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A Spectacle of Inclusion: The Rise of Contemporary Art from the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey in the United States and England, 1970–2020

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in the History of Art & Architecture

by

Rachel Elise Winter

Committee in charge:

Professor Bruce Robertson, Chair

Professor Anneka Lenssen

Professor Laurie Monahan

September 2024

The dissertation of Rachel Elise Winter is approved.

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A Spectacle of Inclusion: The Rise of Contemporary Art from the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey in the United States and England, 1970–2020

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by

Rachel Elise Winter

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dissertation is posited as a single-authored work, a magnum opus of one's years of labor that culminates in the highly coveted Ph.D. Such an ideology is a misnomer for the realities of this process, which is not only collaborative in its formation, but requires networks of support that extend far beyond academia. Rather, this project is the result of the visible and invisible energies provided by numerous individuals and institutions over the years, and I endeavor to thank them here as a small token of my gratitude.

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In a lecture given at the fifth annual Mathaf Curatorial Forum in 2020, the influential curator Ute Meta Bauer noted that it is perhaps better to step on a landmine and generate something rather than to do nothing, for if we didn't want to make a mistake, we would only ever stand still. These are words I live by as a curator and a scholar, and it is with this spirit of stepping on a landmine that I embark on this study.

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ABSTRACT

A Spectacle of Inclusion: The Rise of Contemporary Art from the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey in the United States and England, 1970–2020

by

Rachel Elise Winter

This dissertation traces a history of how art museums in the United States and the United Kingdom began to collect and curate contemporary art from the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey (or the Middle East, or Southwest Asia and North Africa (the SWANA region)). Current thinking suggests that contemporary artists from the SWANA region first appeared in Western art museums following the events of September 11th, 2001, in the US to dispel Islamophobia and foster intercultural, inter-religious understanding. Furthermore, the predominant line of inquiry focuses on the content and frameworks of major temporary loan exhibitions as opposed to the development of permanent collections and the *longue durée* of shifting art historical canons as they are formed in and represented by museum collections.

By contrast, I show how interest in contemporary Middle Eastern art took form in the 1970s as it emerged from a complex nexus among festivals, galleries, alternative spaces, and museums. Festivals, such as the World of Islam Festival (London, 1976) and the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife (Washington, DC, 1973–76), sparked an interest in Arab religion and culture, often through historicized presentations that focused on specific topics,

including historical Islamic art, dance, and music. However, festivals frequently neglected contemporary cultural production and nearby diasporic populations. Instead, contemporary Arab artists acted on the momentum generated by festivals in an era of multiculturalism to present their work in alternative spaces and craft their own historiographies. These artists and their work, as I demonstrate, later became part of major Anglophone museum collections beginning in the 1980s; these collections were formative to the now well-known museum exhibitions after 9/11. The constellation of networks connecting different spaces and the dialectics between representation and self-representation brings forward a complex history of exhibitions and collections that subsequently repositions the genealogy of SWANA artists in major Anglophone institutions.

In short, competing forms of knowledge produced across and between cultural institutions of all kinds facilitated the proliferation of contemporary Middle Eastern art in the US and the UK from the 1970s until the present. To outline this trajectory, I read official festival archives against press records, exhibition histories, and artists' recollections contrapuntally in order to outline a constellational art world as it shifts in a proto-global, multicultural era. My dissertation thus offers several major contributions to the fields of museum studies, American art, contemporary Middle Eastern art, and festivals by extending festival literature into the late-twentieth century, augmenting British and American art histories with SWANA voices, foregrounding SWANA artists in global art histories, fostering dialogue between exhibitions and festivals in a trans-Atlantic context, considering Arab American art histories, and expanding SWANA art histories to consider their diasporas.

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I. Introduction

A. Introduction

In 1942, Iraqi artist Madiha Umar (b. 1908, Syria–d. 2005, Jordan) moved to Washington, DC.[1] Soon after, she began visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and found herself mesmerized by its collection of Islamic art. Umar then started to work with Islamic art historian and former Met curator Richard Ettinghausen at the Corcoran School of Art, who encouraged her to explore the Arabic letter as an artistic form.[2] Umar had already considered the subject when she studied to be an art teacher in London circa 1933; she was the first woman to receive a scholarship from the Iraqi government. At the time, she considered the Arabic letter's geometric form as something ripe for a "freer expression" by rethinking its movement and intrinsic qualities.[3] Ettinghausen supported Umar because he found her approach novel, so she set out to find the "personality of each letter" and its

[1] "Paintings and Drawings by Madiha Umar," 1950, Folder 20, Box 34, ARCH.EXH.001, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Archives, San Francisco, CA; Dara Kittani, "Madiha Umar," in *Alcove: Intimate Essays on Arab Modernist Artists*, ed. Myrna Ayad (London: Kaph, 2024), 311. Umar moved because her husband, the second secretary of the Iraqi Embassy Yasin Umar, had a new appointment in the US.

[2] By Arabic letter, I here refer to the basic set of 18 shapes that constitutes the written Arabic script. Stylizations thereof or approaches to writing, such as calligraphy, which has many subsets, are a separate matter. Equally important to Umar was the book *Arabic Paleography* by Nabia Abbott. See: Kittani, "Madiha Umar," 311.

[3] Charbel Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya: Art and Identity* (Milano: Skira, 2016), 136. The Iranian painter Charles Hossein Zenderoudi claims his use of the letter was first, but his works post-date Umar's. Ali Omar Ermes also notes that he and Madiha Umar were largely working in related areas at different times. See: Samar Faruqi, ed., *Ali Omar Ermes: Recent Works* (Dubai: Meem Gallery; London: Art Advisory Associates, 2010), 5.

"individualistic quality."[4] Umar's investigation worked to liberate the Arabic letter from the scientific objectivity and rationality of Islamic art in order to render the letter as a malleable artistic element for both herself and future contemporary artists. Umar would continue to explore this question, and later obtain her MFA from the Corcoran in 1959.

Umar's story, briefly summarized here, brings forward the importance of travel, abstraction, and learning in the West as key factors that shaped contemporary artists from the Middle East in the mid-twentieth century and beyond. However, while we know how the Arabic letter became a part of contemporary artistic production in Southwest Asia and North Africa (or the SWANA region), as seen in the case of Umar, we know less about how these works of art circulated and later became a part of major museum collections in the United States and the United Kingdom. In other words, how and why did museum collections come to be interested in work by Umar, her contemporaries, and her successors?

B. Points of Departure

As such, this project departs from absence: the relative absence of contemporary SWANA artists in major Anglophone art museums, particularly in the early to mid-twentieth century. While many institutions have slowly been diversifying their collections, contemporary Arab, Iranian, and Turkish artists frequently remain the last to achieve recognition or institutional parity, and the timeline of these acquisitions is often ambiguous.[5]

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[4] Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 152.

[5] A word on terminology: I refer to this group of artists as contemporary Arab, Iranian, and Turkish artists because these labels mirror national and linguistic affiliations that allude to larger questions about nationality, identity, and diaspora that are integral to contemporary art. Sometimes this designation will be abbreviated to contemporary Arab art, but doing so can exclude Iranian and Turkish artists. I prefer this term over Middle Eastern, which has

Current literature emphasizes that interest in contemporary Arab art grew following and because of the events of September 11th, 2001 in the US, as seen in major exhibitions, many of them loan-based, which primarily took place in the US.[6] The logic follows that, after 9/11, as academic discourse shifted to reconsider the Middle East and Islam writ large, so too did museums begin collecting and exhibiting contemporary art from the so-called Middle East as a way to foster understanding. This shifting discourse was both prefaced and facilitated by the presence of artists in diaspora from the SWANA region throughout major artistic centers, as explained by scholars like Sussan Babaie.[7] The result is that there are now select museums in the West with extensive collections of contemporary art from the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey, such as the British Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. These are

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colonialist implications, or Islamic, which has religious implications that are often not applicable to the contemporary nature of this discussion. I use Middle East in this paper sparingly to add variety for the reader. When I refer to Islam/Islamic, it is because I am referring to premodern works more traditionally associated with the field, or following the language of a given artist. Finally, I recognize that the notion of "Arab" is a particularly ambiguous signifier in a globalized art world, but here, I use it to allude to the idea of the Arab world and the 22 nations it encompasses. On the ambiguity of "Arab" and new definitions thereof, see: Amin Alsaden, "Countering Erasure: Producing Knowledge on Arab Art Today," in *Knowledge Production: Examining Arab Art Today*, ed. Eline van der Vlist (Amman: Darat al Funun, 2020), 10.

[6] For example, see: Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 651-81; Fereshteh Daftari, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006); Alsaden, "Countering Erasure," 19; Mirjam Shatanawi, "Curating Against Dissent: Museums and the Public Debate on Islam," in *Political and Cultural Representations of Muslims: Islam in the Plural*, ed. Christopher Flood, et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 177. Alsaden's essay notably marks the 2003 invasion of Iraq as an equally important turning point.

[7] Sussan Babaie, "Voices of Authority: Locating the "Modern" in "Islamic" Arts," *Getty Research Journal*, no. 3 (2011): 133-49.

two larger, more well-known examples that are part of a larger mosaic where SWANA artists are slowly being placed in museum collections globally.

While it is true that there was an accelerated period of collecting and exhibiting SWANA artists post-9/11, this narrative arc misses the fact that the work of many pioneering Middle Eastern artists was actually present in select Anglophone art museum collections prior to 9/11, although their work was not widely exhibited.[8] This discrepancy between acquisition and exhibition thus paints a false picture suggesting that museums did not develop an interest in this material until after 9/11. Furthermore, public understanding of these artists comes from grandiose, temporary exhibitions hosted by major museums to feature new content, but in many cases, to generate revenue rather than alter the canon.

Furthermore, the current narrative also overlooks the many different venues that featured Arab, Iranian, and Turkish artists in the US well before 9/11, which should be seen as influential to the ways museums later engaged with this material. Specifically, smaller institutions in less metropolitan centers were the first to share this work—well before big institutions in major cities. Kahlil Gibran (Lebanese, 1883–1931) showed his work at Wellesley College in 1903, followed by a solo show hosted by Fred Holland Day the next

[8] Although I discuss several examples of this in relation to exhibitions in 2006, more recently, another example of this phenomenon occurred when the Museum of Modern Art in New York installed works from its collection in the galleries in response to then President Trump's travel ban. The result was that works by artists like Siah Armajani (Iranian, 1939-2020), Charles Hossein Zenderoudi (Iranian, b. 1937), and Ibrahim el-Salahi (Sudanese, b. 1930) were on view, but the white modernist canon remained untouched. See: Kirsten Scheid, "Review of Museum of Modern Art, New York, Installation Following the Executive Order of January 27, 2017," *H-AMCA, H-Net Reviews* (August 2017): https://networks.h-net.org/node/3444/reviews/192655/scheid-museum-modern-art-installation-following-executive-order; and John Reeve, "Islam: Islamic art, the Islamic world – and museums," in *The Contemporary Museum: Shaping Museums for the Global Now*, ed. Simon Knell (London: Routledge, 2018), 60-1.

year.[9] Following her many visits to the Met, Umar first showed her work in solo shows like *Abstract Painting and Arabic Calligraphy* at the Peabody Library at Georgetown in 1949, and at the Arts Club of Washington from May 21–June 11, 1950.[10] In DC, Umar also met Grace McCann Morley, Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SF MoMA), who later invited her to put on a solo exhibition; her show at SF MoMA ran from November 22–December 17, 1950.[11] These exhibitions are some of the earliest known shows featuring Arab artists in the US who were not US citizens.

This trajectory from Umar's artistic innovation and one woman shows to the presence of contemporary SWANA artists in museums today prompts an important question: how did art museums in the United States and the United Kingdom develop an interest in the idea of what we now refer to as contemporary art in the Middle East, when, and why?

C. Argument

This dissertation posits that awareness of and interest in contemporary art from the SWANA region by Anglophone art museums grew significantly in the 1970s. This argument

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[9] Isabella Kapur, "A Chronology of Kahlil Gibran's Life and Work," in *A Greater Beauty: The Drawings of Kahlil Gibran* (New York: The Drawing Center, 2023), 181, 183.

[10] "Paintings and Drawings by Madiha Umar," 1950, Folder 20, Box 34, ARCH.EXH.001, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Archives, San Francisco, CA; Kittani, "Madiha Umar," 311.

[11] Letter from Grace L. McCann Morley to Madiha Umar, June 27, 1950; Press release, "Contemporary Abstract Art from the Middle East," nd., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Salwa Mikdadi Papers, MC.022, New York University Abu Dhabi Library Archives and Special Collections. Notably, Morley wanted the exhibition to travel, but did not receive a response, telling Umar that there was little interest in solo shows. Instead, Morley suggested that there might be more interest in group shows of artists "in the near East." See: Letter from Grace L. McCann Morley to Madiha Umar, July 3, 1950, Folder 20, Box 34, ARCH.EXH.001, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Archives, San Francisco, CA.

is historically situated between the prominence of World's Fairs in the early-twentieth century as venues for projecting national identity, the importance of shifting metropolises following the colonial/mandate period, and the rise of global exhibition culture in the late-twentieth century as events which shifted the nature of museums. Specifically, I argue that Anglophone festivals in the late-twentieth century provided a catalyst for this interest by drawing attention to Arab culture, identity, and religion in new ways.[12] While the festivals I discuss (the World of Islam Festival, London, 1976 and the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, Washington, DC, 1973–76) largely excluded contemporary artistic production, I suggest that artists acted on the momentum generated by these festivals to share their work in alternative spaces—a constellation of displays. If festivals shifted the terms of the conversation to include Arab culture and tradition during a multicultural era, then contemporary artists became their own advocates partially in response to this situation by working in alternative spaces, cultural centers, and select galleries to share their work and that of their contemporaries when otherwise excluded. The ways artists highlighted themselves and their colleagues in these alternative spaces, which was often contrary to historicized representations at festivals, eventually gave way to the presence of these artists

[12] While this study of festivals and museums is unique in its scope, there is a known history of festivals and fairs playing a key role in the establishment of new museums, such as the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. For more on this, see: Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), especially chapters 6 and 7. For more on the case of London, the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, see: Peter Trippi, "Industrial Arts and the Exhibition Ideal," in *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson (New York: Harry N. Abrams; Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1997), 79–88. While Trippi's chapter specifically speaks to this, the entire volume provides useful insight on the subject.

in major museum collections and exhibitions. Museums, notably, were the last to shift their canons and recognize these new voices.[13]

Tracing the arc of this interest is not a linear narrative with one catalyst, but a constellation of events that shifted the discourse, one which can be best understood by thinking contrapuntally, in the manner proposed by Edward Said, across fields. Emerging from the question of interest, I tell an untold story focused on two distinct places: London and Washington, DC. These two cities were very different kinds of world capitals and hubs for both museums, festivals, and alternative spaces. While London was a bustling metropolis and imperial center rife with museums and artists in diaspora, DC was a political center whose contemporary art scene was not yet fully established; both cities were also academic hubs for study of the so-called Middle East. In the 1970s, as London reckoned with the influx of populations from its former colonies throughout the twentieth century, particularly in South Asia, the US further entrenched itself into the Middle East as a neo-imperial power, particularly with its involvement in Iran and Egypt—although those connections had a ripple effect. The dates of the festivals (1971–76) situate my inquiry squarely within the 1970s, a decade shaped by proto-globalization and shifting global socio-political dynamics. To re-construct this narrative, I rely on the voices of the protagonists and antagonists of these many institutions, which are both overlooked yet present in archival material that is rarely cited in the extant literature, in turn prompting questions of both production in reception. This study not only challenges the dominant post-9/11 narrative around Middle Eastern art and museums, but also endeavors to juxtapose the historiographies of art museums, festivals, and

[13] On this, see: Bruce Robertson, "The Tipping Point: Museum Collecting and the Canon," *American Art* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 2-11.

contemporary Middle Eastern art to reshape our understanding of exhibition histories and artistic circulation within the Anglophone art world.

Furthermore, this project reveals the conditions of possibility that supported the emergence of contemporary art from the SWANA region in Anglophone art museums. These conditions include not only festivals, but also happenings at artist-run spaces, cultural centers, and galleries both within and beyond art world centers. The aesthetics and subject of the art itself, particularly contemporary works rooted in the Arabic letter, were also integral to these changing conditions. Such letter-based work tapped into common conceptions about the relationship between Islam, the Middle East, and Arabic calligraphy (or a stylized form of writing in Arabic equated with Islam), which was propagated by museum exhibitions globally through historical Islamic art, and then reinvented for the contemporary moment, thus providing audiences an opportunity for engagement by rethinking what was already legible and relatable. These conditions take shape throughout the 1970s, making this decade in particular a formative moment for both shifting artistic and exhibition practices, but this period is largely understudied. As a result, this dissertation proposes a new history of representing the Arab world in the late-twentieth century.

Finally, I articulate the concept of a spectacle of inclusion, and adopt it as my dissertation title, as a way to probe the representation of Arab art and culture at festivals, alternative spaces, and in museums, including contemporary artists at major museums. The notion of the spectacle was most notably articulated by Guy Debord who highlights the spectacle's many dimensions, including society and its means of unification or fragmentation, images, social relations, hegemonic ideologies and modes of production, the relationships between disconnected phenomena, the weakness of Western philosophies, pseudo-objectivity, power,

and more.[14] Here, the spectacle of inclusion refers to the way Arab art, culture, and tradition, be that historical or contemporary, are included in ambitious festivals or museum exhibitions to fit a particular socio-political moment. At festivals, the presence of populations from the Middle East was rooted in metonymic approaches where one particular group of people, such as individuals from Egypt, stood in for an entire cultural group or region, such as Arab populations or the Arab world. This framework informed large displays inclusive of these peoples in order to meet goals around national identity and shifting social fabrics. Later at museums, including artists from the SWANA region was similarly tied to shifting social fabrics in which art was employed in major exhibitions that either implicitly or explicitly worked to foster new social relations. Neither spectacle created meaningful change: special exhibitions created the illusion of more inclusive museums but did not meaningfully alter the nature of the museum's self-articulated canon; festivals projected inclusivity, yet their attempts to educate people and create unity did not incite lasting change. Yet understanding these spectacles from the 1970s and their lasting impact is important to an art world spinning on its axis toward a more global form.

D. Methodology

To realize this argument, this dissertation employs two methodological frameworks: the contrapuntal reading, as articulated by Edward Said, and the constellational, as outlined by Alex Dika Seggerman. Importantly, these dual frameworks are a means to uncover

[14] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2004), 7-17.

overlooked stories and reveal the connections between spaces, venues, activities, and artists' practices.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said defines and practices the idea of contrapuntal reading. This idea emerged in part from the literary narratives he studied in his highly influential *Orientalism* (1978). *Culture and Imperialism* functions as a semi-sequel, where Said considers culture to be a tool used to implement and uphold imperialism, such as in the ways novels formed "imperial attitudes, references, and experiences." Said also notes that culture and narrative could function as methods of resistance by providing counter-discourses that asserted the value of their own culture to oppose colonial ideologies. Said describes culture as "the arts of description, communication, and representation," which includes both art and literature. Culture also encompasses "political and ideological causes" tied to identity, contrary to beliefs about its neutrality; these causes can include fostering connections to traditions and nations. Resistance was a means to further nationalist causes, largely around the goal of "self-determination and national independence," as where narratives were a way to assert one's own identity and history against colonial fictions.[15] A contrapuntal reading or perspective is thus that which reads the dominant narrative within and against the many forces that shape or oppose it, or that which "think[s] through and interpret[s] together experiences that are discrepant" to reveal viewpoints and systems that might otherwise be "closed to each other," or overcome insularity.[16] Said subsequently employs a contrapuntal

[15] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), xi-xiv. For a further summary of contrapuntal thinking, see: Jonathan Arac, "Criticism between Opposition and Counterpoint," *boundary 2* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 55-69.

[16] 14, 32-3, 43. Elsewhere, Said likens contrapuntal thinking to the ways themes in Western classical music play off each other. See: Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and*

approach in his narrative analysis to think about the discrepant narratives between the colonizer and the colonized, or imperial processes and resistance.

I follow Said's contrapuntal approach to uncover what he refers to as "intertwined and overlapping histories."[17] Said's approach subsequently advocates for a multiplicity of voices to create history, which is a model that my dissertation intends to enhance.[18] Here, I employ a contrapuntal approach to find the convergences and divergences between systems of representation at festivals and counter-representations by contemporary artists in alternative spaces, using the discrepancies between official narratives, archival absences, and other ephemera to produce a new historiography. This approach is not meant to elicit any comparisons or comparative conclusions, but to show simultaneity found from drawing narratives together and reading them against each other—or contrapuntally.

The use of contrapuntal thinking also invokes Orientalism and the power relations embedded in systems of representation. Said defines Orientalism as a style of thought or a discourse based around a distinction between self and other, or Occident and Orient, both of which are invented ideas. Europe constructed the "Orient" to represent the Other in contrast

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Other Essays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 186. Music is also a theme that reoccurs throughout the volume.

[17] Ibid., 18, 32. Said also described the idea of the contrapuntal as an awareness of multiple dimensions and visions that exist simultaneously. See: Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 186.

[18] Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art* (London: Saqi, 2009), 184. Citing: Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 14. This approach has also been employed recently to study the Slade School of Art in London to see the role of the colony in imperial centers, create a new polyphony, and understand the different contexts across which artists worked, as they interacted with each other. See: Liz Bruchet and Ming Tiampo, "Slade, London, Asia: Contrapuntal Histories between Imperialism and Decolonization 1945–1989 (Part 1)," *British Art Studies*, no. 20 (2021): 3.

to Europe, the Self, or the Occident; such representations allowed Europe to become more powerful by depicting the Orient, or the "Other" as inferior.[19] Zayde Antrim connects the label "the Middle East" to Orientalism as a term that is "not merely [an] expression[s] of directional orientation," but also indicates the imposition of European political and economic domination on the rest of the world, as well as its accompanying imperial discourses."[20] Reflecting on Said, Hamid Dabashi also notes that European identity emerges from colonialism as an allegory of domination, the consequence of which is a particular white supremacy that remains a part of humanity.[21] The binary distinctions that constitute Orientalism later became the ideological basis for essentialist scholarship focused on the

[19] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 1-5. Bottici and Challand also note that Europe itself is an invention, and that the notion of European identity is as formed as all others. See: Bottici Chiara and Challand Benoît, *Imagining Europe: Myth Memory and Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2. Although I cite Said as a key thinker in this body of literature, I would be remiss if I did not note that Said is also the subject of extensive criticism, primarily for the ways in which he presents a certain essentialization of the topic, the same one for which he critiques Europe. See: Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays of Cross-Cultural Encounter* (Syracuse: SUNY, 1996); Ziad Elmarsafy, Anna Bernard, and David Attwell, eds., *Debating Orientalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Hamid Dabashi also critiques Said for seeing a particular colonialism tied to capitalist modernity as being of its own kind. Dabashi is also careful to note in this passage that, while one cannot underestimate the importance of Said's text, that there is a whole body of thought that prefaces it, yet is often left out of the conversation, such as Iranian Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Franz Fanon, and Anouar Abdel Malek. Dabashi also marks Said as a transitional figure towards other writers who would speak against racism and abuses of power, such as DuBois, Malcom X, and James Baldwin. See: Hamid Dabashi, *Europe and its Shadows: Coloniality after Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

[20] Zayde Antrim, *Mapping the Middle East* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 10.

[21] Dabashi, *Europe and its Shadows*, 56-7. Later in this book, Dabashi argues that the development of Europe is tantamount to the development of whiteness, a phenomenon he argues, along with many others, is socially constructed.

incompatibility of different ways of life, such as by Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, which bred xenophobic political policies and social contempt.[22] Such opposition was implicitly embedded in the festivals I discuss in the 1970s in the ways they addressed social divisions, taught about different cultures, and promoted unity through education.[23]

Festivals and World's Fairs, as explored in this project, often exemplify the Orientalist tendency to represent the Other in the late-twentieth century: institutions and venues in the US and the UK depict aspects of Arab culture based on their own ideas in order to fulfill their specific socio-political goals. Historically, Western powers presented their ideas of the so-called Middle East to reify their own power. Projects like the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the 1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition (*L'Exposition colonial international de Paris*) designed exhibitionary modes along a radical separation of worlds to assert difference, thus visualizing a hierarchical power structure that echoed a colonial world order.[24] A century later, global exhibition culture, such as *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989), further enunciated this notion of difference by choosing non-Western artists based on their country of origin and then comparing them to Western artists.

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[22] For example, see: Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic* (September 1990); Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49. This rhetoric was even utilized by Ahmed (Paul) Keeler in his reflections on the World of Islam Festival. See: Ahmed Paul Keeler, *Rethinking Islam & the West: A New Narrative for the Age of Crises* (Cambridge: Equilibria Press, 2019).

[23] Notably, other scholars have also considered Orientalism in the vein of the American fascination with Asia, as opposed to the European fascination with the Middle East. See: Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[24] Patricia Moreton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 6.

In a sense, the effort was laudable in its time for the way it included different artists in ways that aimed to surpass previous shows like *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* at MoMA in 1985. As I will illustrate, these structures of difference and education are maintained throughout the 1970s in festivals and through the educational mission of some exhibitions and alternative spaces.

The notion of difference that is foundational to Orientalism takes on multiple forms in relation to contemporary artists. Difference can be iterated in based on the frameworks of inclusion, such as the curatorial frameworks of an exhibition or a festival, but also ideological mandates: art historians Olu Oguibe and Kobena Mercer explain that many artists of color are often forced to be players in a culture game where they bear the burden of representing their culture and participating in a neoliberal system that upholds hegemony. In other words, artists fulfill evolving diversity requirements set by institutions, but the system in which they participate evolves slowly over time in order to maintain its own supremacy.[25] Artists from the Middle East, particularly in the post-9/11 era, were subjected to a unique version of the culture game where their work was expected to build bridges and create understanding that would dispel Islamophobic sentiments.[26] Furthermore, these artists are working in what Maymaneh Farhat appropriately describes as a hostile environment where their inclusion is paradoxical, exhibitions ruminate on tired if not Orientalist stereotypes,

[25] Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 61-78. Mercer also notes that artists are forced to say everything at once, to put it in colloquial terms, because of their limited access to these spaces.

[26] Winegar, "The Humanity Game," 651-81.

artists' work is often critiqued without basis, if not shut out for its subversive political content.[27] These considerations remain relevant to exhibitions today.

To connect these representations and counter-representations across time, geography, and context, I also employ the idea of the constellational. Drawing on Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, Alex Dika Seggerman outlines the constellational as a framework for studying Egyptian modernism. Drawing on the metaphor of an astrological constellation, her use of the term attends to discrete intersections that help to map relationships and exchanges in ways that are more specific than the all-encompassing term "global."[28] The constellational also disrupts ideas of center and periphery to instead envision modernism as "a series of overlapping and intersecting units."[29] Here, the constellational is a useful framework for thinking about the ways many of these artists and venues were in dialogue with each other, in turn producing new relationships and discourses. In other words, the constellational is a method for tracing the contours of different historiographies to produce a more complex narrative about art museums in an era of change. I utilize the constellational to highlight both the known intersections, such as when festivals mention each other in their thinking, but also the lesser-known relationships, such as the ways artists follow similar exhibition circuits to excavate an evolving art world.

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[27] Maymanah Farhat, "Imagining the Arab World: The Fashioning of the "War on Terror" through Art," *Callaloo* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 1223-31. While editing this introduction, the numerous examples of Palestinian artists being censored following the events of October 7, 2023, exemplify the hostile environment Farhat writes about.

[28] Alex Dika Seggerman, *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt between the Islamic & the Contemporary* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 6-7.

[29] Ibid., 7-8.

As a final note, multiculturalism, much like Orientalism, is a term that appears multiple times throughout this project in different contexts. However, I do not utilize multiculturalism as a framework or methodology. For one, multiculturalism is often considered by scholars to be a series of state-sanctioned policies or initiatives, which conflicts with the many different non-state initiatives discussed in this dissertation.[30] Secondly, the artists I study largely do not define their work in multicultural terms or work to achieve multicultural objectives. Third, discussing their work within this framework could potentially give way to framing their art as a part of the "bridge building" project or other similar tendencies. However, it is important to note that there is a section of multicultural thinking that sees culture as an "idiom for resistance" within movements for cultural empowerment.[31] The artists I discuss are working against hegemonic trends, but not necessarily to achieve a particular "empowerment," and as such, while this line of thinking certainly should not be ignored, it is not a key methodological tenet.

E. Outline and Literature Review

While this project focuses on the 1970s, it is shaped by preceding and subsequent events. On one hand, a younger generation of Arab, Iranian, and Turkish artists had established careers prior to 9/11 and then became more prominent after 9/11, such as Shirin Neshat

[30] For example, see: Ben Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

[31] Ayse S. Caglar, "Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of 'Culture'," in *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, ed. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London; New York: Zed Books, 1997), 178. Also see: Asef Bayat, *Life as politics: how ordinary people change the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

(Iranian, b. 1957), Emily Jacir (Palestinian, b. 1972), and Mona Hatoum (Palestinian-Lebanese, b. 1952). There was also an earlier generation of artists in diaspora throughout the US and the UK that is sometimes overlooked.[32] For example, Parviz Tanavoli (Iranian, b. 1937) was in Minneapolis throughout the 1960s, as was Siah Armajani (Iranian, 1939–2020). Sari Khoury (Palestinian, 1941–97) studied in Ohio before teaching in Michigan, and Samia Halaby (Palestinian, b. 1936) studied across the American Midwest before becoming the first woman to be full time faculty in the art department at Yale University in 1972. While not the focus of this study, these artists importantly worked to create awareness about their work and their contemporaries, an effort that paved the way for the later acceptance of SWANA artists.

Additionally, the 1970s were marked by important events that were critical precursors to the era of globalization marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The global 1970s and its institutional changes can be understood in relation to an evolving and tumultuous geopolitical climate in the Middle East following colonial intervention, liberation, war, and political overhaul. In 1971, the United Arab Emirates gained independence. The second Arab-Israeli War began in 1973, quickly followed by the onset of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, and ongoing settler colonialism and violence in Palestine. The Iranian Revolution began in 1979, which overthrew the Pahlavi regime, followed by the Iran/Iraq War in 1980.

Most importantly, the oil embargo began in 1973. Following the formation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Companies (or OPEC) and its members' demands for sovereignty in the 1960s, the failure of these negotiations, in addition to resentment

[32] As Sussan Babaie also notes, it was the artists in diaspora in major art centers who often acted as catalysts for younger artists, a thesis this project also supports. See: Babaie, "Voices of Authority," 135.

toward those states supporting Israel, prompted a major oil embargo that not only damaged the collective Western psyche but also Western economic systems, particularly in the US.[33] The embargo challenged the legitimacy and dominance of Western independence, economics, and hegemony.[34] Oil also impelled new wealth that could be funneled into creative infrastructures, further cementing oil as something which permeated every aspect of daily life globally.[35] The influx of petrol-funds in conjunction with turbulent geopolitics and a desire to counter xenophobia inspired a renewed interest in the Middle East, as seen in the burgeoning of festivals, gallery shows, and museum exhibitions.

Furthermore, while the 1980s are more known for their global tendencies, this period has also not been given its scholarly due. Migration prompted the rise of the new artistic media, particularly through portable and fast-developing technologies that moved with artists to document transitory experiences. Ulrich Loock sees this as a "temporal coincidence" in which:

> artists from the Arab world were subjected in the 1980s to incisive sociopolitical upheavals, of their enforced diaspora, of a worldwide state of globalization, and of

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[33] Rüdiger Graf, *Oil and Sovereignty: Petro-Knowledge and Energy Policy in the United States and Western Europe in the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), 3-4.

[34] Ibid., 4. For petro-states, while the massive influx of oil wealth was a momentary boon, the later crash in the 1980s was severely damaging to their economies. Furthermore, for oil-dependent economies, or any economy focused on one product, other sectors simultaneously suffer, an effect known as the "Dutch Disease." See: Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-states* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3-4, 16-17.

[35] For example, see: Alireza Fakhrkonandeh, *Oil and modern world dramas: from petro-mania to petro-melancholia* (Routledge: New York, 2023); Nelida Fuccaro and Mandana E. Lambert, eds., *Life Worlds of Middle Eastern Oil: Histories and Ethnographies of Black Gold* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023). On the ways that oil is deeply central to both social and political life in the Middle East, see: Abdulaziz Al-Sowayegh, *Arab Petro-politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

> the widespread introduction of reproductive media in the field of art. It seems that through the conjunction of these events and conditions the media of mechanical reproduction granted artists from the Arab world equal access to a means of artistic production that their peers enjoyed in other parts of the world.[36]

The events of the 1980s generated specific artistic approaches, such as photography, to address contemporary problems such as identity and displacement.[37] Loock's analysis correctly points out the importance of changing media and relevant geopolitical dynamics, but his analysis misses the shifting artistic infrastructure in the 1970s that contributes to the "temporal coincidence" of the 1980s. I commence with this shifting infrastructure of artistic production and circulation, as well as with the temporal coincidence that is the increasing number of cultural events about the Middle East in the late 1970s.

Chapter 2 explores the World of Islam Festival held in London in 1976, and the ways in which it constructed ideas about Islam and British society through displays of historical Islamic art. At the time, London as a former imperial capital was reckoning with its colonial past as people from its former colonies across the Asian continent immigrated to London, prompting a great crisis about the British nation and its identity. Using largely uncited archival materials, I demonstrate how the personal beliefs of the organizers generated a particular view of Islamic art connected to its supposedly innate religious character that was paradoxically responsive to contemporary conflict yet divorced from the experience of everyday British Muslims and historical scholarship on Islamic art. Specifically, I analyze

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[36] Ulrich Loock, "Transitions and Translations," in *Arab Art Histories: The Khalid Shoman Collection,* ed. Sarah Rogers, and Eline van der Vlist (Amman: The Khalid Shoman Collection, 2013), 310.

[37] Ibid., 309-10. The importance of the 1980s is also underscored by a forthcoming volume organized by AMCA around the 1980s.

how the festival's anchoring exhibition, *The Arts of Islam*, was a means of modeling a new approach to more cohesive British society. Objects of Islamic art were highlighted as relics representative of a multicultural society rooted in co-existence and mutual respect; by looking closely at objects and learning from them, the festival proposed that audiences could think about how such ideals might become a guide for resolving contemporary social issues in Britain. In this context, festival denotes a specific program of exhibitions and events organized by private individuals that happened across London's rich network of museums and educational institutions designed to bring people together. While questions about the identity of British society were not new, employing Islamic art in response was, and it elicited numerous responses that had a lasting impact—one of which was not a more cohesive, unified society.

Current literature about the festival emphasizes the festival's final product and its impact, but does not address its planning processes, nor does this scholarship employ the full breadth of archival information. Specifically, the archives I discuss introduce critical information to scholarship about the festival, which is integral to understanding the festival's structure and formation. The festival commissioned several exhibition catalogues, which provide important insight into the final form of the festival, its exhibitions, and its ideology, but do not go into detail about certain planning and negotiation processes that are actually pivotal to understanding the final product.[38] Art historian Monia Abdallah's study argues that the

[38] There were exhibition catalogues for each show, including: May Beattie, *Carpets of Central Persia* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976); Leonard Harrow and Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Science and Technology in Islam* (London: Crescent Moon Press, 1976); David Heathcote, *The Arts of the Hausa* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976); *Isfahan: City of Light* (London: The British Museum, 1976); *Islamic Art and Architecture in Libya: Catalogue for the Exhibition* (London: The Committee, 1976); Jean Jenkins and Poul Rovsing Olsen, *Music and Musical Instruments in*

festival reactivated Islamic civilization, as seen in the ways that new Islamic art galleries appeared in museums after the festival that later turned London into a site for disseminating contemporary Islamic art.[39] However, Abdallah's argument is more rooted in post-9/11 examples, as where this project delves into events in the 1970s connected to contemporary art and the festival. Historian Klas Grinell analyzes the traditionalist perspectives dominating the festival's framing, suggesting that they purport to present Islam as antagonistic to modernity, thus subsequently excluding Muslims.[40] Art historian Anneka Lenssen argues for

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the World of Islam (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976); Dalu Jones, ed., *The Arts of Islam* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976); James Kirkman, ed., *City of San'ā* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976); Martin Lings, and Yasin Hamid Safadi, *The Quran* (London: The World of Islam Publishing Company, 1976); Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from Iranian Lands: 8th-18th Centuries* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1976); Ralph Pinder-Wilson, *Paintings from the Muslim Courts of India* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976); *The Qashqai of Iran* (London: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1976); Shelagh Weir, *The Bedouin: Aspects of the Material Culture of the Bedouin of Jordan* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976). There are commentaries and reviews on some of these catalogues, including: Rachel Ainsworth and Sarah Worden, "Jean Jenkins, Music and the 1976 World of Islam Festival," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 28 (2015): 184-97; Diana Grimwood-Jones, "The World of Islam Festival: A Note," *Bibliotheca Asiatica* 15 (1979): 155-8; Peter Lamborn Wilson, "The World of Islam," *Sophia Perennis* 2, no. 2 (1976): 105-16; David B. Thomas, "Science and Technology in Islam: An Exhibition at the Science Museum," *Museum* XXX, no. 1 (1978): 18-22; Shelagh Weir, "The Nomad and City Exhibition, Museum of Mankind," *Museum* XXX, no. 1 (1978): 23-9.

[39] Monia Abdallah, "World of Islam Festival (Londres 1976): Naissance d'un nouveau paradigm pour les arts de l'Islam," *Racar: revue d'art Canadienne* 39, no. 1 (2014): 1-10; Monia Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," in *Global Trends in Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art,* ed. Rui Oliveira Lopes, Giulia Lamoni, and Margarida Brito Alves (Lisboa: CIEBA Edicoes, 2015), 77-93.

[40] Klas Grinell, "Framing Islam at the World of Islam Festival, London, 1976," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 7 (2018): 73-93. Grinell's claim about Islam as antagonistic to modernity directly contradicts the perennial thinking, a specific philosophy around Islam and religion, that many of the organizers adhered to. According to perennial thinker Frithjof Schoun, modern civilization, as well as modern thought and culture, are "an indeterminate flux" that for him "cannot be defined positively." Rather, modern thought is slowly unfolding, making many of our qualifications, judgments, and definitions inaccurate. Thus,

the limits of the West/rest paradigm as a means of displaying Islamic art in her study of the festival, and argues that the festival's anti-intellectual Orientalism was closely tied to the period's emerging multiculturalism by showing its power to heal the world through a resolution of difference.[41] Dorothy Armstrong's MA thesis specifically studied Oriental carpets at the festival and its collateral events within the context of larger histories of exhibiting carpets.[42] More recently, these many threads were woven together in art historian Nur Sobers-Khan's analysis and critique of the festival as a catalyst for planning a new exhibition in London, and her reflections on that process.[43] Iheb Guermazi's recent dissertation augments the work of Grinell, for one, and studies the Sufi theory of Islamic art as it was connected to Western philosophers and their students to analyze how René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon's traditionalism was manifested at the World of Islam Festival.[44] However, Guermazi's thoughtful study does not consider how and why such thinking was

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Islam cannot be antagonistic to modernity because we in fact do not know enough about what modernity is to define it, according to Schoun. See: Frithjof Schoun, *Understanding Islam* (London, Boston: Unwin Paperbacks, 1976), 24-5.

[41] Anneka Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art": The 1976 World of Islam Festival," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 42, no. 1/2 (Summer/Winter 2008): 40-7.

[42] Dorothy Armstrong, "Unravelling the carpet: oriental carpets in the International Exhibition of Persian Art, 1931, the World of Islam Festival, 1976, and Turks, 2005" (MA Thesis, Royal College of Art, 2014), 78-119.

[43] Nur Sobers-Khan, "The *Islam in Europe* Exhibition and the World of Islam Festival: Curatorial Aporia and Failure as Methodology," in *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, ed. Onur Özturk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker (London: Routledge, 2022), 57-76.

[44] Iheb Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn: Modern Sufism and the Study of Islamic Art and Architecture" (Ph.D. Diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022). I see Guermazi's dissertation as significantly expanding on the work of Grinell.

meant to engage British society writ large. Finally, Dorothy Armstrong's new article continues her previous work on carpets while focusing on the festival's explicit role in cultural diplomacy.[45] My study broadens the existing literature by uncovering the planning processes and ideologies that shaped the festival. Rethinking displays of Islamic art at the festival promotes questions about the way art from the Middle East, both in its historical and contemporary forms, is appropriated for bridge building exercises that aim to solve social problems, particularly in major cities, as well as the ways Islam is contingently constructed in distinct temporal and geographical contexts.

By reconsidering the World of Islam Festival, my dissertation expands the ways we think about festivals—a scholarly field, for one, which often excludes events in the late twentieth century.[46] Festivals can take many different forms, including performance-based or object-based events.[47] At their core, much of a festival's purpose boils down to the act of defining

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[45] Dorothy Armstrong, "Persophilia and technocracy: carpets in the World of Islam Festival, 1976," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 28 (June 2023): 1-22.

[46] For the most recent state of the field essay on festivals, see Judith Mair, "Introduction," in *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019): 3-12.

[47] See: Alessandro Falassi, *Time out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 1; Richard Bauman and Patricia Sawin, "The Politics of Participation in Folklife Festivals," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 288-314; David Picard and Mike Robinson, *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds* (Buffalo: Channel View Publications, 2006). Picard also provides characteristics of festivity, including forms of life crisis, moments of social concentration and connectivity; liminality; ritualizing transgressions; performances, symbolic recreation, and enactment of tradition; ostentation, sacrifice, and exchange; politics, political economy, and power; cultural creativity and change; festivals, signs and international tourism. On the etymology of festivals, see: John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Cities of Culture: Staging International Festivals and the Urban Agenda, 1851-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 12-14.

and projecting identity, be that of the self, the other, or in a relational sense through a festival's social atmosphere; this can be achieved through object-based learning or interpersonal education.[48] In this context, more important than defining festivals or belaboring their types is an understanding of the different yet concurrent objectives that festivals fulfilled around citizenship and multiculturalism, and what their approaches were.

Festivals are an ideal conduit for achieving certain goals because they promote a "cultural public sphere," or sites for communication and relationship building that help people form political opinions and identities.[49] As opposed to books or radio programs, the festival can inculcate specific ideals by producing models for people to emulate and creating conditions for dialogue about the subject of the festival with other festival goers. Staging is essential to festivals since it creates a specific environment that aims to elicit these responses among participants.[50] Although a festival might take place in a well-known city, like London, the festival is staged as a world apart. Its environment is key to its objectives by creating a space

[48] For examples of these different pedagogies, see: Jason T. Busch and Catherine Futter, "Preface," in *Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Kansas City: Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, 2012), 16-17; David Seth Raizman and Ethan Robey, eds., *Expanding Nationalism at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851-1915* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

[49] Liana Giorgi and Monica Sassatelli, "Introduction," in *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere*, ed. Gerard Delanty, et. al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 1. Theoretically, their public sphere is built on the work of Jürgen Habermas, and their importance of culture is rooted in Raymond Williams. Rydell also makes a similar argument when he discusses how festivals create a symbolic universe to achieve a social experience. See: Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[50] Gold and Gold, *Cities of Culture*, 6.

for celebration and providing new opportunities for exchange and conversation.[51] This process has been theorized by Jenni Jordan in her thinking about the festivalization of everyday life, which uses festivity, experimentation, spectacularisation, theming, and participation to create a space for learning and participation.[52] At the same time, festivals are not isolated, but connected to their temporalities, politics, and social formations, like the Cold War or the Space Race.[53]

The contemporary, community-based form of the festival with its sociopolitical objectives traces its lineage to World's Fairs. Festivals and World's Fairs can be similar in their goals and forms: they often take place in major metropolitan cities that either have a robust cultural infrastructure, or can handle a massive influx of people; they celebrate economic success; they craft a microcosm of the universe in order to summarize aspects of the human experience and showcase a particular power dynamic; they define and uphold different definitions of modernity, often to purport superiority; both render the nation legible and tangible for its citizens in order to foster national identity and networks of exchange; these events create new social relationships and assert identities; they can (hypothetically) help to improve morale following crisis; they express national sentiments; finally, both have

[51] Tourism can be key to this. See: Picard and Robinson, *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change*.

[52] Jennie Jordan, "The Festivalisation of Contemporary Life," in *Focus on World Festivals: Contemporary Case Studies and Perspectives,* ed. Chris Newbold and Jennie Jordan (Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers, 2016), 6.

[53] Rebecca Brown, *Displaying Time: The Many Temporalities of the Festival of India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Arthur P. Molella and Scott Gabriel Knowles, *World's Fairs in the Cold War: Science, Technology, and the Culture of Progress* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019); Joseph Tirella, *Tomorrow-land: The 1964-65 World's Fair and the Transformation of America* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2014).

a capacity to promote behavioral reform, assuming that high culture can transform the lives of citizens by promoting good conduct and civilizing those who attend.[54] Here, the festivals discussed explicitly wish to change citizen behavior through education to promote a new social order.

The contemporary practice of displaying the "other" at festivals also has a precedent at World's Fairs. Festivals and World's Fairs visually depict and reenact power dynamics between East and West in political, military, national, economic, scientific, and cultural terms.[55] This power dynamic is further reiterated by locating the festivals in imperial centers and making the subjects of imperialism the festival's focus. Such power structures can also be upheld or legitimized by academic research, such as anthropology at universal

[54] Falassi, *Time out of Time*, 7; Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles," *Assemblage* 13 (December 1990): 36; Simon Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 47; David Raizman and Ethan Robey, "Introduction: Communities real and imagined: world's fairs and political meanings," in *Expanding Nationalism at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851-1915*, ed. David Raizman and Ethan Robey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 1-14; Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 21; *The Great World's Fairs and Exhibitions* (Miami: Mitchell Wolfson Jr. Collection of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Miami-Dade Community College, 1986), 1; Robert H. Kargon, *World's Fairs on the Eve of War: Science, Technology and Modernity, 1937-1942* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 1-4; Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

[55] Debra Hanson, "East meets West: Re-presenting the Arab Islamic world at the nineteenth-century World's Fairs," in *Expanding Nationalism at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851-1915*, ed. David Raizman and Ethan Robey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 15; Moreton, *Hybrid Modernities*; Molella and Knowles, *World's Fairs in the Cold War*.

expositions.[56] The Middle East had a longstanding presence at World's Fairs beginning with the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition in London, which presented replicas of the Alhambra as a reflection of colonial and imperial interest in the non-Western world.[57] At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Midway Plaisance (a fairway off the main fairgrounds) featured different ethnographic villages, including a recreation of a Cairo street not based on an actual street in Cairo, but a reinterpretation of another recreation of a street in Cairo featured at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris.[58] Subsequent representations of the Middle East in the US throughout the twentieth century helped to promote American hegemony, but also responded to larger political situations, particularly during the Cold War.[59]

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[56] Penelope Harvey, *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition* (London: Routledge, 1996); Stefania Zuliani, "The Postcolonial 'Exhibitionary Complex': The Role of the International Expo in Migrating and Multicultural Societies," in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History,* ed. Iain Chambers (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 175-84.

[57] Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 1. This topic has also been taken up by other scholars. See: Hanson, "East meets West:"; and Christian A. Hedrick, "From London to Paris (via Cairo): the world expositions and the making of a modern architect, 1862-1867," in *Expanding Nationalism at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851-1915*, ed. David Raizman and Ethan Robey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 33-49.

[58] Ibid. Such a principle also applies to the colonization of women's bodies, and the scopic principles of segregation at these events. See: Çelik and Kinney, "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles"; Moreton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 6.

[59] Eric Davis, "Representations of the Middle East at American World Fairs, 1876-1904," in *The United States and the Middle East: Cultural Encounters,* ed. Abbas Amanat, and Magnus Bernhardsson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 342-381; Molella and Knowles, *World's Fairs in the Cold War*; Rydell, *All the World's a Fair.*

Festivals took over the place of World's Fairs as spectacular events that emphasized difference, but not without some challenges. The stratification of the world at World's Fairs outlined by Zeynep Çelik continues at festivals, which operate in a similar manner by creating microcosms of the world that visually encapsulate non-Western cultures, such as the Middle East. Çelik, Leila Kinney, Timothy Mitchell, and Eric Davis all write about festivals and World's Fairs, succinctly arguing that representations of the Middle East at fairs and festivals are not neutral, but reflect a particular world order based on hierarchical power relationships.[60] However, by mid-century, formerly colonized or mandatory countries began participating in World's Fairs to advertise their independence or otherwise assert their autonomy, including a newly independent Lebanon at the 1939 New York World's Fair, Egypt (among others) at Expo Brussels in 1958, and Kuwait and Algeria at the 1967 Montreal Expo; at present, this rich topic is prime for further study.[61] As these dual

[60] Çelik, *Displaying the Orient*; Davis, "Representations of the Middle East at American World Fairs, 1876-1904," 342-81; Çelik and Kinney, "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles"; Timothy Mitchell, "The World as Exhibition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989): 218; Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in *Colonialism and Culture,* ed. Nicholas Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 289-317.

