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Whither the Spiritual? Rethinking Secularism's Legacy in post-Ottoman Art

History or Project? The Double Life of Islamic Art Since the 1970s

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Whither the Spiritual? Rethinking Secularism's Legacy in post-Ottoman Art

HISTORY OR PROJECT? THE DOUBLE LIFE OF ISLAMIC ART SINCE THE 1970S

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Abstract | This article argues that since the 1970s a duality divides the concept of Islamic Art. On the one hand, we have Islamic Art as the subject matter of a modern mode of historical inquiry, invented and developed in the colonial period in Europe but then taken up by scholars from around the world, including Muslim academics. This is the Islamic Art of Islamic Art History as a field of secular scholarship. But then, in the decolonization period, and more pronouncedly since the 1970s, we witness the birth of another concept of Islamic Art that is not focused on the past. This second notion of Islamic Art seeks to envisage Islamic Art as a component of a future-oriented project of reorganizing life under and against modernity. It locates Islamic Art not primarily in historical objects but more importantly at the center of a contemporary "civilizational vision" of Islam. This latter Islamic Art is an explicitly modern project with a professedly social reform agenda. This article explores the challenges that this duality in Islamic Art poses to the discipline of Art History, particularly in terms of the relationship between the two academic fields of Islamic Art and Global Modernism.

Keywords | Islamic Art, Modernism, Historiography, Islamism, Perennial philosophy, Islam as Ideology, Global Modernism, Saqqakhaneh.

Résumé | Cet article démontre que depuis les années 1970 une dualité divise le concept d'art islamique. D'une part, nous avons l'art islamique en tant que sujet d'un mode moderne d'enquête historique, inventé et développé pendant la période coloniale en Europe mais ensuite repris par des universitaires du monde entier, y compris des universitaires musulmans. C'est l'art islamique de l'histoire de l'Art Islamique en tant que domaine d'érudition laïque. Mais ensuite, dans

la période de décolonisation, et plus particulièrement depuis les années 1970, on assiste à la naissance d'une autre conception de l'Art Islamique qui n'est pas tournée vers le passé. Cette seconde notion d'Art Islamique cherche à envisager l'art islamique comme une composante d'un projet tourné vers l'avenir, d'une tentative de réorganisation de la vie sous et contre la modernité. Elle situe l'art islamique non pas principalement dans des objets historiques, mais surtout au centre d'une « vision civilisationnelle » contemporaine de l'islam. Ce dernier Art Islamique est un projet explicitement moderne avec un programme soi-disant de réforme sociale. Cet article explore les défis que cette dualité dans l'Art Islamique pose à la discipline de l'Histoire de l'Art, en particulier en termes de relation entre les deux champs académiques de l'Art Islamique et du modernisme mondial.

Mots clés | Art islamique – Modernité – Historiographie – Islamisme – Philosophie pérenne – Islam et idéologie – Modernisme global – Saqqakhaneh.

The articles in this special dossier of *Regards* are prompted by a call from guest editors to examine "the implications of art history's secular tilt [...] on the study of modern and contemporary art from the Middle East."[1] As the editors' call indicated, for them, the problem with art history's assumption of modern art's secularity was that it failed to properly address intersections of art and Islam in the post-Ottoman period. While artists' work "evinces and propagates a concern for spirituality," the editors wrote, this aspect of artistic production "has been alternatively escalated as proof of authenticity (and so rendered insignificant) or put to the side because to really address it risks falling out of alignment with the dominant norms of 'modernity.'" Distancing themselves from an equally problematic and essentializing line of thinking that says, "modern or contemporary art from places where Islam is a dominant religion [...] can only be studied through the lens of Islam," the editors argued that "exploring artistic experiments themselves will allow us to re-historicize both Islamic concepts and the corresponding, conjoined conceptualizations of Islam and art." As my close reading of the three published articles shows, this dossier not only succeeds in offering new avenues for re-historicizing the conjunction of Islam and art in the modern period, it also, and perhaps more importantly, points to productive challenges that such a re-historicization poses to the discipline of Art History in general—to Art History's terminology and method, and to its presumed detachments from modern political transformations of the "Muslim world." This, however, is not explicitly expressed in individual articles of the journal. It only comes to the fore through a collective reading of the articles and by situating them in the dual context of current debates about Islamic Art History on the one hand, and studies of modern transformations of Islam on the other. In my reading of these articles, I will focus on what I believe to be their collective bearing on the future intersection of Art History with the fields of Islamic Art and Global Modernism.

