AHC 312-Seminar: Issues in Modern and Contemporary Art in the Middle East and the Arab World

Syllabus

Catalogue Description

AHC 312-Seminar: Issues in Modern and Contemporary Art in the Middle East and the Arab World 3; 3.0 cr. Offered Annually.

The seminar offers topical treatment of issues related to modern and contemporary art in the Middle East and the Arab World. Specific case studies of artists and institutions from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and so on will be combined with theoretical discussions upon anti-colonial struggles, post-colonial dilemmas, cosmopolitanism, identity politics and others issues.

Course Description

There has been an unprecedented international interest in contemporary art from the Middle East and the Arab World. While triggered by political motivations and exacerbated after the attacks in the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, this interest has helped to strengthen the local institutional field of contemporary art in the region and encourage reflective artistic and curatorial practices.

Throughout the seminar we will discuss specific art practices from the region (Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, UAE and Syria) as starting points to engage larger questions pertaining to what constitutes an art practice in the region; the institutional frameworks that accommodate these practices; the way in which value (both symbolic and monetary) is constructed through these institutional structures and the dynamic of internationalization of these practices and their participation in the global art scene. Particular attention is paid to the historical contexts of art production and reception and various methods of interpretation. While the course is framed around a region, we will pay a close attention to the singularity of specific practices and the heterogeneity of various contexts. The course combines in-class discussions and lectures with mandatory attendance to public talks, exhibitions and institutional visits scheduled throughout the semester.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, students should have gained the following skills and aptitudes:

- Identify individual works of contemporary art from the Middle East;
• Develop methods of interpretation;
• Evaluate (describe, interpret, theorize and contextualize) individual works of visual culture;
• Develop a thesis and argue it consistently and coherently;
• Identify the importance of context and reception issues for the understanding of individual works of art;
• Reflect on their learning processes;

Course Assessment

Attendance: 15% - This includes students’ class attendance record. More than 6 absences result in failure.

Participation 15% - This includes students’ active engagement with in-class discussions and demonstration of the knowledge and understanding of the daily reading. The syllabus will be made available as a work in progress document, to which students are encouraged to add further bibliographical references, artists’ names as well as any other resources they find relevant for the course. The on-going work on the syllabus is also part of the participation grade.

Writing Assignments - 40% - This includes an interview with an artist (1000 words, max. points: 10), two exhibition reviews (500 words each, max points: 7 each) and two critical writing texts focusing on individual artworks (500 words each, max points 8 each).

Presentation: 10% - Each student should choose an artist and introduce his or her work to the class. The issues to be discussed should include but are not limited to the contextualization of the work(s) in larger social and cultural contexts as well as relevant artistic practices. Students are encouraged to open up questions for in-class discussion and address their peers directly.

Final Paper: 20% - 3000 words. The final paper should be an argumentative essay, addressing one of the topics discussed during the course and engaging the course literature. Plagiarism results in an F grade. Papers should be submitted electronically. Confirmation will be sent to each student upon reception. If the student has not received such confirmation, it means that the paper is not submitted. It is the student’s responsibility to contact the instructor and make sure that the final work is received. No late submissions are accepted.
One month prior to the deadline for the submission of the paper, each student is required to schedule a meeting with the instructor to discuss his or her topic and submit a brief outline describing the argument, the method of writing as well as his or her bibliographical references.

**Course Outline**

**Week 1:** Middle Eastern Art? How to frame the course? What is Arab Art? What is Middle Eastern Art? Regional taxonomies.

Reading: Kirsten Scheid, "What we do not know: Questions for a study of contemporary Arab art", *ISIM Review* 22 (Autumn, 2008).


Samir Kassir, “Being Arab”, in *The Future of a Promise*.

**Week 2:** The Middle East as a Geopolitical Concept in Transformation

“Introduction and Conclusion”, *Is there a Middle East: Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, ed. by Michael Bonine, Abbas Amanat

Anthony Downey, “Beyond the Former Middle East,” in Ibraaz, pp. 46-64


Shady El-Noshokaty, “Rehearsal for an Important Statement”, video.