[61] Amanda Engelland-Gay and Alexandra Draycott, "How Arab connection to World Expos has evolved over time," *Arab News*, last modified May 22, 2023, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1904406/middle-east. On Lebanon, see: Asher Kaufman, "'Too Much French, but a Swell Exhibit': Representing Lebanon at the New York World's Fair 1939-1940," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 1 (April 2008): 59-77; Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert, "Nationalist Cultural Heritage and the Question of Lebanon: 1939, 1999" (MA Thesis, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2019). Notably, Lebanon is excluded from Kargon's *World's Fairs on the Eve of War: Science, Technology and Modernity, 1937-1942.* On Expo Brussels, see: Mohamed Elshahed, "Egypt Here and There: The Architectures and Images of National Exhibitions and Pavilions, 1926–1964," *Annales islamologiques* 50 (2016): 107-43. Egypt participated in Brussels alongside Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

phenomena evolved into the 1970s, a new tension emerges as Western cultures look to project images of the Middle East while ignoring diaspora populations in a domestic context. Festivals spoke to a tenuous postcolonial world order, reflecting a paradoxical tension by which the formerly colonized world was represented by the colonizer in the colonizer's capital in an era of decolonization. It is this line of thinking that I aim to expand upon while also connecting these conversations to representations in galleries and museums to show the constellations in representing the so-called other.

With this alternative history of festivals in mind, in chapter two, I also explore different iterations of festivals, such as the Asilah Festival (Morocco, 1978) and the al-Wasiti Festival (Iraq, 1972), as subversive conduits for identity formation and community building that harness the potential of people coming together in a specific temporality and context. Recently, scholars have turned their attention to re-evaluating festivals in a global context, including in the Arab world. Alia Nakhli's recent article assessed festivals in the SWANA region as one element of a creative apex in the 1970s.[62] Other scholars have studied specific events, like Sarah Dornhof and María Gómez López writing on Asilah in Morocco, and Alessandra Amin and Amin Alsaden writing on Baghdad's Arab Biennial.[63] These events,

[62] Alia Nakhli, "Les grandes messes panarabes: festivals et biennales d'art arabe dans les années 1970," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 138 (2015).

[63] Sarah Dornhof, "Street Art out of Time: The Cultural Moussem of Asilah and Other Entanglements of Public Space, Arts, and Politics," *Manazir Journal*, no. 4 (2022): 74-97; María Gómez López, "Asilah Arts Festival (Morocco): encounters in the urban space," *Ge-conservación*, no. 11 (2017): 10-16; Alessandra Amin, "Introduction to "Revolutionary Painting and the Palestinian Revolution," by Mohammed Chabaa, and "Palestinian Artists and the Biennial," from Toni Maraini's "Baghdad 1974: A Summary of the First Arab Biennial of Fine Arts" (Both 1974)," *Artmargins* 12, no. 3 (2023): 102-112; Amin Alsaden, "Baghdad's Arab Biennial: Regional Subversions, Global Ambitions," *Third Text* 33, no. 1 (2019): 121-50. Furthermore, the Modern Art Iraq Archive is an invaluable resource for this study: https://artiraq.org/maia/.

and more, also preface thinking about the globalization of biennials across the Asian continent, as discussed by Oliver Marchart and many others.[64] I contribute to this field with a comparative reading of these festivals between center and periphery as it highlights the festival's pliable form.

Chapter 3 contrapuntally re-reads the World of Islam Festival to find contemporary Arab art in London, a city that was home to many Arab artists amid shifting political situations in the Middle East, particularly as Britain loosened its colonial grip. While the festival largely ignored contemporary artistic production for ideological reasons, which I explain in detail, alternative spaces instead took up this mantle and allowed artists to put forth self-representations. Some of the work shown was letter-based artistic production that harkens back to the work of Umar, and which provided an early introduction to this new artistic genre to London audiences.[65] Through their hybrid styles that bridged the Arabic letter and approaches to Western abstraction, artists simultaneously ruminated on their experiences in diaspora while sharing them with audiences who questioned the place of Arab populations in London. These events in the 1970s impacted the way museums in Britain, such as the British Museum, formed their collections of modern and contemporary art from the Middle East.

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[64] Oliver Marchart, "The globalization of art and the 'Biennials of Resistance': a history of the biennials from the periphery," *World Art* 4, no. 2 (2014): 263-76.

[65] Umar paved the way for other pioneering modernists, such as Shakir Hassan al Said. See: Nada Shabout*, Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 110-2.

Currently, artistic experimentation with the Arabic script occupies much of the literature and historiography within the field of modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art.[66] Charbel Dagher first theorized this genre in his book *Arabic Hurufiyya* (1990), which defines *hurufiyyah* as works that engage with the Arabic language as visual elements for artistic composition that reflect upon "civilizational" identities and gesture toward independence while merging local languages.[67] Wijdan Ali takes up this discourse in *Modern Islamic Art* (1997) by arguing that after a decline in Islamic art and a rising interest in Western painting, the return of the letter reflects a revival of Arabic calligraphy as a historical art form, which constitutes a modern Islamic art that encompasses both Western aesthetics and the letter. Ali suggests that after an identity crisis inflicted by Western art, the advent of the Calligraphic School of Art, which posits a lineage between traditional Islamic art and contemporary art based on interpretations of calligraphic writing with the Arabic letter, showcases Islamic art's continuity.[68] Finally, Nada Shabout engaged in this debate in *Modern Arab Art* (2007) by

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[66] For the most recent state of the field essay, see: Anneka Lenssen and Sarah A. Rogers, "Articulating the Contemporary," in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, vol. 2, ed. Finbarr Flood and Gulru Necipoglu (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 1314-38. On writing histories and canons, also see: Silvia Naef, "Writing the History of Modern Art in the Arab World: Historical Overview, State of the Art and Critical Remarks on an Emerging Field," in *Knowledge Production: Examining Arab Art Today*, ed. Eline van der Vlist (Amman: Darat al funun, 2020), 75-85.

[67] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 17, 19-20. Elsewhere in this volume, Dagher classifies hurufiyya as the history of an aesthetic problem of Western oil painting in the Arab world and suggests these artists discovered the script in "exile."

[68] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*, 1-2. Ali also outlines stages of this development where artists catch up, discover themselves, and then participate in a larger cultural awakening. Ali classifies artists based on themes, like religious and secular. Within secular, there are sociopolitical, literary, and decorative works. Ali also delineates styles: the pure calligraphic style, the abstract style, and calligraphic combinations, each with its own subset. Ali later shifted her position from saying that calligraphic work continues, her stance in the 1990s, to claiming there is no modern Islamic art, and that Islamic art today is not contemporary or

taking an intermediary position that argues for a modern Arab aesthetics that emerges out of an "Arab cultural identity," which is both against colonialism and a reflection of different styles experiences coming together—sometimes in contestation.[69] Notably, Shabout rejects any ideas of naturalized continuity while also moving away from religion as the primary analytic.[70] Instead, Shabout sees the Arabic letter as something which changes amid sociocultural and political contexts tied to concerns around nationalism and identity, which is reflected in the letter's plasticity and form.[71] Embedded in this discourse is also a debate about naming between modern Arab art and modern Islamic art, one which still vexes scholars.[72] I do not aim to solve these debates. However, I contribute to this conversation

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modern, but rather, that Islamic art ended with the calligraphic school. See: H.R.H. Princess Wijdan Fawaz Al Hashemi, "Contemporary or Modern Islamic Art?" in *Islamic Art: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 202-4.

[69] Shabout*, Modern Arab Art*, xiii-xiv. Shabout is also explicit to say that Arab and Islamic art are not the same. Arab art for her means "that art produced by those who consider themselves part of the Arab world," and its many ethnicities and minorities. Arab and Arabic are a part of a particular metaculture that also includes Moslems and non-Moslems. Shabout also says that what is Arab is "an umbrella term that signifies a pluralization of experiences arising from Islam, ethnos, language, and the West," and "designates the secularization of traditionally religious societies."

[70] Ibid., 5-10.

[71] Ibid., 70-6. Shabout adds that hurufiyya is based on two tenets: "negotiating the letter as a plastic element grounded in the modernist understanding of form and constructing a modern work of art engaged in its cultural specificity." See: Nada Shabout, "In Focus: *Huroufiyah*: The Arabic Letter as Visual Form," in *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents,* ed. Anneka Lenssen, Sarah Rogers, and Nada Shabout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 142-3.

[72] There is an adjacent text I do not discuss here, which is Dadi's *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia.* Dadi considers modern Islamic art as existing on the "shifting terrain of struggle and contestation between artistic projects that reconfigure "tradition" and critics who seek to understand their work." See: Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 38.

around the letter and *hurufiyyah* by providing and analyzing examples of how British and American publics encountered and responded to these letter-based works, illustrating how the contexts of their times shaped their reception and influenced museum practices.

Chapter 4 returns to festivals by shifting to Washington, DC to consider the Festival of American Folklife (FAF). The 1976 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife coincided with the World of Islam Festival, and organizers in London took specific note of this as they expressed potential attendance concerns.[73] FAF was in some ways the opposite of the World of Islam Festival: it was held in a nascent city that was still an established political hub, and it looked to separate itself from museums rather than work within their infrastructure. While there was a stated rationale behind shifting from museums, a point I return to in chapter four, DC's museums also lacked the necessary objects and infrastructure to answer the kinds of questions the festival asked around national identity and immigration. I investigate the presence of Arab and Arab diaspora populations at FAF from 1973–76, how identity is constructed within and beyond religion, and the festival's pedagogical approach that foregrounded people over objects. Different countries from the Arab world were included at the festival in response to contemporary events and in line with shifting rhetoric around multiculturalism and the melting pot. Audiences were invited to learn about different cultural practices at the festival through performance and conversation, thus making the festival a social experience that directly defied the object focus of museums and other festivals. The visual evidence of this nation in flux and the festival's performative pedagogy is visualized in

[73] Minutes of a meeting held on May 20, 1975, FCO 13/765 or INF 12/1307, National Archives, London, England.

the work of Mississippi embroiderer Ethel Wright Mohamed (1906–92), whose unique place between the American south and the Middle East became an integral part of the Smithsonian's project.

Current festival research largely focuses on definitions of the event, its mission, and its curatorial praxis. Researchers and curators Olivia Cadaval, Sojin Kim, and Diana N'Diaye's recent book *Curatorial Conversations* (2016) considers the festival's history of curatorial work, nothing that "living exhibitions," such as the festival, run the risk of objectifying participants if not framed appropriately, meaning curators play an important role as mediators.[74] Richard Kurin's autobiographical, retrospective study questions the festival's history, including the different populations represented, their form, and their impact.[75] These two texts are formative for understanding the festival's history and objectives, in turn illuminating part of the reason why populations from the Middle East were included at different moments. However, these authors are a part of the festival's planning structure, meaning the texts are from institutional perspectives, thus requiring additional consideration.[76]

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[74] Olivia Cadaval, Sojin Kim, and Diana Baird N'Diaye, "Introduction," in *Curatorial Conversations: Cultural Representation and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, ed. Olivia Cadaval, Sojin Kim, and Diana Baird N'Diaye (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 14.

[75] Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By, and For the People* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 51. Kurin argues that "we do the festival so that people can be heard."

[76] Also see: Richard Bauman, *Reflections on the Folklife Festival: An Ethnography of Participant Experience* (Bloomington: Folklore Institute Indiana University Bloomington, 1992).

Other studies of the Festival of American Folklife also provide important frameworks. Anthony Shay discusses how modes of representation at the Festival of American Folklife echo those of World's Fairs.[77] As I explore "Old Ways in the New World," I also consider the power structures framing these systems of representation. Additionally, Virginia Myhaver's recent dissertation focuses on how the politics of the 1960s and 1970s impacted the bicentennial festival. Specifically, she explores how the advent of neoliberalism contributed to the formation of national identity, such as corporate partnerships that mark a turn toward privatization and neoliberalism.[78] Myhaver's insight is domestically focused, but her considerations about partnerships are important for thinking about the Middle East and marketing community at the Festival of American Folklife.

To date, there has not been a sustained study of "Old Ways in the New World" (OWNW), which was the Smithsonian's four-year program focused on different immigrant communities—a gap I aim to fill. However, other scholars have modeled different approaches to analyzing specific aspects of the festival's larger program, such as the bicentennial and the depiction of BIOPOC populations.[79] In this way, scholars are

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[77] Anthony Shay, *Choreographing Identities: Folk Dance, Ethnicity and Festival in the United States and Canada* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006).

[78] Virginia Myhaver, "The "New American Revolution": Cultural Politics, New Federalism, and the 1976 Bicentennial" (Ph.D. Diss., Boston University, 2014), viii-ix.

[79] On Working Americans, see: Robert H. Byington, "Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife," *Smithsonian Folklife Studies* (1978): 1-103. On Indigenous populations, see: David Whisnant, *All that is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); William S. Walker, ""We Don't Live Like That Anymore": Native Peoples at the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife, 1970—1976," *American Indian Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 479-514. On Family Folklore, see: Steven J. Zeitlin, Amy Kotkin, and Holly Cutting Baker, *A Celebration of American Family Folklore: Tales and Traditions from the Smithsonian Collection* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982). On African Diaspora, see:

reconsidering the social formation of identity at the festival, thus furthering our understanding of festivals as venues for articulating identities.[80] Historian William Walker points out the tensions around cultural diversity at the bicentennial, arguing that its attention to diversity is somewhat "superficial," and "masked deeper fissures and inequalities."[81] Walker's assessment deserves further attention: while he crafts his thesis in relation to pluralism at the festival writ large, I return to his quandary around Arab populations and OWNW. Likewise, historian Heather Diamond addresses the contradictions in representing Hawai'i at the 1985 iteration of the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife as something affected by governmental and corporate mandates, a framework that can similarly be applied to OWNW.[82] These studies, as well as mine, fit within a larger discourse that highlights the way festivals uphold hegemonic ideas about identity and constructs ideas about the nation.[83] As I consider the presence of Arab populations at the festival, I hypothesize about what it means to be Arab or Arab American within a shifting rhetoric around multiculturalism,

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Krista A. Thompson, "Beyond Tarzan and National Geographic: The Politics and Poetics of Presenting African Diasporic Cultures on the Mall," *The Journal of American Folklore* 121, no. 479 (Winter 2008): 97-111.

[80] Udo Merkel, "Making Sense of Identity Discourses in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles," in *Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles*, ed. Udo Merkel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3-36.

[81] William Walker, *A Living Exhibition: the Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 153-5.

[82] Heather Diamond, *American Aloha: Cultural Tourism and the Negotiation of Tradition* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 3-5.

[83] Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, eds., *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

American identity, and the melting pot as this dialogue took place at the nation's capital. Rather than proposing different ways non-Western populations could fit into the American cultural mosaic, I draw attention to the way cultures remained separate, leaving the festival at the intersection of a phantasmagoric past and a multicultural future. Furthermore, I offer an in-depth examination of the festival's visual culture, which is also absent from the extant literature.

Finally, in chapter 5, I remain in Washington, DC to offer preliminary thoughts on the place of contemporary Arab art in the city, as seen in the example of the important yet short-lived Alif Gallery. While DC was a growing city with a nascent contemporary arts infrastructure, the gallery uniquely fit into the city as a well-established political and academic nexus, one which was also indicative of the US' reach into the Middle East. As a parallel to the Iraqi Cultural Centre, I consider the way artists used the space to share their subjective experiences while also putting forth new ideas about art history and art historiography. Although the gallery was founded after the conclusion of Old Ways in the New World at the Festival of American Folklife, some of the gallery's later programs, like its "Musics of Struggle Program," and researchers, like Halim el-Dabh, were connected to the festival.[84] The Alif Gallery's little-known history paves the way for future study about

[84] Denise A. Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim el-Dabh* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 119-37; *1990 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 6, 56. Ripley supposedly wrote a letter saying that anyone who was helping el-Dabh was also assisting the US government. The program and its thinking were documented in a publication. See: *Music of the Nile* (Washington, DC: Arab American Cultural Foundation, 1991). This book was another designed by Kamal Boullata and his partner Lily Farhoud.

alternative spaces in the Anglophone art world that supported contemporary Arab artists, and the lineage of artist-run spaces in the Anglophone art world..

This brief study of the Alif Gallery contributes to the nascent field of Arab American art history. While Arab American history and literature have received a great deal of attention in the last two decades, art history is a step behind. To date, there are two key texts in this field, both of which work to define a list of Arab American artists that are the foundation for this burgeoning field.[85] Other shorter writing projects assert the legitimacy and validity of this field, as well as define resources and institutions that have supported and/or currently support this work.[86] Furthermore, many of these artists are an active part of American art histories, yet excluded from these historiographies. Yet Washington, DC, is an important site in this history as a place of learning and conversation for many in the Arab diaspora, and later, a key site for exhibitions. Understanding the spaces that these artists operated in helps to outline a much larger historiography of the ways artists worked in and around the American art world. However, these studies must also trouble the idea of Arab American as a label with many connotations and implications connected not only to a "unique" aesthetic, but also the notion of whiteness and citizenship in the US.[87]

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[85] Fayeq Oweis, *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008); Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, *In/Visible: Contemporary Art by Arab American Artists* (Dearborn: Arab American National Museum, 2005).

[86] Holly Arida, "The Arts," in *Daily Life of Arab Americans in the 21st Century*, ed. Anan Ameri and Holly Arida (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2012).

[87] On this, see, for one: Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

The rise of contemporary art from the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey in the 1970s within the Anglophone art world is currently an unwritten chapter of global contemporary art history. By revealing the mechanisms, individuals, and institutions which mobilized contemporary Arab, Iranian, and Turkish art, I advocate for new ways of thinking that emerge from reevaluating and synthesizing historiographies, thus paving the way for further studies of the circulation and reception of contemporary art from the SWANA region in the Anglophone art world.

II. "1000 years of Islamic art? 1001 years might be better:" Exhibiting British Multiculturalism through Islamic art at the 1976 World of Islam Festival

A. Introduction From April to June 1976, London was the site of the World of Islam Festival, a three-month long event held throughout greater London and its museum infrastructure that presented Islam and Islamic civilization to Western audiences through Islamic visual and material culture. Learning about Islam and its many facets was presented as an opportunity for discovering new worlds, as seen in a pair of advertisements for the festival's eight-exhibition program (see Figure 2-1). The advert describes the festival as an opportunity to learn about fourteen centuries of Islamic civilization, including its religion, culture, and communities. Within this program, objects were a way to make aspects of Islamic civilization legible when curated as a part of exhibitions, each of which compartmentalized and summarized the Islamic world along thematic lines. Anchoring the festival was *The Arts of Islam* at the Hayward Gallery—the only event that repeats across the two posters, thus placing Islamic art at the festival's core. Although not advertised here, these exhibitions were accompanied by concerts, lectures, colloquia, films, television programs, radio shows, and other happenings designed to draw in Western audiences, and inform them about different facets of Islam across its history. But why did a group of British individuals choose to organize an exhibition of Islamic art and a festival about Islam, and for what purpose? And what does this exhibition, in conversation with the festival, tell us about both

British society, histories of presenting art from the Arab world, and contemporary events focused on articulating identity?

This chapter explores the role of Islamic art at *The Arts of Islam* and the World of Islam Festival as a conduit for producing and disseminating ideas about Islam in contemporary British Society, but not about British Muslims. I argue that, at the festival, the visual features of Islamic art—framed by the theory of unity in diversity and accompanied by a metanarrative about Islam and Islamic civilization as exemplifying unity—put forth a model of interconfessional collaboration that could be adapted to contemporary day Britain and its need for a new multiculturalism. Such a presentation of Islamic art was the primary conduit for achieving the festival's stated goal of fostering unity between Muslims and Christians. This social project intervened into local tensions, and in dialogue with global undercurrents, like the aftermath of the 1973 OPEC crisis, the Cold War, fallout from the Yom Kippur War, and nascent conservatism that would bloom under Reagan and Thatcher. In this way, Islamic art was not only given a particular social objective in relation to contemporary geopolitical dynamics, something out of step with then contemporary scholarship, but it was also shaped by individual worldviews that appropriated Islamic art. Presenting this dissonant view of Islamic art, however, purported a particular fiction that gave way to a utopia of a better social life, something necessary for a then tumultuous Britian. Such a reconsideration of the festival to understand how and why Islamic art was presented in this way not only augments our understanding of exhibition histories of Islamic art, but also provides a counterpoint to understand the exhibition and reception of contemporary art from the Middle East at that time at both British institutions and global events.

The World of Islam Festival and Islamic art taught a history directly relevant to the social, religious, and political changes in Britain prior to and during the 1970s. Sociologists Chamion Caballero and Peter J. Aspinall explain that in 1970s Britain, the shifting racial and ethnic topography evoked fears about "mass immigration from backward alien cultures" that many Brits felt was an assault against what it meant to be English; this fear was both about immigrants and Black populations in Britain.[88] Anti-Black racism in Britain impacted immigrants as the two groups were elided in political discourse concerned with increased violence and a declining state.[89] Discussions of migrants were distinctly racialized: as the number of Muslims in Britain increased, immigrants of all backgrounds were simultaneously defined as "coloured" post-1945; skin color and place of origin were also correlated with religious affiliation and used to separate the pre-existing and new populations.[90] While

[88] Chamion Caballero and Peter J. Aspinall, *Mixed Race Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 394; W.I.U. Ahmad, and Ziauddin Sardar, *Muslims in Britain: Making Social and Political Space* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-4; John Solomos, Bob Findlay, Simon Jones, and Paul Gilroy, "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race: the experience of the seventies," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 27.

[89] Errol Lawrence, "Just plain common sense: the 'roots' of racism," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 47.

[90] Jørgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 41; Maurits Berger, *A Brief History Islam in Europe*: *Thirteen Centuries of Creed, Conflict and Coexistence* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014), 39; Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); 1; Talal Asad, "Multiculturalism and British Identity in the Wake of the Rushdie Affair," *Politics & Society* 18, no. 4 (1990): 467. Calling immigrants "coloured" around the World of Islam Festival was still prominent. See: "Now it's our Turn," *East Anglican Daily Times,* July 18, 1976, np. The author says that as the number of "coloured aliens" grew, that everything "dear to the British nation… is being eroded."

"coloured" was a catch-all term referring to people of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian descent, it also encompassed others. As such, the term was all inclusive of both the earliest immigrants from India and Pakistan, but also those from Yemen, Somalia, Bangladesh, and later Iran, Turkey, Morocco, and Iraq.[91] In the 1960s, immigration remained racialized, but entry was more restricted due to questions about the benefit of "coloured" immigration, and new requirements for a personal connection pre-immigration.[92] These changes in immigration were not unrelated to the rise of the left in 1964 as it endeavored to promote social change from the top down, but also the fear of the "enemy within" as the cause of the nation's "diseased" state.[93] That the nation was "diseased" was not unrelated from the

[91] Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 43; Robert Pauly, *Islam in Europe: Integration or Marginalization?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 73; Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain*, 29-30, 44-53.

[92] Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 39; Robert Pauly, *Islam in Europe: Integration or Marginalization?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 99; Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Routledge, 2015), 163. For more on the growing discourse around race and racism in Britain, see: Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, *Racism and Political Action in Britain* (London; Boston: Routledge and Paul, 1979).

[93] Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 23. Ahmad and Sardar very clearly summarize the problem of the "enemy within" as the people from Britain's former imperial colonies moved to Britain: "All those other categories through which Britain defined and measured itself – the 'evil Orientals', the 'fanatic Muslims', the 'inferior races of the colonies', the Irish, the immigrants, the refugees, the Gypsies – are now an integral part of Britain. It is not just that they are 'here' but that their ideas, concepts, lifestyles, food, clothes now play a central part in shaping 'us' and 'our society'. How can good ol' Middle England be comfortable with accepting the identity of villains? What happens to conventional notions of Britishness when there is no yardstick to measure difference and define the (white) British as over and above everyone else?" See: Ahmad and Sardar, *Muslims in Britain*, 3.

"racially exclusive" idea of the nation that dominated, as discussed by Stuart Hall.[94] By the 1970s, concerns about violence topped the list of examples of reasons why society was in decay, as British life was in crisis at all institutional and social levels.[95] Furthermore, changes in immigration regulations also went in close tandem with shifting supply and demand for labor, making immigration an economic metric of control.[96] Immigration crashed after the 1973 OPEC oil crisis with few exceptions, including elite Arabs who had funds to invest abroad.[97] By 1976, roughly 1.85 million people in Britain were considered non-white.[98] Racist sentiments affected many groups across Britain at the time, particularly as politicians called for people of color to return to their countries of origin following both a neo-conservative logic around race and a political logic of resolving domestic tensions via repatriation.[99]

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[94] Paul Gilroy, "Steppin' out of Babylon – race, class and autonomy," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 278.

[95] Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 24. On violence and policing, see: Paul Gilroy, "Police and thieves," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 143-82.

[96] Pratibha Parmar, "Gender, race and class: Asian women in resistance," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 240.

[97] Humayun Ansari, *'The Infidel Within': Muslims in Britain since 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 146. Another iteration of the history of immigration was featured as a part of the press around the festival. See: "A Million Moslems in our Midst," *The Guardian,* April 8, 1976, np.

[98] Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, 163.

[99] Stella Dadzie, "The Black Women's Movement: Fighting on All Fronts," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 47; Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 32. Deeply

As immigration flourished, Islam in Britain was a topic of conversation that emerged related to questions of religion and national identity as the country's demographics shifted. It is difficult to accurately calculate the growing Muslim population in Britain since religious affiliation is not a question on Britain's census.[100] Estimates suggest between 1945 and 1971, immigrants who identify as Muslim are estimated to have increased from around 23,000 to as many as 360,000, many of whom immigrated for work purposes.[101] As immigration both continued and increased in some cases, the estimate number of Muslims in Britain grew from 533,000 in 1981 to 1.6 million in 2001.[102] Yet these groups, who crossed many cultural and national backgrounds, notably lacked political representation, creating frustration and feelings of disenfranchisement.[103] One specific example of this among many is the way

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connected to this thinking was the notion of the underdevelopment of the so-called "Third World," which was not seen as a biproduct of colonial and imperial intervention, but a natural outcome due to the supposed inferiority of those on the Asian content, which was less inferior than those from the African continent following a racist teleology. See: Lawrence, "Just plain common sense," 65.

[100] Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 41; Berger, *A Brief History Islam in Europe*, 199; Caballero and Aspinall, *Mixed Race Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 316. Ethnicity was also only added as a metric in the 1970s.

[101] Pauly, *Islam in Europe,* 98; Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach, *Islam in Europe: The Politics of Religion and Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 18; Tariq Modood, "Introduction: The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe," in *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, ed. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London; New York: Zed Books, 1997), 1.

[102] Pauly, *Islam in Europe*, 99; Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Jonathan Birt, "A mosque too far? Islam and the limits of British multiculturalism," in *Mosques in Europe: Why a solution has become a problem*, ed. Stefano Allievi (London: Alliance Pub. Trust, 2010), 135. During this period, there was a notably increase of immigrants from Iran, Turkey, Yemen, Egypt, Morocco, and Iraq, among others. These figures do not account for white Brits converting to Islam. See: Berger, *A Brief History of Islam in Europe*, 203.

[103] Paul Weller, *A Mirror for our Times: 'The Rushdie Affair' and the Future of Multiculturalism* (London: Continuum, 2009), 78-81, 103.

women of color, including Black and Asian women, were relegated beyond the fight for women's right put forward by British feminists seeking equal rights, equal pay, and equal opportunities.[104] This example is also indicative of the larger ways in which migrant workers existed within a precarious condition prompted by a shifting labor sector and changing immigration laws in addition to the union busting efforts that followed the proliferation of unions in the 1960s.[105]

The city's landscape simultaneously manifested the shifting religious composition of London. The number of mosques in Britain increased with the number of Muslims in Britain: the first mosque was built in 1889, and by 1985, there were 338.[106] Mosques were erected both within and beyond London while churches were also destroyed, thus physically manifesting the dwindling power of Christianity and Christian-democratic political parties after the World War II that was also perceived by some as a threat to British identity and nationhood.[107] The traditional values of the British church were questioned and often

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[104] Linsey Young, "Introduction: The Personal is Political," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 17. Also see: Hazel V. Carby, "White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 212-35.

[105] Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 12, 23.

[106] Steven Vertovec, "Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain," in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (London: Oxford, 2002), 21. Press for the festival also commented on the growing number of mosques, which was c. 300 by the time the festival opened after a post-1960 construction spike. See: "Bishop Welcomes Festival," *Baptist Times,* March 18, 1976, np.

[107] Berger, *A Brief History Islam in Europe*, 193; Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 30-1; Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2009), 170; Weller, *A Mirror for our Times*, 103. While there is a distinction between British

abandoned in the 1960s.[108] Furthermore, the dominance of the British Anglican church also created challenges for the potential for a multicultural society when religions were not tolerated or accepted equally, and the ways Islam fit into notions of British identity were deeply questioned.[109]

Simultaneously, misperceptions around Islam also took root or gained popularity, such as the *hijab* as a symbol of women's oppression, along with intensified racial prejudice, as seen for one in an uptick of "Paki-bashing," public opposition to interracial or interreligious marriages, and the proliferation of American scholarship arguing Islam and Christianity were diametrically opposed; these many factors heightened tensions in Britain.[110] Populations from West and South Asia, many of whom were Muslim, further suffered after the OPEC crisis when those perceived as Arab were racialized as "shifty, dangerous people determined to undermine civilization as we know it" in order to blame Arabs and Muslims for the oil

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Christians and the British Church, the use of Christian here follows the secondary sources cited.

[108] Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, 33; Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 1-2, 176; Gerald Parsons, *The Growth of Religious Diversity in Britain*: *Britain from 1945,* vol. 2 (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 130. This was also a period of economic downturn, disillusion with the Labor government, widespread political turbulence, and the end of a boom for British artists. See: Lisa Tickner, *London's New Scene: Art and Culture in the 1960s* (New Haven; London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2020), 233.

[109] Ahmad and Sardar, *Muslims in Britain*, 3, 7; John Rex, "The Political Sociology of a Multi-cultural Society," in *Multiculturalism and the State*, vol. 1 (London: University of London Institute of Commonwealth, 1994), 33. Church here follows Rex's wording.

[110] Pauly, *Islam in Europe*, 107; Hakan Yilmaz and Çagla Aykaç, *Perceptions of Islam in Europe: Culture, Identity and the Muslim Other* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012)*,* xiii; Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 25. As Errol Lawrence notes, the racist remark of calling someone "Paki" was a part of the same racist logic of denigrating other people of color in Britain, implying that all non-white groups were the same. See: Lawrence, "Just plain common sense," 66.

crisis that caused unemployment and currency inflation for British populations; loose stereotypical correlations between Muslims and Arabs put others at risk.[111] In this way, scholars have posited this version of Islamophobia as something akin to antisemitism in its generalized racism and cultural tolerance as opposed to specifically religious intolerance.[112]

These geographical and socio-political factors prompted a reconsideration of London's social dynamics, or what I consider a new multiculturalism in relation to the festival. Described by historian Rita Chin as a "floating signifier," multiculturalism is an umbrella term for a series of philosophies, social structures, and legal practices that are contingently defined, re-defined, and imposed by the state; it is as malleable as the idea of Britishness itself.[113] Multiculturalism represents the presence of cultural difference, and considers how to deal with said difference on a social and political level, particularly as it relates to how social

[111] Ahmad and Sardar, *Muslims in Britain*, 2.

[112] Modood, "Introduction," 4.

[113] Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 8; Barnor Hesse, "Introduction: Un/Settled Multiculturalisms," in *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, "Transruptions*," ed. Barnor Hesse (London; New York: Zed Books, 2000), 1 (citing Homi Bhabha, "Culture's in Between," in *Multicultural States*, ed. David Bennett (London: Routledge, 2002), 26-34); Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir, "What is Postwar Multiculturalism in Theory and Practice?", in *Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth*, ed. Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 1; T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 9, citing Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s," *Cultural Critique* no. 14 (Winter 1989-90): 179-208); Christina Julios, *Contemporary British Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 10; Asad, "Multiculturalism and British Identity in the Wake of the Rushdie Affair," 465. Notably, the development of these practices is contemporaneous with what are now considered state sanctioned structures of racism. See: Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 25.

and cultural diversity are connected to race.[114] In ideal, theoretical terms, multiculturalism can be implemented in a manner that accommodates different ways of life, such as religious beliefs, cultural practices, and so on, without disturbing the extant way of life for the majority.[115] Notably, multiculturalism is often posted as a secular dialogue which speaks of religious, but does not deal with religion in terms of religious practices, instead focusing on religion as a proxy for ethnicity; instead, it should be seen as reflecting a connection between religion and politics.[116]

Multiculturalism emerged after World War II as Empire declined, and it was first used in an American context before its British adaptations.[117] In Britain, this process began with the

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[114] Ben Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 2-20. Pitcher also goes on to say that multiculturalism is "a terrain on which to get things done, where various social actors deploy forms of social and cultural politics to serve their interests and objectives."

[115] Paul Wetherly, Max Farrar, Simon Robinson, and Yasmin Valli, "Introduction: 'Islam', 'the West' and 'Multiculturalism'," in *Islam in the West: Key Issues in Multiculturalism*, ed. Max Farrar, Simon Robinson, Yasmin Valli, and Paul Weatherly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

[116] Thomas Sealy, *Religiosity and Recognition: Multiculturalism and British Converts to Islam* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022), 1-3, 8-10.

[117] Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir, "British Multiculturalism after Empire: Immigration, Nationality, and Citizenship," in *Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth*, ed. Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 25; Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 8-9, 17. Chin cites the term in the novel Lance in 1941, and then in an academic context, in the journal Hispania in 1947, according to Oxford. On this, also see: Tariq Modood, "British Muslims and the politics of multiculturalism," in *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: A European Approach*, ed. Tariq Modood, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ricard Zapata-Barrero (London: Routledge, 2006), 37-56. The term also has important precedents in the Canadian context. See: Max Farrar, "Multiculturalism in the UK: A Contested Discourse," in *Islam in the West: Key Issues in Multiculturalism*, ed. Max Farrar, Simon Robinson, Yasmin Valli, and Paul Weatherly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7-23.

British Nationality Act of 1948 that redefined British nationality to include those in the Commonwealth, leading to a legal influx of immigrants.[118] Such a shift challenged British identity, leading to first, a push for immigrants to assimilate into British society, and second, other reactive policies to curb immigration, such as the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act that restricted immigration to the same group of immigrants based on their skill, a policy pushed even further with the 1971 Immigration Act that more explicitly banned immigration based on race, specifically distinguishing between white and non-white immigrants.[119] This legislature was contemporaneous with shifting political parties and discourse that focused on the "enemy within" as the threat to Britain, which was the non-white population broadly.[120] When conflict arose around the presence of immigrants, other policies emerged that addressed how to deal with a country that held multiple cultures, and proposing integration instead of assimilation. Additionally, the Labour party put forward various acts around the idea of "race relations" in 1965, 1968, and 1976 that respectively outlawed discrimination in public places tied to race, extended nondiscrimination to housing and employment, and introduced the notion of indirect discrimination; the latter did not mention religion, but it could include religious discrimination if it affect an ethnic or racial group; race relations thus became both a moniker of social reform and political control.[121] Simultaneously, from the

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[118] Ashcroft and Bevir, "British Multiculturalism after Empire," 26-8.

[119] Ibid., 29-30; Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 87; Julios, *Contemporary British Identity*, 98; Rex, "The Political Sociology of a Multi-cultural Society," 27.

[120] Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 23.

[121] Ashcroft and Bevir, "British Multiculturalism after Empire," 29-30, Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 90; Jed Fazakarley, *Muslim Communities in England 1962-90: Multiculturalism and Political Identity* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 208; Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 32. As discussed by

1970s–1990s in particular, marginalized populations used the same claims around citizenship and equality to work toward gaining political representation and rights, particularly as immigration declined following the death of British prosperity post-OPEC.[122] And during these decades, (white) women were making demands for (white) women's equality, moves that would not necessarily improve the lives of Black and Asian women.[123] Women of color were also meeting to formulate their own demands against institutional racism, which went

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Fazakarley and Julios, among others, "race relations" is a term used by Roy Jenkins around policies that equate to ideas about multiculturalism. There was also the 1966 Local Government Act, and Section 11 had provisions for local authorities to distribute resources to help the community, such as to help non-English speaking students in school. Notably, these questions around learning the English language also harken back to the centrality of the English language to British identity. Also see: Asad, "Multiculturalism and British Identity in the Wake of the Rushdie Affair," 460. This struggle within the education system was different yet not unrelated to the ways Black women were fighting for changes to the curriculum as a part of the Supplementary School movement. See: Dadzie, "The Black Women's Movement," 49; Hazel V. Carby, "Schooling in Babylon," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 183-211. Race relations also gave way to a larger sociological field, which Errol Lawrence criticizes for neglecting more quotidian aspects of racism. See: Errol Lawrence, "In the abundance of water the fool is thirsty: sociology and black 'pathology'," in *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 1970s Britain*, ed. University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 95-142.

[122] Les Back, Michael Keith, Kalbir Shukra, and John Solomos, *The Unfinished Politics of Race* (London: Cambridge, 2022), 19-22; Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 81-2. Notably, the uprisings of 1981 that discriminated against African Caribbean populations in Britain led to X Robinson's book *Black Marxism* in 1983, which was foundational to the contemporary discourse on racial capitalism. See: Arun Kundnani, *What is Antiracism? And Why it Means Anticapitalism* (New York: Verso, 2023), 131.

[123] Young, "Introduction," 17-18. For example, the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970, but not enacted until 1975. Many of these demands were set out across a series of conferences between 1970-78 by the Women's Liberation Movement, including equal pay, equal education and employment opportunities, free contraception and abortion, free childcare, monetary and judiciary independence, an end to discrimination against lesbians, and an end to violence against women based on male aggression.

unaddressed in the initial legislature around the Race Relations act.[124] These many endeavors were also met with great skepticism if not outright protest about the ways such policies would upset British cultural hegemony, undermine British identity, and prompt Britain to "lose its distinctive features."[125] In the context of 1970s London, multiculturalism was a series of state initiatives to deal with everyday popular problems stemming from racial and cultural diversity, one which often did not go far enough in addressing discrimination.

By comparison, the World of Islam Festival proposed a bottom-up version of multiculturalism that reimagined what British society could be by using Islamic art objects to demystify the markers of difference that created social divides. While legal notions of multiculturalism focused on race, nationality, and legal status, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, the festival focused on culture and religion as boundless signifiers.[126] Specifically, it aimed to resolve social tensions through object-based learning and interpersonal education as opposed to state-sanction policies. Much of these conversations took place within museums, thus harnessing the power of the museum as an educational institution, a site for inculcating

[124] Ibid., 18. Institutional racism here is a catchall term from unequal pay to stereotypical expectations for non-Western artists to become "ethnic artists," such as in the case of Houria Niati. See: Linsey Young, ed., *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90* (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 178.

[125] G. Gordon Betts, *The Twilight of Britain: Cultural Nationalism, Multi-culturalism and the Politics of Toleration* (London: Routledge, 2001), xvii. Betts' book can be read as a racially-inflected diatribe against non-white immigrants who it seems he fears will ruin Britain. His text, however, echoes the uncertainties of the 1970s.

[126] Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 3-4. Chin notes that culture was a marker of difference in the 80s, and only later did it turn to religion.

proper behavior, and a space for fostering national identity.[127] Educating people about Islam through the different objects, exhibitions, and events was a way to alleviate misunderstandings that created conflict. Following this logic, teaching people the principles of Islam could demonstrate that Islam was not incompatible with British life. Revealing the many aspects of Islam as a culture, religion, and way of life throughout its history might suggest that immigrants from the Asian and African continents who practiced Islam in both a religious and cultural sense would not disrupt or ruin British identity or culture. Such a pedagogical model relied on London as an imperial, cosmopolitan city where people not only came together, but there was a robust museum infrastructure that was already socially signified as a site for art and learning—even if Islamic art was not a part of the recent museum program. Beyond education, the British converts who planned the festival exemplified how Islam could be a part of British life as Muslims in London themselves, and the governments who collaborated modeled tolerance and respect on a large scale; in short, these efforts exemplified the very integration and tolerance required for a multiculturalism that accepted and supported difference in the public sphere.[128] In this way, the festival proposed a unique form of multiculturalism that focused on religion and religious discrimination vis a vis the marginalization of Islam instead of previous foci on racial discrimination.[129]

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[127] On this, see: Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[128] Modood, "Introduction," 20.

[129] Ibid., 8.

Amid these complex dynamics, however, *The Arts of Islam* is often overlooked within histories of exhibiting Islamic art and British exhibition histories, even though its scope, argument, and context are unique and significant. Recent books and lectures by Ahmed (Paul) Keeler, a figure I will return to momentarily, have sparked new interest in the festival and the exhibition, but his narrative is only one in a complex web of figures, institutions, and historical circumstances. The festival's recent resurfacing in scholarly and public histories, including my own research, is in part due to Keeler's autobiography, where he reappraises the festival as part of his own life journey based on his memories. An avid public speaker, Keeler's memories dominate conversations around the festival today with joy and charisma but are often at odds with scholarly narratives and archival evidence. A contrapuntal reading of the festival between Keeler's memory and archival documents illuminates the critical moments of dissonance that constituted the festival and begins to uncover the hidden stories in this spectacle of inclusion that make the festival a key site of knowledge production ripe for discovery and conversation.

In addition to Keeler's perspective, the previously unexamined archival material also provides new insight into the topic; it is this archival reconstruction that I contribute through this discussion. The primary archives on the World of Islam Festival are held at the Tate Archives, the National Archives, and the Victoria & Albert Museum Archives in London. At the time I began this project prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, both archives were available for researchers to visit in person following a simple email exchange. While a small portion of the archive at the V&A has been cited by Dorothy Armstrong, the archives at the National Library and the Tate Archives remain uncited. The two folders at the Tate provide an important window into the making of the 1971 World of Islam at the Institute of

Contemporary Arts in London, an important preface to the 1976 festival. The information held at the Tate reveals the early formation of Keeler's ideology from a present perspective rather than in hindsight. The six folders at the National Archives bring to light different aspects of the planning processes through various correspondences, as well as provide a trove of press around the festival. Lastly, the Arts Council of Great Britain archives at the V&A has at least seven boxes of material related to the festival that outline the activities of the World of Islam Festival Trust and the formation of *The Arts of Islam* exhibition, including installation photographs. The folders can be read individually as capsules that explore different themes, such as who attended different events or how the press responded to different moments. Yet when read collectively, often in dialogue with each other, we can reconstruct the specific worldview and choices that facilitated the exhibition and festival's creation, one which ultimately argues for a construct of Islamic art at odds with the scholarship and exhibitions at the time, as well as contemporary global events. It is this contrapuntal reading of the archive that serves as the foundation for this chapter.

This chapter thus outlines and contextualizes the planning processes that informed *The Arts of Islam* and the World of Islam Festival as an event designed to reshape Islamic art for a particular British social purpose, which had significant ramifications for contemporary artists that I explore in the next chapter. My argument unfolds chronologically across nine subsections that track the following topics: Keeler's biography; *World of Islam* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1971; the festival's ideology and funding; curating *The Arts of Islam*; advertising the festival; a close reading of *The Arts of Islam*; festival reception; rethinking Islamic art, unity and diversity, and British multiculturalism; and festivals as a locus of identity articulation between Britain and the Arab world. I conclude with remarks

about the capacity of Islamic art to intervene in social problems, the festival's impact, and the Rushdie affair, thus setting the stage for chapter three, which explores the marginalized place of contemporary Middle Eastern art at the World of Islam Festival.

B. The Protagonist: Ahmed (Paul) Keeler The festival's development simultaneously follows the biography of Ahmed (Paul Keeler), who wanted to look to Islam and its history to envision a better future; his biography and worldview, in dialogue with similarly minded collaborators, frames the festival and ideas of Islamic art.[130]

Born in 1942 at what he describes as the "heart of British Empire," Keeler describes himself as a Child of Empire born in a conservative town outside Windsor. Keeler was raised Christian, spending his childhood at the local parish thinking he would become a priest, and later attending a Christian boarding school that developed future servants to the (British) state. He first pursued a career as an actor, leading him to explore new facets of the world in drama school through "anti-establishment playwrights," and reading other books by authors like Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht that fed him "a diet of unremitting angst," thus prompting him to reconsider his Christian upbringing.[131] In the 1960s, Keeler, like many others, questioned the traditional values of the Anglican Church and British empire's actions that were predominant in British society.[132] Years later, after some Indian musicians and

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[130] Throughout the event, he is listed as Paul Keeler in the program because he had not yet converted and changed his name. However, in other sources, he claims he converted before the festival opened. The chronology is unclear.

[131] Ahmed Paul Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia Berhad and Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2015), 3-11. Christian is Keeler's terminology.

[132] There is also a colloquial retelling of how Keeler came to plan the event. See: "World of Islam Festival," *Impact International,* April 9-22, 1976, 24-7. Keeler also augmented his retelling in his recent book. Of note in this retelling is that Keeler explains the origins of

dancers from the Kathakali dance troupe visited London and performed at Sadlers Wells Theatre, he went to a private concert and met sitarist Mahmud Mirza, who introduced Keeler to a world of art, music, and later, Islam.

Inspired by this encounter, Keeler later had the epiphany that his life events led him to Islam, a path he would now follow by converting.[133] Keeler notes that "his cause became mine," referring to Mirza's passion for "traditional lineages of music" that rejected Western music academies, celebrities, and Western thinking about Indian music.[134] Then, some months later, after reading Will Durant's *The Case for India*, Keeler began to realize his own biases about India vis-à-vis British imperialism, prompting him to rethink the histories of British Empire.[135] Keeler then made his contemporaneous, private journey to Islam public through exhibitions and events, such as a 1970 festival on the Mughals at Brandeis University, a 1971 exhibit called *World of Islam* at the Institute of Contemporary Art

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Impact International, which was a relatively new publication started by Ibrahimsa Mohamed, a student from Malaysia, and Abdul Wahid Hamid, a student from Trinidad known for his writings on Islam. See: Ahmed Paul Keeler, *A Life's Journey: The Story Behind a Book* (Cambridge: Equilibria, 2022), 41-66.

[133] Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 11-14; Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 12, 26-7. Keeler says that at this moment, he was first enamored with India, but not a Hindu India, which led him to the Mughal Courts. See: Ahmed Paul Keeler, "44th Cultural Majlis," (Youtube Live, virtual, September 2, 2020). Following this performance, he and his colleagues at the commune also put on a performance of "The Bird Ballet," which was loosely based on the Persian poet Attar's *Conference of the Birds*. Keeler's retelling of his own biography also resonates with the broader trend of conversion by way of discontent with Western modernity. See: Iheb Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn: Modern Sufism and the Study of Islamic Art and Architecture" (Ph.D. Diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022), 16.

[134] Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 30-1.

[135] Ibid., 34.

(London), and then, the 1976 World of Islam Festival.[136] As the story of the festival unfolds throughout this chapter, Keeler's relationship to Islam resurfaces in ways that suggest that following his conversion, he and a small group of his colleagues were the only ones who had a true understanding of what Islam really is, and thus, it was only them who had the right to share this knowledge with others; perhaps this trajectory implies that his research and experiences across faiths is what gives him the true knowledge of Islam.

In between angst and Islam, Keeler fed his quest for knowledge through art in London as a burgeoning site for contemporary art. After being introduced to modern art by Filipino artist David Medalla, Keeler opened and ran the Signals Gallery on London's West end beginning in 1964 with financial support from his father.[137] Keeler ruminates on his gallery as a place for him to engage with Islam through art. Signals, however, is more commonly known for presenting Kinetic and Latin American art, a unique venue that advocated for immigrant/migrant/exile artists in the early to mid 1960s.[138] Keeler showed modern artists

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[136] Key scholars of Islamic art who participated in the Brandeis event include Annemarie Schimmel and Stuart Cary Welch. Notably, prior to the event at Brandeis, Keeler spent a few months to a year in the US where he visited museums on the East coast that allowed him to learn more about Mughal India and its visual culture, including the miniatures formerly belonging to historian and philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy. See: Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 32.

[137] Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 8-11, 24. Prior to this curatorial endeavor, Keeler also curated presentations of Medalla's work. Keeler curated Medalla's first exhibition of paintings and drawings in England in 1963, then after encountering Kinetic work with Medalla, Keeler curated a show on the subject at the Ashmolean Museum in 1964. Keeler then curated what Guy Brett calls the "first survey of kinetic and optical art in Britain." See: Guy Brett, *Exploding Galaxies: The Art of David Medalla* (London: Kala Press, 1995), 46-7.

[138] Isobel Whitelegg, "Everything Was Connected: Kinetic Art and Internationalism at Signals London, 1964-66," in *London Art Worlds: Mobile, Contingent, and Ephemeral Networks, 1960-1980,* ed. Jo Applin, Catherine Spencer, and Amy Tobin (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 21-22; Tickner, *London's New Scene*, 7. Tickner refers to Britain in this period as Tickner refers to as "a lively centre for international

like Josef Albers (German-American, 1888–1976), Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887–1968), Naum Gabo (Russian, 1890–1977), Kazimir Malevich (Russian, 1879–1935), and Piet Mondrian (Dutch, 1872–1944), but he believed Latin American artists were inspired by the Alhambra, which he connected to Islam.[139] This offered him an entry into Islam through geometric patterns, an epiphany he claims he had about the unity of Islamic civilization while reading at the British Museum's library.[140] Keeler wanted to show that variety in modern art was informed by "the search for dynamic structures underlying the visible world."[141]

In this way, Keeler's initial thinking about unity was framed by aesthetic similarities between places where Islam was the dominant religion, a starting point that was not dissimilar to the ways some art historians were surveying Islamic art across its contexts to search for a larger meaning. Yet Keeler's early interactions with Islamic art extend from

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exchange." An alternative history of the Signals Gallery suggests that the gallery opened in 1964 as the Centre for Advanced Creative Study as a collaboration between David Medalla (who edited the gallery's publication, and who Keeler credits as the man who introduced him to modern art), Guy Brett, Paul Keeler, Marcello Savadori, and Gustav Metzger. See: Courtney J. Martin, "Exiles, Emigrés, and Cosmopolitans: London's Postwar Art World," in *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965,* ed. Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel, and Ulrich Wilmes (Munich, New York: Haus Der Kunst, Prestel, 2016), 572; Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 24.