Most pressingly, the three articles in the present issue of *Regards* show that a duality divides the concept of Islamic Art since the 1970s—a duality that splits the de-facto life of the term "Islamic Art" but is yet to receive proper recognition by scholars of the field. On the one hand, we have Islamic Art as the subject matter of a modern mode of historical inquiry, invented and developed in the colonial period in Europe but then taken up by scholars from around the world, including Muslim academics. This is the Islamic Art of Islamic Art History as a field of secular scholarship. (I use capitalization to signify proper nouns.) But then, as articles by Sarah Sabban, Noah Salomon, and Kasper Tromp each differently evidence, in the decolonization period, and more pronouncedly since the 1970s, we witness the birth of another concept of Islamic Art that is not focused on the past. As I will show, this second notion of Islamic Art seeks to envisage Islamic Art as a component of a future-oriented project of reorganizing life under *and*

1- I am grateful to Rebecca Johnson, Arang Keshavarzian, Maya Dukmasova, and Hannah Feldman for their instructive comments on the draft of this article.

against modernity. It locates Islamic Art not primarily in historical objects but more importantly at the center of a contemporary "civilizational vision" of Islam (to use Ahmad 'Abd al-'Āl's term discussed in Noah Salomon's article), which is an explicitly modern project "with a professedly social reform agenda.[2]"

The discipline of art history traditionally deals with art produced by Muslims between the 7th and the 18th Centuries. Both recent transformations of Islam and recent transformations of art are thus excluded from the discipline. In the past two decades, however, scholars of Islamic Art increasingly acknowledge that they are facing a pressure to incorporate works produced since the advent of the modern era.[3] The task has not been easy. In the modern period artists introduce modern technologies and European influences into artistic traditions. Incorporating this new work into the notion of "Islamic art" threatens the specificity of the term as a scholarly concept. The new art seems more directly informed by issues of the modern period than by the inherited traditions of Islamic Art.[4] In other words, it has seemed that the new works' novelty and hybridity undermines academically authorized definitions of Islamic Art and makes the new art more readily suitable for studies in the field of Global Modernism rather than Islamic Art History.

In the meanwhile, what I suggest we call "the future-oriented concept of Islamic Art" stands apart from these academic debates and squarely positions Islamic Art in the context of modernity. The three main registers that such a convergence of Islamic Art and modernity takes are fortuitously illustrated in different articles of the current issue of *Regards*. First, we have the case of Ahmad 'Abd al-'Āl (1946–2008), a Sudanese artist, theorist, and Sufi mystic, whose practice is contextualized in Noah Salomon's article in conjunction with Sudan's Islamic state experiment (1989–2019). For 'Abd al-'Āl, Islamic Art is an alternative to the Enlightenment's separation of truth, ethics, and aesthetics and is a step towards building an Islamic state. I will call this *the Islamist register*. In the clay sculptures of the young Iranian artist Rene Saheb (b. 1987), taken up in Kasper Tromp's article as a "(meta) physical experience," Islamic Art helps the modernist form to articulate its response to crises of individualism and anxieties of contemporary life. This I will call *the modernist register*. And in the case of the 1974 exhibition of Islamic Art at the Sursock Museum in Beirut, the subject of Sarah Sabban's article, this art functions as a tool that is initially produced by global institutions—here, Sabban does an admirable job tracing the network of French, British, Egyptian, and Lebanese agencies and individuals who work

2- Noah Salomon, " The School of the One: A Mystery on Canvas" Regards, 28 (Octobre 2022, 54-55.)

3- Sussan Babael, "Voices of Authority: Locating the 'Modern' in 'Islamic' Arts," *Getty Research Journal,* no. 3 (2011), 133–49. Finbarr Barry Flood, "Picasso the Muslim Or, How the *Bilderverbot* Became Modern (Part 1)," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 67/68 (2016/2017), 42–60.

4- Silvia Naef "Questioning a Successful Label: How 'Islamic' Is Contemporary Islamic Art?," in *Global Trends in Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art*, ed. R. Oliveira Lopes, G. Lamoni and M. Brito Alves (Lisbon, 2015), 95–107.

together to introduce/invent Islamic Art for the Lebanese public—but is then taken up by nations and sects to construct modern national and sectarian identities. Embedded in the context of colonial and postcolonial nation-building, this latter tendency can be called *the identarian register*. I will return to the artistic, political, and academic implications of this tripartite categorization and to how these registers contradict and complement each other.