**Week 3:** Redefining the Other: Postcolonial Conditions and Questions of Knowledge and Representation


**Week 4:** Photographic Practices in the Middle East

Reading: Maria Golia, *Photography and Egypt*, chapters four and five
Week 5: Modern Art and Its Ideologies in the Arab World


Lilian Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art*, Introduction and Chapter 7—Internationalism and Abstraction


Week 6: The Construction of “Contemporary Art”

Reading: Jessica Weineger, *Creative Reckonings…* excerpts to be chosen

Lilian Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art*, Chapters 12–16

Recommended: Clare Davies, *The Artist-Bureaucrat Speaks*, Bidoun #23

Abbas Baydoun, “Culture and Arts. Re: the Actual” in Homeworks I

Week 7: Introduction to Contemporary Art in Lebanon

Reading: On Being “the Other” in Post-Civil War Lebanon: Aid and the Politics of Art in Processes of Contemporary Cultural Production by Hanan Toukan

Rasha Salti, “Framing the Subversive in Post-War Lebanon” in Homeworks I


**Week 8:** Institutions of Modern and Contemporary Art (please, refer to the Resources section at the end of the syllabus), International exhibitions of Middle Eastern Art


Recommended: Mirene Arsanios, *How to Make Nice Things Happen*, issue 0

Reading: Dina Ramadan, “Regional Emissaries: Geographical Platforms and the Challenges of Marginalisation in Contemporary Egyptian Art”

Catalogues for Review: Contemporary Arab Representations, Africa Remix, Unveiled, DisOrientation

**Week 9:** Who is the Curator? Exhibition-Making Practices in the Middle East


Some of the exhibitions to consider:

--Meeting Points, catalogue

--Invisible Publics, review by Clare Davis in Bidoun

--15 Ways to Leave Badiou ACAF, Alexandria

--Photo Cairo

--Khalil Rabah’s Palestinian Natural History Museum

--Homeworks

**Week 10:** Transnational Art Events.


Recommended:

Hanan Toukan, "Boat Rocking in the Art Islands: Politics, Plots and Dismissals in Sharjah’s Tenth Biennial," in *Jadaliyya*. May 02, 2011.

Catalogues to Review: --Sharjah Art Biennial catalogues


**ARTISTS IN FOCUS**

**Week:** The Cinematic Image in Video Art

Sherif El-Azma, Hassan Khan, Akram Zaatari, Ghasan Salhab, Jalal Toufic, Maha Mammoun, Rania Stephan


Recommended: Salwa Mikdadi, “Should We Mind the Gap? New Media Arts and the Art of Painting: the Case of Beirut and Ramallah” in *Maidan: Prospective on Contemporary Art and Culture*...

Screening of video works

**Week 12. Performing History**

Walid Raad, Khalil Rabah, Wael Shawky, Ziad Antar, De-colonizing Architecture, Munira El-Sohli, Basma el-Sharif, Rabih Mroue and Lina Saneh


Resources:

Artists

Ayrene Anastas and Rene Gabri (Palestine)
Joana Hajothomas and Khalil Joreige
Vartan Avakian
Marwan Rachamou
Iman Issa
Hrair Sarkissian
Ziad Antar
Rokni Haerizadeh (SAB)
Adel Abidin
Walid Sadek
Maha Mahmoun
Doa Aly
Decolonizing Architecture
Amal Kenawy
Rania Stephan
Raed Yassin
Maha Mahoun
Sherif El Azma (Egypt)
Lara Baladi (Egypt)
Yto Barrada (Morocco)
Hala Elkoussy (Egypt)
Lamya Gargash (UAE)
Mona Hatoum (Palestine)
Emily Jacir (Palestine)
Rachid Koraïchi (Algeria)
Hassan Khan (Egypt)
Lara Baladi
Shirin Neshat (Iran)
Marwan (Syria)
Farhad Moshiri (Iran)
Rabih Mroue (Lebanon)
Shady El Noshoukaty (Egypt)
Walid Raad (Lebanon)
Khalil Rabah (Palestine)
Wael Shawky (Egypt)
Hassan Sharif (Dubai)
Adel El Siwi (Egypt)
Akram Zaatari (Lebanon)
Basma El-Sharif (Jordan)
Wafaa Bilal (Iraq)
Jannane Al-Ani
Oraïb Toukan (Jordan)
Ghada Amer (Egypt)
Ala Younis
Salah Saouli
Tarek Attoui (Lebanon)
Kader Attia
Wafa Hourani (Palestine)
Bouchra el-Khalili (Morocco)
Institutions:

Palestine:
Riwaq Biennial
East Jerusalem Art Center
El Mahata Gallery in Ramallah

Jordan:
Darat El-Funun
Makan in Jordan

Lebanon:
Ashkal Alwan
Gallery Sfeir-Semler
Beirut Art Center
Espace SD
Dar el Fun, 196-1975
Janein Rubeiz Gallery
Sursock Museum
BIEL
Agail Gallery
98 Weeks

Egypt:
ACAF
Townhouse Gallery
Madrar
Mass Alexandria
Contemporary Image Collective
Zamalek Art Gallery
Palace of the Arts
Gezira Art Center
Modern Art Museum
Saad Zaghoul Cultural Center
Karim Francis Gallery
Foundation for Media Art and Education

Periodic Exhibitions and Biennials:
Alexandria Biennial (Egypt)
Cairo Biennial (Egypt)
Cairo Documenta (Egypt)
PhotoCairo (Egypt)
Meeting Points (multiple locations)
Homeworks (Beirut)
Riwaq Biennial (Palestine)
Sharjah Art Biennial (UAE)
Art Dubai (UAE)

Bibliography

Damascus: Tourists, Artists, Secret Agents: A Collective Narrative; Reloading Images: 2010

Irit Rogoff “De-Regulation: With the Work of Kutlug Ataman” Third Text, Volume 97, Issue 2, March 2009
Akram Zaatari, *The Uneasy Subject*, catalog of the exhibition in MUSAC.

Miren Arsanios, *How to Make Nice Things Happen*. Issue 0.


*Art Journal’s 2007 Summer issue on contemporary art in Lebanon*

Global Art Forum, 1 Transcripts.


*Tragedy in a Moment of Vision*. A text by Bilal Khbeiz with annotations by Fadi Abdallah and Hoda Taha.


*Art Now in Lebanon*, Darat el Funun, 2008.

Arab Studies Journal, Spring 2010, vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Special Issue: Visual Arts and Art Practices in the Middle East)

Presence Absence: Contemporary Art From Lebanon, Galerie Tanit

Parachute, 108, Beyrouth-Beirut


Is there a Middle East: Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept


Lilian Karnouk, Modern Egyptian Art. AUC Press, 2009


Provisions, 1 and 2, Sharjah Biennial 9, 2009.

Plot for a Biennial, Sharjah Biennial 10, 2011.


--- “Postwar Art and the Historical Roots of Beirut’s Cosmopolitanism.” Diss., MIT, 2008.


**Homeworks I, II and III, Ashkal Alwan publications. Beirut.**


Omar Kheif on Ahmed Bassiouny -
http://contemporarypractices.net/essays/volumeX/TheCaseforEgyptianMediaArt.pdf

**Journals and Periodicals**

Bidoun: Contemporary Art in the Middle East

Contemporary Practices in the Middle East

Canvas

Ibraaz

Nafas Magazine

ArteEast

Universesinuniverse

Art Territories

Not Non Arab, Third Text (forthcoming)

**Critical Reviews:**

“Art Now in Lebanon” Kaelen Wilson-Goldie in
http://www.daratalfunun.org/main/activit/currentl/art_lebanon/b.htm

Goal (on Ziad Antar) By Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, in Bidoun, #13, Glory -

Many more reviews in Daily Star, Frieze, art Forum, The National, etc.


Guest lecture by Bassam El-Baroni (Alexandria) – to be confirmed

Reading: Interview with Bassam El-Baroni, Hassan Khan, in 3 parts, http://www.artterritories.net/?page_id=2063