[139] Ibid., 22; Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 15; Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 37. Notably, Keeler's reflections and connections do not include collections of Indian or Islamic art at the Victoria & Albert Museum or the British Museum, among others.

[140] Ibid., 22; Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 15; Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 37.

[141] Anneka Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art": The 1976 World of Islam Festival," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 42, no. 1/2 (Summer/Winter 2008): 43. Citing: Paul Keeler, announcement in *Signals* 1, no. 6 (February-March 1965): 12. Notably, as Keeler was working through his own experimentations, the idea of Black power emerged in Britain as a transnational political formation that would shift Britain's social structure. See: Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

tenuous, opaque linkages. The majority of the artists he worked with, such as Hélio Oiticica (Brazilian, 1937–80), Lygia Clark (Brazilian, 1920–88), Alejandro Otero (Venezuelan, 1921–90), and Mira Schendel (Brazilian, 1919–88), did not mention Alhambra as a primary influence on their practices.[142] Likewise, Keeler's recollection of the space are at odds with art historical scholarship on the venue, such as Guy Brett who writes about Signals as the epitome of avant-garde activity in the period, comparing it to the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, and foregrounding its innovative presentation of kinetic work.[143] When Keeler's gallery closed in 1966 following years of financial precarity, he continued his search by opening a hippie commune/art gallery called the Exploding Gallery in his home with Medalla and other folks both interested in Indian spiritualities and with a distaste for their Christian heritage; the space hosted events that comprised what might be considered mini festivals, though not by the festival moniker. The space closed in 1968.[144]

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[142] Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 8-11; Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 26. In Guy Brett's retelling of David Medalla's career, he notes that *Signals* closed in Autumn 1966. See: Guy Brett, "David Medalla: From biokineticism to synoptic realism," *Third Text* 3, no. 8-9 (1989): 89. Keeler calls *Signals* his second encounter with Islamic art. What Keeler does not write in his autobiography is that he also had an early trip to Turkey that piqued his interest in the region, but he was not yet interested in Islam when he went, recalling that he said that at the time he believed it was a pity they (referring to Turkey) had Islam. See: Keeler, "44th Cultural Majlis." Keeler also promoted art centers like Caracas, Sao Paulo, and Rio De Janeiro, none of which are thought of for their ties to Islamic art. Keeler also frequently eliminates from his biography that David Medalla cofounded the gallery with him. Notably, Keeler's gallery career ended at age 25 due to his debt.

[143] Brett, *Exploding Galaxies*, 50. For a counter-reading of the ICA that considers its neglect of women artists, see: Amy Tobin, "'Little Circles': On Group Work, Feminism and Art by Women," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 32-43.

[144] Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 8-14; Brett, "David Medalla," 90-2. In Keeler's retelling, he lists the closure date as 1967, not 1966. Brett also calls the space the "Exploding Galaxy," not gallery, and goes on to add that part of what prompted the gallery to close was that Keeler's father withdrew his funding. See: Brett, *Exploding Galaxies*, 67, but

Keeler's personal engagement with Islam is sometimes overlooked in scholarly narratives around the festival. However, his discontent with his European, Christian, hegemonic upbringing was pivotal for his discovery of Islam, and his subsequent invitations for others to follow suit through exhibitions and programs. Keeler's inquisitiveness exemplified the festival's spirit and its multicultural goals: if one man could have an open mind and learn about something new, like Islam, so too could others. If given the right circumstances, people could turn from their British-Christian upbringing like he did to find a new way of life in Islam, and then dedicate their lives to helping others find a reprieve from Empire's woes. In other words, through education, one could find peace and unity in a new religion and share that new life. Likewise, his belief in the unity of Islamic civilizations, as made visible through art, would similarly impact curatorial decisions in 1976. I follow Keeler's engagements with Islam throughout this chapter to understand how he constructed his worldview, in dialogue with British society and art world happenings, to demonstrate how that came to bear on the festival.

***C. Before 1976: The 1971* World of Islam** Between 1971 and 1976, Keeler continued building his own knowledge of and relationship to Islam, which guided his future endeavors as he considered how to portray the complexity of Islamic civilization to an unfamiliar public. As Keeler prepared different events and exhibitions, his work did not necessarily co-opt any particular festival or exhibition form, but rather he indirectly recreated versions of

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also, 67-90. Notably, this was one of many counter-cultural movements in the 1970s. See: Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, 36-7; Parsons, *The Growth of Religious Diversity in Britain*, vol. 1, 68-9; Young, "Introduction," 22-23; and Rachel Garfield, "Unexpected Pleasures: Punk, Feminism and Art," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 134-63.

the same learning opportunities that redirected his life toward Islam. For one, before Keeler presented his view of Islamic art at *The Arts of Islam* in 1976, he put on an exhibition in 1971 that experimented with similar curatorial and intellectual questions.

From November 12–December 12, 1971, London's Institute of Contemporary Art presented the exhibition *World of Islam*, a subject entirely new to the venue, but not necessarily to London—a point I return to later in this chapter.[145] Keeler originally proposed a year-long series of lectures about aspects of what Keeler defined as Islamic civilization, including a mini-festival dedicated to Sufism, and a 17-day event showcasing the Islamic city, pitched collectively as "the first festival of Islamic culture."[146] Keeler's goal was to introduce what he called a "western audience," namely white non-Muslim Brits, to the breadth and depth of Islamic art and culture.[147] Despite being critiqued as "over-ambitious,"

[145] Keeler narrates this sequence of events in a longer fashion in his new book. See: Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 37-40. The full program for the exhibition and its programs can be found here: The World of Islam Festival Events, 1971, Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, England.

[146] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to David Thompson, December 3, 1970, Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, England. Keeler also noted that Sufis are very "unspecific in nature," and a part of every Islamic country, contributing to the breadth of his proposal. That Keeler's knowledge about Islam was then nascent is further illustrated by the incident when Keeler had to reschedule his opening dinner for Muslim dignitaries in Britain because he previously scheduled it for Ramadan. See: "The Times Diary," *The Times,* July 30, 1971, 14.

[147] Official proposal for "The World of Islam," undated, Folder TGA955/7/2/28; Correspondence from Paul Keeler to David Thompson, December 3, 1970, Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, England. Here, Keeler specifically says he does not want the event to be too scholarly so as to engage the "ignorant" public. I do not think Keeler meant that he thought the public was stupid, but rather that misinformation was prevalent, leading to the creation of a societal schism.

Keeler's proposal was accepted.[148] As the host venue, the ICA maintained full financial detachment.[149] Keeler independently funded the event, but there is no documentation about how; Keeler concluded the project 10,000 pounds in debt.[150] What Keeler ended up with was a smaller exhibition, and a series talks and performances, including lectures by Oleg Grabar on "The Muslim Achievement in the Minor Arts" and Annemarie Schimmel on Rumi that followed a performance by the Mevlevi from Turkey (better known as the Whirling Dervishes."[151] While Keeler's project did not utilize museum collections from the ICA or

[148] Correspondence from David Thompson to The Council, December 7, 1970, Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, England; Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 15. Thompson accepted Keeler's proposal because of his success with the Mughal Festival in the US at Brandeis University. Little is known about this event.

[149] Correspondence from Peter Clarke to David Thompson, July 23, 1971, Folder TGA955/7/2/28; Correspondence between Paul Keeler to M.C. Hussey, August 17, 1971, Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, Britain, UK. In another invoice, Hussey emphasized that the festival was separate from the ICA, and bills should go to Keeler, not the ICA, because, as Hussey says, the "Festival is an entirely separate entity," and is not in any way "responsible for it or its organizer." See: Correspondence between M.C. Hussey and J. Bontemps, Esq., June 15, 1971, Folder TGA955/7/2/28; Correspondence between Paul Keeler and Mikey Hussey, June 10, 1971, Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, Britain, UK. Liability is also mentioned elsewhere in this folder in this archive. On the ICA's financial commitments, see: Roland Penrose, "Economies at the ICA," *The Times,* June 11, 1971, 15."

[150] Correspondence from David Thompson to Peter Bird, Esq., October 14, 1971, Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, Britain, UK. British Petroleum (BP) was set to be a donor, but they pulled out. A savvy marketer, Keeler was also never forthcoming about his debt, instead claiming a second festival was imperative in order to realize his full ambitions. See: "World of Islam Festival," *Impact International,* April 9-22, 1976, 24-7.

[151] "The World of Islam Festival: Events," undated (likely fall 1971 given the booking details included," Folder TGA955/7/2/28, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Tate Archives, London, England; Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 38-9.

anywhere else in London, placing the exhibition at a major venue like the ICA lent the project an aura of legitimacy vis-à-vis its place in the museum.

The focus on pattern and design in the 1971 exhibition is a direct precursor to the emphasis on geometry and arabesque later seen in *The Arts of Islam* at the Hayward Gallery.[152] The sole remaining photograph of the exhibition documents one wall with geometric patterns and two people admiring it (see Figure 2-2). The patterns derive from the quadrilateral layout of Persian gardens, or *charbagh*, while interweaving geometric and vegetal motifs represent the four rivers of Paradise. The vertical lines dividing the photo are pointed arches, architecture constructed in the gallery to allude to their ubiquity throughout the Islamic world while integrating the Islamic city into the gallery.

This photo both indicates and obscures the way Keeler defined Islamic art in 1971. On one hand, Keeler's object-based approach was not rooted in what we might traditionally think of as Islamic art, but objects that reflected interpretations thereof. In that vein, Keeler also defined Islamic art through Western interpretations of the subject. The work featured at the ICA was not an actual Persian garden carpet, but a graphic designed by British artist Keith Albarn, who was interested in abstract Islamic patterns.[153] Keeler described Albarn's

[152] The exhibition was contemporaneous with the rediscovery of Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*, which was first published in 1856. However, Keeler does not cite this book in his thinking.

[153] Guy Brett, "Pattern and nature in Islam," *The Times,* November 23, 1971, 12. Albarn went on to write a book about his engagement with pattern. See: Keith Albarn, *The Language of Pattern: An Enquiry Inspired by Islamic Decoration* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974). One can compare Albarn's design to Persian garden carpets like the one held at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, as published in *Islamic Carpets from the Joseph V McMullan Collection*, 40 (no. 29), plate IX. Albarn does not cite Oleg Grabar or Owen Jones in his thinking on ornament and Islamic art.

piece as an "analysis of a paradise garden carpet from Iran."[154] Although there is no archival documentation suggesting why Albarn's work was featured, it is likely because the two men thought similarly. Keeler believed that the unity of Islam was key to unity in life, a belief he came to by learning from Indian sitarist Mahmud Mirza and reading about Mughal India.[155] Albarn also considered the ways unity was a common feature across many cultures where disparate forms of knowledge were brought together. Likewise, Albarn saw abstraction in Islamic patterns as a way to "unify the diversity of experience" in a "true reflection of Islamic cosmology."[156] For both men, pattern represented Islam, and it had a spiritual significance that was key to understanding the religion and teaching others about it. Albarn and Keeler also shared a background as British individuals investigating Islam, modeling a particular behavior for their audiences to follow. Such an approach, Keeler hoped, would help develop a new way of redressing social problems derived from witnessing Islamic art.[157]

The pattern and design that defined the 1971 exhibition was also adapted into advertisements, thus making geometry and design a key metonym for Islamic art, and a conduit for engaging the public. In one poster for an event featuring musician Mahmud

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[154] Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 38.

[155] Keeler, "44th Cultural Majlis." Keeler narrates this relationship in depth in his new autobiography. See: Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 29-35. As Keeler learned about India, his counterpart David Medalla also took a similar journey to learn about Buddhism, which as Guy Brett notes, contributed toward his Third World politics and later Marxist inclinations. See: Brett, *Exploding Galaxies*, 67-90.

[156] Albarn, *The Language of Pattern*, 34-52.

[157] Elsewhere, Keeler argued that Islam would spark a new Renaissance for the West, and that its arrival might fix the woes of man. See: Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art"." Citing: Paul Keeler, "Example of Islam attracts West," *The Times,* March 20, 1975, np.

Mirza, who was also Keeler's friend and mentor, a geometric pattern overwhelms the page, much like the designs filled the ICA's wall (see Figure 2-3). An eight-sided star radiates toward overlapping hexagonal shapes recalling an octagonal star and a repeating motif connected by interlaced squares and triangles. The 8-sided star frames a negative space with information about Mirza's concert at Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room. Advertising the concert through geometry rather than a picture of Mirza creates a visual relationship between pattern and repetition in music and Islamic art, as interpreted by Albarn at the ICA. Moreover, depicting music with a similar visual language draws a connection to the Islamic civilization Keeler wanted to present, thus illuminating the many facets of Islam that Keeler and the public alike were exploring. I will return to the ways that Islam, geometry, and ornament carried through to 1976.

The novelty of Islamic art presented in this moment drew an array of responses that reflected stereotypes around the subject. A masterful planner and ingenious marketer, Keeler titillated everyone's senses, engaging scholars and the public through various events reflecting the multifaceted nature of Islam. On one hand, anticipation yielded Orientalist language where one writer suggested "The Institute of Contemporary Arts… is going Muslim," describing the festival as a "jamboree," and expressing trepidation about the presence of Islamic art.[158] Others were less skeptical, instead building anticipation as early as May 1971 around the festival as the first of its kind.[159] Princess Margaret attended the

[158] "Muslims to Take Over ICA," *Design* no. 272 (August 1971): 17. Cited in: Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art"."

[159] Staff Reporter, "London Festival of Islamic Art and Culture," *The Times,* May 19, 1971, 19.

opening, and the Queen had an early preview, signaling to British audiences that the event was worthwhile.[160] On the other hand, British critic Guy Brett called *World of Islam* a "small but intelligent" exhibition with thought-provoking questions about Islamic art that would inspire new interest.[161] While coincidental, the early publicity and later reviews follow a narrative arc that mimics Keeler's journey from uncertain, if not entirely uninterested, toward an effort to learn, understand, and inquire further.

The 1971 *World of Islam* sketched out an important blueprint for what would take place in 1976. Keeler maintained his interest in engaging the public through Islamic art to break down divides between Muslims and Christians. Geometry and pattern also remained pivotal pathways for connecting people with Islamic art. Historical art and culture were further utilized as critical conduits for addressing social problems. Moreover, the 1976 festival allowed Keeler to realize his original ambitions and rectify the debt from 1971.[162]

D. Planning 1976: A Framework Organizing the festival was a monumental logistical and financial feat led by Keeler with support from the World of Islam Festival Trust and funding from the Middle East. After months of brainstorming about the festival's components and scoping out suitable venues in different London museums, the planning

[160] "Court Circular," *The Times,* November 12, 1971, 16.

[161] Brett, "Pattern and nature in Islam," 12. Here, Brett attributed the predominance of pattern to the longstanding yet inaccurate belief in a ban on the human figure in Islamic images, something Keeler repudiated much later.

[162] Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 15. In a recent lecture, Keeler noted if it weren't for his original debts, he may never have taken on the ambitious effort to do a second festival. See: Keeler, "44th Cultural Majlis."

process formally began by establishing oversight to ensure the relevant financial, social, and political networks were in place for a successful event.

Founded in October 1973 and led by British diplomat Sir Harold Beeley, The World of Islam Festival Trust was a non-profit organization in London that coordinated festival operations and administered funds. The Trust's larger goal was to create a legislative body that facilitated ongoing events about Islamic culture through what the Trust specified would be "non-political" "scholarly, cultural and artistic work."[163] Its trustees were described by Indonesian politician and scholar Mohamed Natsir as "British figures, lovers of Culture" who derived their authority from their education and careers as ambassadors, publishers, artists, and diplomats, much of which also came from their connections to London as an imperial and academic nexus.[164] The diplomats were exceedingly important for negotiating loans and fundraising from foreign governments. Within the Trust was a sub-group of philosophers, scholars, professors, architects, artists, historians, and writers led by Keeler who oversaw the

[163] First press release for the World of Islam Festival, March 1975, INF12/1307; Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England.

[164] Mohammad Natsir, *World of Islam Festival dalam perspektif sejarah: ceramah pada tanggal 19 Juni 1976 di Gedung Kebangkitan Nasional Jakarta* (Jakarta: Yayasan Idayu, 1976), 11; Official World of Islam Festival program, April 1976, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. There were seven trustees who oversaw the logistics of the festival: Sir Harold Beeley; H.E. Sayed Mohamed Mahdi al-Tajir; Lord Caradon; F. Clive-Ross; J.B. Knight-Smith; Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Nutting, Bt.; and Sir John Richmond. Five of the seven trustees were former ambassadors, and the other two (Clive-Ross and Knight-Smith) were publishers with a history of publishing perennial philosophy. One contemporary artist also made the program: Ali Omar "Remayes" was listed as a visual consultant. His name is actually Ali Omar Ermes.

festival.[165] Seven of these 15 individuals were Muslim.[166] The Trust included a variety of scholarly backgrounds, but including Muslim and non-Muslim members meant that all viewpoints were represented. Furthermore, the Trust's primary location in London allowed it to be deeply connected to London's political and academic networks, and in turn, the Islamic world Keeler wished to show.

The Trust had multiple functions, which for one, included addressing skeptics. The Trust fielded questions about whether Keeler had the organizational skills and knowledge necessary to execute the event from an Islamic point of view.[167] Some early press was optimistic about Keeler's longstanding interest in Islam, and his ability to produce an engaging event. Even Keeler's co-organizers, like Nobert Lynton, questioned his ability to

[165] Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England. The organizers included Professor Syed Naguib Al-Attas; Professor Walid Arafat; Nader Ardalan; Titus Burckhardt; Issam El-Said; Hakeem Abdul Hameed; Professor Yusuf Ibbish; Dr. Husain Mones; Dr. Mustapha Mu'min; Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Dr. Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi; Dr. Hakim Mohamed Said; Dr. Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din; Osman Waqialla; and Dr. Yaqub Zaki.

[166] Summary of festival components, December 1975, FCO13/766, National Archives, London, England. Keeler is not included as he has not yet converted. Natsir suggests that only two are Muslims, Yahya al Tajir, and Sheikh Shukri, meaning he excluded the many white converts. See: Natsir, *World of Islam Festival dalam perspektif sejarah*, 11. Syed Naguib al-Attas, Hakeem Abdul Hamid, Yusuf Ibbish, and Yaqub Zaki (formerly James Dickie) also identified as Muslim.

[167] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Norbert Lynton, Esq., March 28, 1973, Box 5, Folder 2; Correspondence from Norbert Lynton, Esq., to Paul Keeler, March 29, 1973, Box 5, Folder 2; Memo from Norbert Lynton, Esq., to Basil Gray, Ralph Pinder-Wilson, Robert Skelton, Edmund de Unger, David Sylvester, and Alan Bowness, April 2, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Their organizational concerns were not misguided, as Keeler created many problems by missing important meetings.

create a show about Islamic art that sidestepped "western predilections."[168] These tensions followed Keeler throughout his planning efforts, fostering a push and pull between those who believed in the event, and those who doubted its intention and legitimacy, pointing to a larger problem present throughout the period: who speaks for Islam, on what grounds, and to what end?

These conversations were a key part of the Trust's other job: to speak for Islam and define the idea of Islamic civilization vis a vis Keeler's ideology. Keeler's goal for 1976 was an event fit to be opened by the Queen, and as he describes, "the most important cultural event devoted to Muslim civilization ever to have been held in the Western world," surpassing events such as the 1910 exhibition in Munich.[169] Each event within the festival contributed to a comprehensive view of Islamic civilization, a term Keeler adopted for lands stretching from Morocco to Indonesia between c. 650–1800. In hindsight, Keeler also explains that the festival was guided by a belief in the unity of Islam and Islamic Civilization and understanding Islam "in terms of its own criteria," not that of Western academics.[170] This definition of Islam did not include contemporary art, or diasporic Muslim populations in Britain.

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[168] "After Tut, The Koran," *The Guardian,* August 30, 1973, np. On Western predilections, see: Correspondence from Norbert Lynton, Esq., to "Chairman" (presumably Basil Gray), May 18, 1973, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[169] Keeler, *Reflections of an English Muslim*, 16; Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England. Keeler narrates the four-year planning process here in two and a half pages.

[170] Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 46.

The festival espoused ideas about Islam and its unity that derived from personal beliefs and the Western dispositions they spoke against. Festival organizers like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Titus Burckhardt, Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din (née Martin Lings), and Keeler were Muslims and students of German-Swiss convert to Islam Frithjof Schuon, who advocated for perennialism, which thus influenced his followers.[171] For Schuon, a student of French meta-physicist and writer René Guenon, perennialism is a religious philosophy that considers Islam in relation to other world religions to identify the Truth behind different beliefs.[172] This ideology ruminates on Islam's essence by *a priori* comparison to the philosophical nature of other world religions to argue for a universal, transcendent knowledge, or a singular truth that can guide people out of "ignorance," as Schoun says.[173] Where religions differ is in their

[171] Schuon was not based in London, nor was the school he founded. The festival's program also promoted perennial texts. See: Official festival brochure, 1976, Box 3, folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Schoun founded the Tariqa Maryamiyyah, or the Maryamiyyah Sufi Order, which springs out of the Alawi Tariqa, a Sufi order that arrived in London in 1936, and is responsible for many of the white converts to Islam in the mid-to-late twentieth century. See: Ansari, *'The Infidel Within'*, 137-43; Grinell, "Framing Islam at the World of Islam Festival, London, 1976," 73-93; and Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). In his recent biography, Keeler addresses Schuon's perennial ties. He explains he was part of the Maramiyya Tariqa with Lings and Schuon, amongst others, and this was a key part of his introduction to and knowledge of Islam. However, Keeler goes on to renounce perennialism as a falsehood, one that distorts Islam, and suggests that the Maramiyya showed him the falsehood of perennialism. Keeler later broke away from the tariqa and Schuon. See: Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 83-4. For a broader overview of Schuon's thinking within a larger trajectory of perennial thinking and Sufi thought on Islamic art, see: Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn."

[172] Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2004), 1-5; Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn," 27-8. Truth is Schuon's capitalization.

[173] Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976), vii; Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993), xxiii; Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, vii-viii. Guermazi notes that Schuon's *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* was "the

external form, which can create conflict.[174] While Islam is rooted in unity, seen in god's oneness (*tawhid,* as opposed to the Christian trinity), or the *ummah* (a unified, global community of believers), perennialism put forth a metaphysical unity beyond Islam, including the shared god connecting Abrahamic religions. Perennialism is not a branch of Islam, but a product of Western philosophical thinking around the nature of religion.

Yet the ideas espoused by the Trust, and the authority given to them to speak for Islam, presents a paradox, one which is also inflected by the UK's connections to Orientalist thinking. The Trust and festival's disposition saw Islam as a monolith in binary opposition to Western ways of thinking. This ideology was presented as objective, but it reflected the organizer's personal lineages, showcasing the way religion is contingently constructed.[175] The homogeneity of Islam they advocated for was a false premise, as Islam encompasses multiple points of view based on personal beliefs, backgrounds, and religious and scholarly

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only other work concerned with Islamic theology and metaphysics that the festival selected for publication." See: Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn," 229.

[174] Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, xi-xviii.

[175] Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 6, 72-3, 104. When asked, Keeler denies that the festival was done from any framework of traditionalism or perennialism and rejects claims people like Klas Grinell set out about this matter, and on which I elaborate. Instead, Keeler says Islam was presented "on its own terms" or "from within," claims which neglect to illuminate to outside audiences how definitions of Islam are not monolithic. See: Ahmed Keeler in discussion with the author, September 3, 2020. I maintain the relevance of perennialism as it can be understood from the biographies of the organizers and textual sources. Further supporting this claim is the advent of Islamic civilization, not as a term from primary sources, but as one articulated and defined in Western academies. See: Kevin Bladel, "A Brief History of Islamic Civilization from Its Genesis in the Late Nineteenth Century to Its Institutional Entrenchment," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 28 (2020): 150-73. Furthermore, Iheb Guermazi's recent dissertation also further delineates the connections to perennial thinking at the festival. See: Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn."

education. Meanwhile, the festival advocated for a multicultural unity constructed along religious lines, necessitating polysemous ways of thinking. A new British multiculturalism meant acknowledging and tolerating multiple viewpoints within and across traditions, yet the festival's tenets only allowed one disposition, thus inherently decreasing the possibility for dialogue. Moreover, their entire framework was rooted in the very Western way of thinking they strongly spoke against.[176]

While subjective British ways of thinking about Islam funded the festival, it was funding from the Middle East that enabled its realization, even though the British government was not involved. British cultural projects, including the World of Islam Festival, benefitted from Gulf wealth and other projects in the wake of OPEC, and the bountiful oil revenue from the Gulf States and Iran, which was publicly noted.[177] This funding bolstered London's history as a site where, as described by Mohammad Natsir, "culture-enthusiast English scholars" crafted an academic study of the Middle East to present the Muslim world and attempt to

[176] Such a critique has also been leveled against different ideas of Islamic art that focus on its Islamic character without recognizing the Western nature of the construct. See: Terry Allen, *Five Essays on Islamic Art* (Manchester: Solipsist Press, 1988), 2; Amy Goldin, "Islam Goes to England," in *Amy Goldin: Art in a Hairshirt: Art Criticism, 1964-1978,* ed. Robert Kushner (Stockbridge: Hard Press Editions, 2011), 219.

[177] Christa Salamandra, "Cultural Construction, The Gulf and Arab London," in *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf,* ed. Paul Dresch (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 73-4; Mohammad Natsir, "World of Islam Festival" dalam Perspektif Sejarah," *Budaya Jaya* 99 (1976): 451; "Marvels on a Magic Carpet," *Sunday Times,* April 4, 1976, np.

bring Muslims in touch with Europeans.[178] Both this wealth and London's role in Middle East studies shaped the World of Islam Festival, as oil profits provided key financing.[179]

Estimates suggest the festival cost between 1 and 4 million pounds.[180] British institutions offered little aid due to collapsed exchange rates, inflation, rising oil prices, a burgeoning recession, and rampant unemployment, which diminished public art programs (conditions not dissimilar to funding challenges at the ICA in 1971). The British Council, an independent government entity representing Britain overseas, did not involve itself.[181] The FCO (Foreign & Commonwealth Office), a ministry designed to globally protect British interests, did not

[178] Natsir, *World of Islam Festival dalam perspektif sejarah*, 40-3. Natsir's language is echoed in the press of the time, which refers to organizers as "culture-oriented persons." See: "World of Islam Festival," *The Muslim World,* December 27, 1975, np.

[179] Correspondence from Harold Beeley (Chairman of Trustees) to P.M.G. Wright, August 28, 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England.

[180] Moorehead and Natsir suggest the cost was 2 million pounds. See: Moorehead "Four Years Scouring the World for Rare Exhibits," 11; Natsir, *World of Islam Festival dalam perspektif sejarah*, 12. Amy Goldin figures 3.5 million pounds. See: Goldin, "Islam Goes to England," 216. Christa Salamandra says it was 2.25 million, 80% of which was paid for by the UAE. See: Salamandra, "Cultural Construction, The Gulf and Arab London," 76. Citing: *World of Islam Festival Trust, 1973-1983: The First Ten Years* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983), np. Sabini says it was $4 million, not pounds, as does Ainsworth. See: John Sabini, "The World of Islam: Its Festival," *Saudi Aramco World* 27, no. 3 (May/June 1976): 2-4; Rachel Ainsworth and Sarah Worden, "Jean Jenkins, Music and the 1976 World of Islam Festival," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 28 (2015): 189. The first overall estimate was 1 million pounds, which was quickly surpassed. See: Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629; Correspondence from K.G. Halestrap to The Representatives, February 21, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[181] Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, xiii; Correspondence from P.R.V. Deed to Colin Prickett, Esq., September 12, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

give funds, but facilitated contact with embassies.[182] The Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) was in a precarious situation as they reckoned with growing deficits.[183] ACGB provided *The Arts of Islam* between 40,000 and 116,000 pounds, none from taxpayer funds, which festival organizers treated as a loan they promised to repay.[184] ACGB was otherwise detached, occasionally comforting weary lenders, but never offering indemnities.[185] The lack of British support allowed organizers to reject criticism that the festival was funded by tax-payers, but undermined ideas of unity as institutions declined to participate. At the same

[182] Telegraph from J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., to A.J. Coles, October 5, 1973, FCO 13/629; Correspondence from R.N. Dales to S.H. Wright, Esq., October 28, 1975, FCO13/765, National Archives, London, England.

[183] Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, xv, 171-4. On the history of the Arts Council, see Peter Lord, "Homogeneity or Individuation? A Long View of the Critical Paradox of Contemporary Art in a Stateless Nation," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 56-70. Notably, the Hayward Gallery where *The Arts of Islam* was held was understood to be the "public face" of the Arts Council at the time, perhaps making this choice of exhibition venue clearer. See: Kirsten Forkert, "Artists and the Labour Movement," in *British Culture and Society in the 1970s*, ed. Laurel Forster and Sue Harper (London: Cambridge, 2010), 59. The Hayward was also the site of protest at the time by feminist artists dissenting against all male shows. See: Young, "Introduction," 24-25.

[184] Parliamentary question from Mr. Greville, March 21, 1975, FCO13/764, National Archives, London, England. The answer was in a written response tied to parliamentary debates on March 26, 1975. See: "Written answers," *Hansard* 889, no. 96, March 26, 1975. In his interview, Roger Malbert suggests that the Arts Council "still" ran the Hayward in 1983, implying perhaps that the Arts Council ran the Hayward during the festival, but there is nothing else to support this claim. See: Imogen Racz, "Roger Malbert," in *British Art of the Long 1980s: Diverse Practices, Exhibitions and Infrastructures,* ed. Imogen Racz (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 125. On the loan, see: Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England.

[185] Telegraph from Callaghan, December 1, 1975, FCO 13/765, National Archives, London, England. Government indemnities were key to *Treasures of Tutankhamun*. A summary of the Trust's activities published several years after the festival ended erroneously says the British Treasury offered indemnities. See: *World of Islam Festival Trust, 1973-1983,* np.

time, the festival's relationship to ACGB gave the aura, importance, and legitimacy of a state-run project because the council was a state proxy, thus facilitating a high-level event even though the partnership was not financially lucrative.

In light funding deficiencies in Britain, Keeler turned to what he called "Moslim Governments" [sic] for funding, from which he anticipated to receive half the needed funds while never publicly recognizing the irony of turning to Britain's former colonies for support.[186] The Trust claimed support from the Middle East was necessary to mount a worthwhile presentation of the Islamic world that would promote mutual understanding.[187] British officials also suggested going to Arab countries to make up the deficit.[188] British ambassadors in Middle Eastern countries shared information about the festival with heads of state, reported back about interest, and then festival organizers would court officials through diplomatic visits, such as in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran.[189] While logistically necessary,

[186] Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England.

[187] Correspondence from Harold Beeley (Chairman of Trustees) to P.M.G. Wright, August 28, 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England. Such a line of thinking that emphasized using Islamic art to build understanding is also a historical trope. See: Melissa M. Forstrom, "Islamic Art Exhibition, Orientalism, and Contemporary Socio-politics," in *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, ed. Onur Özturk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker (London: Routledge, 2022), 123-34.

[188] Telegraph from R.A.F. Sherwood, February 11, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. The note also states that a British contribution is appropriate, but the Council did not have the funds.

[189] Exhibitions Committee Meeting Minutes, January 7, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England. Iran immediately responded positively to requests. Other documents suggest Qatar and Libya were on this list but were later removed. See: Correspondence from Alistair Duncan to J. A. L. Morgan, Esq., April 25, 1973, FCO 13/629; Correspondence from Alistair Duncan to Hilary Evans, June 20, 1973, FCO 13/629, National Archives, London, England.

funding from Middle Eastern governments bolstered the event's legitimacy by giving organizers the ability to claim support from Muslims and the Middle East, and in turn, their view of Islam.

The same oil funds that incited aforementioned racial and ethnic tensions in Britain were also integral to the list of funders. Notably, most donors were a former colony, mandate, or protectorate of the British Empire; the hegemony's subjects during the age of imperialism were now financing attempts to fix the Empire's problems during a decolonial era. The newly-independent United Arab Emirates was the largest donor, thanks to Emirati ambassador to Britain Mohammed Mahdi al-Tajir, who negotiated for 100,000 pounds, and then 500,000 more; the UAE also promised to support any shortfalls.[190] Kuwait was the second largest at 100,000 pounds.[191] Saudi Arabia donated first, and they financed the British Library's Qur'an exhibition at the festival; inspired by Kuwait's generosity, they gave c. 250,000 pounds.[192] Egypt's expected gift of 100,000 pounds, in addition to covering

[190] Salamandra, "Cultural Construction, The Gulf and Arab London," 76; Correspondence from R.N. Dales to R.W. Wright, Esq., October 28, 1975, FCO13/765; Correspondence from Hilary Evans to Mr. Kinchen, July 21, 1975, FCO13/765; List of album presentations, October 22, 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England; Exhibitions Committee Meeting Minutes, January 7, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England. On overdrafts, see: Caroline Moorehead "Four Years Scouring the World for Rare Exhibits," *The Times,* April 2, 1976, 11.

[191] Exhibitions Committee Meeting Minutes, April 2, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England. Also see: *The Times*, April 1, 1974; Max Warren, "A Meeting of East and West," *New Fire,* Winter 1974, 179-82.

[192] Exhibitions Committee Meeting Minutes, February 12, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England.

transportation costs, was bait for Saudi Arabia.[193] Saudi King Faisal helped fundraise by publicly proclaiming "the duty of every Muslim to contribute towards the Festival to enable it to achieve its aims."[194] Libya donated roughly 100,000 pounds; Iraq 100,000 dollars.[195] Iran contributed 100,000 dollars, and paid for the British Museum's Isfahan exhibit; they also committed to bringing Iranians to the festival.[196] Organizers did not secure support from Morocco and Algeria, among others.[197] Inquiries to Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, Pakistan, Algeria, Turkey, and Oman went unrequited.

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[193] Notes of Discussions of a Meeting Held on Monday, January 4, 1974, BW1/650; Correspondence from Hilary Evans to Mr. Kealy, June 11, 1975, FCO 13/765, National Archives, London, England. In return, the Saudis wanted what they identified as a "non-political Muslim" appointed as trustee.

[194] Notes of Discussions of a Meeting Held on Monday, January 4, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[195] Minutes of a meeting, June 19, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England; Correspondence from K.D. Temple to J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., January 30, 1975, FCO 13/764, National Archives, London, England; "Iraq to participate in World Islamic Festival," *The Baghdad Observer,* December 3, 1974, np.

[196] Correspondence from Hilary Evans to Mr. Kinchen, July 21, 1975, FCO13/765; Telegram from A. D. Parsons, May 14, 1975, FCO13/765; Correspondence from A.B. Lambert to G.R. Tribe, Esq., February 21, 1976, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[197] Correspondence from J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., to R.W. Bailey, June 28, 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England. Part of this might problem have been a miscommunication in which members of the Trust did not communicate appropriately with Morocco, given that by 1975, Moroccan representatives had no knowledge of any communication about their participation. See: Correspondence from M.A. Marshall to J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., April 9, 1975, FCO13/764, National Archives, London, England. Other correspondence, however, intriguingly suggests Moroccans did participate, and gave their royal blessing. See: Correspondence from R.W. Bailey to J.A.L. Morgan Esq., January 24, 1975, FCO13/764, National Archives, London, England. On the Algerians, see: Correspondence from J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., to M.B. Collins, Esq., January 13, 1975, FCO13/764.

Middle Eastern funding was as contentious as the festival itself.[198] British ambassador to Saudi Arabia A.K. Rothnie noted his distaste for the call to write to "Moslim governments" [sic], suggesting that if there were a request for participation from what Rothnie called "Kristian governments" [sic] for a festival hosted by a Muslim country, reception might not be favorable.[199] To utilize and repeat "Moslim governments" without definition propagates an essentialized, Orientalist view of the Middle East that assumes political and religious homogeneity, much like the festival essentialized Islam. Donors did not have any input in the festival or its exhibitions, perfectly exemplifying what Said would later call Orientalism.

The public, like government officials, probed the nature of Middle Eastern funds. The first festival press release announced that the Trust would solicit funds from the Middle East.[200] After an ad in *The Times* (1974), journalist Max Warren questioned the festival by noting its petrol funding might imply political motivation, also contemplating if the goal of bettering the Western perception of Islam was tied to the proselytizing nature of Islam.[201] Journalist Donald Watt interpreted the festival's funding as an "Arab propaganda exercise"

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[198] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Norbert Lynton, March 22, 1973, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[199] Correspondence from A.K. Rothnie to J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., May 12, 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England. Oleg Grabar also took issue with the conflation between Islamic art and Christian art. See: Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 2-3.

[200] First Press Release, March 1975, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England. This statement was made after significant financial support had already been promised and received and termed as "Moslem governments."

[201] Warren, "A Meeting of East and West," 179-82. Warren asks why Muslims and Christians cannot unite, utilizing a clash of civilizations-esque rhetoric.

that he thought required a political payoff, calling the event a "public-relations-inspired exercise in cultural propaganda" based on the number of diplomats involved.[202] Watt reiterated the same frustrations six months later, to which Keeler responded in ire refuting claims about the event's political nature.[203] Watt was the festival's most ardent critic, and one voice indicative of a larger distrust around Arab funds, which resonated with fear around the growing prominence of Arabs in Britain at the time.

Middle Eastern funding was a double-edged sword. These funds made the event possible. Support from Muslims, as implied in Keeler's phrase "Moslem governments," also indicated that the Islamic world agreed with the project and reaffirmed the accuracy of their representations of Islam. This cooperation bolstered the festival's ideology while reflecting a meta-unity. If governments and the individuals within them could collaborate for a shared purpose, including those of different faiths, then the people of Britain could also learn about and coexist with people of other faiths; this was a new British multiculturalism. While the funders modeled unity, in line with the perennial ideology, the source of the wealth in oil,

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[202] Donald Watt, "Festival Full of Eastern promise," *Daily Telegraph*, March 18, 1975, np. Binyon later echoed Watt's claims. See: Michael Binyon, "Islam's world, the most glittering exhibition of all," *The Times,* April 7, 1975, np. An Iranian newspaper called *Kayhan International* notably responded to Watt's critiques, calling his sentiments anti-Islamic. See: "Attacks on Islamic Festival Unjustified," *Kayhan International,* March 24, 1975, np.

[203] Donald Watt, "Misgivings on Festival of Islam," *Daily Telegraph*, November 15, 1975, np. This was in the wake of new funding from Jeddah. On Keeler's defense, see: Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Daily Telegraph, November 17, 1975, Box 8, Folder 3; Correspondence from Paul Keeler to William Daedes, Esq. at the Daily Telegraph, November 17, 1975, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Keeler explains here that he went to the Muslim world for support to make the festival happen, but he argues that participation was merely cultural, not political, concluding that Watt's claims were baseless.

stemming from a crisis that continued to impact Britain, was more important. These tensions show why multiculturalism was necessary but were the same circumstances preventing its realization. Even a carefully constructed, well-financed ideology could not solve social problems across racial and religious lines.

E. Curating 1976: Looking to the Orientalist Past 1971 proved there was an appetite for Islamic art Keeler could satisfy, and with funding in hand from the Arab world, the conversation turned to think about how to curate Islamic art for 1976 and get new audiences excited—a subject both novel and foreign to those who frequented London's many museums.

Organizers positioned *The Arts of Islam* as a successor to *Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst* (Munich, 1910), and turned to *The Treasures of Tutankhamun* (London, 1972) as a model for bolstering public engagement. The World of Islam Festival's effort to build unity through art was not new, but rather it harnessed an extensive legacy of appropriating art and culture to foster social relations. At the time, the festival's use of Islamic art was a new approach to what is now referred to as bridge building, or promoting mutual respect and understanding through education.[204] Specifically, the festival did this at *The Arts of Islam* by utilizing the unity of Islam to theorize and share the unity of Islamic art under the idea of unity and diversity, a concept I describe further in this section. Such a curatorial methodology promoted unity and diversity not only as a way for understanding Islamic art, but also British society.[205]

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[204] On bridge building, see Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 651-81; and Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[205] While I do not explore this question in detail, the idea of unity in diversity has also been discussed as an alternative to cultural nationalism in thinking about the fabric of European societies. See: Ayse S. Caglar, "Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of 'Culture',"

While Islamic art is now a common fixture of many encyclopedic museums, including the British Museum, at the time of the World of Islam Festival, the subject was not prominent in London's museums at the time, meaning the subject was likely relatively novel to many museum audiences, and thus particularly malleable and adaptable for this project. Some audiences were introduced to Islamic art through *Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst*, a major survey of Islamic art at the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 1910. *Meisterwerke* showcased the region defined as the Orient through c. 3,600 objects of Islamic art in order to elevate the field to the level of masterpiece and promote art historical study.[206] Munich was a scholarly endeavor to assert the value of Islamic art through an encyclopedic survey across several period rooms that divorced objects from historical context to assert their aesthetic value.[207] Accompanying the show was a limited-run three-volume tome identifying each masterpiece in the exhibition while also characterizing its uniqueness and importance; the Orientalist methodology framing the catalogue also posited the Islamic world's inferiority as opposed to the West's development.[208] *Meisterwerke* sparked an interest in Islamic art, but it was narrowly confined to scholars and collectors.

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in *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, ed. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London; New York: Zed Books, 1997), 169-85.

[206] Chris Dercon, León Krempel, and Avinoam Shalem, eds., *The Future of Tradition, The Tradition of Future: 100 Years After the Exhibition Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art in Munich* (Munich, New York: Prestel, 2010), 7. Also see: "Exhibition of Mohammedan Art at Munich, 1910," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 6, no. 81 (December 1909): 160.

[207] Ibid., 13, 18; and David Roxburgh, "Au Bonheurs des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910," *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 23-5.

[208] Funda Berksoy, "Art Exhibitions in Munich and Istanbul (1909-18): Cultural Events as Part of German Imperialist Policies," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 189-96.

Meisterwerke was one of the largest and most recent exhibitions of Islamic art before 1976, and as such, festival organizers considered it as a key predecessor; 1976 was to present the next great exhibition of Islamic art.[209] Yet contrary to the scholarly goals of 1910, *The Arts of Islam* proposed an entirely different religious framework for the object that was also directed at a more general audience, further making Munich more of a dialectical counterpart than a parallel example. Instead of identifying and exhibiting masterpieces of Islamic art, *The Arts of Islam* endeavored to reveal the nature of Islamic civilization, or the history of lands where Islam was the dominant religious and political system, through objects; this move indexes the nature of a community where people of different faiths, ethnicities, and cultures hypothetically co-existed without issue.[210] Rather than the collector, the target audience was the Westerner unfamiliar with what organizers termed the "Muslim aesthetic," which was not defined.[211] Further opposing the Orientalist framework of the masterpiece, *The Arts of Islam* was designed to present the subject from what Keeler defined as "within" Islamic

[209] Organizers acquired knowledge of the event through reviews, now located in Folder 3, Box, 6, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Positioning themselves in relation solely to the 1910 exhibition misses another landmark show, a survey of Persian art held at the Burlington House in London in 1931, which is often ignored due to its narrow focus on Persia only. This show had governmental support from Iran. See: Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (March 2003), 155; Oleg Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology: The Festival of Islam and the Study of Islamic Art," in *Islamic Art and Beyond,* vol. 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 146.

[210] Correspondence from Norbert Lynton to David Sylvester, May 14, 1973, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England.

[211] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Nobert Lynton, May 15, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

civilization, or from an "internal point of view," frameworks that were not delineated.[212] By comparison, *The Arts of Islam* was supposed to be a counter-Oriental, anti-imperial, anti-Western curation project formulated for its domestic agenda of social conflict in Britain.[213] In this way, *The Arts of Islam* and the festival more broadly also departed from Munich by pointing toward the notion of community and society during the time period represented via objects.

While the two exhibitions are ideologically opposite, the curatorial choices made for *Meisterwerke* clearly impacted *The Arts of Islam*; I will return to a thorough gallery analysis of *The Arts of Islam* later in this chapter. Art historian Funda Berksoy notes that the exhibition strategy employed for Munich was "neutral."[214] *The Arts of Islam* features a similar exhibition design: objects are presented against white walls within the framework of the Hayward's modernist architecture, thus drawing attention to the aesthetics of Islamic art. Islamic art historian David Roxburgh also notes that Munich showcased themes in Islamic art, like calligraphy, ornament, and aniconism.[215] *The Arts of Islam* similarly followed a

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[212] Exhibitions Committee Meeting Minutes, January 7, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England.

[213] While *The Arts of Islam* was intended to be solely cultural, it was critiqued as having political motives. In that way, it echoes the international political project connected to *Meisterwerke*. See: Berksoy, "Art Exhibitions in Munich and Istanbul (1909-18)," 173-74.

[214] Berksoy, "Art Exhibitions in Munich and Istanbul (1909-18)," 191. David Roxburgh makes a similar argument by noting that Munich worked to distance itself from Orientalist modes of representation. See: David Roxburgh, "Staging the Orient – A Historical Overview from the Late 1800s to Today," in *The Future of Tradition, The Tradition of Future: 100 Years After the Exhibition Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art in Munich*, ed. Chris Dercon, León Krempel, and Avinoam Shalem (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2010), 18-20. Furthermore, this particular exhibition type was on display for Londoners to see in the V&A

[215] Roxburgh, "Staging the Orient," 18.

thematic approach defined by what organizers deemed the essential characteristics of Islamic art. Both Munich and London repurposed a survey format focused on themes to make Islamic art comprehensible to its designated audiences. Yet despite their vast intellectual differences, the two shows appear similarly, illustrating the ways that interpretations of Islamic art are distinctly shaped by their curators according to social contexts, thus mediating receptions of Islamic art.

After Munich, there were few opportunities for European publics to engage with Islamic art, especially in London, even though these objects were a part of museum collections throughout the city. What few exhibitions there were often emphasized one subject or theme, like Persian art, such as with the 1931 *Persian Art* show at the British Museum that coincided with the major 1931 *International Exhibition of Persian Arts* (Burlington House, London).[216] The British Museum intermittently dedicated galleries to Islamic art, with only one major exhibition specifically for Islamic art between 1910 and 1976.[217] The Department of Oriental Antiquities also featured Islamic art in select projects.[218] The Victoria & Albert Museum

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[216] Joanna Bowring, "Chronology of Temporary Exhibitions at the British Museum," *British Museum Research Publication* no. 189 (2012): 11. Other Persian exhibitions include: *Indian and Persian Paintings* (1922); *Persian Manuscripts* (1934); *Persian Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (1969-70); *Polo Miniatures from Persian and Mughal Manuscripts* (1972).

[217] Ibid., 17. The exhibition was *Islamic Art in India of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (1961-62). For a broader history on the history of collecting and displaying Islamic art in London, see: Ian Heath, *The Representation of Islam in British Museums* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007).

[218] For example, see: *Oriental Books and Manuscripts* (1953); *Art under the Mongol Dynasties of China and Persia* (1955); *Oriental Bookbindings and Book Covers* (1962); *History and Romance in Mughal India* (1966); *The Literature of the Turkish Peoples* (1967); *Oriental Manuscripts* (1973).

intermittently presented aspects of Islamic art, such as about Mughal India; the museum also had galleries dedicated to Islamic art beginning in the 1950s.[219] In 1971, the V&A relaunched their Islamic art galleries, and the neutral-adjacent curatorial method that appeared in Munich and in *The Arts of Islam* was also available for Londoners to see.[220] In 1972, the Hayward Gallery presented an exhibition of Islamic carpets from a private collection, but it did not make claims around the totality of Islamic art.[221] Audiences in the United States were in a similar situation around a paucity of Islamic art.[222] Contrary to *The Arts of Islam*, the few exhibitions that allowed audiences to interact with Islamic art in London were more focused

[219] Elizabeth James, *The Victoria and Albert Museum: A Bibliography and Exhibition Chronology, 1852-1996* (London, Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Pub, 1998); Rosemary Crill and Tim Stanley, eds. *The Making of the Jameel Gallery of Islam Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London; New York: V&A Publications, 2006), XI. See: *Mogul Paintings* (1917); *Paper Casts and Photographs of Byzantine Mosaics from the Mosque of the Omeyyads, Damascus* (1931); *Persian and other Near Eastern Metalwork* (1931); *A Loan Exhibition of Persian Miniature Paintings, 1300-1900* (1951); *Turkish, Caucasian, and Persian Carpets* (1958); *Islamic Jades* (1966); *Six Centuries of Persian Painting* (1967); *Turkish Art of the Seljuk and Ottoman Periods* (1967); *Islamic Pottery 800-1400* (1969).

[220] Tim Stanley, "Islamic Art at the V&A," in *The Making of the Jameel Gallery of Islam Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. Rosemary Crill and Tim Stanley (London; New York: V&A Publications, 2006), 21. Likewise, *The Arts of Islam* did not follow any type of media specific approach, which had fallen out of favor at the V&A for some aspects of presenting the collection, as Stanley explains.