The tension that arises from the duality in the concept of Islamic Art since the 1970s concerns not only transformations in the modern period of art but, more importantly, in Islam. Presently, art historians debate whether to understand the Islam of Islamic Art "as culture" or "as religion."[5] Complicating the nomenclature even more and furthering the gap between the two notions of Islamic Art, the future-oriented concept of Islamic Art that I am proposing understands Islam neither as culture nor religion. Here it is useful to draw on the work of a range of highly influential twentieth-century European and non-European thinkers who interpreted Islam as an alternative paradigm to the Enlightenment: from Perennial philosophers like René Guénon and Titus Burckhardt to Islamist writers such as Mortaza Motahhari and Abul A'la Maududi. All of them left their mark on the Muslim anti-colonial imagination and contributed to the reinvention of Islamic Art as part of a future-oriented project by conceptualizing Islam beyond culture or religion. They saw it instead as "the way of life."[6] This expanded understanding of Islam, one in which Islam becomes a Divine-sanctioned blueprint for all aspects of spiritual and material existence, treats Islam as an *ideologie*—a loanword used in the second half of the twentieth century across many languages by the likes of Motahhari and Afzalur Rahman to signify "a complete philosophy of life."[7] Islamic ideology, we are told, is superior to existing materialist philosophies of life that Marxism and capitalism offer. (This usage of ideology should not be confused with the Marxian notion of ideology as false consciousness.) Islamic Art, as a result, becomes "the bridge between the material and the spiritual world"[8] and presents a path out of "the ugliness of the modern world."[9]

Of course, Art History as an academic discipline has every reason to feel anxious about the impact that an understanding of Islam as an "ideology" and "the way of life" may have on the notion of Islamic Art. After all, this Islamic Art does not sustain scholarly scrutiny. Writing in 1988 about the World of Islam Festival (held

5- Wendy M.K. Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 6 (June 2012). Wendy M.K. Shaw, *What is 'Islamic' Art?: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

6- Sayed Abul A'la Maududi, *Eslam Ka Nizam el-Hayat (Islamic Way of Life)*, (India: Maktaba Jama'at Eslami, 1950). https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.278127 (last accessed September 28, 2022). Afzalur Rahman, *Islam: Ideology and the Way of Life* (London: Seerah Foundation London, 1980/1988).

7- Morteza Motahhari, *Moghaddame-ee Bar Jahan-bini-e Eslami (An Introduction to the Islamic Worldview)*, Vol. 1, *Ensan va Iman (Man and Belief)*, (Tehran: Motahhari Foundation, 1978/2006), 54.

8- S. H. Nasr, *Sacred Art in Persian Culture* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1971), 11.

9- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 196.

in the UK, primarily London, in 1976), where event publications included books by Titus Burckhardt and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Oleg Grabar complained that "a hodgepodge of ideas from very different sources and inspired by very different experiences of the Muslim world has been promoted into aesthetic canons."[10] Earlier in 1983, in his important preface to the inaugural issue of *Muqarnas*, Grabar, the journal's founding editor and arguably the most authoritative voice in Islamic Art History in the second half of the twentieth century, had already made a point of taking a stance against Burckhardt's idea that Islamic Art was "an ideologically unique phenomenon" and that "Muslim revelation" was an ideology that affected "all aspects of the life of man."[11] For Grabar, the universalizing approach (that is, the projection of a unity on the entirety of Islamic Art corresponding to the absolute Oneness of God in Islamic theology) in Burckhardt's Perennialism (that is, the belief in the existence of "Perennial Philosophy" or "primal truth") was "a dogma rather than a methodology, and to a historian concerned with methodology with particular movement its usefulness [was] limited."[12]

