine Hammam (Egypt), Zakaria Ramhani (Morocco), Tamara Nasr (Lebanon)

Week 10 (4/9, 4/11): Art of the Palestinian Intifadas

Primary Documents:

- Statement on the Closing of Gallery 79, Ramallah (1980)
- “Along New Paths: The New Visions Art Collective in Occupied Palestine,” Vera Tamari (personal reflection, 2018)
- Adila Laidi-Hanieh, “Arts, Identity, and Survival: Building Cultural Practices in Palestine” (first-hand account), *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2006

Secondary source readings:

- Kamal Boullata, “Visual Expression Inside a Cultural Ghetto,” in *Palestinian Art from 1850 to the Present* (Saqi, 2009)
- Tina Sherwell, “Imaging the Homeland: Gender and Palestinian National Discourse,” in *After Orientalism: Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks* (Brill 2004)
- Bashir Makhoul and Gordon Hon, selections from *The Origins of Palestinian Art* (Liverpool University Press, 2013)
- Lina Khatib, selections from *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

Week 11 (4/16, 4/18): The Arab Spring

Primary Documents:

- TBD

Secondary source readings:

- Nancy Demerdash, “Consuming Revolution: Ethics, Art, and Ambivalence in the Arab Spring.” *New Middle Eastern Studies* 2 (2012)
- Hanan Toukan, selections from *The Politics of Art* (Stanford University Press, 2020)

Week 12 (4/23, 4/25): Resisting Oppression in Gaza and Lebanon

Primary Documents:

- American University of Beirut Library Guides: Art of the Lebanon Protests
<https://aub.edu.lb/libguides.com/c.php?g=981597&p=7106321>
- Art of Thawra Instagram account https://www.instagram.com/art_of_thawra/?hl=en

Secondary source readings:

- Rayane al-Rammal, “Digital Artivism in Movement: The 2019 Lebanese Uprising’s Art on Instagram,” *The Global Politics of Artistic Engagement* (Brill, 2022)
- Sarah Khalil, “Lebanon’s Revolution: How Art Turned Into a Political Weapon,” *The New Arab*, October 16th, 2020
- Bill Rolston, “Messages of Allegiance and Defiance: The Murals of Gaza,” *Race and Class* 55.4 (2014)
- Marion Slitine, “Contemporary Art from a City at War: The Case of Gaza,” *Cities* 77 (2018)