[221] *Islamic Carpets from the Joseph V McMullan Collection* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1972). Notably, several figures involved in *The Arts of Islam* were engaged with this project, including May Beattie, who wrote about carpets, and David Sylvester and Norbert Lynton, who assisted with the exhibition's planning. The foreword notes that Ralph Pinder Wilson was also an advisor to the show.

[222] For example, in his 1970 introduction to an exhibition of Islamic art, Ernst Grube suggested that the show was the first in more than 50 years to focus on Islamic art. See: Theodore Robert Bowie, *Islamic Art Across the World: An Exhibition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Art Museum, 1970), 7. This statement is somewhat hyperbolic, as the Met had galleries, for one, and Esin Atil also curated several exhibitions.

on select cultures and time periods, thus providing discrete historical windows, and making the exhibition's scope particularly novel in its time. Furthermore, the majority of the objects in these collections did not become a part of the festival.

With Munich in mind and British audiences' lack of previous engagement with Islamic art, Keeler saw Islamic art as playing a central role in presenting Islam and Islamic Civilization.[223] As opposed to 1910's scholarly focus, or 1971's emphasis on pattern, Keeler described framing Islamic art in 1976 "as it is understood by Muslims," or "from the Islamic point of view" to educate Western audiences about Islam.[224] Neither Keeler nor his fellow organizers defined this framework, but the language suggests organizers saw a difference between a scholarly view and a personal view held by Muslims. This essentializing binary imagines that knowledge of Islam from personal experience resulted in a different and superior perspective than that of Western scholars who approached the material academically. Furthermore, this perspective suggests that objects of Islamic art have a unique "Islamic" essence that can reveal larger histories. Keeler and his co-organizers subsequently thought that the best approach was not a comprehensive survey, but a selection of the best objects. Everything was to be curated in a mixed-media, semi-thematic fashion to exemplify a set of essential characteristics that define and unite the field of Islamic art; this framework

[223] Meanwhile, Keeler acquired his own knowledge of Islamic art, specifically by spending time in the US visiting museums and attending lectures at Harvard, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and others. He also read the work of people like Ananda Coomaraswamy, Annemarie Schimmel, and Stuart Cary Welch. When he returned to London, he visited places like the British Museum, and the Victoria & Albert Museum to further his knowledge of Mughal India. See: Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 32-7.

[224] Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England.

is known as unity in diversity.[225] Designed for a general public, this overview was a public-facing curation of Islamic art history designed to educate Western audiences about Islam, assuming Islamic art was reflective of Islam and its unity.

Furthermore, the selection of loans was based on a particular framework that emphasized the imperative to feature the "best" pieces from Cairo, Damascus, Istanbul, and Tehran, among other "Muslim governments," as described by Keeler.[226] From there, what was provided by museums in the West would be comparable to whatever came from the aforementioned "Muslim governments."[227] By this logic, a British museum collection could own the same piece as a museum in Cairo, but the work held by the museum in Cairo would be seen as more significant. Why objects from collections in the SWANA region were superior was never explained. However, to posit these objects as central to the exhibition's success suggests they not only might have more aesthetic merit, but also that their current location is more important. This is to imply that perhaps objects from the region's museums

[225] First Press Release, March 1975, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England; Monia Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," in *Global Trends in Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art,* ed. Rui Oliveira Lopes, Giulia Lamoni, and Margarida Brito Alves (Lisboa: CIEBA Edicoes, 2015), 81. On the Hayward framework, see: Exhibitions Committee Meeting Minutes, January 7, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England. On objects from the Middle East being the best, see: Correspondence from Edmund de Unger to Basil Gray, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[226] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Norbert Lynton, March 22, 1973, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[227] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Norbert Lynton, March 22, 1973, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

might be more legitimate representations of Islam than objects in the West and its museum collections. Such an assertion, if this was Keeler's intention, also sows doubt about the provenance of Islamic objects and their legitimacy.

Unity and diversity as a curatorial framework encompassed questions relevant to British society at the time: a connective fiber that was overlooked; differences in background and ways of life that needed to co-exist; an all-encompassing way of life; and a method for coming together. On a personal level, Keeler was recreating an opportunity for audiences to encounter the unity found in Islam that first inspired him. In the context of 1970s London, unity in diversity allowed the festival to present Islamic art as a visual lesson in the history of coexistence between religious groups. Audiences could learn from this history through objects and borrow its messages to foster unity in the form of a new British multiculturalism that advocated for religious tolerance in order to solve broader societal tensions around race, ethnicity, and immigration in a climate of war and proto-globalization. Here, multiculturalism, was contingently constructed along religious lines that sought mutual recognition and dialogue between Christians and Muslims through education to promote a new, bottom-up social contract by asking people to learn ways of thinking and tolerate difference. Furthermore, such a line of thinking echoed the ideas of integration common in the era based in tolerance and understanding as opposed to previous ideas about assimilation.[228] Multiculturalism vis-à-vis unity in diversity becomes a framework for understanding Islamic art and the goal of its display.

[228] For more on defining multiculturalism, see: Farrar, "Multiculturalism in the UK," 7-23; Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "Multiculturalism and Identity: Their Relationship for British Muslims," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 2 (1998): 347-54; Ralph Grillo, *Living with Difference: Essays on Transnationalism and Multiculturalism* (Lewes: B and RG Books of Lewes, 2015); Christine Halse, "Theories and theorising of multiculturalism," in

The person in charge of taking this ideology and turning into an exhibition was Titus Burckhardt, who was also a historian of Islamic art appointed curator by the Trust. Burckhardt was appointed over American Islamic art historian Ernst Grube and British Islamic art historian Basil Gray. Grube proposed a show about Islamic art's historical evolution, which not only contradicted the stated opposition to a comprehensive survey of Islamic art, but Grube's scholarship also rejected the idea of Islamic art's innately religious character.[229] Indeed, only a few years before, Grube wrote about how Islamic art was not a "religious art," and there was no such thing as "Islamic art," nor was there an innate unity to it, all ideologies which directly countered *The Arts of Islam*.[230] Indeed, it is not redundant to re-emphasize here that Grube's thinking was almost antithetical to what recent scholarship by Iheb Guermazi has discussed as the Sufi theory of Islamic art, as proposed by scholars like Titus Burckhardt and Frithjof Schuon, that proposes Islamic art as a "manifestation of Sufi esoteric doctrines," and more importantly, Islam's essence itself.[231] Meanwhile, Gray

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Multiculturalism in Turbulent Times, ed. Christine Halse and Kerry Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2021), 3-19; Nasar Meer, *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

[229] Proposal from Ernst Grube for "An International Exhibition of Islamic Art," September 1, 1973, Box 11, Folder 4, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Grube also noted the importance of the 1910 exhibition.

[230] Ernst Grube, "Islamic Art – a Proposed New Classification," in *Islamic Art Across the World: An Exhibition*, ed. Theodore Robert Bowie (Bloomington: Indiana University Art Museum, 1970), 7-9.

[231] Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn," 13. In the dissertation, Guermazi also astutely summarizes the festival as a unique attempt to make Islamic art "Islamic."

recommended a chronological display of Islamic art to illuminate key themes, but his approach also went against the organizers' idea that a survey show was not appropriate.[232] Burckhardt, by comparison, proposed a selective display based on repeating elements that saw Islamic art on its own terms so Islam could invoke a new vision of the world.[233] Through thematic rooms, Burckhardt sought to show the unity of Islam and the shared language of Islamic art through geometry, rhythm, calligraphy, and arabesque, alongside other themes, like the roots of Islamic civilization and the mosque.[234]

Burckhardt's curatorial praxis drew from his previous scholarship and echoed the festival's language around new worldviews created through an understanding of Islam. Burckhardt's scholarship argued Islamic art manifested Islamic beliefs.[235] In "The Foundations of Islamic Art" (1967), Burckhardt suggests that the prominence of abstraction in Islamic art is a sign of its unity as it expresses god's divinity through a lack of

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[232] Proposal from Basil Gray, May 22, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England; Exhibitions Committee Meeting Minutes, January 7, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England.

[233] Proposal for "Principles of Islamic Art" exhibition by Titus Burckhardt, nd., Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. There is a second iteration of the proposal. See: Proposition for the Arts Council of Great Britain by Titus Burckhardt, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[234] Ibid. Burckhardt's proposal was critiqued for being too didactic: Correspondence from Norbert Lynton to Paul Keeler, November 15, 1973, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England.

[235] Titus Burckhardt, *Arts of Islam: Language and Meaning* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), 8. For another overview of Burckhardt's scholarship, see: Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn," 234-48.

subjectivity.[236] In *Arts of Islam* (1976), Burckhardt identifies the key attributes of Islamic art, including the arabesque and the Arabic script, and claims that they illustrate the centrality of Islamic art in society, and showcase unity.[237] For him, the arabesque negated figuration, contributed to geometric ornament, eliminated the artist's individuality, and fostered visual metaphors for Paradise.[238] Calligraphy was the most esteemed for transmitting the word of God.[239] For Burckhardt, interweaving these elements, which derived from geometry, exemplified the unity in multiplicity of Islamic art.[240] While art historians have identified formal similarities and repeating attributes of Islamic art, Burckhardt differed by attributing this repetition to a divine sense of unity, and a theological system.[241] Burckhardt's thinking thus defined key attributes of Islamic art, and these features, as well as their significance,

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[236] Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods* (London: Perennial Books, 1967), 101-3; Titus Burckhardt, "Perennial Values in Islamic Art," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 1, no. 3 (1967): 6. Grabar critiques Burckhardt's assertions by noting that geometry as a "metaphor for the all-pervasive but intangible divine" is a "semiotic creation" that is "strikingly contemporary." See: Oleg Grabar, "What Makes Islamic art Islamic?," in *Islamic Art and Beyond*, ed. Oleg Grabar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 250.

[237] Burckhardt, *Arts of Islam*, np. For another critique of Burckhardt, see: Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (London: Phaidon, 1984), 224-5.

[238] Burckhardt, "Perennial Values in Islamic Art," 5-6; Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 109-111.

[239] Ibid., 7; Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 116; Pamphlet for *The Arts of Islam*, 1976, Box 7, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[240] Ibid., 6; Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 109.

[241] Wendy M.K. Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 6 (June 2012): 30.

were shared with audiences in the exhibition program alongside a discussion about god's unity.[242] However, the majority of Burckhardt's scholarship did not cite the extant discourse in Islamic art history at the time.

Burckhardt held similar beliefs to other organizers, but he also fulfilled the festival's dictum that every aspect would be overseen by Muslim academics. His appointment upheld the festival's Islamic point of view, since organizers believed Muslims had a completely different view of the world.[243] Burckhardt also met Keeler's desired attributes, including being someone "of the culture" with knowledge of Arabic, a good writer who knew and could communicate the essential principles of Islamic art and their significance to Muslims, and someone with previous curatorial experience.[244] I interpret Keeler's emphasis on hiring someone "of the culture" as an implicit way of saying someone who is Muslim, an interpretation supported by the Trust and festival's discourse and frameworks. Yet Burckhardt's capacity to do this work was questioned.[245] While people like Martin Lings, a

[242] Pamphlet for *The Arts of Islam*, 1976, Box 7, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[243] Summary of festival components, December 1975, FCO13/766, National Archives, London, England; Draft agreement between the Arts Council of Great Britain and the World of Islam Festival Trust, October 30, 1975, Box 8, Folder 3; Special World of Islam Exhibition Meeting, January 3, 1974, Box 9, Folder 6, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Elsewhere, Keeler noted that Burkchardt and Seyyed Hosssein Nasr were the festival's main theorists. See: Ahmed Paul Keeler, "The festival's Vision," (*Revisiting the 1976 World of Islam Festival*, filmed 2016, London), 14:10, cited in: Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn," 230.

[244] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Nobert Lynton, May 15, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. This letter explicitly mentions that Burckhardt would be a good fit for this position.

[245] Correspondence from Martin Lings to Nobert Lynton, May 18, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

curator at the British Museum, spoke to the quality of Burckhardt's scholarship, Norbert Lynton, a British art historian and director of exhibitions for the Arts Council at the Hayward, questioned if Burckhardt's personal involvement with Islam would hinder his ability to do the job.[246] Lynton's comment is paradoxical, since the Trust said every aspect would be overseen by a Muslim academic. No one else's character and relationship to Islam was questioned like this, particularly not Keeler.[247] Interrogating Burckhardt's character became a proxy for finding someone whose idea of Islam aligned with organizers' preconceived definitions. By choosing Burckhardt, a white convert whose biography echoes Keeler's, he too was a model for how people in Britain might find a new way of life in Islam.

With a defined curatorial approach in mind, organizers also considered how to engage audiences with Islamic art. For this, they turned to a more recent example: *The Treasures of*

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[246] Ibid.; Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 42. In this letter, Lynton suggested Burckhardt was "insufficiently detached" from the subject matter. Keeler also asked Lings to testify to Burckhardt's competence. In a follow up letter from May 24, 1973, Lynton thanks Lings for his recommendation of Burckhardt's character and scholarship, noting that his recommendation means a lot. See: Correspondence from Norbert Lynton to Martin Lings, May 24, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Others believed Burckhardt's relationship with Islam would be helpful. See: Correspondence from Basil Gray to Norbert Lynton, February 14, 1974, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Basil Gray said there was nothing fanatic about Burckhardt. See: Correspondence from Basil Gray to Norbert Lynton, February 14, 1974, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Burckhardt was also critiqued for his English not being good enough. See: Correspondence from Dalu Jones to Robert Skelton, June 27, 1974, Box 9, Folder 2, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[247] The slight exception is that Ernst Grube's character was questioned in light of his recent identification as "persona non grata" at the Met. See: Correspondence from Robert Skelton to Norbert Lynton, July 31, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Grube had been recently fired from the Met for taking kickbacks from art dealers to support his mistresses.

Tutankhamun (British Museum, 1972). The British Museum's presentation of Tut showcased 50 objects for the 50th anniversary of Howard Carter discovering the famous boy-ruler's tomb, a point of pride since a wealthy Brit, Lord Carnarvon, funded the dig. Tutankhamun was a cultural diplomacy project that fostered ties between Egypt and Britain through inter-governmental negotiations securing loans via indemnities.[248] The British public flocked to the show, and the Queen also attended, a signal of importance. In this case, the object held a distinct mystique and intrigue that engaged audiences, as did the unique opportunity to see something that came from far away.

Subsequently, Keeler advertised that *The Arts of Islam* would be "larger than both the celebrated Tuttenkhamon exhibition and the Chinese exhibition," which he achieved by having more artifacts.[249] One early advertisement was also cognizant of the festival's potential, suggesting Keeler could "Out-Khamun Tutan," or draw on Tut to garner enthusiasm.[250] Keeler reiterated this in an interview by noting that "if a dead man, King Tut, could have had such an impact in the West, how much more would a living culture like Islam have."[251] Choosing Tut as a precedent recognized its capacity for presenting history to excite people through what was intriguing and unfamiliar. Likewise, Tutankhamun as a model for exhibition building implies a reliance on Middle Eastern partnerships to gather objects that

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[248] *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (London: British Museum, 1972).

[249] Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629, National Archives, London, England.

[250] "After Tut, The Koran," *The Guardian,* August 30, 1973, 11. Tut was referenced after the festival's opening as well. See: Caroline Moorehead "Four Years Scouring the World for Rare Exhibits," *The Times,* April 2, 1976, 11.

[251] *The Museum,* December 1975-January 1975, np.

new and exciting and would exemplify an intergovernmental unity representative of a top-down model for a similar social unity created on a personal, bottom-up level, all of which were relevant to the World of Islam Festival.

Taken together, *Meisterwerke* and Tutankhamun as interlocutors also indicate the importance and perpetuity of Western, Orientalist thinking around the Middle East to engage new audiences.

F. Advertising 1976 *The Arts of Islam* was at the center of a much larger festival program. Across its three-month run, the World of Islam Festival hosted 13 exhibitions along with numerous programs, including Qur'an recitations, concerts, lectures, readings, and conferences, as well as published eight books and worked with BBC to produce a series of six films titled *The Traditional World of Islam*. The program relied on both the museum and media infrastructure of the city to create a specific experience. While *The Arts of Islam* was the central event, its place within the festival's constellation allowed its scope to be extended through pseudo-collateral events (or other exhibitions) that also expanded the educational experience, its duration, and potentially its impact. If *The Arts of Islam* was the festival's conduit for achieving unity, then the multifaceted advertising campaign used unity in diversity to entice audiences, inviting people to engage, learn, and achieve their goals.

A year before the festival opened, a press release went out announcing the festival and its frameworks. The announcement declares that in the spring of 1976, London will host exhibitions, concerts, conferences, and an academic program showcasing the Islamic world—from Morocco to Indonesia—across 1,400 years. Organizers heralded the festival's large-scale engagement with the study of another civilization as unparalleled. In collaboration with several institutions guided by one legislative body, and shaped by the

expertise of Muslim scholars, the aim was to present the unity of the Islamic world from what organizers identified as an Islamic point of view.[252] Importantly, the press released defined Islam and its temporality, both of which were outside the boundaries of contemporary Britain, even though the event was a means of responding to contemporary British social divisions. Furthermore, the release explained who had the authority to speak for Islam, which was not British Muslims in diaspora from the SWANA region.

Advertising was focused on attracting the festival's target audience, which were British Christians.[253] The choice of audience meant the labor of building a new multiculturalism was put on a narrow spectrum of British audiences who were largely unfamiliar with Islam. The Western aims are further seen in carefully placed advertisements with Western academic organizations like the Middle East Studies Association in the US, and the British Middle East Studies journal, organizations primarily made of white, European scholars.[254] Likewise, important art periodicals also featured announcements, including *Apollo,* the *Connoisseur,* and *Burlington*, even though these periodicals had a limited scope: wealthy, white

[252] First press release for the World of Islam Festival, March 1975, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England. Those who visited the festival recalled that its purpose was about showcasing a *complete* civilization unknown by the Western world. See: Natsir, *World of Islam Festival dalam perspektif sejarah*, 12.

[253] Correspondence from Paul Keeler to Nobert Lynton, May 15, 1973, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England; Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," 82-3.

[254] "News for the Members." *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (May 1, 1975): 91-5; J. D. Latham, Robin Bidwell, and Frank Taylor, "The World of Islam Festival Programme," *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 2, no. 2 (1975): 94-9.

collectors.[255] Promotional material was translated for 24 countries, and distributed through collaborations with travel organizations and hotels, and help from lending countries.[256] More effort was made to engage Muslims in the Middle East than in Britain.[257] And indeed, organizers acknowledged there was not advertising targeted toward the Muslim community in Britain.[258]

Features of Islamic art like calligraphy and geometry were positioned in the exhibition as integral to understanding the material and then appropriated to capture public interest in the World of Islam Festival. Calligraphy was particularly important to this endeavor. Master

[255] Correspondence from Joan Asquith to Joanna Drew, December 2, 1975, Box 6, Folder 7; Correspondence from Joanna Drew to Joan Asquith, December 8, 1975, Box 6, Folder 7, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[256] On translations and collaborations, see: Minutes of a Meeting Between Members of Festival Staff and Representatives of other supporting Organizations, February 21, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. Partners include: Festival office, BTA, British Airways, LEP Travel, Haj Tours, British Council, FCO, ME Association, Intercontinental, and American Express. There were also concerns that the event would conflict with the American bicentennial, as celebrated with the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, detracting potential visitors. See: Correspondence from M.S. Buckmaster to Mr. Jones and Miss Warburton, June 6, 1975, FCO13/765; Minutes of a meeting to discuss overseas publicity, May 20, 1975, INF12/1307; Minutes of a Meeting Between Members of Festival Staff and Representatives of other supporting Organizations, February 21, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. The American bicentennial was also celebrated in London with an exhibition titled *American Art 1750-1800: Towards Independence* from July – September 1976 at the Victoria & Albert Museum. See: James, *The Victoria and Albert Museum,* 566.

[257] Correspondence from M.S. Buckmaster to K.S. Sutton, Esq., May 9, 1975, INF12/1307; Correspondence from M.S. Buckmaster to C.G.A. Denn, Esq., August 8, 1975, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England.

[258] Correspondence from Joan Asquith to Joanna Drew, December 2, 1975, Box 6, Folder 7, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. This was primarily because they were not the target audience.

calligrapher and contemporary Sudanese artist Osman Waqialla designed the festival's logo. He is rarely credited for his contributions, listed only as a design consultant in the festival's program.[259] Waqialla's logo takes the "World of Islam Festival" in Arabic, and transforms the text into sinuous gold gestures decorated by diacritics, and placed on a plain black background (see Figure 2-4). Below the graphic is a generic, sans-serif font announcing the festival's date and location, not detailing where the event was, or what it was about. Viewers may not have made the connection that the logo was an Arabic translation of festival's title. Featured on a poster and a postcard (see Figures 2-4 and 2-5), organizers harnessed the objects' materiality, dimensions, portability, and mutability to achieve broad awareness.[260] Waqialla's calligraphy likewise gave the festival an immediately recognizable brand that reasserted the relationship between Islam and calligraphy, which *The Arts of Islam* illustrated.

While the work was made during the period that encompasses contemporary art, the work itself was not assessed as such by the festival or its organizers. On one hand, Keeler previously mentioned that there was nothing "contemporary" about Islam.[261] Keeler's line of thinking implies that the things which define Islam, including Islamic art, thus also cannot be

[259] Minutes of a Publicity Committee Meeting, July 3, 1975, Box 6, Folder 7, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. In a retrospective history of the trust, Colin Larkin is given credit for designing the poster based on calligraphy by Osman Wagialla [sic]. See: *World of Islam Festival Trust, 1973-1983: The First Ten Years* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983), np.

[260] The estimated print run of the poster was c. 250,000. See: Minutes of a Meeting with British Airways, British Tourist Authority, and Festival office, December 11, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[261] "Muslims to Take Over ICA," 17. Cited in: Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art"," 40-7.

contemporary. In *The Arts of Islam*, Keeler and his colleagues set forward calligraphy as a key feature of Islamic art. Thus, Waqialla's logo is made at a time where it could be conceived of as contemporary art, but the ideology framing the festival and the exhibition prevents it from being considers it as such within the festival's framework. Furthermore, since Waqialla is sometimes neglected in favor of crediting Colin Larkin, this further displaces a contemporary artist connected to Islam from the idea of contemporary art, instead relegating the visual to the historical domain of Islamic art, and the perennial Arabic script. Lastly, because Waqialla rendered the text as a semantic element as opposed to a visual element, it remains within the realm of calligraphy as opposed to *hurufiyyah*, a concept I discuss in chapter three.

Waqialla's design also branded the festival's bilingual brochure, a document with detailed information about the festival, its goals, and location in (see Figure 2-6). The pamphlet foregrounds the relationship between calligraphy and Islam through Waqialla's logo. The next page features a contemporary interpretation of a Qur'an page, reiterating the ties between calligraphy and Islam while presenting basic festival information (see Figure 2-7). Identifiable by its ornate, geometric borders filled with arabesques, and calligraphic text inside the oval frame, the page rehearses the *bismallah* (meaning in the name of god) in the style of a Qur'an manuscript.[262] Putting the *bismallah* here reiterates a common practice of using the text as a benediction to open important events and books. A novice reader may not recognize the text, but similar objects were displayed in *The Arts of Islam*. Prefacing the program with a pseudo-Qur'an page introduces readers to the holy book of Islam and god's

[262] Of note is that most contemporary Arabic texts do not feature full diacritics like this, making it a linguistic feature mostly unique to the Qur'an and some news media.

attributes while familiarizing people with visual features in the exhibition, making it a synecdoche for aspects of Islam and Islamic art critical to the education offered at the festival.

This same program also disseminated ideas for a newly interconnected Britain through visual parallels between a Britain united by the festival's events, and the Asian and African continents unified by Islam. The double centerfold, located between the English and Arabic portions of the program, features a map of London with the institutions hosting festival events, and their names in English and Arabic (see Figure 2-8). The festival draws London together, prompting visitors to traverse the city and see each exhibition, in turn promoting new interactions between audiences through this movement; furthermore, as Islam unifies people, places, cultures, and creative production, so too does the opportunity to learn about Islam's many facets bring British audiences together. Yet what seemed so simple was not. As one visitor noted, to see all of Islam at the festival, "one will have to chase all over London to absorb it all, a taxing pilgrimage."[263] However, the bilingual program nodded to the festival's donors, and the people of different backgrounds who would both attend the event and participate in this multicultural social project, despite the narrow target audience.

This center spread also unfolds into a four-page world map (see Figure 2-9). Dotting the map are images of monuments from the Islamic world, like Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem), and Fatehpur Sikri (the former Mughal capital outside Agra, India).[264] Each structure, related

[263] James Cameron, "Art thou Weary…", *The Guardian*, April 19, 1976, np. Another interpretation of this visitor's response and this map might liken the travel around London to learn about Islam to the experience of traveling for the hajj.

[264] Additionally, there are also ways of thinking that conceive of architecture as manifesting the nature of god as it brings forth unity between the earthly and divine, thus making architecture key to a unity between the cosmos, life, and god's unity (*tawhid*). See:

through shared architectural features, is drawn together by concentric circles radiating out from a central dot at the Ka'aba in Saudi Arabia, visually alluding to the way Islam spread from Mecca across the world. Buildings act as the physical manifestation of Islam's impact across the world and history. The Arabic text on the top right, translated in the opposing corner, advocates for proselytizing Islam, calling on those who believe to be a witness to all mankind. Keeler and Burckhardt as organizers, amongst others, were these witnesses, and their presence, and this caption, calls for their readers, or their British audience to follow suit. By putting a map of the unified Islamic world inside a map of London, their proximity and shared visual features invokes a parallel between London brought together by the festival and a world united by Islam, positing a historical view of the united Islamic world as a model for a new, cohesive London found in Islam. Yet to a more critical eye, the map also reflects the reach of Britain's imperialism, and to a degree, its ongoing neo-imperialism in the region.

If general festival advertisements utilized calligraphy and unity, then those for *The Arts of Islam* highlighted its counterparts, geometry and the arabesque, to make complementary programs encompassing the four essential characteristics of Islamic art. A vibrant green background behind a white serif font, the poster announces *The Arts of Islam* at the Hayward Gallery (see Figure 2-10). The text is more specific, giving key information about where to see the show, its dates, and the admission price (the only exhibition during the festival that

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Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art & Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 37. Nasr, notably, played a role in organizing the festival. Others were also influenced by Nasr's thinking. See: Nader Ardalan, *The Sense of Unity: the Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Dominique Clévenot, *Ornament and Decoration in Islamic Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017); Nisreen Moustafa, *Divine Inspiration: Seven Principles of Islamic Architecture* (Kuala Lumpur: IAMM Publications, 2008).

was not free). The central design is a geometric twelve-sided star made of overlapping squares filled with vegetal, arabesque ornamentation designed by Gary Martin, a British artist inspired by Islamic aesthetics. Much like Keeler hired Albarn for the 1971 *World of Islam* (see Figure 2-2), a British artist again was tasked with interpreting Islam and designing a pattern to entice audiences. British artists and thinkers interpreted and presented ideas about Islamic art to engage Western audiences much like the festival was invented by Western thinkers. Moreover, the geometric forms Martin used echo the 1971 poster for Mirza's concert, the poly-sided star illustrating a relationship between the 1971 and 1976 efforts to engage people with Islam, as well as geometry and Islam (see Figure 2-3). Martin's design synthesizes certain characteristics of Islamic art, emphasizing geometry while alluding to the star tiles seen throughout *The Arts of Islam*, and referencing the repetition of arabesque and floral motifs derived from geometry in his poster, and in the exhibition.

G. 1976:* The Arts of Islam *at the Hayward Gallery While the entire festival espoused a rhetoric of unity, as seen in the festival's advertisements for one, I pose *The Arts of Islam* as the primary mechanism for demonstrating and teaching unity at the festival, not only because it was the anchoring event, but because of the very rhetoric and framework the exhibition posited. The recurring themes of Islamic art seen throughout the objects presented was a metaphor for and symbol of the unity of Islam and Islamic civilization, and thus the idea of a new unified society that the festival aimed to achieve.

The Arts of Islam exhibited roughly 650 Islamic art objects dated to the 7th–19th centuries CE from Tunisia to India, and everywhere in between, serving as a continual touchstone for the festival.[265] *The Arts of Islam* was chosen as the title instead of one proposed by David

[265] Roxburgh, "Staging the Orient," 19-20.

Sylvester, a prominent British art historian, who suggested "1000 years of Islamic art," a title whose parameters are more limited than that of the final exhibition.[266] The *Arts of Islam* connotes the idea of objects as indicative of religion, rather than the arts of Islamic lands, which could account for minority religions in Muslim-majority lands; it refers to a similar time period as "1000 years of Islamic art" without explicitly saying so. The title also connects art to religion, not geography or dynasty. Notably, the choice to use arts in the plural sense implies a multiplicity, one which is key to the exhibition's very fabric as it advocates for Islam as a unifying force. However, such a polysemy is not one, by this language, that accounts for non-Muslim groups who lived in these lands, a curatorial choice that precludes one possible multicultural view of Islamic art.

Furthermore, implicit in the title *The Arts of Islam* is the exhibition's theoretical framework: the idea of unity in diversity, or unity in variety in Islamic art.[267] In other words, the arts in their plural sense (or their diverse form, or varieties) are of or connected to Islam, a religion whose very tenets are founded in the unity of god (*tawhid*); Islam functions here to unite art in all its forms, and the many people who made Islamic art across its many time periods.[268] Unity in diversity is a once fashionable trope in Islamic art history suggesting the

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[266] Minutes of the 2nd Islamic Executive Committee Meeting, May 13, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England. Notably, Basil Gray quipped back that "1001 years might be better," a subtly play on and reference to the infamous and ubiquitous *One Thousand and One Nights*. This chapter's title derives its name from this exchange.

[267] Notably, the idea of unity and diversity has also been a tool for constructing Europe. See: Maryon McDonald, "'Unity in Diversity'. Some tensions in the construction of Europe," *Social Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (1996): 47-60.

[268] The possessive or connective nature embedded in the title is also understood in its Arabic sense. The title in Arabic would be written in an *idafa* structure, a grammatical form

religious roots of Islamic art produce a sense of visual unity, as seen in repeating, or essential visual features, such as the arabesque, calligraphy, geometry, and the figure, that underscore and connect Islamic art. Aesthetic cohesion stands in for, or represents, a unified Islam and Islamic civilization. In other words, while repeating features might be identified as a part of a stylistic consideration of any number of fields, in Islamic art, this specific line of thinking attributes such a pattern, or unity of features, to Islam, an innate religious significance, and the power of the religion to create such unity within and against different circumstances. As scholars have pointed out, this ideology takes the unity of Islam as a religion and transfers it to a way of thinking about Islamic art, one that has also been critiqued for an oversimplification and overgeneralization of multiple complex, co-existing cultures and their contexts.[269]

Preparatory designs by exhibition designer Michael Brawne reveal the roadmap for encountering Islamic art through various approaches that rendered each gallery an opportunity for a point of contact with unity in diversity through objects (see Figure 2-11).[270] Visitors began with a sampling in gallery two, seeing carpets, stucco, and tiles that introduce Islamic art through its many media. Next, gallery three was a projection room showing

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that is used to connote possession or connection between two nouns, in particular. Arts and Islam both function as nouns here, and the *idafa* structure shows their relationship. This structure is also used when referring to concepts like the "state of California" or the "university of California," showing its connection and relationship.

[269] Avinoam Shalem, "What do we mean when we say 'Islamic art'? A plea for a critical rewriting of the history of the arts of Islam," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 6 (2012): 9-13; Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic art history," 28-30.

[270] This counter's Abdallah's argument that the exhibition is thematically oriented. See: Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," 81.

architecture in Islamic lands that presented the physical context for cultural production.[271] Moving to gallery one, audiences saw the essential elements of Islamic art across time and media: calligraphy, arabesque, the figure, and geometry. Upstairs, galleries four and five presented a chronological display to visually suggest that Islam, seen in the repetition of artistic motifs across history, was a unifying force (see Figure 2-12). The fifth gallery also featured objects from peripheral lands to indicate Islam's spread. While the mixed media approach was not new, as seen in presentations ranging from Munich in 1910 to an exhibition of Islamic art at the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo in 1958 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1975 reinstallation, the rejection of chronology, dynasty, and geography in favor of a pseudo-thematic arrangement vis-à-vis unity in diversity was a new way of sharing Islamic art, especially when considered against the single topic shows that had been in London throughout the 20th century.[272]

Exhibition photographs found in the archives and across various press of the time thus help reconstruct the gallery experience and uncover the visual argument made for the unity of Islamic art; to date, this type of walkthrough has not been reconstructed in the extant

[271] Curator Titus Burckhardt required entirely new photographs of all the cities and architectural monuments for his slideshow, which he presented typologically, not chronologically. See: Minutes of the 3rd Islamic Executive Committee Meeting, June 10, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England. In another letter, Jones notes that the fifteen-minute slideshow is correct from "an Islamic point of view," but what Jones means is unclear, nor does she define herself. See: Correspondence from Dalu Jones to Joanna Drew, December 5, 1975, Box 8, Folder 6, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. As Amy Goldin points out, architecture was also absent from 1910, making this room, among other objects in the show, exceedingly important. See: Goldin, "Islam Goes to England," 217.

[272] On the Cairo exhibition, see: Mohamed Mostafa, *Unity in Islamic Art: Guide to the 2nd Temporary Exhibition* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, 1958).

literature. The multifaceted curatorial approach produces a series of visually similar rooms projecting unity on the micro-scale of the gallery through objects and the macro-scale of the exhibition through its key themes. Galleries were densely hung in an approach contrary to the modernist white-cube aesthetic. Most likely, the only didactics were tombstones, which are not currently available, meaning the viewer had to identify the essential characteristics of Islamic art and imbue them with meaning, a significant task given organizers assumed the audience had little to no prior knowledge.[273] In what follows, I outline the contents of the five galleries based on design documents, partial checklists, and photographs in order to match previously unattributed photographs to galleries, and recover how audiences encountered Islam and Islamic art. To date, such a reconstruction does not exist in the extant literature, making this descriptive outline a significant contribution to the field based on its review and synthesis of archival material.

The first gallery of *The Arts of Islam* (gallery two) overwhelms audiences with grandeur: ornate, oversize rugs, vibrant colors, and intricate architectural elements introduce audiences to Islam and Islamic art (see Figure 2-13). The ceramics on the back wall orient the room, as seen in the white *mihrab* that indicates the *qibla* wall, or the direction of Mecca, where Muslims face when praying.[274] The ninth-century mihrab, borrowed from the Baghdad Museum, is surrounded by tiles to create the effect the *qibla* wall. The tiles to the right are an

[273] Grabar notes that the curator overlooked historical specifications, instead presenting artworks based on typology, origin, and sometimes size and color, suggesting that perhaps there may not have been any didactics. See: Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology," 147-8. Cited in: Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn," 233.

[274] Dalu Jones, ed., *The Arts of Islam* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976), cat. 471.

assemblage of like Iranian types from the 13th–14th century—borrowed from European collections—with blue-painted luster and Qur'anic inscriptions extolling god's virtues.[275] To the left are Iznik tiles from c. 16th century Turkey, identified by their blue-and-white paintings and floral motifs, one set from the Mosque of Piyale Pasha, and the other from the Tomb of Selim II.[276] These objects mix sacred and secular as well as eras and styles, but share aesthetic attributes. This curatorial choice also serves to uncover the features of sacred spaces in the Islamicate world so as to suggest what elements might be seen in contemporary British spaces for Muslims to pray, such as the *qibla* wall, albeit in various forms. Although versions of these elements would point Muslims West towards Mecca for prayer when placed *in situ*, be that in Britain or in the Islamicate world, this wall is not actually oriented West as it would be *in situ*. Yet opening the show this way presents Islam as monumental through its large-scale objects, alluding to its evolution into a vast civilization.

The tiles and *mihrab* are a metonym for the context and space where the carpets in this gallery would have been when *in situ*, thus fashioning a wholistic environment (see Figure 2-14).[277] Two carpets hang on the right wall. Displayed vertically, there is an animal carpet

[275] Ibid., cats. 373, 374a-b, 375, 376, 377, 381.

[276] Ibid., 420 and 421. One set is held by the Gulbenkian Museum in Portugal, and the other by the Louvre in Paris.

[277] This particular approach was in sync with contemporary museum practice at the time, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art's installation of its Nur ad-Din house from Damascus (or Damascus room, colloquially). The larger curatorial framework, as designed by Richard Ettinghausen, similarly followed a rhetoric of unity, with variety stemming from regional differences, influenced by the powerful role of Islam as a universal religion. See: Richard Ettinghausen, "Interaction and Integration in Islamic Art," in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed. Gustave E. von Grunebaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 107-31; Richard Ettinghausen, *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), 3-4. Notably, Ettinghausen's approach was distinctly different than that of curators like Esin Atil, whose exhibition *Art of the Arab*

from Mughal India commissioned by Jahangir (son of Akbar), who notably re-adopted Islam as the state religion.[278] To its left hanging horizontally is a garden carpet representing the rivers of Paradise through its straight lines representing water, and floral patterns alluding to paradise's verdant nature.[279] The triangular silk banner at the center dates from the Qajar period (18th–20th centuries), with inscriptions extolling god's virtues.[280] Also hanging from the ceiling in the same gallery, seen in the left third of the photograph, are a trio of 17th–18th -century Ottoman rugs with shared architectural motifs, like columns with Corinthian-style capitals surrounded by floral motifs.[281] Finally, two plinths support more textiles. The rug closest to the *mihrab* is the infamous Ardabil Carpet held by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, a sixteenth-century Persian rug whose scenes of animals and foliage represent Paradise, much like the Garden Carpet to its right.[282] The rectangular carpet in the

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World opened at the Smithsonian in 1975, but with no whiff of unity and diversity. Such a methodology was also used in the 2011 reinstallation, which was reviewed and discussed by Nasser Rabbat. See: Nasser Rabbat, "What's in a Name?" *Art Forum* 50, no. 5 (January 2012): 74-8.

[278] Jones, *The Arts of Islam*, cat. 99. The object is held by the National Gallery in Washington, DC.

[279] This carpet is not pictured in the catalogue.

[280] Ibid., cat. 91. The object is held by the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. The wrong Quranic verses are cited in the catalogue. The Quranic inscriptions on this textile include 68:51-2, 61:13, and 48:01. It is also interesting that a Qajar item is included, given that there was dissent among the organizers about whether Qajar art was Islamic art, as well as the complex relationship between the Qajars, Islam, and modernity. See: Letter from Basil Gray to Edmund de Unger, March 8, 1975, Box 5, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[281] Ibid., cats. 53, 54, 55. These were drawn from American and European collections.

[282] Ibid., cat. 60.

foreground is an eighteenth-century dragon carpet whose palmettes, rosettes, and animals attest to stylistic exchange between Persia and China.[283] The relationship between these textiles points towards an intersection of Paradise as the goal of Islam, rugs as a place for prayer, prayer as integral to Islam, the state's relationship with Islam, and Islam's broad influence, prompting questions about the role of individuals and the state in Islam's expanse. Objects and their function are also presented as integral to all aspects of daily life, much like Islam itself.

Audiences encounter more textiles as they leave the gallery. En route to the transitional ramp, one walks under four wooden roundels with gold calligraphic inscriptions on a blue background, a style similar to the Iznik tiles, that contributes to the larger idea of a mosque-like environment in the gallery (see Figure 2-15). From eighteenth-century Ottoman Turkey, the roundels are typical of Ottoman mosques, here with inscriptions naming key figures in Islam: 'Umar, 'Ali, Husyan, and Fatima.[284] Finally, walking up the ramp, audiences peer over the railing to see six more textiles (see Figure 2-16). The first two carpets cannot be identified from extant photographs. The other four, moving from foreground to background, include a 16th–17th-century Ottoman Lotto rug, now attributed to the Transylvanian style inspired by Turkish knots; a 16th–17th-century Transylvanian rug from the Ottoman empire; a 17th-century Ottoman white ground rug, a type frequently seen in European paintings; and an

[283] Ibid., cat. 70. This was drawn from the private British collection of Edmund de Unger, or the Keir Collection. See: Friedrich Spuhler, *Islamic Carpets and Textiles in the Keir Collection* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), no. 67.

[284] Ibid., cat. 294. These objects were from a private Parisian collection.

18th-century Ottoman prayer rug resembling the Transylvanian rugs.[285] These textiles reflect the Eastern borders of Islam's expanse while showcasing the spread of Islam through visual motifs. Notably, with much of the gallery's content drawn from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the exhibition begins with the era of three empires, an apex of socio-political and economic power in the Islamic world. Furthermore, the gallery begins at the chronological end of Islamic art history while setting forth examples of the ways Islam was the dominant political, social, and religious system, particularly in its heyday with objects being key indicators of this success.

Continuing with the curatorial choice to fashion environments, audiences encountered other architectural features while transitioning to the next gallery. At the end of the ramp is a bronze lamp from c. 14th-century Nasrid Spain with inscriptions praising god, much like others in the gallery (see Figure 2-17).[286] Around the corner, there are two wooden doors with intricate geometric carvings. At the opposite end of the ramp in the hallway to the next gallery, there is a wooden *mashrabiyya*, or window screen, from 14th century Mamluk Egypt situated within an open window-like area (see Figure 2-18).[287] On either side of the *mashrabiyya*, one can peer through to the next gallery, recreating the viewing experience when *in situ*. The rest of the hallway is dotted with small ceramic and wood architectural

[285] Ibid., cats. 41, 51, 50, 49. Three of the four rugs were drawn from a museum in Budapest, while one was from a private collection in England, which was that of Edmund de Unger, now known as the Keir collection. Notably, the work in the Keir Collection was also shown in the 1958 Cairo exhibition. See: Spuhler, *Islamic Carpets and Textiles in the Keir Collection*, no. 24.

[286] Ibid., cat. 175. This was borrowed from a Spanish collection.

[287] Ibid., cat. 455.

features, immersing viewers in an environment reminiscent of walking the streets in the Middle East. The repeat abstract decoration and ornament covering the surfaces of buildings was itself an example of unity as it existed not only in these objects, but as it would have *in situ* throughout a given city.[288]

The idea of the landscape notably frames the next gallery, of which no photographs remain. Gallery three, which was the second gallery audiences visited, was converted into a projection room showing roughly 720 photographs by French photographer Roland Michaud featuring architecture in Islamic lands.[289] This slideshow of Islamic architectural monuments, likely including the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Egypt, the Mosque of Suleymaniya in Istanbul, the Masjid-i Shah in Isfahan (a mosque), and the Great Mosque of Damascus, presented the physical context for cultural production.[290] An accompanying audio track narrated the importance of architecture in Islam while explaining Islam's history, spread, cultural forms,

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[288] Bowie, *Islamic Art Across the World*, 10; David Talbot Rice, *Islamic Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 7. On unity and diversity in Islamic architecture, also see chapter 4 of Allen, *Five Essays on Islamic Art*.

[289] Curator Titus Burckhardt required entirely new photographs of all the cities and architectural monuments for his slideshow, which he presented typologically, not chronologically. See: Minutes of the 3rd Islamic Executive Committee Meeting, June 10, 1974, TGA200816/3/4, The Arts Council of Great Britain "Islamic Executive Committee," Tate Archives, London, England. In another letter, Jones notes that the fifteen-minute slideshow is correct from "an Islamic point of view," but what Jones means is unclear, nor does she define herself. See: Correspondence from Dalu Jones to Joanna Drew, December 5, 1975, Box 8, Folder 6, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[290] "Photographs requested of M. Michaud for the slide projection at Hayward Gallery," no date, Box 3, Folder 5; Letter from Titus Burckhardt to Paul Keeler, November 4, 1974, Box 3, Folder 5, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

and broad relevance.[291] The audio track notably provided critical historical context that would have illuminated new aspects of the many objects on view. Such an approach endeavors to show Islam as a lived experience in its "human and social context," to borrow artist Amy Goldin's phrasing when she saw the exhibition.[292] Additionally, by presenting a broad temporal and geographical scope of Islamic architecture, the slideshow illustrates Islam as a complex phenomenon that reached and united people across history. This, combined with the narrative of Islam's history, presented a visual argument for Islam's unifying power by showing its physical manifestations via architectural presence across the Asian continent. Importantly, as Nur Sobers-Khan notes, the slideshow did nothing to propose that Islamic architecture, and implicitly, Islam, was a vibrant facet of Britain, but something that happened "abroad"; I will return to this point later.[293]

The third gallery in the walkthrough is gallery one, which was the largest, presented the essential characteristics of Islamic art through objects of different media: geometry, arabesque, calligraphy, and the figure. These elements were also represented in gallery two. Leading with the diversity of media underscores the idea that the heterogeneity of Islamic art is critical to its unity, exemplifying disparate things coming together. A plinth stretching

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[291] "Commentary to Slide Projection Sequences on 'Architecture Among the Arts of Islam'," nd., Box 3, Folder 5, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[292] Goldin argued that the lack of this context was "a kind of barbarism." See: Amy Goldin, "Islamic Art: The Met's Generous Embrace," in *Amy Goldin: Art in a Hairshirt: Art Criticism, 1964-1978,* ed. Robert Kushner (Stockbridge, MA: Hard Press Editions, 2011), 191.

[293] Nur Sobers-Khan, "The *Islam in Europe* Exhibition and the World of Islam Festival: Curatorial Aporia and Failure as Methodology," in *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, ed. Onur Özturk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker (London: Routledge, 2022), 68-9.

from end to end at the center of the room features sumptuous carpets in shades of red with vegetal motifs (see Figure 2-19). First in the foreground is a 17th-century Persian "Polonaise" carpet, its name referencing the relationship between the Safavids and the Polish rulers who commissioned it.[294] Next is a 16th-century Persian medallion carpet with designs based on Chinese motifs, like the Ardabil carpet.[295] There are three other carpets leading to the 16th–17th-century Ottoman Lotto carpet on the back wall named after the painting by Sebastiano del Piombi it appeared in, and recalling the Holbein carpets in later galleries.[296] To the left of the plinth between the vitrines are textiles hanging vertically, which cannot be identified from photographs (see Figure 2-19). Preceding the vitrines are a trio of Central Asian architectural fragments from the 14th century all from Samarkand.[297] Displays to the right of the plinth feature kaftans, showing people's attire during the Ottoman and Safavid

[294] Jones, *The Arts of Islam,* cat. 64. This was borrowed from the V&A. The Polonaise carpet was likely a gift for European princes. Polonaise here means Polish, items which were also exhibited in 1910. See: Eva-Maria Troelenberg, "Framing the Artwork: Munich 1910 and the Image of Islamic Art," in *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition "Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst" Reconsidered*, ed. Andrea Lermer and Avinoam Shalem (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 39. More recent literature objects to the idea of Polish or Polonaise, calling it a misnomer "reflecting the mistaken identification of a related Persian carpet belonging to Prince Wladyslaw Czartoryski from Krakow at the Paris Exposition of 1878." See: Jessica Hallett, "Calouste Gulbenkian and the Rise of Islamic Art," in *The Rise of Islamic Art* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2019), 28.

[295] Ibid., cat. 61. This carpet came from Washington, DC. Notably, the relationship between Persian and Chinese art broadly speaking was also a key theme in the 1910 Munich exhibition. This is not the only parallel, but one of many. See: "Exhibition of Mohammedan Art at Munich, 1910," 160.

[296] Ibid., cat. 42. This was held in the private collection of The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, V.R.D. Collection.

[297] Ibid., cats. 390, 391, 392. These were all borrowed from European museums.

empires.[298] This section of the gallery continues presenting objects in their context while simultaneously adding a personal dimension to the visual conversation and illustrating Islam as a global actor.

The personal side of Islam across multiple eras is further explored on the opposite side of gallery one, a view often obscured in other photographs (see Figure 2-20). The vitrine in the left background presents a Qur'an manuscript, tiles, and a small casket, while the middle display shows blue-and-white motifs, also seen in previous galleries, now adorning tiles, cups, and bowls. The right vitrine has manuscripts and portable ceramics, while the final case on the adjacent wall highlights a monumental Qur'an, either from 15th-century Mamluk Egypt or Timurid Persia, alongside other smaller Qur'ans.[299] Hanging on the freestanding wall to the left is an 18th-century Ottoman *firman*, or official decree, nominating Mahmud Pasha as the grand vizier (see Figure 2-21).[300] Another red carpet peaks out from behind the wall. There are three more vitrines in the space, only two of which were photographed (see Figure 2-22). While gallery one employs similar strategies around objects in context, the new juxtaposition of large and small objects shows the mutability and repetition of Islamic art's essential characteristics to further illustrate its unity across its diverse applications.

Gallery one also purports an ideology contrary to that of the projection room by showing the exchange between Islam and Europe. This exchange is visualized in the Polonaise carpet, the Chinese motifs in the Ardabil carpet, the Ottoman lotto carpet featured in a European

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[298] Ibid., cats. 31, 75, 84, and/or 89.

[299] Ibid., cats. 540 or 554.

[300] Ibid., cat. 637. This was borrowed from the notable Ahuan Collection.

painting, and more. Such visual dialogues not only show artistic engagement across the world but depict Islam as a globally entangled phenomenon. In this way, Islam and its art are not confined to Islamic lands, but present Islam as having a far greater reach, including in Europe, something particularly relevant to the festival's target audience. Islam is thus propagated as a religion which could not only be the state religion as it was during the empires of the objects depicted, but Islam could also be the foundation for a new, inclusive empire that successfully engages with the world; unity through Islam could be created across diverse global populations. Yet notably, Islam remains absent in contemporary London, even if it had a presence in early modern Europe, as seen in the interplay of objects.