But what about its usefulness for non-historians? In both above-mentioned texts, Grabar indicated that the notion of Islamic Art as "a culturally normative value"[13]—his term for what I call the future-oriented concept of Islamic Art—was an idealization of the past with an intention and potentiality to change something in the future. In the 1988 essay about the Festival of Islam, he framed this futurity in terms of institutional affiliations and the impact of wealthy "Near East" countries on exhibitions, events, and of course on the practice of art history by employing art historians in consultation capacities. He saw how patronage, in the context of the oil boom of the 1970s, appropriated Islamic Art (and its historians) to serve identity-politics: "The need had arisen for normative and prescriptive statements about the art of a culture in history, no longer for interpretations of the history of an artistic tradition."[14] This is precisely *the identarian register* that Sarah Sabban's article about the Sursock's exhibition of Islamic Art also explores. Sabban shows us that the essentialist ideas of the London 1976 Festival, primarily articulated by Europeans such as Basil Gray and Burckhard but also by the Iranian Seyyed Hossein Nasr, were first rehearsed in Beirut, where the centralization of an art-historically-dubious letter attributed to Prophet Mohammad had already demonstrated Islamic Art's political potential for identity-building in the post-mandate context. Another notable achievement of Sabban's research is to show

10- Oleg Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology: The Festival of Islam and the Study of Islamic Art," in *A Way Prepared, Essays on Islamic Culture in Honor of Richard Bayly Winder*, eds. Farhad Kazemi and R. D. McChesney (New York and London: New York University Press, 1988), reprinted in *Islamic Art and Beyond; Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, Vol. III* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 50. This passage is also cited by Sabban, this volume.

11- Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art, *Muqarnas* no. 1 (1983), 6.

12- ibid, p. 7.

13- Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology," 51.

14- ibid, 51.

that Islamic Art as a concept did not have a defining circulation in Lebanon, a country with a significant Muslim population, prior to its introduction as "a culturally normative value" in the Sursock exhibition. As she writes:

> The leap from "Muslim Miniatures and Illuminations" to "Islamic Art" was not obvious and went beyond a mere shift in content as revealed by the committee's grappling with this still unfamiliar concept. Aboussouan's report stipulated a labor of "reconnaissance and identification of the most characteristic pieces" of Islamic art and underscored the lack of references and guides in the country. Museum personnel had to be dispatched abroad where the most important ensembles of Islamic and Arab art could be found, and ample diplomatic efforts had to be exerted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to secure loans of "exceptional pieces[15]."

My own research shows that Lebanon is not an exceptional case in this regard. In Persian as well, the phrase Islamic Art (*Honar-e Eslami* or *Sana'ie' Mostazrefe-ie Eslami*) only gained everyday circulation after the 1953 Anglo-American coup, and, even then, this circulation was mediated by the translational work of Western-educated authors, including Nasr, who operated in the context of the Pahlavi government's turn to identity-based nationalism in the post-coup period. In that sense, the role played by Islamic Art in the history of Iranian nationalism was comparable and complementary to that of Arthur Upham Pope's earlier essentialization of the concept and history of "Persian Art." The history of both these terms in Persian is hard to separate from their performance in the discourse of modern national identity and state-building[16].

Apart from the identarian tendency, which revealed the usefulness of the normative notion of Islamic Art in patronage and political contexts, Grabar was also wary of its impact on new artistic production. In his preface to *Muqarnas*, after describing Burckhardt's "dogma" as "only one of many options open to us [art historians] for understanding the past," he immediately wrote: "For the contemporary artist, on the other hand, it is immensely attractive because it claims to penetrate the whole ethos of a culture and, positively or intuitively (a favorite term in [Burckhardt's] book), to define its parameters."[17] This is *the modernist register* which Kasper Tromp outlines in the practice of young Iranian artist Rene Saheb. The Islamic Art that emerges in Tromp's analysis of Saheb's practice and in his conversations with the artist recalls Grabar's "hodgepodge," now in full artistic fruition. In her *Valley of Knowledge* series of ceramic works, Saheb combines Attar's quintessentially Sufi poetry, which is about finding one's path to the One, with Khayyam's thematization of the universe as a potter's workshop. Although there is historical precedence for Khayyam's

15- Sarah Sabban, "Imagining Lebanon with Islamic Art: The 1974 Exhibition at the Nicolas Sursock Museum", *Regards* 28 (Octobre 2022), 101

16- Kishwar Rizvi, "Arthur Upham Pope and the Discourse on 'Persian Art'", Muqarnas 24 (2007), 45–65.