After going upstairs, the exhibition's final two galleries feature a chronological arrangement of different media, which subtly also alludes to Islam's spread and growth. This begins in gallery four, a densely packed room with wall-to-wall double-sided vitrines, an enormous center plinth, and carpets hanging from the ceiling (see Figure 2-23). Two 16th-century Ottoman Holbein rugs with repeating geometric designs hang over the central plinth (see Figure 2-24).[301] Below, two cenotaphs rest on a raised central plinth: the taller was ordered by Mamluk Sultan al-Zahir Baybars in 13th-century Syria; the other was commissioned by Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir in 13th-century Iraq. Cenotaphs dually exemplify political leadership and the religious beliefs of rulers, as well as the prominence of calligraphy.[302] Between the cenotaphs, one can see two monumental Qur'an pages from 15th-

[301] Ibid., cats. 40, 39. These were drawn from European collections. Holbein here refers to a type of rug imported into Europe from Turkey, also seen in Holbein's *Ambassadors,* and Persian miniatures.

[302] Ibid., cats. 453, and 454. Both have Qur'anic inscriptions. The Mamluk cenotaph features Qur'an 2:255, 3:185, 31:33, 9:23, 39:73, and 112:21. The Abbasid cenotaph is

century Timurid Iran written in *naskhi* script, whose scale echoes the Ottoman *firman* (see Figure 2-25).[303] A lack of photographs in the archives obscures the full chronological display across 27 vitrines, as does a precise checklist.

Finally, gallery five showcases a mixed-media approach to objects from regions where Islam was deemed peripheral (see Figure 2-26). Few photographs remain of this gallery, perhaps a coincidental indication of its secondary importance. Like gallery four, illuminated vitrines surround a central plinth. The vitrine to the left mostly contains manuscripts, while the one on the back wall features a variety of metalwork, including a candlestick, a pen box, a knife, and a helmet (see Figure 2-27).[304] To the right of the plinth are two more vitrines, one filled with manuscripts. The central plinth remains a place for textiles. The thin, horizontally oriented textile with a floral design on top is a 17th-century Mughal velvet.[305] The carpet below it decorated with three *mihrabs*, shaped much like the ceramic *mihrab* in

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inscribed with Quran 33:33. These two cenotaphs were from Damascus and Baghdad, respectively.

[303] Ibid., cat. 558. The image in the catalogue is very different from the image on display here. The two pages are stacked on top of each other and then hung, placing two 177-centimeter pages in succession to create a monumental composition that was 354 centimeters, or 139 inches (c. 11.6 feet). Ordinarily, they would also be shown side-by-side. To read these pages, one would need to stand on the opposite side from where the photographer was. These pages were borrowed from the Imam Riza Shrine Library in Iran, and The Shah of Iran had to intervene to get these pages out Mashhad to London. See: "Library gets its manuscripts by order of the Shah," *The Times,* April 2, 1976, 16.

[304] Ibid. Candlestick: cats. 200, 207 or 208; Pen box: cats. 202, 206, 224; Knife: cats. 230, 231, 233; Helmet: cat. 229. The vertical plaque may also be ivory, not metalwork, like cats. 155 or 154. No definitive attributions can be made without a closer view of their inscriptions, which is not attainable through the extant photographs.

[305] Ibid., cat. 94. This is held by the collection of the V&A.

gallery two, is an 18th-century Mughal prayer carpet.[306] If this gallery was meant to show the periphery, then the objects point to Mughal India, positioning it as separate from the contemporaneous Safavid and Ottoman empires. As the exhibition concludes, it terminates at the chronological end of Islamic art history, the same place where the show started.

As the final two galleries illustrate the essential characteristics of Islamic art and the spread of Islam, it is here that perhaps the exhibition most clearly illustrates the notion of unity in diversity through the objects shown. By identifying the essential characteristics of Islamic art, organizers gave a visual form to Islam's unifying power. If Islam united people across time and space, then shared, repeated visual motifs manifest this unity as it reached new territorial expanses. Furthermore, presenting objects across different media and scales illustrated how Islam was both an institutional and a personal phenomenon that permeated every aspect of life, a point he first began to understand after a lecture by Oleg Grabar in 1971.[307] Identifying and repeating the main visual features of Islamic art engendered this visual coherence, or unity, across the diversity of object types and empires.[308]

The visual argument for unity and diversity was supplemented in a five-page, double-sided, fold out program costing 10 pence, which offered a pared down version of the larger exhibition catalogue.[309] *The Arts of Islam* catalogue was organized by media with historical

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[306] Ibid., cat. 101. This was drawn from the Keir collection.

[307] Keeler, *A Life's Journey*, 39.

[308] Burckhardt, "Perennial Values in Islamic Art," 5-6; Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West,* 109-11.

[309] Minutes of a Meeting to Discuss Arts of Islam Catalogue, May 14, 1975, Box 7, Folder 1; Minutes of the 13th Islamic Executive Committee Meeting, February 6, 1976, Box 9, Folder 6, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

context and descriptions written for a general public, including overarching narrative texts that advocated for ideas of unity through discussions of Islamic art.[310] By comparison, one side of the program outlines the core tenets of Islam, namely the oneness (tawhid) of Allah (god), thus explaining Islam as a religion and its social contexts. There is also a map visualizing the history of Islamic civilization from the Prophet Muhammad to the Ottoman empire, importantly locating Islam in time and place—outside London. The other side describes the way Islamic art manifests the diversity of Islamic civilization through the essential elements of Islamic art, including form and style, calligraphy, geometry, arabesque, and the figure, while addressing misconceptions about aniconism.[311] Language in the program connects the two, such as by clarifying calligraphy's importance for the "transmission of the word of God," and the arabesque as a metaphor for Paradise, showing a relationship between aesthetic form and religious belief that audiences are asked to follow throughout the exhibition.[312] The exhibition catalogue builds on the program by explaining that these four characteristics result from the exhibition's attempt to define the "Islamic

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[310] Jones, *The Arts of Islam*, np. In identifying the public nature of the 1976 catalogue, organizers were careful to suggest that object entries should not be too schematic, bibliographies not too long, and entries not just descriptive, but rather, should place objects in context. See: Correspondence from Dalu Jones to Joanna Drew, March 1, 1975, Box 11, Folder 4; Correspondence from Dalu Jones to Ms. Hourani, June 5, 1975, Box 7, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Editors also took note to use the most current terminology, replacing "Moslem" with "Muslim" to fend off criticism. See: Memo from Auriol Evans to Joanna Drew, February 10, 1976, Box 9, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[311] Pamphlet for *The Arts of Islam*, 1976, Box 7, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[312] Ibid.

creative spirit," which is then explained in the galleries by showing the unity of Islamic art across the diversity of media, time period, and scale.[313] Notably, there is no record of what gallery didactics existed, meaning it is possible that paying for this program was required to gain all information necessary. Such an approach to contextualizing the material supports Margaret Graves' argument that when institutions present Islamic art, significant amounts of time and ink are necessary to contextualize Islam, its theology, and larger socio-political histories, recognizing that few if any audiences will come with such contexts and understandings.[314]

Yet this way of thinking about Islamic art was distinctly out of step with scholarship at the time, presenting a fictionalized view of a historical moment in order to similarly propose a fictional utopian future. Grube summarized this simply when he said there was nothing "Islamic" about Islamic art, referring to the way that art made during the time of Islam was not necessarily because of or inspired by or reflective of the religion.[315] Likewise, *The Arts of Islam* saw unity as perpetual, as opposed to many scholarly considerations that saw unity as

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[313] Jones, *The Arts of Islam,* 9. Other publications released for the festival also explore this question. See: See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976); Jennifer Scarce, ed., *Islam in the Balkans: Persian Art and Culture of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Museum, 1979); R.B. Serjeant, *San'a: An Arabian City* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983). Notably, Grabar sees this move a "fascinating sleight of hand" where *tawhid* was transferred to all Muslims (*ummah*), and to all objects made and used by the *ummah.* See: Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology," 150.

[314] Margaret S. Graves, "Feeling uncomfortable in the nineteenth century," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 6 (June 2012): 24.

[315] Ernst Grube, *The World of Islam* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 8. Such a response paralleled the way that Muhammadan fell out of fashion for its lack of meaning, which Bowie also discusses in the aforementioned book *Islamic Art Across the World*.

ending with the Abbasid empire.[316] Perhaps more pressing than the scholarly incongruities of this interpretation was that unity in diversity elided the multiplicity it aimed to reveal, neglecting the way diversity could illuminate connectivity within Islamic art by reconsidering its diverse constituents and their regional styles. By speaking from an "Islamic point of view," implying a monolithic perspective, the exhibition denied a diversity of lived experiences in past and present, a multiplicity necessary for multiculturalism. Advocating for the unifying features of multiculturalism glosses over the ways diversity is necessary and intrinsic to unity. Exhibiting the art of Christian or Jewish populations from Islamic lands at this time could have strengthened the argument for tolerance and unity.

However incongruous the exhibition might have been, the place of Islamic art at the Hayward Gallery, which can be considered here as a museum, also modeled another multiculturalism. The exhibition did so by putting forth "alternative epistemologies" to Western ways of thinking, in this case rejecting the tenets of Islamic art, a move in line with larger shifts to upset hegemonic thinking.[317] Specifically, it modeled the integrationist philosophy that dominated the race relations era from the 1960s on in which the goal was to illustrate how immigrants and their cultures could be a part of British culture, and be good members of society.[318] It did so by putting forward a body of artistic production that was without artists, thus eliminating the subjectivity and personal bias of Western contemporary art to instead put forward a collective, objective art form; this put the collective ahead of the

[316] For example, see: Clifford R. Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022). The first edition was published in 2003.

[317] Guermazi, "The Spiritual Turn," 19; Waters, *Thinking Black*.

[318] Hesse, "Introduction," 6.

individual, and thus modeled a new social order. Museums are venues which exhibit the histories of art, and this construction a history requires conscious decisions about whose art is considered worthy of history; likewise, museums model good conduct and participation in the nation.[319] This act of representation is akin to the ways multiculturalism allows for the representation or tolerance of different cultures, by what means, and to what degree. To include Islamic art was not only an act of representation, but a sign of tolerance for a type of art not prominent in Britain at the time. Its place in the museum indicated the gravity of the topic. To engage with Islamic art in the museum was to be a good member of society. The exhibition was a microcosm for the festival's goal of representation and a means to promote tolerance. If Islamic art could not only find a place in British museums during an era of nascent multiculturalism but a prominent place that asserted the validity of a particular kind of cultural production, then it could make a positive statement about a group of people who identified with this cultural production—one that defied social stereotypes. In this way, the museum itself exemplifies ways to be tolerant through the display and appreciation of different kinds of art.

H. Receiving Islam The targeted advertising, narrow view of Islamic art, and restricted view of Islam, taken alongside longstanding questions about the festival's funding and organizing structure, led to a mixed reception of the festival. The festival reached between

[319] On this, see: Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*; Nathaniel Burt, *Palaces for the People: A Social History of the American Art Museum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995); Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997); Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum: From Boullee to Bilbao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

116,000 and 133,000 visitors through partnerships with 15 ambassadors, 32 governments, 40 institutions, as well as numerous events.[320]

On one hand, the festival's impressive scope and financial support led to an opening fit for a queen, as Keeler intended. Inaugural events were attended by diplomats and royal figures, like the Shahbanou (Empress) of Iran Farah Pahlavi, evoking a political ambience. Pahlavi opened *Science and Technology in Islam* at the Science Museum on April 7.[321] The Shahbanou's presence was a strategy to shift the Arab emphasis at the festival that was perceived by Iranian officials and a dubious public as a so-called "Arab jamboree."[322] Farah visited in place of her husband, the Shah, and stayed at Clarence House with the Queen's hospitality, a special accommodation that required much negotiation since this was not a government visit.[323] British protestors against the Pahlavi's modernization program met the

[320] Summary of festival components, December 1975, FCO13/766, National Archives, London, England. On various visitor figures, see: Correspondence from Angela Morhange to Joanna Drew, July 2, 1976, Box 6, Folder 1; Template Correspondence from Joanna Drew, August 1976, Box 6, Folder 1, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England; Salamandra, "Cultural Construction, The Gulf and Arab London," 76; Ainsworth and Worden, "Jean Jenkins, Music and the 1976 World of Islam Festival," 188; Sabini, "The World of Islam: Its Festival," 1.

[321] Memo from "PA to DG," December 3, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. The Shahbanou's opening had to be one day before *The Arts of Islam* to avoid conflicting events, which meant rescheduling. See: Correspondence from Alistair Duncan to J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., August 1, 1975, FCO 13/765, National Archives, London, England. The exhibition was primarily organized by Iranian scholars.

[322] Correspondence from Patricia Man to E.T.H. Fitsimmons, November 17, 1975, BW1/650; Correspondence from A.D. Parsons to Shelagh Weir, Esq., February 13, 1975, FCO13/764; Telegram from Tehran, February 16, 1975, FCO13/764, National Archives, London, England.

[323] Correspondence from J.N.O. Curle to T.J. Clarke, April 8, 1975, FCO13/764; Note from M. Lucas to Shelagh Weir and J.N.O. Curle, March 26, 1975, FCO13/764; Telegram from Callaghan, April 29, 1975, FCO13/765; Correspondence from W.J.M. Paterson to R.N. Dales, April 17, 1975, FCO13/765, National Archives, London, England.

Empress' arrival, while Iranian newspapers celebrated her efforts to make Iran central to Islamic civilization and the festival.[324] Welcoming the Shahbanou allowed organizers to acquire funds and loans, but her participation, in light of her ongoing efforts to further Iranian cultural diplomacy through art, fed the skepticism of a dubious public concerned about the festival's political nature.[325] Yet like the involvement of Middle Eastern governments demonstrated multicultural unity on a large scale, the Shahbanou's attendance, particularly alongside Queen Elizabeth II, further reiterated the kind of cooperation necessary for a brighter future.

The event's political nature was further underscored by another royal woman: Queen Elizabeth II**,** who inaugurated *The Arts of Islam* on April 8, and whose political presence both supported and undermined the festival's goals. The Queen only agreed to attend because she

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[324] Correspondence from M.S. Buckmaster to Information Officers, April 20, 1976, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England. Those students would later be tried in court on charges of assault and causing bodily harm to a police officer, as well as for their threatening behavior. See: "Students in Court," *The Guardian,* April 8, 1976, np. From Iran: "Big Part for Iran in London Islam Tribute," *Kayhan International*, December 4, 1975, np.

[325] Farah Pahlavi's efforts include founding the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and organizing exhibitions like *7,000 Years of Iranian Art*. See: Sarah McFadden, "Tehran Report: The Museum and the Revolution," *Art in America* (October 1981): 9-16; Robert Hobbs, "Museum under Siege," *Art in America* (October 1981): 17-25; Eva Cockroft, "Post-Shah Art," *Art in America* (October 1981): 26-28; and Edith Porada and Richard Ettinghausen, *7,000 Years of Iranian Art* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1964). The Empress also funded an exhibition on "Books and Calligraphy of Iran" at the Commonwealth Institute, which was not on the festival's program. See: *Annual Report* (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1976), 19. At the time, she was also engaged in efforts to rebuild a Christian hospital in Isfahan, which required extensive fundraising. See: Henry Macrory, "Children Collect for Hospital in Oil-Rich Iran," *Sunday Express*, February 16, 1975, np.

had no political objections, and government funds were not involved.[326] As guest of honor at the opening, her speech rehearsed the festival's goals while welcoming what she identified as "distinguished representatives from the Islamic countries" and calling for "the need for mutual understanding between nations."[327] Her appeal advocated for an intergovernmental unity that modeled a broader social unity while praising the personal and institutional relationships that made the event possible. If members of the British church, presented as a metonym of British royalty, could work with Muslims, exemplified by the organizational committee and governments abroad, then the British public could watch, learn, and achieve this mutual understanding.

The Queen's engagement with *The Arts of Islam* is documented in periodicals of the time, and her public interest in the material signaled the exhibition's importance to audiences (see Figure 2-28). Here, the Queen stands in front of a large vitrine with two oversize manuscripts, her attention turned toward the man accompanying her, who holds *The Arts of Islam* catalogue. A focused view of the vitrine, likely from in gallery four, clarifies its contents (see Figure 2-29). The two large Qur'an manuscripts are from Mamluk Egypt, borrowed from the Egyptian National Library, and share similar geometric borders framing

[326] Memo from J.A.L. Morgan to Scrivener and Kerr, April 11, 1975, FCO13/764, National Archives, London, England.

[327] Opening Speech for the World of Islam Festival by Her Majesty the Queen, April 8, 1976, Box 6, Folder 4, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Her speech also summarizes Islamic civilization by noting the longstanding Western fascination with "Islamic design and color" that "have influenced European art," all she says is now on display with 1,000 years of "Islamic culture." A photograph of her giving her speech can be found in: *World of Islam Festival Trust, 1973-1983*, np.

its calligraphic content.[328] Both folios recall the Qur'an page in the festival program, and the monumental Qur'an seen in gallery one (see Figure 2-20). The smaller, open manuscript in the bottom left (see Figure 2-29) is a copy of *The Wonders of Creation and the Rarities of Things* by 13th-century Persian physician and philosopher al-Qazwini, a widely disseminated cosmographic treatise. While the catalogue identifies this as Qazwini's manuscript from Mamluk Egypt, now held by the British Library, this is likely a copy from Mamluk Egypt, since Qazwini's works are in Persian, he was not from Egypt, and he was not alive in the 15th century.[329] Photographing the Queen by this particular case draws attention the Middle Eastern lenders who made the exhibition possible, and reiterates the ways Islam spanned all realms of life and thought, like science and religion. Moreover, the Queen's thoughtful participation, open-mindedness, and investment in learning, in line with the utopian goals she set out, made her a model for the festival's desired outcomes.

Like the Shahbanou and the festival, the Queen's attendance received mixed reactions. British Official M.S. Buckmaster writes of an "unidentified Muslim" who thanked the Queen for attending on behalf of what the man called the "Moslem world."[330] One reporter defined her as the "Defender of the Faith," and said her position in the church should not be criticized

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[328] Jones, *The Arts of Islam,* cats. 536 and 537.

[329] Ibid., cat. 577. On this manuscript, see: Stefano Carboni, *The Wonders of Creation and the Singularities of Painting: A Study of the Ilkhanid London Qazwini* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

[330] Correspondence from M.S. Buckmaster to Information Officers, April 20, 1976, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England; Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," 83; Alistair Duncan, *Some Thoughts Upon the World of Islam Festival – 1976* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976), 2.

because her participation reflected her role as a pluralist Head of State.[331] These reviews suggest a tension about whether her participation was politically or religiously appropriate, something related to the ongoing discourse about religion and politics at the festival and in Britain at the time. Yet the Queen's actions reiterated the festival's goals, making her a conduit for the organizers' ambitions, ideally inspiring others to participate in what became an unrealized multicultural project.

Other responses to the World of Islam Festival and *The Arts of Islam* were largely along religious lines, reiterating the tensions the festival aimed to ameliorate. British Jews were not a target audience, instead putting the problem of a new multiculturalism on Christians and Muslims. Likewise, British Jews were skeptical because of the festival's conception one year after the Yom Kippur war ended and Arab power peaked, prompting an interpretation of the festival's Palestinian advocacy as anti-Jewish in anti-Semitic era.[332] However, such a line of thinking was only loosely tied the festival's program: there are only two explicit mentions of Palestine in the festival's calendar of events.[333] Furthermore, when the Syrian Director of the

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[331] "A Chance for Christians to Learn," *British Weekly,* April 16, 1976, np.

[332] Maurice Samuelson, "World of Islam Festival," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* April 2, 1976, 2. For press about the festival as anti-Jewish, partially in response to an exhibition on Palestine, see: "Propaganda Threatens Islam's Image," *The Guardian* (April 15, 1976), np; "Islam's Festival of Peace," *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review,* April 2, 1976, np. On skepticism about the event as an Arab propaganda exercise, see: "Islam Festival for London," *Jewish Chronicle,* March 21, 1975, np; "The Information War," *Jewish Chronicle,* March 21, 1975, np; "World of Islam," *Jewish Chronicle,* April 30, 1976, np. While the era of race relations administration was helpful at least by name to the struggles of Muslim populations, Jewish populations supported these projects, but did not find them helpful to their own struggles. See: Gavin Schaffer, "Race and colour revisited: white immigrants in post-war Britain," in *Migrant Britain*, ed. Jennifer Craig-Norton, Cristhard Hoffman, and Tony Kushner (London: Routledge, 2018), 153-61.

[333] Official festival brochure, 1976, Box 3, folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. These mentions include an

Classical Department of the Aleppo Museum Shawki Sha'ath proposed Palestinian participation in the festival, which Sha'ath wanted to have a political leaning, organizers responded with concern about keeping a cultural image and avoiding politics.[334] As such, as a whole, Palestine did not have a prominent place at the event.

Religious and cultural leaders repeatedly called on Jews to embrace the event and create understanding.[335] Other stories elided Jews from the discussion, instead emphasizing the way the festival brought Muslims and Christians together.[336] These conflicting reactions show the necessity of involving all groups who would contribute to and benefit from a new British multiculturalism, as well as the perils of a narrow target audience.

The British Christian population was much less receptive. As the target audience but also the hegemony, some responses reflect fear about the festival upsetting or demoralizing Christian culture, or Islam controlling the West, and shifting the civilizational balance.[337]

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exhibition titled *Palestine in Pictures* at 2 Hinde Mews in London organized by the Palestine Exploration Fund, and a lecture and exhibition titled *Mediaeval* [sic] *Muslim Monuments in Jerusalem* at the Institute of Archaeology in London organized by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. There was also a lecture titled "Islam in Syria and Palestine" given by John Carswell, and while this was a part of the festival, it was at the Society of Antiquaries organized by the Palestine Exploration Fund.

[334] Correspondence from J.H. Bunney to M.J. Richardson, Esq., July 1, 1975, FCO13/765; Correspondence from H.M. Evans to J.H. Bunney, Esq., July 10, 1975, FCO13/765, National Archives, London, England.

[335] "Judaism and Islam," *Jewish Chronicle,* May 14, 1976, np. Another article told British Jews to "play it cool." See: *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review,* April 2, 1976, np; "Welcome for the Islam Festival that can Lead to Misunderstanding," *The Guardian,* April 15, 1976, np.

[336] "William Beckford and Islam," *The Connoisseur* 191, no. 770 (April 1976): 252.

[337] "Festival Proves another Turning Point in Anglo-Arab Relations," *Voice* (May 15, 1976): np; Leslie Brierly, *The Significance of the World of Islam Festival* (Bulstrode, England: International Research Office of the Worldwide Evangelical Crusade, 1976), 1.

These tensions reflect a perpetual tension around immigration and the concern that immigrants must not damage the "British way of life," questions which were part of the original impetus for multiculturalism.[338] Despite this, Christians were called upon by their leaders to visit the festival, and learn about Islam to promote conversation, and overcome misconceptions.[339] Simultaneously, there were calls for Christians to teach Muslims about Christianity, turning a cultural event into a missionary endeavor.[340] This move recalls the language in the festival's program, despite claims that the festival was not a proselytory event. Debates around conversion also echo the way historical religious strife was employed to claim dialogue was not possible among people with different beliefs.[341] Christian

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[338] Umberto Melotti, "International Migration in Europe: Social Projects and Political Cultures," in *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, ed. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London; New York: Zed Books, 1997), 79.

[339] "Christians urged to visit Islam Festival," *Church Times,* January 2, 1976, np; "Christians & Muslims," *Church Times,* April 30, 1976, np. Part of the reason this knowledge was important was that there were Christian missionaries in these countries. See: "Opportunity to Meet Muslims," *Church Times,* July 2, 1976, np; "Islam: The Christian Response," *English Churchman,* June 18, 1976, np; "Share Christ's Love with Muslims," *English Churchman,* July 16, 1976, np; "CMS Says Christians should Learn from Islam Festival," *The Life of Faith,* January 10, 1976, np; "A Chance for Christians to Learn," *British Weekly,* April 16, 1976, np; and "Christian Churches and Islam 'Failed to show Christ's Reality'," *Church of England Newspaper,* July 2, 1976, np. People were also cautioned to learn, but not to give in to syncretism, or become Muslims. See: "Islam and the Anglican," *Kensington Post,* June 11, 1976, np.

[340] "Opportunity to Meet Muslims," np; "CMS Says Christians should Learn from Islam Festival," *The Life of Faith,* January 10, 1976, np; Brierly, *The Significance of the World of Islam Festival*, 14-21.

[341] "Cross and Crescent," *English Churchman,* May 21, 1976, np. The author goes on to note that it should not be solely on Christians to promote communication if Muslims were not doing the same. Elsewhere, Brierly refers to this hatred instead as Islam and Christianity being "anathema." See: Brierly, *The Significance of the World of Islam Festival*, 14-21.

populations at the festival firmly retained beliefs in a civilizational divide tied to religious differences that resonated with the tensions of the time while perpetuating the opposite side of the festival's binary ideology. The contradictory responses indicate a hesitancy about learning, and a fear that the Judeo-Christian social hegemony might be upset; these trepidations were both the reason for and a hindrance to multiculturalism.

Although British Muslims were largely excluded, they too had varied reactions.[342] The Union of Muslim Organizations (UMO) of UK and Eire questioned whether to condone the festival: while they saw it as important in the history of British Muslims for presenting Islam, they were also critical of its materialistic representation of Islam, its non-Muslim organizers, and the presence of music.[343] The UMO later came to tentatively support the project.[344] The UMO did not speak for everyone, and their support did not dissuade general tensions. Others were concerned about the exclusion of British Muslims.[345] Festival organizers knew this, and made note to acknowledge the one million Muslims in the UK; this never amounted to a

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[342] Paul Betts, "The New Arabian Nights," *The Financial Times,* February 28, 1976, np.

[343] Press Release from Union of Muslim Organizations of UK and Eire, December 1, 1975, Box 6, Folder 7, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Keeler accepted these misgivings, but returned to ideas of unity and civilization, suggesting art defines god's attribute. Yusuf Ibish responded by noting Muslims were in charge and would protect the image of Muslims on display.

[344] "UMO Endorses Islamic Council Resolution on Festival," *Impact International,* December 26, 1975-January 8, 1976, 15.

[345] Correspondence from Joan Asquith to Joanna Drew, December 2, 1975, Box 6, Folder 7, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Plans for a photographic exhibition by the Muslim community also fell through, as did an exhibition about mosques in Britain. See: Correspondence from Dalu Jones to Joanna Drew, September 12, 1975, Box 8, Folder 3; Minutes of Schools and Higher Education Meeting, September 9, 1975, Box 8, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

festival-sponsored event.[346] When other British Muslims were apprehensive about folklore events, they were cancelled.[347] The Crescent Cultural Committee circulated a petition against the festival because it contained non-religious elements, like music, dance, and film, a point of contention which British journalist and historian Nassem Khan describes as exemplifying "the pitfalls of thinking in non-Islam terms of Muslim culture in general," referring to the competing positions about what was appropriate or Islamic.[348] Dr. Ghayas Uddin Siddiqui of The Muslim Institute for Research and Planning described the festival as a "non-Muslim Orientalist affair," and claimed it was guilty of "trivializing and commercializing" of Islam.[349] Keeler responded to Siddiqui by noting Muslims oversaw the festival, a blanket gesture that glossed over the core issue of representation and multiplicity of experiences.[350]

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[346] "More than a legacy… ideals, values and principles," *Impact International*, February 27-March 25, 1976, 31; Correspondence from M. S. Buckmaster to Dalu Jones and Miss Warburton, June 6, 1975, FCO13/765; Correspondence from J.C. Kay to R.A. Kealy, Esq., December 20, 1975, FCO13/766; Minutes of a meeting to discuss overseas publicity, May 20, 1975, INF12/1307; National Archives, London, England. The exception is that there was an event about Islam and Britain, but it was by the Society of Antiquaries. See: Official festival brochure, 1976, Box 3, folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[347] Betts, "The New Arabian Nights," np. Others also had issues with the way ablution was depicted. See: "Festival Film: Protest in Britain," *Impact International,* May 14-27, 1976, 15.

[348] Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1978), 84.

[349] "World of Islam Festival and Muslims," *Impact International*, March 26-April 8, 1976. 13.

[350] Paul Keeler, "World of Islam Festival," *Impact International,* April 9-22, 1976, 24-7. Keeler also suggested the unity of civilization could not be understood from a Western point of view, and so the event was from the Islamic point of view, a term he repeated but did not define.

Other critiques centered on representational gaps around Indonesia, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Kurdish problem, a problem that echoes larger issues running throughout the festival.[351]

These critiques each posit Islam as multifaceted and contingently defined, countering the organizers' rigid and essentialized viewpoint, and their failure to welcome other ways of seeing. The question of who could represent, speak for, and define Islam was an ongoing point of contention, one recalling the premise of Orientalism, and reflecting perpetual suspicion around the organizers' intentions.

Visitor reflections that were not classified along religious lines took a different tone and lamented the aesthetics of Islamic art. Some saw Islamic art as an opportunity for collectors and criticized the exhibition's commercial orientation; this perspective recalled reviews of Munich in 1910, which was the opposite of what organizers wanted.[352] Others wrote about their spatial perceptions, critiquing the Hayward's mundane environment, and noting that the arrangement lacked cohesion.[353] The latter comment suggests that the curatorial approach

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[351] Moorehead, "Four Years Scouring the World for Rare Exhibits," 11; "The Kurdish Heritage," *The Financial Times,* May 12, 1976, np.

[352] Geraldine Norman, "Getting into the Rhythm of Islam," *The Times,* April 17, 1976, 10. This interest in collecting goes back to nineteenth century London and before. See: Isabelle Gadoin, *Private Collectors of Islamic Art in Late Nineteenth-Century London: The Persian Ideal* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

[353] Correspondence from Basil Robinson to Joanna Drew, June 9, 1976, Box 3, Folder 6; Correspondence from Hugh A. Lifson to the Hayward Gallery, June 8, 1976, Box 8, Folder 5, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. The correspondence from Lifson also calls the exhibition "patronizing" and "imperialistic," suggesting audiences could not learn from the show. It is possible that imperialistic here meant Western, and the organizers did mean to appeal to the Westerner but did not think of this meant imperialistic. See: Memo from Auriol Evans to Joanna Drew, June 21, 1976, Box 8, Folder 5, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. In another review, the writer comments that this "was

was not legible to audiences, particularly without didactics identifying the essential characteristics. Another guest named Simon Strachan, about whom little is known, asked for a book about Islam, which was already in the program, but the request is notable since *The Arts of Islam* purported to explain Islam through objects.[354] Another letter compared the Hayward to the Met's recent re-installation, critiquing the Hayward for lacking history; without didactics, it is difficult to ascertain the validity of this claim.[355] A few responses captured the idea of unity and diversity, such as through the nomad and the city challenging

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not an easy exhibition for the casual observer." See: Anthony Gardner, "The Arts of Islam," *Arts of Asia* 6, no. 4 (July-August 1976): 59-66. Much of the information we have regarding reviews is in thanks to Keeler, who clipped the reviews, and now has them labeled in a PPT file, which I am grateful he shared with me.

[354] Correspondence from Simon Strachen to Joanna Drew, August 11, 1976, Box 8, Folder 5, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Notably, Drew responded to him and noted that the "Arts Council was only concerned" with *The Arts of Islam* as a part of the festival and recommended that he contact the Islamic Cultural Centre and London Central Mosque. See: Correspondence from Joanna Drew to S.R. Strachan, Esq., August 17, 1976, Box 8, Folder 5, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

[355] Correspondence from Melanie Graham-Hunter to Joanna Drew, May 21, 1976, Box 8, Folder 5, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. This correspondence also calls the architecture slideshow an "eye boggling kaleidoscopic puzzle." Also see: "The Arts of Islam," *Belfast Telegraph,* May 5, 1976, np. On the Met, see: Richard Ettinghausen, "Islamic Art," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 2-52; Goldin, "Islamic Art: The Met's Generous Embrace," 184-96; Oleg Grabar, "An Art of the Object," *Art Forum* 14 (March 1976): 36-43; Rebecca Lindsey, "Displaying Islamic Art at the Metropolitan: A Retrospective Look," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art,* last modified February 2, 2012, https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/features/2012/displaying-islamic-art-at-the-metropolitan; Sarah-Neel Smith, "A Meeting of Two Minds: Oleg Grabar and Amy Goldin on the Met's Islamic Art Galleries, 1975," in *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art, 1972-1975,* ed. Anna Katz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 123-34.

social divisions.[356] The majority of responses do not indicate that visitors saw Islamic art as a metaphor or metonym for Islam or Islamic Civilization, or larger social change, and were instead caught up in other impressions of art and curatorial praxis that shaped their experience.

The overarching reception points toward persistent religious tensions and the limited capacity of the object and object-based learning at the festival. If Islamic art was a bridge building device, or a means to promote multiculturalism, public responses suggest that objects alone did not have the capacity to achieve this goal or overcome religious or political baggage.[357] The tension between the cultural and political never dissipated, which undermined the event's efficacy. Moreover, the festival reignited fears about the spread of Islam, and its modest popularity tapped into trepidations around Britain's changing landscape, inhibiting people's ability to think about a new social order. Aesthetics could not mitigate or overcome historical religious strife that clouded people's minds in conjunction with contemporary social divides. Instead, conversion emerged as a form of conflict

[356] Caroline Tisdall, "The World of Islam: A Guardian Guide," *The Guardian,* April 8, 1976, np. A similar review noted that "unity, indeed, was the key to the Festival's aesthetic success," noting the ongoing appearance of unity that "imposed a recognizable unity on the whole festival." See: Sabini, "The World of Islam: Its Festival," 2-4.

[357] One review noted that "art has never been detached from political development in the Moslem world." See: "Sipping from a Sufi Mug," *New Society,* April 8, 1976, np. Amy Goldin similarly asserts that "international art exhibitions these days are usually a continuation of politics by other means." See: Goldin, "Islam Goes to England," 216. Commentary by the Church of England further supports this claim by their statement that Islamic affairs could not be divorced from religious and political contexts. See: Correspondence from J.A.L. Morgan, Esq., to M. Lucas, March 7, 1975, FCO13/764, National Archives, London, England.

resolution rather than tolerance and conversation.[358] Analyzing the reception and interpretation of these events reiterates that the object is not autonomous, even if declared to be or conceived of as such. Rather, it is wrapped in the sociocultural fabrics of their time and presentation as much as the era of their making. The gaps between intention and reception demonstrate the reasons the festival did not make its intended impact, but this fissure instead paved the way for other endeavors.

I. Festivals and Identities in the Late-Twentieth Century

At this point, it might be puzzling to think about why such an anachronistic, non-scholarly approach was utilized to present Islamic art in Britain. However, when considered in tandem with Islamophobic beliefs percolating in 1970s Britain, I posit the metaphor of unity and diversity framing *The Arts of Islam* as one used as a lesson for building a new multiculturalism. Presenting Islam as a unifying force through visual examples was a direct counter to the ways people saw Islam and Arabs as divisive at the time. Unity in diversity was transformed into a social metaphor for a multicultural Britain built upon the recognition of mutually held beliefs that would promote coexistence, even as social fabrics shifted. If the exhibition could teach Western audiences about Islam and correct erroneous assumptions, then different groups could find commonalities and eliminate conflict. If Islam came to be understood as a unifying force, rather than detrimental to Britain and British identity, and if Brits could learn from Islam's beliefs and history, then perhaps Britain too could achieve social unity; Keeler himself was the model for this. The past was adapted and harnessed to

[358] "Christians & Muslims," *Church Times,* April 30, 1976, np; Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 50.

comment on and solve present problems. Unity in diversity was a model for what British society could be, something cohesive and at peace in its multiplicity if it found shared sentiments. This was not a direct analogy, as the structure of Islamic civilization was not directly applicable to monarchical Britain, but required interpretation to find points of intersection, and unpack the multicultural nature of Islamic art and civilization.

However, unity and diversity must also be read within a larger context of festivals and identity formation within and beyond the metropole in the 1970s that are contradictory yet reflect the tensions of the time. The idea of unity and diversity reflected a top-down approach to thinking about a new British society that was based on out-of-date ideologies that excluded many populations.[359] Yet contemporaneously, Arab populations were also launching festivals across the Arab world in order to establish a new locus of identity articulation and share their creativity. In this way, the festival's mutability based on its context that indicates its significance in multiple contexts: that it can be adapted for top-down or bottom-up discussions of identity that respond to different situations. Seen in this light, projects like the World of Islam Festival become dialectical pairs to events like the al-Wasiti Festival that began in Baghdad in 1972, thus imbuing both with a new significance.

That unity and diversity was a way to think through Islamic art and subsequently British social fabrics is related to the historical roots of the concept as it applied to different terse social climates. In one context, historian Clifford R. Backman explains that the Medieval world was invested in finding a "collective cultural identity" that would help establish unity

[359] The critique I offer of multiculturalism at the festival is mine, but it echoes the larger scholarly discourse that critiques the "top-down" approach to multiculturalism. For example, see: Mohanty, "On Race and Voice," 179-208, cited in Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 9.

within growing pluralism, a search that took on different forms across its contexts.[360] Across Backman's numerous citations of examples to construct unity, he mentions that once Islam emerged, the Mediterranean world was broken into three societies, Islam being one.[361] Decades before, historian Gustave E. von Grunebaum also wrote about how the core tenets and practices of Islam serve as a uniting factor that overcomes any other differences, and subsumes any local variations.[362] While the spread of Islam, particularly under the strength of the Umayyad caliphate, created unity, the death of the caliphate and the rise of the Abbasids caused a splintering.[363] Unity also came from shared philosophies, such as Muslim philosophers like the Mu'tazilites drawing on Greek philosophy to defend Islam and root Islam in reason, including its very belief in the oneness of god, a key way of crafting unity during the splintering of the Abbasid era.[364]

Some art historians then took up this line of thinking to pose faith as a unifying factor in Islamic art, one which could overcome other geographical, political, regional, or national

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[360] Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe*, xxi.

[361] Ibid., 144. In this volume, Backman also mentions philosophers like Boethius, who thought about the harmony of the universe.

[362] Gustave E. von Grunebaum, "The Problem: Unity in Diversity," in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed. Gustave E. Grunebaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 18-32.

[363] Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe*, 236; Vernon Egger, *A History of the Muslim World to 1750* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 91.

[364] Egger, *A History of the Muslim World to 1750*, 146-7.

differences.[365] Early on, art historian and curator Richard Ettinghausen explained that there are many forms of Islamic art, such as those that stem from the variety of regions where Islam was dominant, and that Islam also embodies a diverse array of people. Yet despite this diversity, Ettinghausen advocates for a particular "uniform character of Islamic art," seen in examples like the mosque and writing. While Ettinghausen sees differences in form, their core remains unchanged.[366] This unity, for one, facilitated homogenizing, ahistorical views of Islamic art perpetuated by Orientalist thinking that emphasized connectivity and similarity over regional differences and cultural specificity, a critique that certainly applies to *The Arts of Islam* and its emphasis on essential characteristics that overlook the nuances of cultural production.[367]

Such thinking about Islamic art history has been heavily criticized by scholars across generations. Early on, Islamic art historian Terry Allen refers to what has been written about the spirit of Islamic art as "nonsense," and attributes the emergence of thinking around "the nature of Islamic art [as tied] directly to the nature of Islam as a religion" to the scholarship of Islamic art historian Richard Ettinghausen and scholar of Islam Louis Massignon.[368]

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[365] For example, see Ernst Kuhnel, *The Minor Arts of Islam* (London: Bell, 1966), 14; Talbot Rice, *Islamic Art*; *Art Islamique dans les Collections Privées Libanaises: Exposition* (Beyrouth: Le Musée, 1974).

[366] Ettinghausen, "Interaction and Integration in Islamic Art," 107-10.

[367] Valerie Gonzalez, "Debunking the Regionalistic Myth in the Discourse of Islamic Ornament," in *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, ed. Onur Özturk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker (London: Routledge, 2022), 46-8.

[368] Allen, *Five Essays on Islamic Art*, 1, citing: Richard Ettinghausen, "The Character of Islamic Art," in *The Arab Heritage*, ed. Nabih Amin Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944). Other scholars, like Nader Ardalan and Keith Critchlow, also followed similar lines of inquiry. See: Ardalan, *The Sense of Unity*, and Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976). To learn more

Islamic art historian Wendy K. Shaw similarly notes that Islam is in fact the way to understand diversity, but not everything that is "Islamic" necessarily relates back to the religion; such an approach adds nuance to the way we think about Islam, taking it beyond the singular, religious approach employed at the festival.[369] Oleg Grabar questioned the principle's universality, and its emergence as Middle Eastern governments become major artistic patrons, a critique he made contemporaneous to the time of the festival.[370] Likewise, Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom interrogated the way these underlying principles, articulated by people like Burckhardt himself, were frequently used by native-born or Muslim converts to Sufism to set Islamic apart from other visual traditions by disassociating it from historical context.[371] And indeed, Burckhardt did this with his collaborators by identifying key

about Massignon's thinking on Islamic art, see: Robert Irwin, "Louis Massignon and the Esoteric Interpretation of Islamic Art," in *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850-1950*, ed. Stephen Vernoit (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 163-70; and Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic art history: Secularism and Public Discourse," 1-34.

[369] Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What is "Islamic" Art?: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 29.

[370] Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology," 148; Grabar, "What Makes Islamic art Islamic?," 251. The result of this approach, according to Grabar, is a series of "esthetic canons" that justify categorizations.

[371] Blair and Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art," 158. For an example of what Blair and Bloom discuss, see: Moustafa, *Divine Inspiration*. On unity in diversity, also see: Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 35; Gustave E. Grunebaum, ed., *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Nasser Rabbat, "What is Islamic Architecture Anyway?" *Journal of Art Historiography,* no. 6 (2012): 6; Avinoam Shalem, "Dangerous Claims: On the 'Othering' of Islamic Art History and How it Operates within Global Art History," *Zeitschrift fur Kunst und Kulturwissenschaften* 2 (2012): fn 7; Shalem, "What do we mean when we say 'Islamic art'?," 1-18. The field later turned to focus on regionalism and differences to emphasize the diversity of the field, not unity in diversity. See: Finbarr Barry Flood, and Gulru Necipoglu, "Frameworks of Islamic Art and Architectural History: Concepts, Approaches, and Historiographies," in *A Companion to*

characteristics and overlooking specific contexts for cultural production. More recently, Islamic art historian Sam Bowker notes that the emergence of Islamic art as a framework was a way to "unify a variety of diverse objects" through a religious framework in an effort to address the eclectic nature of the field, an effort also seen at *The Arts of Islam*.[372]

That there are recurring visual features seen across different case studies of Islamic art is not an outlandish claim, but the way that *The Arts of Islam* attributed a larger religious, supra-civilizational metanarrative to such unity was what rendered it out of step with the way of thinking present in other museums and private collections; to do so was simultaneously necessary to align with the broader and comprehensive objection to Western thinking.[373] Indeed, in his critique of the festival, Grabar also noted that the curatorial method, which mixed media, geography, and chronology, was an aesthetic one that tried to make certain features specific to Islam, creating a false dichotomy outside the scholarly norm that is

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Islamic Art and Architecture, ed. Finbarr Flood and Gulru Necipoglu (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 18-20.

[372] Sam Bowker, "The Myth of Center and Periphery," in *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, ed. Onur Özturk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker (London: Routledge, 2022), 151.

[373] In her review, Amy Goldin also noted that such a "single large hypothesis" is insufficient for the "peculiarities of artistic production in the Islamic countries." See: Goldin, "Islam Goes to England," 221. By comparison, the framework used for the exhibition *Unity in Islamic Art* at the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo was distinctly similar to that of *The Arts of Islam*. Specifically, the 1958 exhibition in Cairo endeavored to show the character of Islamic art that "belongs to one artistic unity" despite geographical distance and temporal breadth as it reveals the "Unity in Islamic Art." That there is such a parallel is further unsurprising given that the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo was a major lender to the show, and the Egyptian government also provided funding for the project. See: Mostafa, *Unity in Islamic Art,* 3-12. The 1958 rhetoric also reoccurs in a 1985 exhibition titled *The Unity of Islamic Art* held in Riyadh. See: *The Unity of Islamic Art: An Exhibition to Inaugurate the Islamic Art Gallery of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1405 AH/1985 AD* (Riyadh: King Faisal Foundation, 1985).

shaped by an essentialization reluctant to deal with history.[374] For most collectors, scholars, and curators of Islamic art, repeating features were not necessarily essential characteristics of a field or a signal of its unity as drawn from a larger religious inflection. Following the festival, this framework was not widely employed within Islamic art history.[375] It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s and beyond when this line of thinking became more prominent as it defined key features of Islamic art and spoke to the unity of faith as a defining factor shaping cultural production.[376] Notably, this approach has now fallen out of favor, instead emphasizing diversity again as a way of understanding intercultural relations and the co-existence of different cultures and religions.

While anachronistic and sometimes questionable in its logic, unity and diversity as a framework for Islamic art and the festival stood for something much larger: that the state could identify something, like Islam, and impose it to create cultural unity. For example, after the advent of Islam, the Umayyad empire worked to expand the spread of Islam, and in turn,

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[374] Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology," 147-8.

[375] Géza Fehérvári and Yasin Hamid Safadi, *1400 Years of Islamic Art: A Descriptive Catalogue* (London: Khalili Gallery, 1981); J. M. Rogers, *Islamic Art & Design, 1500-1700* (London: British Museum Publications, 1983). This is also contrary to Nur Sobers-Khan claim that the festival had an impact on broader curatorial practice. See: Sobers-Khan, "The *Islam in Europe* Exhibition and the World of Islam Festival," 63.

[376] For example, see: Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); *The Unity of Islamic Art: An Exhibition to Inaugurate the Islamic Art Gallery of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies*, 1985; Ghada Hijjawi Qaddumi, *Variety in Unity: A Special Exhibition on the Occasion of the Fifth Islamic Summit in Kuwait* (Kuwait: Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyah, 1987); Clévenot, *Ornament and Decoration in Islamic Architecture*; Habibeh Rahim, *Inscription as Art in the World of Islam: Unity in Diversity* (Hempstead: Hofstra Museum, 1992). For a further discussion, see: Onur Özturk, "Decolonizing and Demystifying Islamic Art in American Undergraduate Education," in *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, ed. Onur Özturk, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker (London: Routledge, 2022), 141.

created a new civilization and cultural production. This metaphor could be understood visually: if Islamic art was unified by select characteristics, then this represented a unified Islamic civilization rooted in the unity of Islam. One might also imply a similar thinking to the ways that the British church and monarchy endeavored to create a unified society through its imposition of religion, and in turn, a particular social order. This way of thinking also applied to the World of Islam Festival by not only showing Islam as a model for a new social order but proposing that Islam itself could be implemented in Britain. However, across history, such a plan implies that everyone agrees to what is proposed and moves forward in a unilateral fashion without succumbing into a totalitarian society, a course of events that seems utopian at best, and yielded little success.

Such a top-down way of thinking about bringing people together not only framed the festival, but other events in London loosely based around tenets of multiculturalism, albeit without the precise moniker applied. The Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851 that worked to exhibit the British nation as a strong, industrial power capable of trading with the world while planting ideas for a promising future that focused on Britain as a world power; and indeed, its unity in diversity was found in establishing itself as a global superpower in step with everyone else.[377] These questions were of a heightened importance during the interwar

[377] Jason Busch, Caroline Futter, and Regina Lee Blaszczyk, eds., *Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (New York: Skira, Rizzoli, 2012). Also see: Stephen George Tallents, "The Projection of England," in *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain,* ed. Scott Anthony (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2018), 213-7.

and postwar periods when anxiety arose about Britain's liminal place in an era of conflict and austerity that also dislodged Britain's central place as an Empire.[378]

The Crystal Palace's centennial was also celebrated at the 1951 Festival of Britain, an effort led by a man named Gerald Barry intent on examining Britain's history, celebrating its constituents, and rebelling against his upbringing and Britain's imperial, colonial projects.[379] The Festival of Britain in particular invoked its own unity in diversity too by thinking about how the different parts of a fragmented Britain could come together to imagine a new way forward, hence its exhibitions focusing on the myriad aspects of British life, but also metaphorically visualized in the Lion and the Unicorn.[380] What held everything together was the *idea* of Britain, this abstraction a glue that could identify the nation.[381] Like the World of Islam Festival, both events directly responded to the country's social dynamics at the time,

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[378] Henrietta Goodden, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Symbolic Architecture for the Festival of Britain, 1951* (London: Unicorn Press, 2011), 23.

[379] Ibid., 39, 49-64; Suzanne Waters, "In Search of Sir Gerald Barry, the Man Behind the Festival of Britain," in *Festival of Britain,* ed. Elain Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2001), 39; Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2018), 178-9. Shortly after, the Festival of Britain was also commemorated with a celebratory exhibition titled *A Tonic to the Nation: the Festival of Britain* at the Victoria & Albert Museum from November 1976 – April 1977. See: James, *The Victoria and Albert Museum,* 566.

[380] Ibid., 49-63; "Le Corbusier Parle – 1951," trans. Emmanuelle Morgan, in *Festival of Britain,* ed. Elain Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2001), 8; F. M. Leventhal, "A Tonic to the Nation": The Festival of Britain, 1951," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 27, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995), 450.

[381] Paul Hendon, "The Festival of Britain and the Voice of the People," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (December 1999): 17. This was in part accomplished by returning to its roots, invoking nostalgia, and suggesting that being British was tied to the rural and traditional, which could be used to project a new nation. See: Simon Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 50-1; Leventhal, "A Tonic to the Nation," 445.

but now, it was the *idea* of Islam holding things together.[382] Unity also faced a setback in both cases by not fully representing the diversity and nuance of their constituents.[383] These events were built on unity, but the mosaic of the nation was put forth using select elements, fracturing visions of a new future by ignoring all facets.

Yet by comparison to these hierarchically imposed structures of identity and meaning implemented through the form of the festival, sometimes within the city's existing network of museums, Arab artists, among others, also looked to festival structures to propose new ways of thinking about identity that were separate from any one nation or religion. In the 1960s, the 1970s, and beyond, festivals organized by state and non-state entities alike looked to push against institutional or governmental ideologies to instead shift the locus of enunciation around identity through new considerations of modern and contemporary art.

One major shift enabling these festivals was the era of liberation and decolonization in which artists and countries both looked to put forward new identities in a new socio-political era. The festival's focus on contemporaneity marked a major shift from previous iterations of festivals historically in line with a new political moment. This particular movement followed and was in dialogue with the Civil Rights Movement and struggles for independence across

[382] The Festival of Britain and the World of Islam Festival both took place on the South Bank. The South Bank was largely revived and reconstructed in order to make it an appropriate site for the Festival of Britain, in turn creating a metaphor for rebuilding Britain out of a decrepit, decaying area. See: Goodden, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 42; Gavin Stamp, "The South Bank Site," in *Festival of Britain,* ed. Elain Harwood and Alan Powers (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2001), 13; Janine Marchessault, *Ecstatic Worlds: Media, Utopias, Ecologies* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 88; Barry Turner, *Beacon for Change: How the 1951 Festival of Britain Helped to Shape a New Age* (London: Aurum, 2011), 1.

[383] Alayna Heinonen, "A Tonic to the Empire?: The 1951 Festival of Britain and the Empire-Commonwealth," *Britain and the World* 8, no. 1 (2015): 78-88.

the African continent, which also coalesced into efforts toward Black liberation in Britian.[384] Prominent examples of this phenomenon include the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival (or PANAF) in Algiers, in which African nations worked "to articulate their anti-imperialist vision" through art and culture.[385] Counter movements at PANAF reconsidered "political art" by reconsidering notions of Blackness to be more expansive and include "all colonized and formerly colonized people, all those who resisted neocolonialism and authoritarianism."[386] In turn, art and culture were seen as key to liberation, an idea that emerged by not only reconsidering Blackness beyond a "color line" but by seeing art and life as inseparable.[387] At FESTAC in 1977, or the Second World Black and African Festival, this line of inquiry

[384] Dadzie, "The Black Women's Movement," 46. Notably, Stuart Hall describes this effort toward racial liberation as a cultural politics, one which connects many different groups. See: Gilroy, "Steppin' out of Babylon," 289.

[385] Samuel D. Anderson, "'Negritude is Dead': Performing the African Revolution at the First Pan-African Cultural Festival (Algiers, 1969)," in *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966: Contexts and Legacies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 133. PANAF also importantly was a site for critiquing Leopold Senghor's idea of negritude, which suggested that "black Africans could use indigenous cultural forms to foster modern identities free from European racist and colonial models." This model was considered limited.

[386] Paraska Tolan-Szkilnik, *Maghreb Noir: The Militant-Artists of North Africa and the Struggle for a Pan-African, Postcolonial Future* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023), 2-6. Tolan-Szkilnik's argument echoes Water's thesis that conceptions of Blackness changed in Britain to expand beyond distinct racial or ethnic lines. This notion of Blackness is parallel to the one put forward by those in and adjacent to the National Black Women's Conference in 1979, which argued for Blackness as a political term encompassing "anyone who experienced racism." See: Dadzie, "The Black Women's Movement," 48. Furthermore, this specific definition of Blackness as inclusive of "East Asian, South Asian, South East Asian, and Arabic descent" can be seen in the 1985 exhibition *Mirror Reflecting Darkly* at Brixton Art Gallery. See: Tobin, "'Little Circles'," 40-1; Young, ed., *Women in Revolt!*, 211.

[387] Ibid., 6, 73. Similarly, those involved thought it was necessary to go beyond the government, who they had lost faith in at the time, but also critiqued for co-opting the festival for their own goals.

continued as a new question emerged: how North Africans or Arabs could or could not participate, with Senegal, among others, calling for Arabs to be excluded.[388]

Yet perhaps the example most fitting to rethink the World of Islam Festival in a broader context around festivals and identity is the 1972 al-Wasiti Festival in Baghdad.[389] The al-Wasiti Festival is a part of a larger movement in the 1960s and 1970s and the era of Pan-Arabism in which Arab countries and the artists therewithin constructed new venues to display their artistic production in line with decolonization efforts and larger initiatives for artists and nations to stake their claim in a cosmopolitan world; movements for independence were often met by the colonizers with rage that such liberation was a threat to civilization.[390]

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[388] Andrew Apter, "Beyond Negritude: Black Cultural Citizenship and the Arab Question in FESTAC '77," in *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966: Contexts and Legacies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 151-4. FESTAC also emerged from FESMAN in 1966, which was the first pan-African event hosted in Africa. Much like festivals discussed here were catalysts for contemporary Arab artists to highlight their work, FESMAN and FESTAC were also seen by the US as opportunities to bring awareness to modern African American visual art. See: Lindsay Twa, "From Fesman '66 to Festac '77" Competing Curatorial Strategies for African-American Art at Pan-African Festivals," in *Exhibitions Beyond Boundaries: Transnational Exchanges through art, architecture, and design from 1945-1985*, ed. Harriet Atkinson, Verity Clarkson, and Sarah A. Lichtman (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 189-207. Other events of note include the 1974 Artists for Democracy Festival in Chile, as well as Youth Festivals within the Eastern Block.

[389] On festivals in the Arab world in the 1970s, see: Alia Nakhli, "Les grandes messes panarabes: festivals et biennales d'art arabe dans les années 1970," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 138 (2015): np. Furthermore, the festival was contemporaneous with the First Arab Festival of National Plastic Arts in Damascus. See: Alia Nakhli, "Writing the History of Modern Arab Art," in *Past Disquiet: Artists, International Solidarity, and Museums in Exile*, ed. Kristine Khouri and Rashā Saltī (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2018), 95-105.

[390] Anneka Lenssen, "Biennials and Arab Representation," in *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents,* ed. Anneka Lenssen, Sarah Rogers, and Nada Shabout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 191-2; Nada Shabout*, Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 30; Lawrence, "Just plain common sense," 68.

Named after the thirteenth-century miniature painter Yahya al-Wasiti, the festival was a venue for artists from the Arab world broadly to get to know each other at a time when scholarship was limited. Dia al-Azzawi (Iraqi, b. 1939) proposed the festival to Shafiq al-Kamali, the Iraqi Minister of Information, who was interested in the idea of an art festival more broadly; the Iraqi Ministry of Information then sponsored the festival.[391] Azzawi reflects on the festival as the "largest and most diverse exhibition in the history of Iraqi art."[392] Exhibiting artists included Mohammad Melehi (Moroccan, 1936–2020), Mohammed al Qasmi (Moroccan, 1942–2003), Mohammed Chabia (Moroccan, 1935–2013), Al-Hadi al-Turki (Tunisian, 1922–2019), Aref al-Rayyes (Lebanese, 1928–2005), Amine al-Basha (Lebanese, 1932–2019), and al-Bahjory (Egyptian, b. 1932).[393] Along with an exhibition of posters, there were also numerous publications about contemporary Iraqi art, al-Wasiti, and the Baghdad school of miniature painting.[394] In this context, the most important of these publications was Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *Iraqi Art Today*, a survey of 25 Iraqi painters and sculptors. Through his synthesis and analysis, Jabra not only outlines a history of modern art in Iraq, but also illuminates for a broader audience the lineage by which Iraqi artists were trained, and how these artists thought about the relationship between their Iraqi traditions and

[391] Ibid., 192; Catherine David, *Dia Al-Azzawi: A Retrospective, from 1963 Until Tomorrow* (Doha, Qatar: Arab Museum of Modern Art, 2017), 40.

[392] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 40.

[393] Charles Pocock, "Foreword," in *Art in Iraq Today*, ed. Charles Pocock and Dia al-Azzawi (Milan: Skira, 2012), 13-15. I follow Pocock's spelling, but I assume Mohammed al Qasmi is Mohammed al Kacimi, and Mohammed Chabia is Mohamed Chabâa. Al-Hadi Al-Turki is also known as Hedi Turki. Amine al-Basha is also transliterated as Amine El Bacha, and Aref El Rayess as Araf Al-Rays. I believe al-Bahjory refers to Georges Bahgoury.

[394] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 40-1.

heritage and contemporary source material.[395] In effect, the festival and its publications not only created conversation about recent happenings in contemporary Arab art, but also invested in a new historiography that could further future conversations about a burgeoning field.

The al-Wasiti Festival followed from and catalyzed a series of events and artistic happenings focused on rethinking the role of art and culture in articulating national or cultural identities, much like its African predecessors. Furthermore, these events built on the momentum of a burgeoning city with a growing arts infrastructure after the British ended their protectorate. In 1951, the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, led by Azzawi's predecessors Shakir Hassan Al Said (Iraqi, 1925–2004) and Jewad Selim (Iraqi, 1919–61), released their manifesto calling for "a new school of painting." This project was for "the sake of our civilization," and called for a new art that picked up on the innovations of artists in the thirteenth century (before the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols) and brought these innovations together with contemporary practices and sources of inspiration. By being aware of local styles and "local character," a new art would emerge that honored their artistic ancestors like al-Wasiti while bringing to light a continuity between past and present that will prompt art to be reborn.[396] In its broad calls for "civilization" writ large, the group posited art and life as connected, and saw a new art as key to survival, a rhetoric not dissimilar to the subversive calls for political art as key to liberation presented at PANAF. Subsequently, the New Vision

[395] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Iraqi Art Today* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1972), np.

[396] Baghdad Group for Modern Art, "Manifesto," in *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents,* ed. Anneka Lenssen, Sarah Rogers, and Nada Shabout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 150-1.

Group issued a manifesto in 1968 that proposed tradition and heritage were not "static," but sources that could be changed in an effort to make an art that is "a mirror to the present moment."[397] Azzawi recalls this manifesto as proposing a "critical perspective on a tradition."[398] The artists involved in these groups were collectively rethinking notions of Iraqi and Arab identity through art and broader cultural production at a time when the Iraqi state was not only in flux, but as artists were gaining new information from their studies abroad.

This, along with collaboration from other creatives, led to numerous exhibitions and festivals prior to the Al-Wasiti Festival, yet influential thereto, such as an exhibition of contemporary Iraqi art in Kuwait, and a show about contemporary Iraqi art at the al-Marbid poetry festival in 1971.[399] Following the Al-Wasiti Festival, there were also other events that supported this same group of artists, including the Congress of Arab Artists in Baghdad in 1973, the formation of the Union of Arab Plastic Artists, and the first and second Arab biennials in Baghdad and Rabat, respectively, in 1974 and 1976.[400] In this way, the Al-Wasiti Festival existed within a larger constellation of events that supported dialogue necessary for

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[397] Qassim Saad, "Contemporary Iraqi Art: Origins and Development," *Scope (Art)* 3 (Nov. 2008): 54. Azzawi notes that part of his motivation was to "proclaim an avant-garde that joins its humanitarian purpose with a new artistic vision," and be the voice of struggle that united for a new world. See: Lina Hakim, *Dia al-Azzawi: Taking a Stand: Activism through Graphic Design* (Amsterdam: Khatt Books, 2007), 114.

[398] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 39.

[399] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 39-40; Hakim, *Dia al-Azzawi: Taking a Stand*, 160. For a list of artists in the exhibition at the al-Marbid festival, see: *Ma'rad al-fanun al-tashkiliyya fi mahrajan al-marbid al-sha'r 'am 1971* (Exhibition of the Plastic Arts at the Marbid Poetry Festival, 1971) (Basra, 1971). Available at: https://artiraq.org/maia/items/show/33.

[400] Ibid., 41-2; Ibid., 116, fn 102; Ulrike al-Khamis, "An Historical Overview: 1900s-1990s," in *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art*, ed. Maysaloun Faraj (London: Saqi Books, 2001), 29.

reconsiderations of identity and heritage that were later manifested in contemporary painting and sculpture.

A predecessor to the World of Islam Festival, the Al-Wasiti Festival explored similar questions through different forms. Linguistically, the two events both referred to themselves as festivals, and employed the Arabic term *mahrajan*, which in these examples, notes a particular temporality to the experience. Although the World of Islam Festival does not cite the Al-Wasiti Festival as an influence, their linguistic relationship speaks to a more formal, experiential similarity that the label connotes. Both events worked to create a world apart in which one can come to understand art in a new way that reveals it as integral to daily life. In this way, participating in a unique art viewing experience, whether that was in a new structure or a pre-existing space that was adapted, proposed seeing and making art as innately connected to all aspects of life. Such an approach exemplifies Jennie Jordan's theorization of festival known as festivalization where festivity, or creating a space distinct from daily life, and spectacularisation, or creating an experience out of the ordinary, become key to the festival experience, and thus its learning opportunities.[401] Both festivals also had a distinct publishing program that provided audiences the opportunity to learn more at their leisure, ensuring a longer life for the otherwise temporally bound event, and which also crafted new historiographies that would perpetuate ideologies contrary to the hegemony.

Furthermore, the two festivals also require a distinct sequencing of space throughout the city to garner the full experience, one which simultaneously harnesses a city's existing

[401] Jennie Jordan, "The Festivalisation of Contemporary Life," in *Focus on World Festivals: Contemporary Case Studies and Perspectives,* ed. Chris Newbold and Jennie Jordan (Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers, 2016), 6.

infrastructure while creating something unique and specific to an event. This path of movement and the format of the two festivals might be likened to the idea of the biennial. As Sabine Vogel has written, biennials are ambassadors that help to "create and assert a cultural identity at home and to convey the political alliances of the host country to the outside world" while also emphasizing national identities.[402] To understand these goals, most biennials require their audiences to move through different exhibition spaces, if not the whole city. These exhibition venues can be pre-existing sites that may or may not be renovated to varying degrees for the specific event. The oldest and perhaps most famous biennial, the Venice Biennale, requires both, and organizes its spaces along the boundaries of the nation-state. The two main sites (the Giardini and the Arsenale) adapt parts of the Venetian landscape and both construct new structures and renovate pre-existing venues to function as pavilions. Throughout the city, many extant buildings are converted into temporary pavilions for different biennale participants who are not included at the main sites. To understand the world of art, literally, one must make a pilgrimage through the city of Venice and by proxy, around the world, navigating the city to eventually encounter the spectacular biennale sites. In turn, one learns the value of each nation on display, and through the proximity of pavilions, the geopolitics of the biennale's participants.[403]

Both festivals discussed here also require this movement through spaces to understand a bigger picture. At the World of Islam Festival, each stop throughout the city was a way to

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[402] Sabine Vogel, *Biennials – Art on a Global Scale* (Vienna: Springer Verlag, 2010), 8.

[403] Rachel Winter, ""From Palestine with Art": Dreams of Sovereignty and Acts of Resistance at the 2022 Venice Biennale," *react/review: a responsive journal for art & architecture* 3 (2023): 214-23.

understand a new aspect of Islam; to understand the breadth and depth of Islam, one had to experience every exhibition. The al-Wasiti Festival required less movement through the city, but still required a movement and dialogue in order to understand contemporary artistic practice as it brought to light different creative and political possibilities. Both festivals utilized pre-existing structures: the al-Wasiti festival repurposed various venues like lecture halls and other community spaces (as opposed to museums) whereas the World of Islam Festival relied on an existing network of museums. Yet both festivals also upset the nation-state paradigm, proposing a new locus of enunciation: that the state itself was insufficient to articulate an artistic future. Instead, it was in the hands of artists or private individuals to make a proposal through the form of the festival, a form that, unlike the biennial, was designed to upset the nation-state paradigm of the biennial and promote new ways of thinking and learning about art.[404] Sometimes, the state's funding could be helpful to achieve their goals.

It is this new locus of enunciation that reveals festivals as social actors. The World of Islam Festival and the al-Wasiti Festival, like their African predecessors in the 1960s and their successors, who I will return to momentarily, each reconsidered culture as a form of resistance to the hegemonic powers.[405] Culture, be that historical or contemporary, was a way of proposing that there was another social order that was possible. Culture as a form of resistance was a move in line with thinking around multiculturalism at the time in which

[404] Later, Azzawi would further rethink the idea of the biennial with his exhibition *Third World Biennial of Graphic Arts* at the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London in 1980. See: Hakim, *Dia al-Azzawi: Taking a Stand*, 119.

[405] Caglar, "Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of 'Culture'," 178.

multiculturalism could be empowering.[406] At the World of Islam Festival, Islamic art was the culture put forward to resist contemporary British racial and social divides; the answers to present and future problems were found in the past and a return to an unchanged heritage. This unique way of thinking upset the festival's history of Britain, seen in the Crystal Palace and the Festival of Britain, as events that glorify the nation's progress to instead comment on the nation's decay. Meanwhile, the al-Wasiti Festival rejected a timeless heritage, instead positing modern influences and historical knowledge as two elements that could coalesce into a new way forward. This project was not about questioning the state or even Iraqi society, but broader social limitations that kept Arab artists siloed from each other, and which did not value their artistic production. In this way, the al-Wasiti Festival also exceeded the boundaries of the nation-state in the vein of the pan-Arab ethos of the time.[407] More importantly, both festivals posited gatherings as key to a larger struggle: bringing people together in dialogue could create a new understanding that would promote change. In this way, it was the collective that could overturn the current practices. Seeing these two festivals and the larger trajectory in this light, festivals and their sister form in the World's Fair and the biennial are radical events that have the capacity to stop upholding or perpetuating the nation state and its attendant hegemonies and in turn, further counter-cultural movements that

[406] Ibid., 178.

[407] Such a sentiment is similarly expressed by Amin Alsaden, who notes that "the work of Yahya Al-Wasiti provided an alibi for Iraqi artists who wished to anchor their production locally, evoking this figure as a sort of ancestor, the paragon of a distinctive Baghdadi medieval school of painting." See: Amin Alsaden, "Baghdad's Arab Biennial: Regional Subversions, Global Ambitions," *Third Text* 33, no. 1 (2019): 127.

reimagine what contemporary cultural artistic production is and who gets to be a part of the art world.

Al-Wasiti, however, was not the end. Rather, it gave way to discussions about a biennial of Arab art; this resulted in the First Arab Arts Biennial in Baghdad in 1974, and a second in Rabat in 1976.[408] The first Arab biennial brought together numerous artists from around the world, including key pioneers of modernist thinking who were also involved in previous events in Iraq, like al Said, Azzawi, Rafa al-Nasiri (Iraqi, 1940–2013), Ismail Fattah (Iraqi, 1934–2004), and Kadhem Hayder (Iraqi, 1932–85).[409] Many of the artists who exhibited were later a part of the 1978 exhibition *The International Art Exhibition for Palestine* in Beirut.[410] Though the biennial was short-lived, it continued the model of al-Wasiti where people were brought together and awareness was created about new artists by both bringing

[408] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 41; Hakim, *Dia al-Azzawi: Taking a Stand*, 117. Alsaden questions the narrative about the Al-Wasiti festival giving way to the Biennial, suggesting that it was more of a rhetorical political move. Specifically, he says that "Thus, by claiming that the Al-Wasiti Art Festival was where the biennial idea was born, Iraq was nationalizing what was originally a collective Arab project." See: Alsaden, "Baghdad's Arab Biennial," 127. For more on the Arab Biennial, see: Alessandra Amin, "Introduction to "revolutionary Painting and the Palestinian Revolution," by Mohammed Chabaa, and "Palestinian Artists and the Biennial," from Toni Maraini's "Baghdad 1974: A Summary of the First Arab Biennial of Fine Arts" (Both 1974)," *Artmargins* 12, no. 3 (2023): 102-112; Toni Maraini, "Palestinian Artists and the Biennial, From "Baghdad 1974: A Summary of the First Arab Biennial of Fine Arts"," *Artmargins* 12, no. 3 (2023): 116-18; and *Daliil al-fanaaneen al-tashkileen al-3raaqeen* (Guide to Iraqi Plastic Arts) (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1974) (available at https://artiraq.org/maia/items/show/532). On the second Arab Biennial in Rabat, see: *Ma3rd al-sanateen al-3rabee al-thanee multaqaa 1976* (Second biannual exhibition of Arab artists) (Rabat, 1976). Available at: https://artiraq.org/maia/items/show/75. 1974 was also the year of the Artists for Democracy festival in Chile.

[409] Pocock, "Foreword," 13.

[410] See: Kristine Khouri and Rashā Saltī, eds., *Past Disquiet: Artists, International Solidarity, and Museums in Exile* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2018).

artists into dialogue with each other, but also creating a space for artists to articulate their own identities. Furthermore, in 1978, there was the "First Cultural Moussem [sic]" in Morocco, or the Asilah Festival. Beyond Arab identity, but also citing 1960s events in Algiers and Dakar as key influences, the Asilah Festival responded to the larger interest in people and creativity in the "Third World."[411] The festival's goal was "to detach ourselves from current cultural pursuits," including the typical form of the art exhibition, in order to move toward a "common ground" that would allow people to meet each other and appreciate each other's artistic interests. Asilah was the ideal site for this, according to organizers, as an artistic crossroads and a place free of the "stifling atmosphere of the large cities." Artists came from all over the world, including Iraq, Palestine, Morocco, Sudan, and the US.[412] Often, artists that would show at one event would show at multiple, thus increasing their visibility, and paving the way for later recognition. As these events continue the legacy of the al-Wasiti Festival, they point toward the critical role of alternative spaces and events as they make space for people to come in, converse, share their creativity, and leave confident and inspired about the future of the plastic arts, if not culture and civilization more broadly.

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[411] Furthermore, in a recent podcast, Morad Montazami suggested that the Moroccan artists who attended the 1974 biennial in Baghdad, which was largely those who were part of the Casablanca school, were likely inspired by the event, and considered it in their larger frameworks for planning Asilah. See: Hoor Al Qasimi, host, Speaking of Art, episode 11, "Casablanca Art School: The Making of An Artistic Revolution," Sharjah Art Foundation, March 25, 2024, 33 minutes, https://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/web-radio/speaking-of-art.

[412] *Asilah: premier Moussem culturel juillet/août 1978* (Casablanca: Shoof, 1978), 12-13, 44. For more on the Asilah Festival, see: Sarah Dornhof, "Street Art out of Time: The Cultural Moussem of Asilah and Other Entanglements of Public Space, Arts, and Politics," *Manazir Journal*, no. 4 (2022): 74-97, and María Gómez López, "Asilah Arts Festival (Morocco): encounters in the urban space," *Ge-conservación*, no. 11 (2017): 10-16.

J. Conclusion

The World of Islam Festival was not retained within British cultural memory, nor do histories of Britain and its multicultural effort suggest that the 1980s was a period of improved social relations in Britain for anyone, be that Black communities, immigrant communities, or for those in the feminist movements.[413] Conflict eclipsed the event, including the Lebanese Civil War, the 1978–79 winter of discontent in London, the 1979 Grand Mosque seizure in Mecca, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Iran/Iraq War in 1980, and the first Gulf War in 1990, contemporary political events that colored an image of a region in turmoil.[414] Although significant external funding bolstered the event, there is no evidence to suggest that the festival launched an economic redevelopment in the country. Thatcher's election in 1979 to prime minister also heralded in a new conservative era that further entrenched decades of state-sanctioned racism.[415] The miners' strike of 1984 was the latest

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[413] Juliet Jacques, "Too Much to Dream? Trans People and the Art of the 1970s and 1980s," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 55; Young, ed., *Women in Revolt!*, 213. Notably, Nur Sobers-Khan's recent and excellent article that the festival made a major impact on its attendees, and also impacted future displays on Islamic art. While I agree with her thoughtful analysis and broader takeaways, I have not found archival evidence to make a claim in a similar manner. See: Sobers-Khan, "The *Islam in Europe* Exhibition and the World of Islam Festival," 63. Furthermore, when we discuss the impact and status of multiculturalism in Britain, it is important to not silo the conversation into a pre- and post-Rushdie affair framework. See: John Wolffe, "Fragmented Universality: Islam and Muslims," in *The Growth of Religious Diversity in Britain*: *Britain from 1945,* ed. Gerald Parsons, vol. 1, (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 133-72. Lastly, it has also been noted that it is challenging to know whether multiculturalism is "working," and such a question is certainly relevant here as well. See: Wetherly, et. al., "Introduction," 1-6.

[414] Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 168; Grinell, "Framing Islam at the World of Islam Festival, London, 1976,", 74.

[415] Solomos, et. al., "The organic crisis of British capitalism and race," 22-34.

and greatest domestic challenge in Britain that mobilized mass networks of solidarity across groups while also drawing attention to the union busting activities of the government.[416] The challenges of multiculturalism that emerged during the festival reappeared following the Satanic Verses controversy in 1989 around what was deemed permissible in society, who would decide these boundaries, and how society would incorporate different cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, and other practices; likewise, the controversy returned to the question of what British values were, how other values coincided, who gets to be British, and on what terms.[417] And the notion of the "world of Islam," a recurring term in this chapter, later became a catchphrase for conservative critics to fearmonger about a world where religion dominated, and the foundation for an argument about the binary struggle between Islam and Christianity.[418]

The World of Islam Festival Trust later shifted its program into contemporary material, a question I return to in the next chapter, before it ultimately dissolved and was absorbed into the Al-Tajir Trust in 1999, an organization founded by Emirati Ambassador al-Tajir.[419] *The*

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[416] Young, ed., *Women in Revolt!*, 170.

[417] Weller, *A Mirror for our Times*; Asad, "Multiculturalism and British Identity in the Wake of the Rushdie Affair," 455-80; Hesse, "Introduction," 2.

[418] Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, 273. Citing: Frits Bolkenstein, "On the Collapse of the Soviet Union," speech from Switzerland in 1981. Chin specifically references Bernard Lewis as an example of this divisive rhetoric, yet notably, Keeler used something similar in previous years.

[419] Mahdi al-Tajir was originally a member of the World of Islam Festival Trust. For an alternative history of the trust, see: Alistair Duncan, "The World of Islamic Festival Trust," *Museum International* (1981): 249-50; *World of Islam Festival Trust, 1973-1983*, np. In its later years, Al-Tajir Trust continued to sponsor contemporary projects, such as a series of small collection displays at the British Museum in 2009 that coincided with the major exhibition *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*. The three displays were united under the program *Innovation through Tradition: Contemporary Art from Iran and Pakistan*, and

Arts of Islam had far more reach in academic contexts for rethinking histories of display and taxonomies of Islamic art in opposition to ideas of unity and diversity.

These negative pronouncements might lead one to see the festival as a failure, and if the metric of failure is quantifiable social change, then perhaps it was.[420] This failure is why the festival deserves our reconsideration at a time when Middle Eastern cultural production is continually deployed to resolve conflict. In Nur Sobers-Khan's recent article on the festival, she posits the importance of failure as a curatorial methodology that illuminates the "logic of the colonial museum and the structure that it upholds":

> Failure is then far more interesting, and a much richer site of knowledge production, than 'success' in institutions whose collections are primarily historical… failure as curatorial practice can represent a fertile site for thinking, and a generative source for the creation of narratives, especially disruptive narratives.[421]

Failure or not, reexamining the festival reveals the way Islamic art was conceptualized and presented to the public in 1976, and for what aims. Funded by so-called "Muslim governments," the festival is an integral yet overlooked part of a contemporary exhibition history and offers an important glimpse into what objects can do versus how curators animate them. Likewise, it provides an important interlocutor for questions of identity formation during a postcolonial period where the hegemony and the subaltern continually interact if not battle for the final say on representation. The tensions, contradictions, and potential failures

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featured the artists Parviz Tanavoli, Khosrow Hassanzadeh, Sadegh Tirafkan, Muhammad Zeeshan, and Khadim Ali.

[420] Notably, the press also talked about the event as a failure. See, for example: "Masses who Won't Come to Mahomet," *Evening News,* May 11, 1976, np. Here, the author says the event's success is in "grave doubt." Oleg Grabar also referred to the event as a failure. See: Grabar, "Geometry and Ideology," 49-52.

[421] Sobers-Khan, "The *Islam in Europe* Exhibition and the World of Islam Festival," 57.

at the World of Islam Festival set the stage for chapter three, which explores previously overlooked displays of contemporary art at the festival to reveal the way historicism and hegemony were interlocutors for Arab self-representation and the emergence of contemporary Arab art in London, a pivotal moment whose impact continues today.

III. "Presumably such an exhibition would not fall within the scope of the Festival:" Finding the Contemporary at the World of Islam Festival

A. Introduction

In 2006, the British Museum opened *Word Into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East*, curated by Venetia Porter, which highlighted the museum's novel collection of modern and contemporary art from the region known as the Middle East acquired over a roughly twenty-year period. *Word Into Art* overlapped by four days with *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a show curated by Fereshteh Daftari that, to borrow Finbarr Flood's summary, questioned the idea of the Islamic through a supposedly apolitical framework that exhibited both Islamic and Western modern and contemporary art.[422] Whereas *Word Into Art* presented works with visual continuities between historical and contemporary Islamic art, *Without Boundary* highlighted the way artists from the Middle East and the US questioned how the idea of Islamic art is constructed, as well as its application and visual features.[423]

The formation of *Word Into Art* extended beyond the typical 3–5 year curatorial planning process into a multi-decade experiment to expand the British Museum's ideological parameters via the contents of its collection. The British Museum began acquiring contemporary art from the Middle East in the mid-1980s under curator J. Michael Rogers in

[422] Finbarr Barry Flood, "From Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art," in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London: Routledge, 2007), 45-6.

[423] Fereshteh Daftari, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* (exhibition brochure) (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), np. Available here: https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_83_300201644.pdf.

an effort to not only hold art from around the world, but to fashion a collection mindful of contemporary, living histories; this collection was just one of many which expanded its contemporary holdings throughout the museum.[424] Yet to comply with the British Museum's rigid frameworks, the works acquired were primarily on paper (paintings were the purview of the National Gallery), and their content had to illustrate a relationship with historical material from the region; here, and in an effort to make connections to extant work in the collection, this was interpreted as a continuity with Islamic art in the form of reinterpretations of Arabic calligraphy broadly defined.[425] In this way, the scope of contemporary artistic production was still exceptionally limited. Visitors journeyed through the mythical transformation of Islamic calligraphy into a contemporary artistic practice as they perused the four main sections of the exhibition: sacred script; literary traditions; deconstructing the word; and identity, history, and politics.[426] The result was, as summarized by the artist Hassan Khan, an exhibition that deferred to a linear teleology of history while essentializing the region.[427]

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[424] Venetia Porter, *Word Into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East* (London: British Museum Press, 2006), 14; Venetia Porter, "Collecting and Exhibiting Arab Art at the British Museum," in *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi, and Nada Shabout (London: TransGlobe Publishing, 2009), 30-1. Specifically, Ahmed Moustafa's works were the first to be acquired. See: Venetia Porter, "Collecting 20th Century Middle Eastern Art in the British Museum," *Arts & the Islamic World* 21 (Spring 1992): 25-8.

[425] Porter, *Word Into Art*, 14.

[426] Ibid. Finbarr Barry Flood similarly summarizes *Word into Art* by noting that the exhibition "problematized" the idea of the Islamic and showed the way the complexities of this term have come to bear on recent artistic production. See: Flood, "From Prophet to Postmodernism?," 45.

[427] Hassan Khan, "Word Into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East," *Bidoun*, no. 8 (Fall 2006): https://www.bidoun.org/articles/word-into-art-artists-of-the-modern-middle-east.

Khan's incisive review, however, overlooks one key point: the British Museum's exhibition served to present the notion of *hurufiyyah* before it circulated in readily-available, English language scholarship, a term I will unpack later in this chapter; in another sense, the exhibition was also the museological debut of *hurufiyyah*.[428] Through its focus on letter-based work, *Word Into Art* posited that modern and contemporary art from the region was based almost exclusively in the letter, a more exaggerated version of scholarly definitions of *hurufiyyah* that position the letter as a central feature to modern Arab art. Indeed, *Word into Art* even defined *hurufiyyah* in its exhibition catalogue as "a term that denotes works of art 'which deal with the Arab language, letter or text, as a visual element of composing.'"[429] While such considerations became key for scholars to unpack and theorize such the idea of modern Arab art, for museums, it became a restrictive Western container that made new material comprehensible to unfamiliar audiences in ways that partially gave into biases about Arabic calligraphy as the sole artistic form in the region, and simultaneously pigeonholed the subject in ways that made anything beyond the letter non-existent, or not art. In this way, the letter, and all those who interpreted it, became a "spectacle of inclusion," to return to this project's title: a glamourized subject in museums that appears to great acclaim yet often fails

[428] While Dagher first published his text in 1990, the original version was in Arabic. Wijdan Ali's dissertation was published in 1993, but many dissertations were not publicly accessible at the time. At this time, Nada Shabout had also explored the topic in her dissertation, but this was also not readily available.

[429] Porter, *Word Into Art*, 15-16. Citing: Charbel Dagher, *al-ḥurūfīyah al-'Arabīyah: al-fann wa-al-huwiyah* (Beirut: Shirkat al-Maṭbū'āt lil-Tawzī' wa-al-Nashr, 1990), and Nada Shabout, "Modern Arab Art and the Metamorphosis of the Arabic Letter" (Ph.D. Diss, University of Texas at Arlington, 1999). Later, Porter defined *hurufiyyah* as a movement encompassing different uses of the letter. See: Porter, "Collecting and Exhibiting Arab Art at the British Museum," 30-5.

to reach parity with other material, or to find inclusiveness within broader narratives, in part because of its own museological constructions or misconstructions.

Yet taken together, *Word Into Art* and *Without Boundary* publicly put forth different forms of a new art historical field that rapidly proliferated in museums in the following years, as seen in collections and exhibitions at major institutions such as the National Museum of Asian Art (née the Freer Sackler at the Smithsonian), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York). Often interpreted as a reaction to September 11th, 2001, and the urgent need to respond to rampant Islamophobia, these exhibitions and collections were the outcome of years of collecting, planning, and theorizing, often under auspices now deemed highly questionable. But when and how did an interest in modern and contemporary art from the Middle East first begin in London, which ultimately led to exhibitions like *Word Into Art*?

In this chapter, I posit the 1976 World of Islam Festival as a critical interlocutor for a growing interest in, and the later proliferation of, contemporary Arab, Iranian, and Turkish art in London. This phenomenon, as I illuminate, began in the 1970s, and culminated in larger, institutional engagement, as seen in the British Museum's collection and exhibitions in 2006.[430] In other words, contemporary art adjacent to the World of Islam Festival was a catalyst and interlocutor for an interest that facilitated efforts to build collections of contemporary art from the Middle East in the UK. Simultaneously, the methodology behind this process posited dialogues between history, contemporaneity, and the letter, which

[430] Though beyond the confines of this project, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Tate Modern in London also came to acquire significant holdings in this field. Their collecting parameters, however, are much broader in their parameters.

impacted later perceptions of and engagement with this work. London's history as a home for many Arab artists in diaspora was key to this trajectory. Collecting practices in the UK later influenced those in the US, even though the initial debut of *hurufiyyah* was in the US via Madiha Umar (Iraqi, 1908–2005), suggesting a constellational formation. Understanding this sequence of events and its networks of entanglement requires a historical recovery of the largely unknown presence of contemporary Middle Eastern art at events on the "fringe" of the festival, a term I discuss in detail based on its use in the festival program.[431]

Artists featured in events on the festival's periphery later became central to collections at British institutions, such as Ali Omar Ermes (Libyan, 1945–2021), Osman Waqialla (Sudanese, 1925–2007), and Ahmed Moustafa (b. Egypt, 1943, active London). Their styles, as I analyze, reflect both a hybridity between and subversion of Islamic and Western modern art through their engagement with abstraction, modernism, and Arabic calligraphy as visual languages shaped by their experiences in diaspora. London was key to the development of these artistic styles as a site of education, learning, but also experiences of diaspora and exile. Such conversations are in dialogue with the complex thinking around *hurufiyyah*, which specifically focuses on Arab artists returning to the Arabic script or Arabic calligraphy as a

[431] Venetia Porter previously noted that contemporary art was present at the festival, but does not detail what these exhibitions were, or what artists were featured. See: Monia Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," in *Global Trends in Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art,* ed. Rui Oliveira Lopes, Giulia Lamoni, and Margarida Brito Alves (Lisboa: CIEBA Edicoes, 2015), 84. The fringe is a term utilized in the festival program. See: Official World of Islam Festival program, April 1976, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. There are also books about select fringe festival events. See: *The Architecture of Islamic Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: The British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, 1976); *Fine and Rare Oriental Rugs and Weavings from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Anglo Persian Carpet Company, 1976); *Islamic Art and Architecture in Libya: Catalogue for the Exhibition (*London: The Committee, 1976).

part of reconnecting to local traditions. As part of this inquiry, I probe an aesthetics of diaspora in an art world during its nascent stages of globalism, leading to the spectacle of inclusion that is contemporary Middle Eastern art in the 21st century.

This study shifts our temporal understandings of the field to something which emerged in the 1970s, decades prior to its public facing display at museums post-2001, while reevaluating the importance and impact of the festival in relation to understanding the larger conditions of possibility for including Arab artists in the British art world. Lacking one central archive by which to consider this topic, I am reading across, between, and against numerous primary and secondary sources and positionalities to understand the institutions and ideologies shaping this format. While the institutional archives (the Tate and the V&A) often point toward an event's existence, it is through the words of the artists themselves and the press at the time that we gain a fuller understanding of the genealogies of network formation, institutional display, early historiography, and collecting practices.

My argument and its attendant lines of inquiry are shaped by several interrelated questions weaving together the World of Islam Festival, *Word Into Art,* Middle Eastern artists in diaspora, *hurufiyyah*, the British art world, and new historiographies of contemporary art from the Middle East that result from the dynamics of the 1970s, a period where Arab artists felt neglected in Britain.[432] Namely, what was the relationship between the World of Islam Festival and contemporary art from the Middle East, and what are the

[432] Fran Lloyd, "Arab Women Artists: Issues of Representation and Gender in Contemporary British Visual Culture," *Visual Culture in Britain* 2, no. 2 (2001): 1-2. This neglect Lloyd describes continued in the 1980s. Simultaneously, women artists were also advocating for both their liberation and artistic recognition. See: Amy Tobin, "'Little Circles': On Group Work, Feminism and Art by Women," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 37.

ramifications of that entanglement? And what were the conditions of possibility that fostered the emergence and proliferation of contemporary Middle Eastern art in London? Rethinking the relationship of the World of Islam Festival to contemporary Middle Eastern art promotes new possibilities for the historiographies of the field to consider how different interests in the material developed.

B. Arab Abstraction in London: A Dialogue

When Arab artists emerged on the British art scene, they benefitted from the commercial boom in the 1980s that saw new galleries and greater visibility of contemporary British art, even though times were still meager due to global conflict and ongoing domestic economic problems.[433] Likewise, the 1980s were also a shift where Black British artists were gaining visibility following protest and dissent at the whiteness of the exhibition programs at major institutions, including the Hayward and the Institute of Contemporary Art.[434] Such a

[433] Imogen Racz, *British Art of the Long 1980s: Diverse Practices, Exhibitions and Infrastructures* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 1, 9. In the 1980s, there were new galleries specifically for Middle Eastern artists, like the Kufa Gallery, the Zamana Gallery, and the October Gallery. Some museums, such as the British Museum and the Imperial War Museum, also began their collections in the 1980s. See: Racz, *British Art of the Long 1980s*, 1-3; Rose Issa, *Signs of Our Times: From Calligraphy to Calligraffiti* (London: Merrell, 2016), 22; Salwa M. Nashashibi, *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World* (Washington, DC: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994), 11. This era has also been more recently described as the era of art's commodification, as led by Charles Saatchi, who was also a major proponent of contemporary art from the SWANA region in the early 21st century, as seen in his major exhibition *Unveiled*. See: Linsey Young, ed., *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90* (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 27; and *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* (London: Booth-Clibborn, 2009).

[434] Linsey Young, "Introduction: The Personal is Political," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 24-5; Zuzana Flaskova, "The Long Lens of Motherhood: The Art of Giving and Sustaining Life," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 95.

chronology also coincides with the rise and fall of *hurufiyyah*, a spontaneous, independent, and fragmented network of artistic activity rooted in the Arabic letter, and which also intersects with the presence of the contemporary at the World of Islam Festival and post-OPEC crisis market activity.

In 1990, Charbel Dagher published *al-ḥurūfīyah al-'Arabīyah: al-fann wa-al-huwiyah*, or *Arabic Hurufiyyah: Art and Identity*. Therewithin, Dagher endeavored to define the movement of *hurufiyyah*, or "artworks that engage with the Arabic language – letters or texts – as a visual element or material for composing" made by Arab or Iranian artists who were divorced from local tradition and "driven by a chauvinistic preference for Western art and its styles, techniques, and subjects" to create a "art with a local reference and civilizational identity."[435] More simply put, it was the search for an "Arab artistic style" that utilized, in part, Western artistic approaches.[436] While briefly acknowledging that there are numerous approaches to calligraphy, such as the angled *thuluth* script or the square *kufic* script, Dagher also distinguishes between calligraphers and *hurufiyyah* artists by noting a particular innovation that exceeds the boundaries of simply using calligraphy as a stylized form of writing in Arabic in new ways. *Hurufiyyah* employs new manners of viewing and artistic media while thinking through larger questions around Western abstraction; *hurufiyyah* works are "visual," says Dagher, as where calligraphic works are linguistic.[437] Though he waivers in his chronology, Dagher comes to recognize that Umar was the first to work in this manner,

[435] Charbel Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya: Art and Identity* (Milano: Skira, 2016), 17-20.

[436] Ibid., 33.

[437] Ibid., 17-22.

followed by many other artists he cites as examples of this phenomenon: Yousif Ahmad (Qatari, b. 1955), Jamil Hamoudi (Iraqi, 1924–2003), Umar, Wajih Nahle (Lebanese, 1932–2017), Farid Belkahia (Moroccan, 1934–2014), Said Al-Akl (Lebanese, 1926–2001), Rachid Koraichi (Algerian, b. 1947), (Charles) Hussein Zenderoudi (Iranian, b. 1937), Rafa al-Nasiri (Iraqi, 1940–2013), Mohamed Melehi (Moroccan, 1936–2020), Mehdi Moutasher (French–Iraqi, b. 1943), Kamal Boullata (Palestinian, 1942–2019), Ahmed Shibrain (Sudanese, 1931–2017), Etel Adnan (Lebanese, 1925–2021), Shakir Hassan al-Said (Iraqi, 1925–2004), Nja Mahdoui (Tunisian, b. 1937), Dia al-Azzawi (Iraqi, b. 1939), and more.[438]

Dagher's pivotal scholarship was an effort to make sense, for one, of a movement in the moment right after it reached its apex. Wijdan Ali later took Dagher's terminology and definition to task for what she deemed was its inadequacy, instead positing the foundation for a Calligraphic School of Art in traditional Islamic calligraphy; her position directly counters Dagher's statement that *hurufiyyah* did not emerge from Arabic calligraphy.[439] While Dagher's thesis also points to an artistic rupture, Ali holds to a continuity.[440] Nada Shabout also intervened into this debate and looked past terminology to instead focus on works where the letter was the main component or the whole work to reconsider the ways Arab artists were engaging with the Arabic letter as a part of a larger investigation into local sources and

[438] The names of these artists represent those whose work was illustrated in the original Arabic book by Dagher. See: Dagher, *al-ḥurūfīyah al-'Arabīyah: al-fann wa-al-huwiyah.*

[439] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 22; Wijdan Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," (Ph.D Diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993), 13, 274. Notably, Arab and Islamic are not defined.

[440] Ibid., 20; Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 2, 14.

cultural identities.[441] The broad contours of this complex debate ultimately indicate that the letter is central to an important body of artistic production, but the letter's theorization remains unsettled.[442]

One specific aspect of *hurufiyyah* that remains open to interpretation is a clear, concise definition of the Arabic letter that Dagher discusses. While much of Arabic is rooted in oral traditions, the revelation of the Qur'an was later written down, affording the Arabic script, including calligraphic forms of writing thereof, an elevated status. As Maryam Ekhtiar writes, the written Arabic alphabet is the "visual manifestation of the Arabic language" whose earliest forms date to the 4th century CE, were largely established by the 6th century CE, and refined over time, especially in the 9th century CE.[443] Learning to write as a calligrapher was an esteemed skill, in part due to the sacred nature of the script. Over time, new scripts emerged that stylized the Arabic letter, such as the angular *kufic* that emerged in the late 7th–early 8th century in Kufa, Iraq, which grew out of the *Hijazi* script used to transcribe the Qur'an. The 10th century saw the emergence of different stylized versions of *kufic*. In the early 10th century, Abbasid calligrapher Abu 'Ali Muhammad ibn Muqla also defined the theory of proportional script (*al-khatt al-mansub*), which set out a series of ratios

[441] Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 75. Notably, Lina Hakim argues something similar when she notes that *hurufiyyah* was concurrent with the rise of pan-Arabism and seen as "a way of articulating cultural and political unity visually." See: Lina Hakim, *Dia al-Azzawi: Taking a Stand: Activism through Graphic Design* (Amsterdam: Khatt Books, 2007), 67.

[442] Also see: Silvia Naef, "Visual Modernity in the Arab World, Turkey and Iran: Reintroducing the "Missing Modern"," *Asia* 70, no. 4 (2016): 1005-18.

[443] Maryam Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), 17-19, 25.

that would refine and standardize the Arabic script across its styles. Ibn Muqla also articulated the six proportional scripts, or the "six pens," which help to identify major types of writing in manuscripts: *naskh*, *thhuluth*, *muhaqqaq*, *Rayhan*, *tawqi*, and *riqa*.[444] This historical overview of the Arabic script helps to illuminate how a written language took shape with specific stylistic flourishes while maintaining a focus on legibility and the transmission of information and meaning.

By comparison, as Dagher explores the use of the "Arabic letter in modern art," the letter is left as an open signifier with a mutable aesthetic form.[445] For Dagher, but also later for Ali and Shabout, the letter and the script are not confined to one pen, like *naskh*, Furthermore, the Arabic letter in *hurufiyyah* is only loosely attached to the letter's standard form. This break, much like the shift from calligraphy to *hurufiyyah*, is indicative of the ways that *hurufiyyah* artists moved beyond legibility and the transmission of meaning through a written message to an aesthetic, artistic experiment. As where calligraphers adhere to the letter's form, such as in the history outlined above, *hurufiyyah* artists see the shapes and dots that make up the Arabic alphabet as compositional elements for a new modern art.[446] The result is something akin to a play with line, shape, and geometry through abstraction. In this way, *hurufiyyah* artists are not trying to develop a new pen, but as Dagher explains, attempting to deal with the "aesthetic problem" of "Western oil painting in the Arab world."[447] Artists

[444] Ibid., 17-29.

[445] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 22.

[446] The idea of a compositional element is one which Dagher uses to describe Jamil Hamoudi. See: Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 23.

[447] Ibid., 33.

achieve this by drawing on historical concepts, like the Arabic letter, and interpreting it through the Western artistic approaches they learned while studying abroad, thus rendering abstract works like those explored in this chapter. Thus, Dagher's ambiguity in his definition is not necessarily a weakness, but a necessity imposed by the very ways artists free themselves from the semantics of letters to instead play with their visual potential.

Central to the *hurufi* discourse, much like this chapter, is an uneasy relationship between Arab artists and the "West." For one, Dagher identified a group of Western artists who were thinking about letters and abstraction, including Paul Klee (Swiss, 1879–1940) and Bernard Quentin (French, 1923–2020), but he did not consider them a part of his *hurufiyyah* movement.[448] On the other hand, many Arab artists studied abroad in Britain throughout the 20th century, among other places in Europe, but most developed styles contrary to the dominant trends of the time. Mid- to late-twentieth century British modernism was also at a point of transition: it explored color-based abstraction in both painting and sculpture, realism, meditations on Pop art, and responded to American abstraction; it was likewise poised to think through conceptual art, video art, and performance art. British abstraction began in the 1950s with painters like Kenneth (British, 1905–84) and Mary Martin (British, 1907–69), Robert Adams (British, 1917–84), Adrian Heath (British, b. Burma, 1920–92), Anthony Hill (British, 1930–2020), and Victor Pasmore (British, 1908–98). It was largely defunct by the

[448] Ibid., 17. While both groups of artists consider the notion of calligraphy, for Dagher, there is a key distinction between Western interpretations thereof and Arab artists returning to their local traditions, the latter of which is what constitutes *hurufiyyah*. Likewise, American artists who took an interest in Asian traditions would fall in the same group as those Western artists who Dagher says are interested in calligraphy. See: Alexandra Munroe, *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009).