17- Grabar, "Reflections…," 7.

appropriation by the Sufi tradition, Khayyam's work in itself is not necessarily Islamic, nor even religious for that matter. Additionally, in Tromp's account, Saheb's Khayyam is fully mediated by Edward FitzGerald's Victorian-era English translation of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Persian poet, a very creative translation in which individual and self-enclosed couplets of Khayyam turn into a continuous narrative, making it impossible to trace English couplets back to any Persian "original." *Kuze-nameh* (*Book of Pots*), an appendix in the English version consisting of Khayyam's poems related to the metaphor of pottery, does not exist in any Persian compilation of Khayyam, yet Tromp emphasizes its key role in the signification of Saheb's work. Here, we must distinguish the historical Khayyam from Saheb's artistic appropriation of it, and from Tromp's interpretation of that appropriation. For Khayyam, pottery is a metaphor for the futility of human life and creation (as opposed to religious teleology): the potter—a metaphor for creation or "cosmos" (*dahr*)—makes a new pot (a human) at every moment, then as soon as the pot comes to perfection the potter smashes it (death) only to turn the dust into clay for new pots. After Khayyam, this metaphor was taken up and given a theological interpretation in the Sufi tradition of Persian poetry whereby the potter stood for God. However, Saheb's treatment of Khayyam is different from either. She uses Khayyam as if Khayyam was a theorist of pot-making as a medium of art. This interpretation of Khayyam puts Saheb, as a potter, in the anti-Islamic space of idolatrous competition with God's creative autonomy. These contradictions might bother a historian but are bread and butter for modernist imagination—just as the aestheticization of incompleteness in the defectively glued-together pots of Saheb's installation is a modernist device unprecedented in the history of Islamic Art.

It is important to note that Saheb's idiosyncratic interpretation of Islamic Art is not an isolated incident. Although Tromp does not go into much detail about this, Saheb's work inherits a well-established lineage of modernist practice in Iran. The so-called Saqqakhaneh School, a modernist tendency that was internationally canonized during the final two decades of the Pahlavi monarchy, creatively explored the potentials of a normative understanding of Islamic Art for modernist imagination. Saheb's installation in response to the Covid crisis is particularly anticipated in the practice of Parviz Tanavoli (b. 1937), who similarly worked with the medium of clay and appropriated themes from historical Sufi literature to address existential crises induced by modern life.

I first noticed the contrast between the art historical and the future oriented concepts of Islamic Art during my doctoral research on Iranian modern art. Answering the question, "How Modern Art Became Islamic,"[18] I realized that in Saqqakhaneh two seemingly unrelated discourses converged: One was the normative conceptualization of Islamic and Persian Art, and the other was the post-WWII discourse on "the crisis of man"—or as art historian Michael Leja

18- Doctoral dissertation in progress.

in his study of Abstract Expressionism and modern subjectivity calls it "the modern man discourse," in which the modern man has to face terror and brutality without any support from spirituality or community.[19] Exploring this combination of modernism with identarian understanding of Islamic and Persian art—articulated respectively by Nasr and Pope—I found that Saqqakhaneh not only took inspiration from historical art, but also gave Islam and Islamic Art a new function and currency in the contemporary society. It produced in Islam a response to the presumed crises of modern life such as alienation from the self, materialist rationalization of life and labor, uprootedness, and disconnect from traditions. It was precisely because of its quintessentially modernist character that this art played a role in the future-oriented refashioning of Islam—an Islam that was made for contemporary subjectivity. What Finbarr Barry Flood has explored in terms of the modernization of *bilderverbot* in the work of Muslim and Arab artists finds its mirror image as Islamization of modern art in Saqqakhaneh and in the work of Iranian, European, and American theorists and patrons involved in its canonization during the 1960s and 70s, that is, before the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran.[20]

This takes me to the third register of the future-oriented concept of Islamic Art: *Islamism*. This is perhaps the most Art Historically ignored tendency of all, making Noah Salomon's study of 'Abd al-'Āl's Islamist modernism and his engagement with Sudan's experience of Islamic government a rare and doubly valuable endeavor. In the Western public imagination, Islamism or political Islam—the idea advocated by a diverse group of twentieth-century Muslims including Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–1989), and Osama Bin Laden (1957–2011), that Islam is an inherently political religion and therefore it must be responsible for the creation of post/anti-colonial states—is often associated with its fundamentalist desire for taking inspiration from the earliest stages of Islam's history. Artistically, this entails a preference for the presumably austere anti-aesthetics of the Prophet's Arabia, isolating Islamism not only from Islamic Art History (a discipline that primarily studies seemingly luxurious objects and architectural pieces from later, dynastic periods of Islam's history), but also from artistic innovations of contemporary modernist movements. Unsurprisingly, in as far as Art History cares about Islamism, it has mainly focused on its iconoclastic tendencies and the destruction of historical monuments.[21] This can be justifiable because Islamism's identarian politics and its normative understanding of Islam seem even more ahistorical and essentializing than the one projected by the so-called Perennial philosophy of Burckhardt and Nasr, which was at least based on a sustained, though dogmatic, engagement with Islam's historical art and philosophy.

19- Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 64.

20- Flood, "Picasso the Muslim."

21- For example see Pamela Karimi and Nasser Rabbat, "The Destruction of Cultural Heritage: From Napoléon to ISIS" (2016), http://we-aggregate.org/project/the-destruction-of-cultural-heritage-from-napoleon-to-isis.

Another reason for Art History's different relationship with Islamism is that Islamism is a politicized and revolutionary discourse, whereas Perennial philosophy stands away from revolutionary politics. As Nasr frequently states, in Perennial philosophy, the way of life that Islam provides is an individual path available to any and every person at all moments.[22] In the Islamist discourse, by contrast, a political revolution through which the entire structure of everyday life is reorganized is a prerequisite for Islam to become available as "the way of life." The difference in politics between Islamism and Perennial philosophy leads to, on the one hand, the historical convergence and conflict between Perennial philosophy and the discipline of Art History, as both of them were employed in exhibitions and events of the 1970s sponsored by conservative bodies associated with Middle Eastern governments, and, on the other hand, the total divergence between Islamism and Art History, because the two have absolutely opposing understandings of Islam and its historical value.

What is missing from this picture is the actual, historical influence of Perennial philosophy on revolutionary Islam since the 1970s. Elsewhere, through close examination of the life and work of Islamist author and avant-garde filmmaker Morteza Avini (1947–1993), I have shown that European modernism was a key interlocutor for Iranian Islamist artists.[23] Their politicized notion of Islam gave birth to a major state-sponsored movement of Islamizing modern art during the post-revolutionary period. What is more, their normative idea of Islamization was greatly influenced by the normative idea of Islamic Art in the work of Perennial philosophers, despite Islamists' disagreement with the latter's anti-revolutionary politics. State-sponsored publications in post-revolutionary Iran, including those edited by Avini, are inundated by references to Burckhardt and Nasr on Islamic Art, notwithstanding Nasr's close association with the pre-revolutionary Pahlavi monarchy.[24]

Avini's practice anticipates the work of Sudanese artist Ahmad 'Abd al-'Āl and his idea of *al-fann al-wāhidī*—which Salomon translates into the "triple entendre" of "art in the service of God/the unification of Sudan with its origins/the unification of ethics, with epistemology, with aesthetics." 'Abd al-'Āl's School of the One (*madrasat al-wāhid*), which he established as an alternative to Western schools of modern art, epitomizes the future-oriented idea of Islamic Art, but only as it is articulated within the specifically Islamist tendency I have identified. This Islamic Art is not a historically ready-made concept but a project and process. It is also enacted nationally (in Sudan), which suggests that its conceptualization of Islamic

22- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1975/2001).

23- Hamed Yousefi, "Between Illusion and Aspiration: Morteza Avini's Cinema and Theory of Global Revolution," in *Global 1979: Geographies and Histories of the Iranian Revolution*, eds. Arang Keshavarzian and Ali Mirsepassi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 357-388.

24- For example, see Titus Burckhardt, "The Role of Fine Arts in Islam's Educational System" (*"Naghsh-e Honar-ha-ie Ziba dar Nezam-e Amoozeshi-e Eslam"*), translated by Seyyed Mohammad Avini, *Sooreh* 1, no 2 (April 1989/Ordebehesht 1368), 26–32.

Art should not be equated with a geographic region but with a nation-state. ‘Abd al-‘Āl asks: “What would it mean to create a consciously *modern* Islamic art form”? Potential answers to this question can be found in some of the resources that Salomon unearths. For example, formal analysis of ‘Abd al-‘Āl’s painting *From the Diary of Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn al-Bahārī*, (Fig. 1) the work restored by Salomon, shows how the artist combines primitive Islamic aesthetics (note the writing in the top right square) with the modernist grid and schematic narrativization. ‘Abd al-‘Āl’s PhD dissertation, written in France about the fundamentals of aesthetics in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240), can be another potentially important source for interested art historians. Salomon himself does a commanding job of refuting the myth of Islamist asceticism. Highlighting the internal diversity of Islamism, he shows that certain figures within the Islamist movement were invested in simultaneous modernization of Islam and art. Their iconoclasm was more rooted in their avant-garde and modernist taste than in a repetition of historical Islam. For ‘Abd al-‘Āl, for example, the goal was “presenting to the world a vision for contemporary Islamic art.” And as Salomon shows, he did not think that this “contemporary Islamic art” can be achieved by simply repeating “past experiences of Islamic art.” This art, for ‘Abd al-‘Āl, should respond to a “new world” that “has changed in an immeasurable way” since the height of Islamic civilization[25].