1970s, as were its countercurrents.[449] Simultaneously, Arab artists in London were working in abstract idioms, but they were at odds with prominent trends around Anthony Caro's (British, 1924–2013) Minimalism, David Hockney's (British, b. 1937) photo-realism, the 70s School of London, nascent Pop art, and other forms of abstraction.[450] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Arab artists were also then excluded from art historical discourse around British art and retrospective studies of the twentieth century, even as the British art world became more global in the 1980s, in part because the historiography suggested that being Arab could not be analogous with Britain.[451] The older generation of Arab artists, such as those discussed here, were not a part of later revisionist movements, like the Black British Arts Movement, in the same way as younger generations.[452]

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[449] A.I. Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England after the Second World War: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 9. This iteration of abstraction followed in the spirit of Constructionism to develop a vocabulary of geometries in dialogue with American minimalism. See: James Bartos, *Geometry of Beauty: The Not Very British Art of Six British Artists* (London: Unicorn, 2019), 150-65. Lawrence Alloway also coined the term "Pop art" in the mid-1950s. See: Justyna Stepien, *British Pop Art and Postmodernism* (London: Cambridge, 2015), 1.

[450] Andrew Wilton, *Five Centuries of British Painting: From Holbein to Hodgkin* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 240-1. The School of London was not one style, but different artists with various preoccupations, like Leon Kossoff, Frank Auerbach, and Michael Andrews.

[451] The exception to this, to a degree, was the Iranian artist Shirazeh Houshiary, who moved to London in 1974, studied at the Chelsea School of Art, and played an important role in the New British Sculpture Movement. Though not Arab, Houshiary was unique for being from the SWANA region and having a place in British art histories. See: Terry A. Neff, ed., *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture since 1965* (London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 1987).

[452] For example, see: David Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce, *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

While *hurufiyyah* did not follow the aesthetic movements of the West, the West's actions, artistic styles, and institutions, were all connected to its development. Umar catalyzed *hurufi* thinking with her work in London, New York, and Washington, DC; *hurufiyyah* then made its debut, though not with that name, in her 1949 exhibition in Washington, DC.[453] In the 1950s and 1960s, many Arab artists studied in the West, like Hamoudi, and toyed with letters and *hurufiyyah*. Simultaneously, the West was (on paper) extricating itself from its colonial occupation of the region, teasing the idea of independence for many. As Iftikhar Dadi writes, many of the experiments of the letter were in dialogue with nationalism, metropolitan modernism, cosmopolitanism, and subjective expression in an era of a "failure of viable national sovereignty and the waning aspirations for decolonization."[454] During the unrest of the 1970s, Arab artists continued to work in this way, and according to Wijdan Ali, the calligraphic movement peaked in the 1980s; this happens to be contemporaneous with the market boom in London.[455] As a whole, Arab artists learned Western styles as the West slowly began to lose power in the region, and the movement then peaked as the West removed itself, before the style then began to fade at a moment semi-concurrent with the advent of a neo-imperial, neo-colonial era; such outlines, seen in shifting bodies of work, are also inflected with the artists' experiences in their home countries and abroad.

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[453] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 30.

[454] Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 95-104.

[455] Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 286; Issa, *Signs of Our Times*, 22. Notably, there was a second boom after 9/11 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. See: Amin Alsaden, "Countering Erasure: Producing Knowledge on Arab Art Today," in *Knowledge Production: Examining Arab Art Today*, ed. Eline van der Vlist (Amman: Darat al funun, 2020), 22.

Under the later scholarly moniker of *hurufiyyah*, what Arab artists brought to the British art world in the 1970s was an alphabetic modernism that responded to globalization and life in diaspora. The interaction of their artistic heritage with their experiences in the West catalyzed such an innovation. As Dagher notes, this work did not want to imitate the West, and was not "swayed by the chauvinism" of Western art.[456] Nor were these artists reviving or copying calligraphy in historical Islamic art. Instead, their abstraction was subjective and contrapuntal, between their experience and institutional narratives around art and history.[457] However, this complex network of cross-genealogies in which *hurufiyyah* derives from a juxtaposition between East and West is overlooked at *Word into Art*. In his review, Khan notes that the exhibition presents a relationship to modernity as solely derivative of western influence, when the reality is that *hurufiyyah*, no matter how ambiguous a moniker, comes from shedding an adherence to Western visual languages.[458]

The complexities of *hurufiyyah* as it pertains to the body of visual thinking explored throughout this chapter then must be mapped onto and in relation to the very complexities of the fractured movement itself. If *hurufiyyah* emerged at first in the 1990s to make sense of

[456] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 35.

[457] While I did not read this book while outlining or writing this chapter, during the final stages of editing, I realized that my thinking shares several similarities with that of Chika Okeke-Agulu. Okeke-Agulu argues that through the notion of "natural synthesis, which basically meant the selective use of artistic resources and forms from Nigerian/African and European traditions, these artists inaugurated post-colonial modernism in Nigeria." Here, the artists I consider do something similar by drawing on local traditions, like Arabic calligraphy, while employing many of the techniques they learned in Western art institutions. See: Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015).

[458] Khan, "Word Into Art."

something, then it re-emerged in 2006 in the same context: to provide an opportunity for engagement at the museum through a kind of logic of the visual material. The term acts as an institutional bracketing that both aims to provide clarification and frameworks while simultaneously illustrating and reiterating its difference in a way that upholds Western artistic supremacies. Yet there is a third node in this constellation: *hurufiyyah*, though without the label, debuted in London in the 1970s as a part of a constellation connected to the World of Islam Festival. Connecting the dots around these three points is a means by which the complexities can be re-gained, and a new rendering of the letter can be proposed in relationship to earlier definitions of Islam, exhibitions, and trends in society.

Abstraction as a malleable medium, which in this case encompasses *hurufiyyah*, underscored the festival and the emergence of contemporary art from the Middle East in London, and which shaped the intersections between the two. The three Arab artists featured in this chapter employ abstraction in various ways that make modernism and abstraction a phenomenon shaped by their distinctive experiences in diaspora, an aesthetic that counters the non-referentiality of British abstraction. Rethinking abstraction as subjective and inspired by events in London suggests this visual strategy was also a means to show the way local identities and heritages intersected with global activities.[459] In this way, abstraction not only becomes a critical underpinning for this phenomenon, but something polysemous and mutable in response to a particular *zeitgeist*, something used as a conduit for critique, and

[459] Kobena Mercer, "Introduction," in *Discrepant Abstraction,* ed. Kobena Mercer (London: Institute of International Visual Arts; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 7.

which was pivotal to the development and emergence of contemporary Arab art in London.[460]

C. A Return to Ideologies at the World of Islam Festival

The World of Islam Festival repurposed history from what its organizers defined as an Islamic point of view to respond to contemporary crises. Choosing not to include contemporary artistic production from the Middle East at the festival, however, makes it an interlocutor for its later emergence in London; the essentialization of, and emphasis on the past, was the dialectical counterpart to contemporary practice, making a discussion of the past necessary for establishing discourse around the present. This exclusion was rooted in a traditionalist ideology that permeated the festival.[461] Burckhardt's perennial philosophy, which framed the festival, proposed a specific genealogy of abstraction in Islamic art: as where abstraction in Western modern art was individual and subjective, abstraction was objective in Islamic art, and an expression of scientific principles that revealed larger truths in Islamic thought.[462] To include modern abstraction, even if by an artist from the Arab world, would be to invite subjectivity and perhaps disunity within a festival focused on unity and objectivity gained from understanding a true Islam.

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[460] Ibid., 16.

[461] Monia Abdallah also discusses the conservative views around Islamic art at the festival. See: Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," 83.

[462] Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods* (London: Perennial Books, 1967), 103-4.

The framework for exclusion based on historical frameworks was repeated by many of the festival's stakeholders. Speaking in 1971 about *World of Islam* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, Ahmed Paul Keeler said there was "nothing 'contemporary'" about Islam.[463] A brief quip, Keeler offers no further explanation. However, his sentiment reoccurs in other correspondence. A letter from G.M. Forty, Deputy Director of the Fine Arts Department at the British Council, explains that "the festival will not be concerned with contemporary work from Muslim countries" because [the festival] "is not such an art manifestation…as a study in depth of Muslim civilization and its contribution to the world."[464] Forty's comment reflects a similar way of thinking that "Muslim civilization" did not have a contemporary face. In the exhibition catalogue for *The Arts of Islam* (Hayward, 1976), the foreword explains that contemporary artistic media, like oil-painting, and sculpture in the round, were not typical in Islamic art, and that there was not space for it in the exhibition.[465] This preface shifts the problem from ideology to materiality. Organizers also never clarified their definitions of critical analytics like "tradition," "modern," or "contemporary." Rather, their discourse suggests that tradition was loosely equated with

[463] "Muslims to Take Over ICA," *Design* no. 272 (August 1971): 17. Cited in: Anneka Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art": The 1976 World of Islam Festival," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 42, no. 1/2 (Summer/Winter 2008): 40-7. Such a discourse echoes Wendy Shaw's argument around the ways historiographies of Islamic art history can limit the potential of Islamic art to engage with contemporary issues. See: Wendy M.K. Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 6 (June 2012): 1-34.

[464] Letter from G. M. Forty to Representative of Iraq, November 26, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[465] Dalu Jones, ed., *The Arts of Islam* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976), 10. Cited in Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," 83-4.

history framed in static terms, an argument bolstered by their conception of Islamic art through perennial ideologies.[466] Contemporary became equated with modernity's processes and outcomes, emphasizing things in the present, as well as notions which were Western, and potentially dissonant with ideas of tradition and an Islamic point of view.

Indian art historian Geeta Kapur writes about the distinction between tradition and modernity theorized within the context of decolonization and cultural politics in the third world—politics not unrelated to the emergence of *hurufiyyah*. Tradition and modernity are terms deeply related to each other and to capitalism, and are continually resituated and reconceptualized in specific cases.[467] For Kapur, tradition refers to something attached to an identifiable group that is often idealized, filled with ideological underpinnings, drawn from what she calls an "imaginary resource," and "invented in the course of a struggle."[468] Tradition can be manifested in canons that are constructed, sometimes in relationship to the nation.[469] As Kapur probes the notion of tradition, she draws on thinkers like Ananda Coomaraswamy and Rabindranath Tagore to explain that tradition can be romanticized and utopian as it is interpreted to develop affinities; tradition can also become political in its

[466] Notably, culture is also put forth by some anthropologists as something static and unchanging in an effort to create an essentialized concept that becomes a conduit for positing alterity. See: Ayse S. Caglar, "Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of 'Culture'," in *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, ed. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London; New York: Zed Books, 1997), 170.

[467] Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000), 278.

[468] Ibid., 267.

[469] Ibid., 268.

interpretations and applications.[470] Tradition is not synonymous with history, but contingent and invented, by her theorization.

Kapur's conception helps to break down the festival's traditionalist ideology to see how tradition was a dialectic for the emergence of the contemporary and a condition of its exclusion. Islamic civilization and Islamic art are not stable givens, but rather contingent categorizations defined by their maker, here being the festival organizers; Islamic art history is also a Western construct emerging from the work of German Orientalist scholars, and continually reinvented by academics and museums alike.[471] At the festival, visual and material culture from 650–1800 CE were evidence of the activities of a group—in this case, Muslims. Their social, political, and religious structure, signified by their visual and material culture, both holds an ideology to learn from, and is idealized as the superior way of life in its thinking about tradition as an apex. Such frameworks were developed in the course of struggle, that being the efforts to spread Islam and maintain its dominance, or in a fight against the hegemony. Its all-encompassing nature, however, is idealized and imaginary, as these concepts and ways of life have never been static or singular.

The festival's presentation of Islamic history along these lines was also in dialogue with a British nation that was struggling to define itself as it resisted the change in the 1970s sparked by immigration and shifting geopolitics, instead clinging to a white, Christian hegemony. Such restricted notions of tradition and history obfuscated the ways the same traditions were a source of inspiration for *hurufiyyah* artists to rethink national identity both

[470] Ibid., 268-70.

[471] Notably, while *hurufiyyah* was a term coined by a Lebanese scholar, it was also reincarnated as a Western construct in museums, as seen in *Word Into Art*.

in their home countries and in diaspora, a lineage that continues a struggle against hegemonic forces. These contemporary connections, however, were perhaps exceedingly relevant to the question of a new British social fabric. While Kapur's multifaceted definition of tradition shows the festival as a process of interpreting history in order to mediate the struggle to define Britain's present and future, such a narrow interpretation overlooked the vitality of traditions as ongoing entities, a line of thinking that thus made it possible to exclude contemporary material despite its shared origins.[472]

Kapur's definition of modern also helps to discern why contemporary artistic production was antagonistic to the festival and its ideas of tradition. Kapur notes the Western universal lineage that often frames discourses around and references to modernism, a term that is also in constant dialogue with the idea of the nation.[473] She defines modernism as a "social and economic process" applied to developing societies, one which omitted non-western nations, including their arts in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Modernism's connotations are distinctly Western for her, including its bourgeois ideology, center/periphery boundaries, and hegemonic thinking, which applies to the arts.[474] As such,

[472] Traditionalist thinking is also present in the ways that the 1910 exhibition *Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst* (Munich) was an interlocutor for framing the *Arts of Islam* at the Hayward Gallery, as discussed more in the previous chapter. Likewise, as Amy Goldin writes, tradition was a way for the festival to establish "normal" cultural production. See: Amy Goldin, "Islam Goes to England," in *Amy Goldin: Art in a Hairshirt: Art Criticism, 1964-1978,* ed. Robert Kushner (Stockbridge: Hard Press Editions, 2011), 224.

[473] Kapur, *When Was Modernism*, 288.

[474] Ibid., 276.

those who are not European out of step with the idea of modern.[475] In part, *hurufiyyah* artists also contested Western thinking around modernity and the exclusions it encompassed.

Although Kapur's definition of modernism is not cited by festival organizers, the binaries that exclude the non-Western world and the Western locus of the term are intricately related to some reasons why contemporary material was excluded from the festival. A letter from the Representative of Kuwait R. F. Hitchcock asked if there would be any displays of modern Arab painters, and how artists would be selected. He goes on to suggest that if the festival did not want to partake in this endeavor, that perhaps "some galleries… might want to put on fringe exhibitions."[476] P.J. Chenery of the Middle East Department responded by clarifying that the festival had no plans for exhibitions of what Chenery called "modern Arab painting," but adds that commercial galleries may want to "take advantage of the interest that the Festival will arouse."[477] Another letter by G.M. Forty sent to Lewis Linzee, Esq., a producer at the World of Islam Festival, explains that the Iraqi government was potentially interested in an exhibition featuring modern Iraqi artists in London. Forty asked if such an

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[475] Ibid., 276. Also discussed in Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 13.

[476] Letter from R.F. Hitchcock, Representative of Kuwait, to Fine Arts Department, nd., BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. Although the letter is undated, based on other correspondence in the folder located in reverse chronological order, the letter was likely received in May of 1975. There is also a faded stamp to support this, but it is unclear if the stamp is of the date it was written or received.

[477] Letter from P.J. Chenery to R. F. Hitchcock, May 22, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. Chenery adds that he did not know how to contact these artists. Notably, this exchange reflects what Nada Shabout later reflected on as a market propensity for calligraphic works, particularly by religiously inclined collectors. See: Nada Shabout, "Contemporaneity and the Arab World," in *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi, and Nada Shabout (London: TransGlobe Publishing, 2009), 18.

event "could be considered as falling within the scope of the festival," and in the same letter, answers his own question by stating he does not think it will because the festival is more interested in Islam in a traditional sense.[478] Forty's question was not the first. Representative to Iraq R.A.K. Baker also inquired about an exhibition of modern Iraqi artists in London.[479] Baker, like Forty, responded rhetorically by clarifying "all exhibits should be specifically Muslim," implying an exhibition of modern Iraqi art would not be such, and Baker says in return, "presumably… would not fall within the scope of the Festival," the anecdote from which this chapter takes its name.[480] Such discourses and anecdotes also illustrate a ideology where modernity, national identity (Iraq), and Islam, are antagonistic to each other, assuming modern Iraqi art could not be "Muslim," or connect to Islam, without any documented study of artists to support this claim.

Furthermore, conversations about the modern between festival stakeholders reflect the ongoing and conscious choice made by organizers to exclude this material despite interest in and knowledge thereof, and contrary to the desires of interested parties. Governments in the Middle East who were funding the festival, Iraq being one, wanted this material included, but

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[478] Letter from G.M. Forty to Lewis Linzee, Esq., December 12, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. Although there is no evidence to support this, it is possible that this interest is what later led the Iraqi government to fund and found the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London, which I will speak about later. Linzee responded to this letter only to say he would pass the letter on to Alistair Duncan, the administrator of the festival. See: Letter from Lewis Linzee, Esq. to G.M. Forty, December 16, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. Duncan responded much later that he knew of no plans to highlight what he called Arab painters. See: Letter from Alistair Duncan to G.M. Forty, May 16, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[479] Letter from R.A.K. Baker to Deputy Director, Fine Arts (G.M. Forty), November 26, 1974, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[480] Ibid. This correspondence is where the chapter derives its name.

were not given a voice or opportunity to make it happen within the parameters of the festival—a practice akin to the festival's larger planning structure.[481] As such, this foreclosure of modernity prohibited a discussion about the ways that Islamic art was formative to modern Western art, such as in the work of Henri Matisse and Wassily Kandinsky.[482] Simultaneously, it denied conversations about a continuity between Islamic art and contemporary practice by *hurufiyyah* artists, following Ali's framework, one which would have fit the *zeitgeist* of artistic activity in London at the time. To present contemporary material would have undermined the festival's universalizing ideological claims and its implicit critique of the Western world, modernity, and capitalism as the progenitors of social woes.

The organizational response to public complaints around the dearth of modern and contemporary material similarly shows the way that maintaining an ideology was the primary motivation for their decisions. Journalist Caroline Moorehead observed that the festival's temporal boundary was c. 16th century, with some exhibitions going to the 18th century,

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[481] Notably, many artists from or in Iraq were key figures in thinking around *hurufiyyah*, such as Madiha Umar, Jamil Hamoudi, and Shakir Hassan al-Said, among others. This also includes artists' groups like the Baghdad Modern Art Group and the One Dimension Group.

[482] See: Avinoam Shalem, "The 1910 Exhibition "Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst" Revisited," in *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition "Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst" Reconsidered,* ed. Andrea Lermer and Avinoam Shalem (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3-4, 13; Eva-Maria Troelenberg, "Regarding the exhibition: the Munich exhibition *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art* (1910) and its scholarly position," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 6 (June 2012): 33. For more on the relationship between modernism and Islamic art, see: Fereshteh Daftari, *The Influence of Persian art on Gauguin, Matisse, and Kandinsky* (New York: Garland Pub., 1991). Notably, artists like Klee and others of Matisse and Kandinsky's generation were included in Dagher's thinking as Western *hurufi* artists, but they were not a part of his larger definition. See: Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 17.

adding that "there is no modern art (other than tribal)."[483] These sentiments suggest that some audiences could conceptualize parts of the festival's framework. Moorehead's description was reiterated in an advertisement for an exhibition called *Contemporary Islamic Art and Design* at the Long Gallery (1976). The small advert featuring a design by Moustafa (see Figure 3-6), which I will return to later, noted their display was "the only one devoted to the work of contemporary Islamic artists."[484] In response to these contemporary exhibitions and public commentary, festival organizer and British Diplomat Sir Harold Beeley said that the festival intended to "exclude all political considerations from what is intended to be purely a cultural event."[485] In this light, excising contemporary art was about avoiding politics, conflating the modern/contemporary and the political and positioning it as counter to history, culture, and tradition, suggesting one cannot be in the present and deny the circumstances informing it, but also, that history and tradition are apolitical. This association was not unfounded, as many Arab artists saw the personal as political, inflecting their own identities in their work, including the way their lives were affected by current events; *hurufiyyah* artists were also engaged with both history and contemporary events in multiple ways as source material for their work. Yet because the festival was funded by governmental entities, the ability to be divorced from politics was more of an ideal than a reality.

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[483] Caroline Moorehead "Four Years Scouring the World for Rare Exhibits," *The Times,* April 2, 1976, 11. By tribal, Moorehead is likely referring to the Bedouin exhibition at the Museum of Mankind.

[484] "The wondrous coils of Islam," *Kensington Post,* May 28, 1976, np.

[485] "Islam Festival 'will be purely cultural'," *Daily Telegraph*, March 21, 1975, np. Also located in FCO 12/764, National Archives, London, England. Other reviews echo this, noting that there was "no intrusion of political or propagandist intentions." See: Muslim Treasures are Promised for British Islam Festival," *The Times*, March 21, 1975, np.

The debate between tradition and modernity that played out in London responded not only to the festival, but an overlooked aspect of London's history that is simultaneously formative to *hurufiyyah*. London is known for hosting Arab, Iranian, and Turkish artists studying abroad, some on government scholarships, and many relocating to London thereafter, whether by choice, force, or in exile. The pioneering Arab artists graduated between the 1940s and 1970s, but many of their exact activities in London during their studies remain open for further study; however, it was in London and other Western artistic centers that ideas for *hurufiyyah* emerged.[486] Artists hailed from places spanning North Africa to Malaysia, studying at institutions including Cambridge, Saint Martin's, the Royal College, Goldsmiths, Central School of Fine Arts, and Slade, with the Central School and Camberwell being key locations for Arab artists to experiment with abstraction.[487] This

[486] Key texts on this include Wijdan Ali, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World* (London: Scorpion Pub., 1989); Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Venetia Porter, *Word Into Art*; Venetia Porter, *Reflections: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa* (London: British Museum Press, 2020); Liz Bruchet and Ming Tiampo, "Slade, London, Asia: Contrapuntal Histories between Imperialism and Decolonization 1945–1989 (Part 1)," *British Art Studies*, no. 20 (2021): 1-52; Ming Tiampo, "Transversal Articulations: Decolonial Modernism and the Slade School of Fine Art," in *Postwar – A Global Art History, ca. 1945-1965*, ed. Atreyee Gupta and Okwui Enwezoe (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

[487] Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England after the Second World War*, 11. Many of these institutions were also venues for women artists too, including Lubaina Himid, Catherine Elwes, Robina Rose, Eileen Cooper, Joy Gregory, Martine Thoquenne, Sandra Lahire, and Suzan Swale at the Royal College; Maureen Scott, Mary Kelly, Loraine Leeson, Tina Keane, Bobby Baker, Caroline Coon, Martine Thoquenne, Ruth Novacek, Sandra Lahire, and Annabel Nicolson at Saint Martin's; Maureen Scott, Hannah O'Shea, and Eileen Cooper; Bhajan Hunjan at the Central School of Art and Design; and Erica Rutherford, Hannah O'Shea, Catherine Elwes, Judy Clark, Chila Kumari Singh Burman, Mona Hatoum, Bhajan Hunjan, Simone Alexander (who also studied at Camberwell), Zarina Bhimji, and Anne Tallentire at Slade. See: Young, ed., *Women in Revolt!*.

period was coterminous with a time when an increasing number of women artists from South Asia were graduating from art universities in the UK.[488] Furthermore, London was also an important site for questioning universalizing narratives in art history, such as those taught at Slade by Ernst Gombrich and Rudolf Wittkower.[489] This narrative includes painters Ermes, Waqialla, and Moustafa, each of whom developed their key artistic practices while in London, and whose practices I will return to later.

The history of how and why Arab artists went to London is a thread within the discourse of *hurufiyyah*, but on its own, has yet to be written. At the time, Paris was the dominant center for modern painters, including for many Americans.[490] This center shifted to New York after Rauschenberg's success at the Venice Biennale.[491] There were also many artists from Iran and Turkey who studied abroad in Paris, such as Faramarz Pilaram (Iranian, 1937–83), Zenderoudi, Fahrelnissa Zeid (Turkish, 1901–91), and key *hurufiyyah* thinker Hamoudi.[492] However, many Arab artists also went to London; each had individual reasons.

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[488] Alice Correia, "Representing South Asian Women in Britain," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 201.

[489] Liz Bruchet and Ming Tiampo, "Slade, London, Asia," 39-40.

[490] See: Lynn Gumpert and Debra Bricker Balken, eds., *Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France, 1946-1962* (New York: New York University; Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2022).

[491] See: Laurie Monahan, "Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945-1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 369-407; and Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[492] Hamoudi often erroneously claimed himself as the first innovator of *hurufiyyah*. See: Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 278. Hamoudi, however, was integral to later

In this study, the artists at hand were all from places where the British played an extensive role in governing the countries prior to and throughout the mid-twentieth century—Egypt, Libya, Sudan, and Iraq. Their home governments often gave them scholarships to gain an artistic education in London. Learning Western artistic techniques was not only a tactic for individual improvement, but to learn new artistic languages, including that of the colonizer, that artists could then take back to their home country to support its development; it is here that *hurufiyyah* thinking intersects with the nation.[493] Between the SWANA region and London, artists would incorporate elements of their own cultures and heritages, often depicted through adaptations of Western visual languages, in an effort to develop new aesthetic languages, sometimes for national causes, other times for individual endeavors. By sending artists abroad, Arab governments both worked to establish a new identity but also subvert the tactics of imperial, colonial powers.

Reconsidering London's history through this lens posits the city an interlocutor for tradition, modernism, imperialism, and colonialism between past and present, and the conditions of possibility it poses for a changing art world. It is the tensions between East and West, or global and local, that led to the profound rethinking of a field now known as modern

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engagement with artist books. See: Venetia Porter, *Artists Making Books: Poetry to Politics* (London: British Museum Press, 2023), 11. Zenderoudi is also described in relation to questions of the letter. See: Fereshteh Daftari and Layla S. Diba, eds., *Iran Modern* (New York: Asia Society, 2013).

[493] Importantly, Dagher also notes that this learning was not about the mastery of new techniques but interrogating artistic form and subject as a basis for new thinking. See: Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 33. I would add to this that such learning was not as art critic Maurice Sankary writes, a way of merging with the West. Rather, it was more a relationship of observation and adaptation. See: Shabout, *Modern Arab* Art, 94.

and contemporary Arab art, including *hurufiyyah*.[494] London thus becomes the site to reconsider a "cosmopolitan modernism," to borrow Kobena Mercer's term, which advocated for the development of modernisms through discourse on difference across transnational boundaries and exchanges, rather than bound by cultural or national subdivisions, further framed by struggles for representation in the art world by artists of color.[495] These tensions are also bound to the discourses of *hurufiyyah* as they extend and unravel in London. Acknowledging this history points towards the idea that London was not a coincidental location for the emergence of contemporary Arab art, but one which came out of a conscious and deliberate sequence of events that allowed artists to learn a new artistic language, express their subjectivities, and in turn, serve as a conduit for the proliferation of a new field in a globalized art world. Furthermore, this sequence of events benefitted from a shifting arts infrastructure in London that created new places for underrepresented artists.

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[494] These tensions are what Mercer refers to as cross-cultural discrepancies. Kobena Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 9, 16. Elsewhere, this is termed postcolonial modernism in which artists "looked for ways to demonstrate a newfound modernity away from their colonial past, while also asserting their independence from dominant forms of Western art," often taking shape in "overlaps" between calligraphy and Western abstract painting. See: John Curley, *Global Art and Cold War* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2018), 202.

[495] Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*. I am similarly indebted to Iftikhar Dadi for further theorization. See: Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 1, 18, 231-2, fn. 7. Dadi further clarifies his definition in relation to Andreas Huyssen and his assertion that "Crossnational cultural forms that emerge from the negotiation of the modern with the indigenous, the colonial, and the post-colonial in the 'non-Western world." Citing: Andreas Huyssen, "Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World," *New German Critique* 100 (Winter 2007): 189-207. Cosmopolitanism is also critiqued for its Eurocentric roots. See: Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 591-625; and Alex Dika Seggerman, *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt between the Islamic & the Contemporary* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 5-6.

The works I describe in this chapter can be considered a part of *hurufiyyah*, and both embody and explore these complexities. The works and these artists focus on the relationships between the idea of Arabic calligraphy and abstraction, and bridge individual cultural, ethnic, and religious heritages with their studies in the West to create compositions not only reflecting upon their unique identities, but which upset Western imperial, colonial thinking.[496] Modern and contemporary Arab artists both within and beyond *hurufiyyah* were not beholden to mimicking Western modern art, despite Orientalist claims to the contrary, but rather used it as a catalyst for styling their own visual language about their individual contemporary circumstances in diaspora.[497] Difference becomes formative and generative; modernism is reimagined to be reciprocal and bilateral as it traverses different geographies and temporalities.[498]

From these conditions of possibility around tradition, contemporaneity, history, and modernity within this unique *zeitgeist*, the contemporary emerges at the "fringe" of the festival. Venues adjacent to the festival acted upon this momentum to display contemporary art from the Middle East, and in subtle ways, introduced *hurufiyyah* into the gallery scene. These activities were not sponsored by the festival, but its tangential presence was

[496] I would also argue that such a consideration is not about "bridging the gap between traditional and modern art," as Samir al-Sayegh has written, but finding new points of intersection that lead to new forms. See: Shabout, *Modern Arab Art*, 95.

[497] Ali suggests that Islamic artists blindly copied Western styles, but this statement was countered in later literature. See: Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*. Dagher also points out something similar when he notes that many of the *hurufi* artists discovered the capacity of the Arabic letter in Western academies. See: Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 30.

[498] This idea is akin to Dadi's phrasing of modernism as "experimental and reflexive." See: Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 14.

acknowledged under the auspices of "fringe events," defined in the festival program as "exhibitions and concerts of interest taking place during the World of Islam Festival 1976."[499] The fringe, however, is also an interlocutor for visualizing a new way of thinking that upsets historicist notions about Islam and the Arab world set out at the World of Islam Festival while prefacing the British art world's nascent globalism.

In exhibitions like these from 1976 on, artists responded to their current conditions by fashioning a rupture, or an aesthetic break from the past through new, abstract forms that spoke to their present moment; such a break echoes Dagher's lineage of *hurufiyyah*.[500] What emerges is not simply "contemporary Islamic art," but a broad swathe of cultural production tied to variable notions of identity explored through myriad art forms in ways that interrogate ideas of continuity and change through identity, hybridity, and shifting temporalities and geographies.[501] If the World of Islam Festival rendered the letter as a historical construct that

[499] Official festival brochure, 1976, Box 3, folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. The idea of the fringe also appears in planning documents to suggest that those not participating in the festival may present "fringe exhibitions." See: Letter from R. F. Hitchcock to Fine Arts Department, c. March 14, 1975, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. The letter itself is undated, but the stamp of receipt is March 14, 1975.

[500] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 22. While there is not only an aesthetic rupture, Dagher even notes more of a physical rupture when he says that artists took a break and then returned. See: Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 20. Iftikhar Dadi has also discussed tradition, noting that the "antifoundationalism of the discipline of Islamic art, along with the discursivity of other Islamicate disciplines, that provided artists with a "tradition" that they investigated in their practice with an increasingly incisive understanding rather than remaining limited to reworking subject matter and style." See: Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 2.

[501] Monia Abdallah uses the term "contemporary Islamic art" when she argues that the festival revived Islamic art. This dissertation partially counters her argument, because the festival did not "revive" Islamic art to suggest its ability to extend into the contemporary. Rather, the festival kept Islamic art historically bound. Furthermore, the contemporary production that does emerge adjacent to the festival is not a continuity with Islamic art, but

could unlock a people, culture, religion, and civilization, then contemporary artists both propagated the letter as something living, vibrant, and individualistic, and disentangled the homogenizing narratives around the letter connected to the singular narratives of Islam.

D. Ali Omar Ermes

Contemporary art was not presented by the festival, but it was embedded in its organizing structure through participating members. Namely, Libyan artist Ali Omar Ermes (1945–2021), whose abstract work depicts gestural, letter-based meditations, was a member of the World of Islam Festival's organizing committee; he was listed publicly as a contributor to "Visual Arts Research," and later described as a "visual arts consultant to the festival director," which was Keeler.[502] Art historian Anneka Lenssen describes Ermes' participation as a "scout for artistic and calligrapher participants."[503] Towards the end of his festival research, Ermes began his own artistic abstractions rooted in the Arabic letter.

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rather, something subjective, and which toys with modernity, calligraphy, and abstraction. See: Abdallah, "A Historical Synthesis on the Notion of Contemporary Islamic Art," 77-93.

[502] Official World of Islam Festival program, April 1976, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England. His name is erroneously spelled here as Ali Omar Ermayes. Also see: "News for the Members." *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (May 1, 1975): 33; Venetia Porter, "A Lifetime of Painting," in *Ali Omar Ermes: Art and Ideas* (London: Ashmolean Museum, 1992), 11. Keeler says Ermes was a close friend, and as a consultant, played no role in selecting material. Keeler's position contradicts the thinking of Wijdan Ali, who suggested that he "participated in arranging exhibitions on Islamic culture and classical art." See: Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 308. Similarly, Keeler's statement contradicts Lenssen's analysis, where she suggests Ermes did help scout artists and calligraphers, and in "adjudicating the canon of artists." See: Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art"," 45.

[503] Lenssen, ""Muslims to Take Over Institute for Contemporary Art"," 45. Citing: Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*, 193.

The relationships between Ermes' identity as a Libyan artist, his explorations of calligraphy that bridge past and present and his time in London, including with the festival, are formative to understanding his role in the dissemination of contemporary Arab art. Ermes left Libya on a government scholarship in 1967 to study at the Plymouth School of Art and Design in London, and later at London's Central School of Art and Design, which was then a radical institution led by young artists.[504] Ermes attendance at the Central School followed a point of transition in the early 1950s when new, young artists joined the staff and brought with them a particular excitement about experimentation that could generate a new modernism.[505] Ermes, who began painting seriously in the 1960s, was one of few Libyan artists who remained in London after completing his education, returning to Libya only briefly for a short period before settling permanently in England in 1981.[506] Ermes' biography and artistic styles echoes the contours of *hurufiyyah*, and while Ali included him in her study, Dagher did not.

Ermes' letter-based works and theories were also influenced by his time working for the World of Islam Festival. Little record remains of what Ermes made in the 1970s.[507]

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[504] Samar Faruqi, ed., *Ali Omar Ermes: Recent Works* (Dubai: Meem Gallery; London: Art Advisory Associates, 2010), 8; Issa, *Signs of Our Times*, 20, 96; Porter, *Word into Art*, 131; Margaret Garlake, *New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998), 30. The Central School was also linked to the ICA and the Independent Group, both of whom were also important in utilizing conceptualism to rethink modernism.

[505] Garlake, *New Art, New World*, 30. Influential educators included Eduardo Paolozzi, Alan Davie, and Nigel Henderson.

[506] Ali, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, 205; Porter, "A Lifetime of Painting," 11.

[507] For examples of early works featuring the alphabet, see *Letters form Spacious Colours*, 1972 (Collection of the Artist, available at

Furthermore, it is unclear how he became friends with Keeler, and as such, became a part of the festival's orbit. As a traveling researcher for the festival, he amassed a collection of photographs and sketches documenting various artifacts and monuments from the Islamic world, which would have been case studies for imagining new, contemporary calligraphic forms.[508] However, this material is not present in the British institutional archives, nor do the extant archives detail in any way what Ermes did or how he contributed to the festival's planning. There is also no evidence to suggest that Keeler recognized or propagated Ermes' importance as a contemporary artist who was working to bring the aesthetics and philosophies of Islam and Islamic art into the present. Following his festival travels, Ermes solidified his style, works for which he is now famous, and which are featured in exhibitions that are central to conceptions of contemporary Middle Eastern art in London.

Ermes developed his signature artistic style in London, which draws on modernist strands of Islamic and African art through both literal and abstract calligraphic gestures that interpret letters, poems, and Qur'anic verses. His approach bridges past and present through his engagement with historical ideas and modern/contemporary aesthetic approaches. Take for example his 1980 work *Sad* (see Figure 3-1), which is now in the British Museum's collection. *Saad* features *saad*, the name for the Arabic letter S, one of two s's in Arabic,

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https://www.aliomarermes.co.uk/blogs/artists-collection/letters-form-spacious-colours?_pos=1&_sid=d7898eee7&_ss=r), or *Ta, ha*, 1968 (Collection Unknown, published in Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910-2003* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2005)).

[508] Yasima Sellam, "Ali Ermes Man of Letters," *Arabia* (February 1983): 75. This "archive" is held by the family with limited access available to researchers. Ermes' son recently mentions his father's role in the festival, but does not provide any further detail about the archive he amassed. See: Mohammed Ermes, "Ali Omar Ermes," in *Alcove: Intimate Essays on Arab Modernist Artists*, ed. Myrna Ayad (London: Kaph, 2024), 83-92.

distinguished by its emphatic pronunciation. Ermes outlines the letter in a manner true to its original shape. Its dark, black outline contrasts against the marbled brown background to make the letter the focus, a compositional practice recalling early Islamic manuscripts. Smaller text is written in the negative space, which although has not yet been translated or transcribed, shows Ermes' rich knowledge of Arabic literature. By meditating on the letter's form and Arabic literary traditions, he signifies the perpetual vitality of tradition, suggesting that Arabic language and literature remain relevant across sociopolitical, cultural, and historical moments. Furthermore, following Dagher's characterization of hurufiyyah, Ermes makes the shape of the Arabic letter a key compositional element by placing it at the center of the composition, prompting audiences to focus on its shapes, but not attempting to convey any singular meaning through that letter. His artistic rendering of historical writing and literature, however, invites audiences to generate their own interpretations. Read in the context of 1970s and 80s London, and in the festival's wake when Islamic art had peaked public interest, Ermes' work proposes a new dialogue on Islamic art by rendering historical subject matter in a manner that bridges traditional and contemporary practices and subjects to show a relationship between identity and modernism crafted through a return to heritage.

Saad (see Figure 3-1) showcases these complex relationships, which Ermes elaborated on in his writings about his own work and the theoretical potential of the Arabic letter. Ermes began using the letter as the primary subject of his work in 1968 (after moving to London in 1967) out of a desire to not follow conventional modes of artistic practice.[509] Specifically, he wanted to produce original compositions, not reiterations of previous ideas, to give

[509] Faruqi, *Ali Omar Ermes*, 4.

"calligraphy the visual effect of painting," and rejecting Western painting as "…merely "repeating what had already been created beautifully by God."[510] Importantly, Ermes identifies as a painter, not a calligrapher, squarely positioning himself in a contemporary context that also creates space with Islamic art.[511] For Ermes, Arabic calligraphy was not only a plastic form, but a language by which he could engage with his culture and beliefs, as well as the implications of the letter.[512] Ermes' self-description as a painter and his interest in experimenting with calligraphy as a contemporary artistic practice aligns with Dagher's definition of *hurufiyyah*. The malleability of calligraphy, however, was an ideology at odds with the work put forward by the festival around the objectivity and sacred nature of the letter, as well as its larger stance on the irrelevance of the contemporary.

Ermes' departures and frameworks render the letter, formerly a feature of Islamic art, as a malleable, mutable form that could not only stand independently but impact the broader language of painting in multiple contexts. The letter was no longer solely bound to its place within a syntax of religious meaning, but it was a vehicle to uncover a system of shapes and forms that could be reinterpreted in an artistic context. To see them within the context of painting freed them into a new realm of experimentation by breaking from the rigid perspectives of historical Arabic calligraphy and its semantics. All of this was informed by

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[510] "Ali Omar Ermes: Painting the Word," *Eastern Art Report* 1, no. 12 (1989): 12; Maureen Ali, "Letters of Artistic Intent," *Eastern Art Report* 1, no. 3 (1989): 9; Lee Lawrence, "Letter Word Art," *Aramco World* 48, no. 2 (March/April 1997).

[511] Faruqi, *Ali Omar Ermes*, 141-2; James W. Allan, "Introduction," in *Ali Omar Ermes: Art and Ideas* (London: Ashmolean Museum, 1992), 7. Ermes also does not identify as part of *hurufiyyah*.

[512] Wijdan Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 309; Lawrence, "Letter Word Art."

his own individual search, thus placing the letter into subjective contexts that were tied to modernity as a series of experiences, and expressed through the modern, subjective language of abstraction. Ermes questioned the very notion of painting by incorporating his heritage via the Arabic letter as an artistic gesture, a move which ultimately antagonized his Western artistic training. In this way, the letter subjectively mediated locations, identities, and histories, bringing aspects of Islam and his heritage to the present, and into a changing Western art world. Such a framework stood in stark contrast to the objectivity and universality of Islam and the festival, which could be the reason why Keeler never highlighted Ermes as a contemporary artist.

Saad and others like it were also among the first to be acquired by institutions like the British Museum for their contemporary Middle East collections in line with their mission to acquire works that featured a continuity between historical and contemporary material, found here in the form of a calligraphic gesture in Arabic. *Shadda* (see Figure 3-2), for example, features a similar compositional structure with a central, enlarged form outlined with a darker color set against a lighter, visually textured background, with additional text written in the interstitial spaces.[513] Here, the *shadda* is the subject, a diacritic in Arabic indicating a verbal emphasis that also changes the meaning of the attached word; Ermes also included several strong lines below the diacritic, which when positioned this way, reference *tanween*, or the doubling of a short diacritic (a *kasra*) that creates a sound equal to "een." Together, the letter

[513] The smaller texts inscribed on this work are from *Kitab al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin,* or *The Book on Elegance of Expression and Clarity of Exposition* by al-Jahiz, who studied historical poets, such as Bashar ibn Burd and Hasan al-Basri in his work. See: "Painting," British Museum, last modified unknown, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1987-0202-0-1. Here, Porter classifies his calligraphy as recalling the Maghribi style. See: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1992-1215-0-1.

functions as an image, while the annotations function like a text, fashioning a contemporary play between word and image that harkens back to questions in Islamic art history. Likewise, the central placement of *shadda* makes its form the focus of the piece in line with *hurufiyyah* thinking. This interplay of word and image is an important aspect of Ermes' practice because it helps question the letter's signification, or capacity to carry meaning. More importantly, Ermes' work also serves to return to his heritage by analyzing Arabic diacritics, which are often omitted in informal contemporary linguistic settings; to attend to Arabic's grammatical functions is a return to the historical origins of the language, like from the Qur'an.

Like *Saad* and *Shadda*, *Harf al-Kaf* (see Figure 3-3) was another early letter-based acquisition painted in a similar manner. While the textural background is lacking, the archetype of a letter outlined in a dark color placed against a lighter background remains the same, along with supplemental annotations.[514] Ermes takes a new approach to abstracting *kaf*, the letter equivalent to K in English, by collapsing the space between the vertical and horizontal lines, and shifting the top marker left, shaping *kaf* into a pseudo-number two. *Kaf* is still recognizable, but its legibility is impinged upon, which follows *hurufi* thinking. Ermes also uniquely signs the work in the fashion of early Islamic artists, writing that "This is the work of…" (*Hadha min '3amal*), fashioning himself through this signature as a calligrapher instead of a painter.[515] Notably, the signature blends in with the larger inscription program, and does not stand out as a signature. In both the language of and placement of the signature,

[514] In this work, Ermes is ruminating on a poem by the first Abbasid Caliph Abu Jaafar al Mansour (d. 775), which comments on social injustices, and a public lack of concern for the poor. See: Allan, "Introduction," 8; and "Calligraphy," British Museum, last modified unknown, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1992-1215-0-1.

[515] Porter, *Word Into Art*, 14.

Ermes plays on the larger lineage of Islamic manuscript painting. While maintaining and developing his interest in the letter's form and potential, in line with his signature style, while also drawing on techniques of Islamic manuscripts, Ermes further outlines a link between past and present through his contemporary commentaries made by interpreting historical texts in contemporary art, and by fashioning himself as painter and calligrapher simultaneously, categories that were previously diametrically opposed. In this way, while Ermes has positioned his work as a rupture and transition, such compositions posit continuities—like the very ones the British Museum presented.

Like his style, Ermes' exhibition history changed and accelerated after the festival. Ermes had very few shows in London prior to the festival, including those at the Africa Centre (1968) and the Plymouth City Gallery and Art Museum (1969).[516] After, there were many more. In London, this began with his show at the Royal Over-Seas League for Libyan art week (1982), and continued with the Graffiti Gallery (funded by the Kuwaiti bank, 1983), Egee Art Gallery (1987 and 1989), Kufa Gallery (1988), the Barbican Centre (*Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, 1989, and 1995), the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) (1991 and 2001), the Ashmolean Museum (1992), the British Council (1994 and 1997), the October Gallery (2002), and many more, culminating in the show for which he is

[516] Notably, the Africa Centre was a major for Black feminist artists in the 1980s. Key artists who exhibited there include Claudette Johnson, Houria Niati, Lubaina Himid, and Sonia Boyce. See: Dorothy Price, "A Radical Decade: Black Women Artists in 1980s Britain," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 192-99; Amrita Dhallu, "What is the Strategy? Towards Breaking the Cycle," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 288-89; and Young, ed., *Women in Revolt!*, 214, 223, 226.

best known for today: *Word into Art* at the British Museum (2006).[517] In these exhibitions, Ermes is positioned in relationship to other interlocutors this chapter discusses, such as Dia al-Azzawi at the Egee Art Gallery (1989), and Moustafa at the Barbican Centre (1995); similarly, he is exhibited between letter-based, geometric, and color-based abstractions, showing the polysemy of his paintings. While his work considers some of the same subjects as Moustafa, who I will return to later, he did not receive the same support for his work from the World of Islam Festival Trust as Moustafa.

Ermes' career boom coincided with a period when related works by Middle Eastern artists first became trendy in the 1980s market in dialogue with the blossoming of *hurufiyyah* in the 1970s and 1980s. Soon after in the mid 1980s, the British Museum also initiated their new contemporary collection.[518] Ermes was acutely aware that his works fit a particular interest in art from outside the West by those now in the West.[519] This niche curiosity was focused on what is now termed as *hurufiyyah* but was not labeled as such by Dagher at the time. Ermes' paintings fit within the parameters of *hurufiyyah* for their focus on the letter as a flexible form that was created by both returning to one's heritage and fashioning an artistic rupture. Ermes' works also rendered a new relationship between text and image in Islamic art and provided a new analysis of the niceties of Arabic through the visual language of abstraction. Along with his contemporaries, Ermes' calligraphic content bridged past and present between an interest in the historical sparked by the festival, and the contemporary as

[517] For a history of the Kufa Gallery, see: Ahmad Naji, *Under the Palm Trees: Modern Iraqi Art with Mohamed Makiya and Jewad Selim* (New York: Rizzoli, 2019).

[518] Faruqi, *Ali Omar Ermes*, 141.

[519] "Ali Omar Ermes: Painting the Word," 14.

it emerged in London's art world. To trace Ermes' exhibition history is to see the ways his style, which he defined in tandem with the festival, gained attention throughout London after the festival, revealing the ways historical Islamic art was a catalyst for engagement with the contemporary.

When Ermes' *Shadda* (see Figure 3-2) and *Harf al-Kaf* (see Figure 3-3) were exhibited in *Word Into Art* as a new apex in his letter-based trajectory of the 1980s and 1990s, he was inserted into the lineage of *hurufiyyah*.[520] Acquiring and including Ermes' work aligned with the institution's strategy to focus on works on paper, and present art that clearly expressed a continuity with historical Islamic art, such as through Arabic calligraphy. The script is discussed in the exhibition as indicative of the broad literary and artistic traditions in the region, which Ermes does engage with.[521] Ermes' works were in the second of four sections in the exhibition titled "Literature and Art," which considered the way the Arabic script is used in contemporary formats to reflect an engagement with Islam.[522] Porter classifies these letter-based studies as *hurufiyya*, a movement named after the Arabic word for letter (*harf*), and referencing their apotropaic significance; Porter also describes his style in this work as reflective of the Maghribi script, which connects to his North African roots.[523] Such a label

[520] Porter, *Word Into Art*, cats. 17 and 18. There is a similar iteration of Kaf in the collection of the Jordanian National Gallery of Fine Arts, as well as displayed in the Ashmolean show *Art and Ideas* in 1992.

[521] Ibid., 14.

[522] Ibid., 14.

[523] Ibid., 15-16, 43. Citing Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 11; Shabout, *Modern Arab Art,* 164. Building on Shabout and Daghir, Porter describes the history of *hurufiyya* as art responding to "the Arabic language, letter or text, as a visual element of composing."

not only identifies the curatorial theme for the show, but also provides audiences with a means by which to understand the letter in its contemporary form as a dialogue between past and present, a move that aligns with the larger educational multicultural project. However, Ermes objects to the label *hurufiyyah* both in his own work and as a larger field, suggesting that it was random, and more research was needed to fully understand the artistic trend.[524] Such a contradiction alludes to the paradoxes of this field in which artists sometimes dissent against the frameworks that are used to exhibit their work, but without such terms, other challenges arise in explaining their practices to new audiences.

If calligraphy links the World of Islam Festival and *Word Into Art*, so too were these letter-based projects the progenitors of future engagement. For example, iterations of *Kaf*, like the one held by the British Museum, are now owned by the National Museum of Asian Art (neé the Freer Sackler Museum) (S1996.40) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) (M.2006.131). *Word Into Art* also triangulates a relationship between letter-based artists like Ermes, Waqialla, Moustafa, and Dia al-Azzawi, all of whom emerged as a part of a shared constellation in the 1970s London art world, and whose careers grew in similar trajectories with shared exhibitions. Their parallels allow for a re-reading of the letter as a method of identity formation that crafted metonyms for local heritage as it intersected with global abstraction. To think about the script in this manner acknowledges the way it takes a recognized, historical form, and interprets it in an innovative manner through abstract idioms that resonate with the contingencies of the 1970s, and which subvert the Western domination

[524] Faruqi, *Ali Omar Ermes*, 141.

of abstraction.[525] Moreover, abstract uses of the script visualized the evolving state of the modern Arab world in the wake of decolonization, particularly as the region sought to articulate its own identity while entering into the global arena, harnessing the ambiguity of the script to reflect a state of transition and possibility. Artistic discovery and reinterpretation were informed by traveling, studying, and working in the West, suggesting diaspora shaped this artistic practice, an often-overlooked aspect of this approach. Through this metamorphosis, seen in the work of Ermes, Waqialla, and Moustafa, and then placed into the public sphere through numerous exhibitions, artists investigated the letter and its malleability at the juncture of past and present, questioning historical uses of the letter while finding new forms in the present that antagonized Western modern art.