Figure 1
From the Diary of Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn al-Bahārī by Dr. Ahmad ‘Abd al-‘Āl, restored.

As the case of ‘Abd al-‘Āl shows, the Islamist tendency departs from the Art Historical conception of Islamic Art. It seeks to reinvent Islamic Art not only in

24- Salomon, this voulme, 55

dialogue with modernism but also as a service to the newly established modern Islamic state. Here, modern innovations in art and modern reinventions of Islam—two forces that currently press the field of Islamic Art History—converge, proving that Islamic Art can equally be the subject of study for the field of Global Modernism as much as it is for Islamic Art History.

I began by stating that art historians understood Islamic Art as a category of historical inquiry into the past. I then opposed this to an understanding of Islamic Art that sought to reorganize life in the future. By way of conclusion, I would like to nuance, if not correct, this binary. The invention and institutionalization of Islamic Art in Europe was motivated by the perception of Europeans who understood Islam as Europe's ultimate Other. As such, Islamic Art always already carried a future-oriented and interventionist baggage: by studying Islam as its Other, Art History contributed to the invention of Europe as an imaginary unit. What I hope to bring to scholarly attention is that apart from contributing to the creation of Europe, Islamic Art has also contributed to modern reinventions of Islam. As Gülru Necipoğlu has noted, "neither the producers nor the consumers of what is known as Islamic art were entirely Muslim."[26] And as Sheila S. Blair & Jonathan M. Bloom have observed, before the field was invented by European scholars, there was "no indigenous tradition in any of the Islamic lands of studying Islamic art."[27] Nomenclatures, however, are powerful phenomena. By validating the phrase Islamic Art, the discipline of Islamic Art History made it possible for historically, geographically, formally, and most importantly theologically dispersed kinds of objects and practices to be brought under one umbrella and to represent a unity en par with the imagined unity of Europe. It should therefore not be surprising if, as the present issue of *Regards* demonstrates, the discipline has to now grapple with a notion of Islamic Art that understands itself as a Divinely-informed alternative to Europe's secular modernity.

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ملخص | يوضح هذا المقال أنه منذ السبعينيات هناك ثنائية تقسم مفهوم الفن الإسلامي. لدينا الفن الإسلامي باعتباره موضوعًا لنمط حديث من البحث التاريخي، تم اختراعه وتطويره خلال الفترة الاستعمارية في أوروبا، ثم تناوله العلماء في جميع أنحاء العالم، بما في ذلك علماء المسلمين. إنه الفن الإسلامي كمجال للدراسات العلمانية. لكن بعد ذلك، في فترة إنهاء الاستعمار، وخاصة منذ السبعينيات، نشهد ولادة مفهوم آخر للفن الإسلامي لا يتجه نحو الماضي. تسعى هذه الفكرة الثانية للفن الإسلامي إلى تصور الفن الإسلامي كجزء من مشروع تطلعي، ومحاولة لإعادة تنظيم الحياة في ظل الحداثة وضدها. لا تضع الفن الإسلامي في المقام الأول في الأشياء التاريخية، ولكن قبل كل شيء في مركز "رؤية حضارية" معاصرة للإسلام. هذا الفن الإسلامي الأخير هو مشروع حديث بشكل صريح مع أجندة إصلاح اجتماعي مفترضة. يستكشف هذا المقال التحديات التي تفرضها هذه الثنائية في الفن الإسلامي على تاريخ الفن، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بالعلاقة بين المجالين الأكاديميين للفن الإسلامي والحداثة العالمية.

كلمات مفتاحية | الفن الإسلامي - الحداثة - التأريخ - الإسلام - الفلسفة الدائمة - الإسلام والأيديولوجيا - الحداثة العالمية - السقاخانة.

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