Following Ermes' lineage and artistic practice from Libya to London, the festival and London, bound by their calligraphic interests, were critical points of intersection for the emergence of contemporary art, as well as for the growth of Ermes' career. As it overlaps with the festival, Ermes' work created the potential to go beyond, if not outright contradict, the festival's universal, objective religious framework to show that the Arabic script and its letters were multifaceted, subjective, and amorphous with contemporary dynamics. Likewise, London was the primary site for many of the exhibitions that promoted his career. Furthermore, in these early exhibitions, his work is described as having the ability to build bridges between groups of people and populations, a trope which becomes commonly

[525] Shabout also asserts that abstraction was a means to engage with heritage when met with foreign hegemony, but primarily in a case study of Iraqi artists. See: Shabout*, Modern Arab Art*, 37-41.

ascribed to artists from the Middle East in the wake of 9/11 and its attendant Islamophobia.[526] The World of Islam Festival was not the only reason that Ermes gained global prominence, even if Keeler did not provide him a platform as a contemporary artist, but it was a part of a constellation that brought him and others into the global art world, as well as cemented the relationships between past and present in all its niceties that marks the field, and sparks a global engagement with contemporary art from the Middle East post-9/11.

E. Osman Waqialla

Along with Ermes, a second contemporary artist present at the festival was Osman Waqialla (Sudanese, 1925–2007), whose calligraphic work similarly bridges past and present while engaging with tradition. Yet if Ermes wished to free the Arabic letter in his capacity as a painter, Waqialla wanted to return to history and perpetuate traditional forms in a contemporary era.

Waqialla's biography and artistic practice similarly wrestle with questions about tradition and history. Born in a small town called Rufaa in northern Sudan, calligraphy was always an integral part of his life. Waqialla was fascinated by his father's writing board growing up, and later created his own.[527] He went on to study calligraphy at the Gordon Memorial College (now the University of Khartoum), graduating in 1945. Like Ermes, he received a government scholarship to study at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in London,

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[526] Ali Omar Ermes and Sajid Rizvi, *Reaching Out: Conversations on Islamic Art with Ali Omar Ermes* (London: Saffron Books; Eastern Art Report, 1993), 12.

[527] Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 10, 36. By writing board, Waqialla is referring to the wood tablets that children in Africa use to learn the Qur'an, as well as how to write the Qur'an.

completing his studies in 1949.[528] At that time, Camberwell was a radical institution that employed "multi-disciplinary and multi-media teaching" to rethink contemporary art, and push the avant-garde forward through their discourse and cross-media explorations.[529] In London, Waqialla worked as a studio assistant for Sudanese artist Shafik Shawki. Between Camberwell and Shawki, Waqialla was in an experimental environment that further fostered a love for Arabic letters, which prompted him to briefly leave England to study with Master calligrapher Sayyid Muhammad Ibrahim at Cairo's Royal School of Calligraphy. Waqialla earned his diploma in calligraphy, and thereafter, referred to himself as a calligrapher, or *khattat*, not a painter like Ermes, tying himself to tradition and history above all.[530]

Waqialla took his peripatetic training back to Sudan to propel the country's national artistic development, and focus on his own practice.[531] Both Dagher and Ali considered the work of artists in 1950s Khartoum as integral to their thinking around the Arabic letter, and Dagher in particular emphasizes the return to the letter in relation to national identity.[532]

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[528] Porter, *Word into Art*, 391-2; Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 36. Dagher also notes that Waqialla had thought about calligraphy and how to free it since the beginning of the 1940s. See: Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 30.

[529] Garlake, *New Art, New World*, 29. Garlake specifically cites the importance of Victor Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, and their students for experimenting with proportional systems that created new "intellectual flexibility" that would later generate a constructive art that was important to different conceptions of modernism and abstraction.

[530] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art,* 116; Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 24, 36; Porter, *Word into Art,* 391-2. Little is known about Shawki's life and work.

[531] See: Salah M. Hassan, "When Identity Becomes "Form": Calligraphic Abstraction and Sudanese Modernism," in *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965,* ed. Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel, and Ulrich Wilmes (Munich, New York: Haus Der Kunst, Prestel, 2016), 221-5.

[532] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 32.

Waqialla was one of the first artists in Sudan's modern art movement to explore calligraphy in conjunction with larger inquiries around artistic identity through shared heritage, proposing a more universal view of the letter than Ermes, for one.[533] He taught at the College of Fine and Applied Arts, including calligraphy, and encouraged his students to experiment with Arabic letters, a pedagogy parallel to Camberwell's experimentation, and *hurufi* thought. Waqialla then founded Studio Osman in 1954, one of the first of its kind in the Arab world to experiment with Arabic calligraphy through their use of color, secular poetry, and prose. Waqialla closed his studio in 1964, and returned to England in 1967, where he had a modest but important lineage of exhibitions that promoted modern art from the Middle East and Africa.[534] In his return to the Arabic letter and critical thinking on the subject, Waqialla was building a body of work that exemplified *hurufiyyah* in a manner that advocated for focusing on the historical roots of the letter as they could be engaged with the present. His *hurufiyyah* is rooted in the triangulations between Sudan, Egypt, and London, and was further refined in London, fashioning an exchange that positions him in dialogue with Ermes and Moustafa.

While Waqialla did not refer to himself or his work as a part of *hurufiyyah*, he was careful to theorize the letter in relation to abstraction, calligraphy, and the West in ways that intersect with *hurufi* discourse. Waqialla wanted to move calligraphy out of craft and imbue it with new artistic significance. This motivation coincided with the beginning of his studies

[533] On the Khartoum School, which emerged around 1954 thanks to Waqialla, Ibrahim el-Salahi, and Ahmad Shibrain, see: Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 20, 36; Porter, *Word into Art*, 141-2; Ali, *Modern Islamic Art,* 116-7, 147; Shabout, *Modern Arab Art,* 30.

[534] Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 36; Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*, 116.

in the 1940s and was similarly shaped by his belief that Arabic letters were aesthetically pleasing and malleable. He similarly wanted to return to the letter's origins and reinterpret them.[535] As such, his compositions showcase a new aspect of calligraphy that revealed new dimensions of his Arabic letters to see these characters and their significance as living, much like Umar. Beyond form, Waqialla's motivation was distinctly anti-Western in line with the Khartoum school's nationalist ambitions, desiring not borrow from Western art, but focus instead on local artistic heritage and approaches.[536] If Ermes wanted to imagine new forms for the letter as a painter, Waqialla aimed to reinterpret classical Arabic calligraphy as a calligrapher in relation to liberatory thinking.

While exploring the letter in London, his traditional training in Arabic calligraphy brought him into the fold of the World of Islam Festival. Waqialla designed the festival's logo, which branded brochures, postcards, posters, and programs (see Figure 3-4). Written in white script against an evergreen background, a shade reminiscent of Saudi Arabia's national flag, Waqialla clearly writes "World of Islam Festival" in Arabic. Each word (festival, world, Islam) is given its own line, and the components of the letters loosely connect the words. While typically restricted to specific, formal settings, like the Qur'an, or the news, Waqialla added full diacritics to signal the exact pronunciation of the phrase, subsequently signaling the formality of the occasion. Waqialla adheres to a semi-rigid shape for each Arabic letter, rendering the text legible by following its classical proportions and diacritics. Yet Waqialla

[535] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 30; Peter Gwynay Hopkins, *The Kenana Handbook of Sudan* (London: Kegan Paul, 2007), 49-50.

[536] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art,* 147-8, 153; Ali, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, 246; Shabout, *Modern Arab Art,* 30.

also takes some artistic liberties by loosely connecting the letters through the overlaps of the vertical strokes themselves, thus enhancing the natural connective fibers of the script. With its emphasis on legibility and conveying meaning, the work functions as calligraphy more than *hurufiyyah* following Dagher's thinking.

Waqialla's logo serves three critical functions. First, while branding the festival, the script as the defining feature of the logo creates a visual association between Islam and calligraphy. This visual relationship echoes the rhetoric of *The Arts of Islam*, which posits calligraphy as an essential characteristic of Islamic art reoccurring throughout its history. Secondly, Waqialla's work also prepares visitors for *The Arts of Islam*, hinting that what is on the logo can be found throughout the festival. The classical style of Waqialla's script is similar to inscriptions on objects in the exhibition, also furthering the connection between calligraphy and Islam. For example, the arrangement of words on the logo in three rows instead of one in which the elements are connected through curves and angles echoes that of the Ottoman *tughra*, for one, which is featured in the exhibition.[537] Both also serve to function as official seals or symbols that lend an aura of legitimacy and seriousness when applied. Third, because a contemporary artist (specifically, a calligrapher) was asked to render the logo, Waqialla becomes a conduit for bringing history into dialogue with the present by showing historical iterations of the letter as relevant and vibrant today. This relationship is not to suggest that Islam is contemporary, but that Islam's history, as encapsulated in the Arabic letter, should be relevant to contemporary audiences.

[537] Jones, *The Arts of Islam*, cats. 624 and 637.

While Waqialla's imagery is central to the festival and prominently utilized on all official festival material, he is only intermittently given credit for his logo. Waqialla is named in the original event proposal that was likely written and submitted by Keeler, but he is not included in a later list of people involved, nor is he mentioned in the official program, or *The Arts of Islam* catalogue.[538] When organizers selected his design during an official meeting, he was not mentioned by name as the designer.[539] In recent presentations, Keeler credits Waqialla for his work, calling him a "master calligrapher," and referring to the logo as traditional calligraphy.[540] Such a label follows Waqialla's self-attribution as a calligrapher, but overlooks Waqialla's contemporary innovations in his broader artistic practice. Furthermore, to capitalize on Waqialla's classical training instead of his contemporary practice to shape the festival's visual culture furthers the festival's effort to position Islam as entangled with history and tradition in line with their extant frameworks.

Waqialla's biography and theoretical musings bring new meaning to his work at the World of Islam Festival. His script is not just a logo, but a convergence of many things: a global literary tradition; a diasporic, subjective identity; a question of shifting nationalities,

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[538] Confidential memo (presumably written by Keeler), November 1973, FCO13/629; Official World of Islam Festival Program, 1976, BW1/650, National Archives, London, England.

[539] Minutes of a Publicity Committee Meeting, July 3, 1975, Box 3, Folder 2, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Similarly, his role in creating the poster is documented only in passing in secondary literature. See: Monia Abdallah, "World of Islam Festival (Londres 1976): Naissance d'un nouveau paradigm pour les arts de l'Islam," *Racar: revue d'art Canadienne* 39, no. 1 (2014): fn. 28.

[540] Ahmed Paul Keeler, "44th Cultural Majlis," (Youtube Live, virtual, September 2, 2020).

be it Sudanese or British; and religion without borders. This amalgamation was individual and collective. The Arabic script both familial and cross-cultural; this journey is embedded in Waqialla's letters when considering the global spread of Islam, which the festival also addressed. The subtle, gentle, and ornate touches Waqialla adds to his letters express his identity and reflect his mastery of the script. Whether or not the logo is a contemporary work of art is not the most relevant question, because its classification as "Islamic" or "contemporary" does not change how the actual logo functions in relation to the festival, branding, and associations between religion and the script. Instead, Waqialla shows that in any form, the letter can be subjective, personal, and fluid. This reading extends Waqialla's work beyond that of a master calligrapher into questions of contemporary explorations in line with Ermes and Moustafa. In this way, even though Waqialla's logo may not have been intended as a work of art, it embodies the complexities of *hurufiyyah*, and is itself a work that fits within this way of thinking.

Waqialla's later work, done primarily in London, dually reflects the way he worked between modern and traditional Arabic calligraphy in line with *hurufi* thinking, and the way exhibitions propagated the idea of *hurufiyyah*, further revealing these intersections as formative to a burgeoning interest in contemporary Arab art.[541] To date, there has not been a comprehensive study of Waqialla, making it difficult to trace his exhibition lineage. Prior to the festival, Waqialla had a few shows in London, such as at the Camden Arts Centre (now the Africa Centre), the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and the Woodstock Gallery.[542] He did

[541] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*, 153-4; Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 79-82.

[542] Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 36. Ermes also showed at the Africa Centre in London in 1968, which he mentions on his website, but there is little to no remaining information publicly available about the show.

not have many exhibitions in the 1970s, but there were several in the 1980s in Khartoum, Damascus, and the UK. Notable exhibitions in London include *The Influence of Calligraphy on Modern Art* at the Iraqi Cultural Centre (1980), an exhibition about Sudan (1984), and another 1987 exhibition whose name is unknown. In the 1990s, Waqialla showed in Jordan, as well as in London at the Barbican Centre and the Whitechapel Gallery.[543] In the 2000s, Waqialla participated in the British Museum's *Sudan: Past and Present* (2004), and *Word Into Art* (British Museum, 2006). Waqialla's modest but important exhibition history shows the ways his calligraphic works circulated with others working in the same *hurufi* idiom analogous to the burgeoning interest in the letter and contemporary Arab art in London.

Waqialla's participation in *Word Into Art*, alongside Ermes and Moustafa, was a way to exhibit the new style he crafted in London around the letter, history, and an evolution of forms while publicly positioning him within *hurufiyyah*. In line with the multicultural educational project of the show, Waqialla's works served to teach audiences about new aspects of religion. Waqialla showed *Kaf ha ya ayn sad,* made in 1980 (1998,0716,0.1) (see Figure 3-5), one of two works acquired by the British Museum in the 1990s. Notably, the work follows a similar archetype to that of the aforementioned acquisition by Ermes. This work is unique in his oeuvre for its semi-monochromatic palette. The title indicates the letters included—K, H, Y/I, *ayn* (to which there is no English equivalent), and S. Each letter has its own space, reflecting Waqialla's method of individual engagement, but also the *hurufi*

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[543] Notably, Waqialla was not in Wijdan Ali's key *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World* at the Barbican Centre (1989), or *Signs, Traces, Calligraphy* (Barbican Centre, 1995), both of which featured Ermes and Moustafa. In the 2000s, Whitechapel's program changed and became more expansive in its inclusion of different artists globally, including Zarina Hashmi. See: Young, ed., *Women in Revolt*, 239.

emphasis on the letter's form. Top and center is *ha*, or non-emphatic h, in its initial or isolated position. To its right is the stem of *kaf*, a shape which frequently occurs in his body of work, now in an isolated position. Below *ha* and *kaf* is the isolated *ya*, which is much smaller than its companions. To the right is *ayn*, also in isolated position, and the largest of the group. Finally, *saad* is at the bottom in its initial position, depicted in a manner similar to that of Ermes. In between the overlapping lines, Waqialla writes smaller segments of text in *naskh*, a rounded Qur'anic script, with verses from chapter 19 of the Qur'an, or *Surat Maryam*.[544] Waqialla's text is adorned with small, gold dots. The independent presentation of each letter references Waqialla's longstanding interest in understanding the shape of the Arabic letter in line with its calligraphic principles, but also with the *hurufi* interest in letters as aesthetic elements. Like at the festival, this composition particularly ties together a classical approach to the script with individual flourishes. Furthermore, the careful play between calligraphic shapes and intertextual references follows a that of Ermes.

While form is important to Waqialla, his letters have distinct meanings, an approach which surpasses that of many other *hurufi* artists. The five letters in Waqialla's composition reference five of the "mysterious" letters of the Qur'an known for their amuletic powers.[545] In this way, Waqialla's work not only considers the calligraphic shape of Arabic letters but

[544] Porter, *Word into Art*, 37; "Calligraphy," *British Museum,* last modified unknown, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1998-0716-0-1. This work is also published in: Saeb Eigner, *Art of the Middle East: Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World and Iran* (London: Merrell, 2015), 37. Notably, Eigner's description of the work likens it to a *tughra*.

[545] Ibid., 37; Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 40. This line of thinking is directly connected to the talismanic properties of Qur'anic phrases. See: Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*, 22-23.

analyzes the semi-mystical meaning and power of each letter, one which can be unlocked through a close study of its shape. Porter describes Waqialla's style as "ornamental thuluth," defined by its curvilinear forms, and reminiscent of the Ottoman *tughra* that marks political power and the ruler's identity.[546] The artist's choice to add text from the Qur'an also recalls the luxurious illuminations at both the start and end of Islamic manuscripts now depicted in a new form that attends to the intersections between the religious and political. *Kaf ha ya ayn sad* was included in *Word into Art* under the rubric of the "sacred script" to reflect the ongoing intersection between past and present seen in variations on the script, as well as between religion and contemporaneity. One of Waqialla's last artistic gestures before his death from malaria in 2007 was his presence in *Word Into Art*, representing both his artistic apex, and the ways the script becomes a key interlocutor for public engagement with modern and contemporary Arab art.

The nexus between past and present embodied in the letter that shaped this interest in London would soon proliferate globally, as seen in the work of Waqialla and his contemporaries. Like Ermes and Moustafa, Waqialla's prominence was tied to the same thinking around abstraction, London, the script, individuality, and the festival. Each artistic gesture was more than an exploration of the letter's form, but a reflection of his identity and experience between Sudan, the Arab world, London, and the global art world that he traversed—a network by which contemporary Arab art was also disseminated. While Ermes and Waqialla's work share similar forms with their interstitial textual inscriptions and calligraphic shapes, Waqialla's work brought a more mystical, talismanic line of thinking to

[546] Porter, *Word into Art*, 37.

the conversation around *hurufiyyah*. As Waqialla's life went on, his work became more abstract, returning to the original Kufic scripts that inspired him, and investigating the relationships between colors by creating visual vibrations. Above all, he maintained his concerns about the form and freedom of the letter, much like Ermes and Moustafa. His work was also acquired by other important international institutions, such as the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (*Husam al-Salam*, 96-25-4). Seeing Waqialla within the World of Islam Festival is not just about London's importance to the emergence of contemporary Arab art, but also the way that the festival's investment in history would inspire a reconsideration of Islam and its artistic forms as something that could be contemporary, vibrant, and evolving—a worldview opposite the one the festival proposed.

F. Ahmed Moustafa

The third artist involved in this network is the painter Ahmed Moustafa (Egyptian, b. 1943), who was not a part of the festival, but greatly benefitted from being on its periphery. His career grew through exhibitions adjacent to the festival and after its conclusion. If Ermes wanted to free the letter and Waqialla sought its mystical meanings, then Moustafa investigated how the letters as individual components came together into a larger system of meaning.

The letter-based or *hurufi* work that Moustafa debuted in London was informed by a series of transnational experiences. Born in Egypt in 1943, Moustafa studied in the Department of Fine Arts at Alexandria University, graduating with distinction in 1966. He became a lecturer in Alexandria in painting and stage design from 1966–73.[547] In 1966,

[547] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*, 199; Issa, *Signs of our Times,* 76. Early in his life, he actually believed he had no artistic talent.

Moustafa also received a scholarship from former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser called the National Educational Prize. A prestigious honor, Moustafa accepted the opportunity to continue his artistic training, but did not pursue his scholarship until 1974 when he went to London with a feeling of disillusionment about his artistic training in Alexandria.[548] In London, Moustafa felt the styles he learned throughout his life were outdated, instead taking a new interest in science and art.[549] He turned to study advanced printmaking at the Central School of Art and Design in London.[550] After completing his studies in 1978, he stayed on at the Central School to lecture on Arabic calligraphy from 1980–82.[551]

London afforded Moustafa new visual vocabularies and historical inquiries that inspired him to engage with calligraphy and contemporaneity in a manner parallel to other *hurufi* thinkers. Prior to his time in London, Moustafa worked in a figural, painterly style.[552] Then, he learned about the 9th–10th century Abbasid calligrapher Ibn Muqla at the Central

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[548] Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 76; Maureen Ali, "Ahmed Moustafa," *Arts & the Islamic World* 3 (1985): 53-4.

[549] Ali, "Ahmed Moustafa," 53-4; "Calligraphic Visual Symphonies," *Echo of Islam* no. 178 (July 1999), 47.

[550] "Calligraphic Visual Symphonies," 47; Jeremy J. Theophilus, "Ahmed Moustafa: Expressing the Essential," *Arts & the Islamic World* 24 (1994): 21. He learned from British print artist Leonard Merchant, and later from David Gloak. Prior to this, he applied to the Royal College of Art who refused him admission claiming they had nothing to teach him.

[551] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*, 199.

[552] For example, see *Before the Apocalypse*, oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown. Cited in: Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art.*

School.[553] He went on to write his own treatise on the letter, and later received the first doctoral degree from St. Martin's College of Art and Design. Moustafa's dissertation, done under the supervision of British Museum Islamic art curator J. Michael Rogers, explored Ibn Muqla's "proportional script," or *al-khatt al-mansub*.[554] This research led Moustafa to realize his new artistic direction and work through his artistic dissatisfaction. In Ibn Muqla, Moustafa saw the abstract capabilities of the Arabic letter as a way to disassociate from Western thinking.[555] Like Ermes and Waqialla, Moustafa's artistic practice harnessed the potential of abstraction conveyed through the script's principles to critique the Western world and expand the capacity of what modern art could be, a practice informed by his experiences in London.

Moustafa also theorized his own work, much like his contemporaries. First and foremost, Moustafa rejects the idea that his work is about practicing Arabic calligraphy, arguing that such an interpretation reflects a lack of understanding about the Arabic script's true meaning. Such a position not only echoes Ermes' stance on being a painter but aligns with *hurufi* thinking around surpassing Arabic calligraphy. Rather, Moustafa meditates on the letter in relation to science, seeing it as an expression of larger vocabularies of universal mathematical laws, and their spiritual effects on viewers.[556] In his contribution to the book

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[553] "Calligraphic Visual Symphonies," 48; Theophilus, "Ahmed Moustafa," 21. Ali, "Ahmed Moustafa," 53-4.

[554] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art,* 199; Ali, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World,* 42; Issa, *Signs of our Times,* 76; Theophilus, "Ahmed Moustafa," 22. Notably, the British Museum does not own any works by Ibn Muqla. Furthermore, Moustafa's journey of discovery and curatorial encouragement echoes that of Madiha Umar.

[555] Issa, *Signs of our Times,* 76.

[556] Ibid., 24.

Symmetries of Geometrical Patterns, Moustafa emphasizes science as tool to further one's spirituality and understanding of religion.[557] Letters for him, like Waqialla, have religious underpinnings that confer meaning, which he explores through his compositions informed by research into monotheistic religions. The script also helps Moustafa disassociate from Western painting and forms, perhaps most literally seen in his departure from figurative painting, but his work is not exclusively tied to nationality or religion either.[558] Rather, it results from individual explorations shaped by his own beliefs, life experiences, and diaspora, an approach that defies rigid categorizations and groupings. While Moustafa's work resonates with the mathematical thinking of people such as Sol Le Witt (American, 1928–2007) and the spiritual Minimalism of artists like Bilge Friedlaender (Turkish-American, 1934–2000), Moustafa did not see himself as a part of either constellation, likely because of his larger desire to disassociate with Western thinking. Yet Moustafa's artistic journey not only resonates with Ermes and Waqialla as his direct interlocutors in London, but also the broad contours of *hurufiyyah*.

Moustafa's engagement with the Arabic letter was featured in one of his first exhibitions in London, which happened to be contemporaneous with the World of Islam Festival. He participated in a group show titled *Contemporary Islamic Art and Design* held at the Long Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, University of London) in 1976

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[557] S. J. Abas, and Amer Shaker Salman, *Symmetries of Islamic Geometrical Patterns* (Singapore: World Scientific, 1995), xix-xx. Here, he cites his own research on Ibn Muqla as allowing him to understand Islamic civilization as rooted in geometry.

[558] Issa, *Signs of our Times*, 24, 76; Jeremy Theophilus, *Mapping the Unseen* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Galleries, 2003), 6.

(see Figure 3-6). The exhibition, organized by a committee of five people, responded to a general lack of awareness around modern Islamic art, and the recent efforts largely by governments in the "Muslim world" to invest in artistic rediscovery and training.[559] Moustafa's letter-based design adorned the official exhibition advertisement, an approach typical of his mid-to-late career style. The work reflects a process by which Moustafa selects a verse from the Qur'an, counts the number of times each letter appears, and then outlines the form of each letter, presenting them individually alongside a subscript number totaling how many times a letter is used in that verse. The result is a visual symphony of letters and lines overlapping and intertwining into an abstract, gestural composition whose complexities nearly defy a literal reading by breaking up the script's system of meaning. Without Moustafa's assistance, or a name for the work, it is difficult to identify what verse he is referencing, an approach that follows the *hurufi* rejection of legibility and semantics. Moustafa was not credited for his work on the advertisement, even though it brands the exhibition, much like Waqialla. The simple poster asserts a relationship between Islam, calligraphy, and contemporaneity, as well as one between the image and text, which viewers can then explore further at the exhibition.

What was featured on the poster was one of "five calligraphic designs" Moustafa showed in the exhibition, as described in archival documents held within the Arts Council of Great

[559] "Exhibition of Contemporary Islamic Art and Design," Box 9, folder 4, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. The committee included British linguist J.F.G. Bynon, E. O'Connor, Islamic art historian G. Fehervari, Florence Lawson (Honorary Member), and British art historian W. Watson. The committee thanked the School of Oriental and African Studies and the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art for their support.

Britain Archives.[560] However, the checklist does not list specific names.[561] This little-known exhibition brought together 14 artists from the Middle East and Europe to explore the role of the Arabic script in expressing faith, and the importance of calligraphy as an art form. Notably, this language echoes that of the "sacred script" portion of *Word Into Art*, and the artistic parallels interrogated in *Without Boundary*, but strays from a strict *hurufi* concept. Painting was the primary focus of *Contemporary Islamic Art and Design*, and was highlighted to show "the Islamic view of the contemporary world," a term offered without definition in planning documents.[562] Artists included in the exhibition were: Basil Alkazzi (b. 1938, Kuwait); Dominique Bello (b. 1944, France); Jonny Boustros (b. 1958, Lebanon); Abd el-Moniem Ahmed el-Bashir (b. 1942, Sudan); Sayed Tajammul Husain (b. Pakistan); Nevin Holmes (b. Turkey); Saad Kamel (b. Egypt); Floren Lawson (b. 1937, UK); Ahmed Moustafa (b. 1943, Egypt); Nicolas A. Mufarrij (b. 1947, Egypt); Salih Mashmoun (b. 1946, Sudan); Cynthia Scrace (b. 1950, UK); Roger Swanborough (b. 1950, UK); and David Turner (b. 1950, UK).[563] Bringing together these artists positions the Arabic script as both contemporary and universal through its broad use, uniting disparate artists and people through art in a manner similar to the festival.

[560] Ibid. Specifically, information about this show is in a sub folder called "Other Exhibs" within a folder dedicated to festival activities except for major exhibitions. As such, it makes sense that this material is here since the Arts Council was somewhat involved in festival planning and given their historical relationship to the Hayward Gallery.

[561] Ibid.

[562] Ibid.

[563] Ibid. The archival material details that these two groups of artists were described as "Muslim and Western."

Contemporary Islamic Art and Design was one of what organizers called "fringe" events at the World of Islam Festival. Organizers knew about this exhibition throughout the festival's planning process, acknowledging in private meetings and public press conferences that SOAS intended to put on a show of what organizers termed "modern Islamic design."[564] A small amount of press highlighted the event for its unique nature. For example, in Michell's review, he notes the absence of contemporary art at the festival except for the SOAS show, which he describes as having over 100 objects chosen to reflect "recent work of Egyptian, Lebanese and Iranian artists in painting, calligraphic design, textile, and jewelry."[565] Such a description defies the festival's rejection of painting, but also surpasses the *hurufi* thinking that would later become prominent. This small exhibition has largely been neglected in accounts of the festival, and relatively forgotten in Moustafa's history.[566] However, it importantly proves that contemporary art was present around the World of Islam Festival, despite claims to the contrary, and prefaces larger conversations about the presence and dissemination of this material in London.

Moustafa became known for the style presented in *Contemporary Islamic Art and Design*, and later, the World of Islam Festival Trust helped to propel this style and his career

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[564] Minutes of Schools and Higher Education Programme Meeting, May 29, 1975, Box 8, Folder 3; Letter from Dalu Jones to Joanna Drew, June 10, 1975, Box 8, Folder 6; Official festival brochure, 1976, Box 3, Folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England; First Press Release, March 1975, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England.

[565] Michell, "Seeing many facets on the fringe of the festival programme," viii. Other articles erroneously describe the event as a "principal exhibition" of the festival. See: Anthony Hutt, "The Broad Scope of the Festival," *The Financial Times,* April 6, 1976, 24.

[566] Moustafa himself does not recall participating in the show, but does confirm his work is featured on the poster.

forward. Moustafa's style embodies the complex intersections of *hurufiyyah* and broader thinking around modern Arab art rooted in a knowledge of historical art forms, a study of different artistic styles, a dialogue with religion, and growing political ideologies, all connected to experiences in diaspora. This artistic discourse was exhibited broadly. In 1976, Moustafa supposedly had a solo show at the Ashmolean, but there is no record of it.[567] In 1978, Moustafa exhibited his calligraphic paintings in London at the Embankment Gallery sponsored by the World of Islam Festival Trust.[568] Moustafa is similarly thought to have had a 1976 or 1978 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, of which there is also no record.[569] In 1980, Moustafa held another one-person show at the Islamic Cultural Centre in London also sponsored by the World of Islam Festival Trust. Titled "Expressions of Arabic Calligraphy by Ahmed Moustafa," the display inaugurated a new exhibition hall.[570] These two shows in

[567] Email with Francesca Leoni, Ashmolean Museum, October 30, 2020; and email with James Allan, formerly of the Ashmolean Museum, November 13, 2020. Leoni mentioned the exhibition in a correspondence, but could not find a larger trail of information to support further research. Allan did not recall the exhibition. Across these emails, both confirmed that any exhibition would not have been a part of the World of Islam Festival, as the Ashmolean was not involved with the festival.

[568] Email with Fenoon Studio, June 18, 2021. The advertisement for his 1980 show at the Islamic Cultural Centre features the same work as the screen print advertising for his 1978 show. He and his studio do not recall what was featured in the exhibition.

[569] While the exhibition is listed on Moustafa's website and circulates broadly in his biography, I have not found any books, journal articles, or press records/advertisements to substantiate these claims. The gaps in our knowledge about the exhibition both point to the challenges of institutional archives but also the imperative of artists to act as their own historians.

[570] Advertised in *The Guardian.* See: "Expressions of Arabic Calligraphy by Ahmed Moustafa," *The Guardian*, January 2, 1980, 8. It was a short show, only running from January to February 1980. His website insists this was his first one-person show, but his 1978 show at the Embankment Gallery was a solo show, meaning that was more likely his first show. The Trust later dated this exhibition at the Islamic Cultural Centre to 1981, and claims

1978 and 1980 were the first and only known times in which the festival, via the proxy of the Trust, supported a contemporary artist's work.

The World of Islam Festival Trust's support for Moustafa's work was both a continuation of and departure from their previous positions. At a 1981 event, the Trust, led by Harold Beeley, spoke about the Trust's ongoing efforts to "increase[e] mutual understanding between the two cultures, Islamic and Western," language directly echoing the festival's original mission.[571] Seeing their educational mission as incomplete and ongoing, the Trust invested leftover funds into new projects to inspire an ongoing interest in Islamic art, including extending their work into contemporary art, a reversal of their earlier ideological stance, by supporting Moustafa's exhibition on "Arabic Calligraphy as an Art Form."[572] Information about what works were exhibited, as well as photographs, remain unavailable. Moustafa also gave a lecture at the Leighton House in collaboration with the Trust.[573] Yet notably, while the Trust chose to sponsor and support a contemporary artist to further the festival's broader ideology of building relationships between East and West, it was a return to Islamic art via contemporary art that had the bridge-building potential, not contemporary art or *hurifiyyah* itself.

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it was curated by the director of the Islamic Cultural Centre. See: *World of Islam Festival Trust, 1973-1983: The First Ten Years* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983), np.

[571] *Islam and the West: Proceedings of the Constitutive Conference* (Geneva: Jam'īyat Thaqāfīyah Dawlīyah, 1981), 97-9.

[572] Ibid., 98-9.

[573] *World of Islam Festival Trust, 1973-1983*, np.

Following the Trust's sponsorship, Moustafa's career continued to grow. Notable exhibitions include: the Ashmolean Museum (of which the museum has no record) (1983); the Egee Gallery, likely with Ermes (1989); the Barbican Centre alongside Ermes (1989), and again in 1995; the Royal College of Art—the first Arab artist to have a one-person show there (1990); and at the British Museum with *Word Into Art* (2006). His career grew in tandem with the market boom and other alternative spaces in London. Moustafa had other shows globally as well, such as at the National Gallery for Arts in Kuwait (1980), and speaking engagements. His mid-career survey, *Where the Two Oceans Meet* (Italy, 1998) was also sponsored by the Altajir World of Islam Trust, showing their continued support for his efforts.[574] Throughout his career, Moustafa's work remained a conduit for building relationships between different people, cultures, and governments, such as when the Queen gifted his work to Pakistan as a diplomatic gesture.[575] Moustafa's exhibition history was as modest, but like Ermes and Waqialla, London was where his style proliferated.

In 1985, Moustafa became the first contemporary Arab artist to enter the British Museum's collection, closely to be followed by Ermes and Waqialla in the late 1980s.[576] The museum acquired some of his diaries and books in 1985, as well as prints made in the late

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[574] Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, *Where the Two Oceans Meet: the Art of Ahmed Moustafa* (London: Fe-Noon, 1998), front matter. Altajir was the new name for the World of Islam Festival Trust after it was absorbed. Moustafa requested sponsorship, and they obliged. The Trust thought Moustafa's exhibition "would be a powerful and exciting contribution to the development of Christian-Muslim relations."

[575] See: "Visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Pakistan from October 7-12, 1997," *Foreign Affairs* 24, no. 10 (October 1997): 115-6. The work featured Qur'an 55:19 – "He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together."

[576] Porter, "Collecting and Exhibiting Arab Art at the British Museum," 30. One might suspect that Moustafa's mentor, Rogers, may have overseen this acquisition.

1970s and early 1980s expressing Moustafa's earliest explorations of the letter; it was also this exploration of the letter that made his work relevant and in alignment with the museum's collecting practices, much like Ermes and Waqialla. One acquisition of note is *The Psalmody of Qur'anic Chapter al-Ikhlas* (1983) (British Museum, 1987,0604,0.4) (see Figure 3-7). The work's title references *al-Ikhlas*, or *surah* (chapter) 112, a short chapter of the Qur'an with four verses speaking to god's oneness and unity. Like Moustafa's other works, the background is filled with traditional, Qur'anic script repeating the text from the four verses in four lines. In the foreground, Moustafa tabulates which letters appear and how many times before transposing them into a creative composition of sinuous, intertwined lines. Made just after the festival, the *Psalmody* echoes the poster design for the Long Gallery (see Figure 3-6). The two works likely refer to the same Qur'anic verse. Moreover, this verse is also the subject of *The Heart of Sincerity* (1987,0604,0.5), which was featured in *Word into Art* under "sacred script"—the same category as Waqialla.[577] Furthermore, while Ermes' work served a slightly different function, Moustafa and Waqialla's work both functioned in the exhibition to educate audiences about Islam in line with the show's implicit multicultural goals. This presentation directly ties the festival, the British Museum's acquisitions, and the exhibition together, illuminating a linkage between the festival and the emergence of contemporary art from the Middle East in London through their shared forms and patterns of circulation. Thus, the festival and Trust were not only important for pushing Moustafa's career forward, no matter the contradictions in their own ideology, but for disseminating contemporary Arab art in London and beyond in ways that were rooted in the Arabic letter as a key feature of a

[577] Porter, *Word into Art*, 14. Porter does not define Moustafa in relation to one style, like Kufic or Maghribi.

nascent field, prompting audiences to engage with something new through a familiarity with something historical.

G. The Other Fringe

While the fringe exhibition featuring Moustafa was the most widely known and advertised, there were other events that, in hindsight, posit new ways of thinking through potential forms of contemporary art from the Middle East. On one hand, these fringe events deviated from other focused considerations of the Arabic letter, making their subject matter and visual form peripheral to the main attraction. On the other hand, these aesthetic inquiries also proposed relationships to modernity and were not directly connected to Islam in all cases, proposing an ideological adjacency that required separation from the festival—or to be on the "fringe." Little archival evidence remains about these shows, such as detailed descriptions and photographs, making it difficult to ascertain a full picture of adjacent events. However, the extant titles and brief descriptions offer a small window into the different ideologies and artistic forms presented around London in dialogue with or opposition to the festival. These events made the argument that Islam and its visual culture could be contemporary, as well as diasporic and non-religious, a vastly expanded way of thinking from the festival's historically oriented, religious, and anti-modern ideology.

The first fringe event listed in the World of Islam Festival program was "Paintings of Arabian Scenes by European and Arabian Artists" held at the Mathaf Gallery.[578] Michell describes the show as interpreting the theme of the World of Islam, here implying the same

[578] First Press Release, March 1975, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England. The event was also mentioned at the main press conference.

Islam-centric geographic region as the festival, with "paintings of Arabian scenes by European artists."[579] Michell's language suggests that the paintings illuminated the way European artists saw the lands where Islam is dominant, or what we now understand as Orientalist imagery. The gallery has no record of who or what was featured, but such Western visions were certainly antagonistic to the festival's Islamic subjectivities.

Brian MacDermot, an entrepreneur and world traveler, opened Mathaf Gallery in 1975 as a place to sell paintings "of the Arab World," as he explains, specifically for the upcoming World of Islam Festival.[580] Formerly on Motcomb Street in Belgravia, one of the wealthiest residential areas in London, MacDermot strategically located himself near the burgeoning Islamic art market, likely at Sotheby's and Parke Bernet, aiming his sales at Arab audiences.[581] The gallery promoted interest in the Arab world through European visions of the Middle East, not modern Arab artists envisioning their own environments.[582] Later, they

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[579] Michell, "Seeing many facets on the fringe of the festival programme," viii.

[580] "About: Mathaf Gallery," Mathaf Gallery, last modified unknown, https://www.mathafgallery.com/about-us. Salamandra says this gallery was opened to promote contemporary Arab paintings, which is not accurate. See: Christa Salamandra, "Cultural Construction, The Gulf and Arab London," in *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf,* ed. Paul Dresch (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 80. MacDermot traveled the world, and acquired "western paintings of Arab scenes," inspiring him to open his gallery. See: Michael Davies, "Why Arabs buy M and S Pants," *The Observer*, August 14, 1977, 32. His friends were his first and most prominent clients. In its early years, the venue is advertised as a place to show "pictures of Arab life, mainly for Arab collectors abroad, and almost entirely by European painters." See: "Alan Brien's London," *Punch* 275, no. 1 (1978): 121.

[581] Bevis Hillier, "A Connoisseur's Guide," *Town & Country* 132, no. 4976 (April 1978): 89-92. Of note is the World of Islam Festival was also important for inspiring a new market for historical Islamic art.

[582] Johnny Rizq, "Islamic Art: Discriminating Buyers Lead in Record Breaking Sales," *Middle East Economic Digest* 22 (1978) 13. For example, some of their key artists were Gordon Drysdale and John Haywood. MacDermot also worked with Sheikh Sultan of

pivoted their marketing to become "London's Centre for Arab Art," but only rarely, if ever, featured modern Arab artists.[583]

Following "Paintings of Arabian Scenes," other exhibitions at Mathaf also reflected the tensions between Orientalism and the Festival's ideology. One show featured Moroccan painter Taïeb Lahlou (1919–72). The show's checklist is not available, and neither Lahlou's biography nor body of work is well documented. Lahlou was a painter, occasionally described as a neocolonial artist for his interpretations of European imagery, and a government official for the Moroccan Ministry of Information and Tourism.[584] Lahlou's *Hommes bleus* (date unknown) was reproduced on the exhibition advertisement (see Figure 3-8). Depicting two men on horseback riding to an unknown location, their motion is implied through overlapping of shapes. Lahlou's cool-blues and sandy browns along with his rigid lines reflect a Cubist influence, one of many trends which swept through North Africa as European artists brought Western styles to the region. Men on horses were also a common subject for Moroccan painters and Orientalist depictions of the desert. Lahlou's subject matter aligned with the gallery's scope and represents one of the few times in which the gallery promoted Arab artists, yet the work carefully toyed with the Orientalist perspectives

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Sharjah in the UAE to find a modern painter that could create traditional scenes of the UAE, something which resonated with ideas of the Bedouin at the festival. They chose British painter Terry Gilbert. See: Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 252.

[583] *Al-Mawqif al-Arabi*, no. 23-26 (1979): 179.

[584] Ali describes his work as naïve painting in which local, self-taught artists engaged with colonial painters, and imitated their Orientalist style. See: Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 151.

presented previously. While Lahlou's show was not advertised in the festival's program, and only overlapped by a few days, this display was an important opportunity to promote Arab artists, provoking questions about competing imaginations of the Arab world during this early moment of interest. The other key instance was in 2008 when Mathaf hosted Moustafa's exhibition *Seeking an Immutable Essence*, which featured works ruminating on god's attributes and interpretations of Qur'anic verses; these paintings reflect the maturation of Moustafa's style from his 1976 exhibition, which would come to be featured prominently in major institutions, as this chapter illustrates.

The themes presented at the Mathaf Gallery correspond with another exhibition that occurred during the festival titled "Islamic Themes in European Art" at the Ashmolean Museum. This was not listed as a fringe event, nor was it sponsored by the festival, but instead listed in the program as an event held "Outside London."[585] No information remains about the show. However, the title reflects ideological tensions between Islam and Europe parallel to those at Mathaf. If the festival emphasized seeing Islam from an Islamic point of view, then exhibitions at the Ashmolean and Mathaf present an alternative perspective that focuses on the way the West saw the region. Competing ideologies at the center and the periphery of the festival reflected key tensions of the time: Who has the authority to speak for Islam and the Middle East? What is the role of art and culture in facilitating this discourse? And what is Islam's relationship to modernity and globalization in a changing world order?

[585] Official festival brochure, 1976, Box 3, folder 3, Arts Council of Great Britain Archives, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London, England. Michell suggests that the Ashmolean show might have had Rembrandt's sketches after Mughal miniatures, and Delacroix's scenes of North Africa. See: Michell, "Seeing many facets on the fringe of the festival programme."

These questions are also integral to framing the emergence of contemporary Arab art in the West and how various publics came to understand this material.

There were other fringe events that also considered the relationship between modernity and Islam, such as *Contemporary Mosques in the Commonwealth* at the Commonwealth Society in London."[586] This topic resonated with recent events in Britain that saw a large increase in the number of mosques in London. With little information remaining about the event, the title suggests that by showing contemporary mosques in London, that the exhibition drew attention to the architectural forms referencing lived variations of Islam in Britain. This show may have also highlighted aspects of British Muslim identity and history that the festival ignored. There were other non-fringe events as well, such as *Isfahan and the Camera: Nineteenth Century Persia through Photographs by Ernst Holzer* (Photographers' Gallery), likely a modern look at the pre-modern Safavid capital of Isfahan; and Qajar paintings (Jack Frames), a period of transition in Iran towards adopting Western academic painting styles; as well as an exploration of nineteenth-century pictures of Palestine (Palestine Exploration Fund), a period prior to the *nakba*.[587] No information remains about these events, but their presence on the periphery of the festival interrogates the relationship between Islam and modernity subjugated by the festival.

A third fringe event was *Contemporary Arts and Crafts in the World of Islam* at the International Art Centre.[588] Not much is known about this event or the exhibition's content.

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[586] Ibid.

[587] Ibid.

[588] Ibid.; First Press Release, March 1975, INF12/1307, National Archives, London, England.

Unlike at Mathaf and the Ashmolean, the title of this exhibition suggests that the show uniquely highlighted contemporary craft production. If so, this means artists not only represented themselves, but also shared a media that may have been novel to different populations. Likewise, it may have also created a platform for women makers. Such a move aligns with the venue's mission. (Michael) Kim Wall opened the space in 1974 for artists unable to operate in the mainstream art world to have a place to work and communicate through galleries, studios, and conversation spaces.[589] By 1975, the space freed itself from state financial support, yet was still criticized for having work deemed of insufficient quality, a refrain commonly applied to craft.[590] As such, the center was a logical venue for Islamic craft, loosely defined, which was otherwise absent. Moreover, by presenting work from the region, rather than images of the region by travelers, it returned agency to artists and their historical forms of production as living cultural production. Across these institutions, autonomy from the festival allowed for an exploration of modern and contemporary forms while harnessing momentum from the festival to reveal what was absent.

These fringe events, although understood from a birds-eye view, broadly reflect a larger reconsideration of the festival's frameworks and perspectives by engaging with history and temporality in all its forms at alternative spaces. Most importantly, the fringe as label for things adjacent to but not sponsored by the festival comes to be a signifier of that which departed from the festival's ideological and aesthetic core. Namely, the fringe shows went

[589] Hugh Hubert, "Retaining Wall," *The Guardian,* December 9, 1974, 11. The venue was rented from the Greater London Council.

[590] James Heard, "John Bainbridge, *International Art Centre,*" *Arts Review* XXVII, no. 6 (March 21, 1975): 159.

beyond Islam and the letter, particularly the *hurufiyyah* aesthetics that would later become mainstream. If the festival presented Islamic civilization from an Islamic point of view on historical terms, these fringe events argued that these analytics were outdated, that Islam and its artistic production evolved with time, and that they were also present in Britain today. Instead, these events made the argument for a contemporary diasporic and non-religious interpretation of Islam and its visual culture while positioning it as ripe for further exploration.

Furthermore, these fringe events also reflect the place of Arab artists in the British art world: on the periphery of mainstream institutions, largely lacking support. Yet the small venues who did show their work made space for a contest against the festival and British ideas of its social order, making these alternative spaces pivotal venues to upset hegemonic, colonial, imperial, Western ideas about Islam, Islamic art, and contemporary art from the Middle East. It is in the interstices of alternative venues and mainstream institution that ideas of contemporary Arab art emerge and proliferate in London, leading to its later mainstream popularity.

H. Conclusion

Modern and contemporary Arab art in London emerges as a rupture from history in alternative spaces emphasizing artists whose practice counters mainstream institutions and aesthetics using visual languages that harness abstraction and the Arabic script as methods for critique. In the 1970s, this fracturing saw contemporary works reevaluating history by expanding beyond mimicry to think about contemporary artistic permutations inspired by studies of history, and which proliferated in smaller galleries and non-profit cultural centers; the letter became an individual, subjective entity as opposed to select ideologies around

Islam's objectivity. It was the need to articulate the self against a homogenized view of Islam and Arab identity that was a conduit for the arrival of artistic forms that mark Arab modernism, a movement built within the interstices of cultural difference, and expanding the capacities of art production to foster a globalized art world. Such a search was not in seek of national identities, as Dagher poses, but something transnational and constellational built out of the intersections and connections of art, education, and lived experience.[591] While this was an aesthetic rupture, now known as *hurufiyyah*, it was marketed as a continuation, which allowed it to gain momentum in conjunction with the 1980s market boom.[592] This larger constellation of forces was also connected to the ongoing efforts of Black British artists to fight against the institutional racism of the art world.[593] Exploring the cases of Ermes, Waqialla, and Moustafa thus illustrates the ways these artists were not afforded the opportunities given to other contemporary artists, but also the ways in which expectations about what Arab artists should do, such as calligraphic work (often marketed as *hurufiyyah*), became a way for them to express their individuality and also gain prominence in the art world.

If the World of Islam Festival was a conduit for inspiring interest in Islam, then it should also be seen as an interlocutor for the emergence of contemporary Arab art by inciting

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[591] Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 32.

[592] Shabout, *Modern Arab Art*, 150. Shabout's quote is notable here: The need to establish continuity between modern Arab art and Islamic art is essentially responsible for the popularity of Hurufiyah. In such works a spurious continuity is perceived between the manipulation of the Arabic letter in modern Arab art and Islamic calligraphy."

[593] For more on this, see: Ash Reid, "Don't Do it for Love: Feminist Film Distribution in 1980s Britain," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 164-91; and Price, "A Radical Decade," 192-99.

discourse around Islam, its diasporas, and cultural production in the 20th century as it can be discovered through the Arabic letter. This interlocutor is part of a larger network that sees the importance of London for this experimentation, alongside the script as a critical visual feature, abstraction as a visual language, and subjective life experiences as a central motivator. These complexities come to be contained within the notion of *hurufiyyah*, a catch-all for letter-based work that threatens to flatten the very rupture which sparked its emergence and homogenize the subjectivities integral to its formation. Though not described as *hurufiyyah*, the Trust's sponsorship of contemporary art in later years, such as with Moustafa's calligraphic compositions, shows their shifting ways of thinking, and their continued role as a discussant in the field. As the Trust changed leadership and took on new forms, other artists and alternative spaces took up the mantra of promoting contemporary Arab art that culminated in the British Museum's 2006 exhibition.

Reflecting in hindsight, the tone which discounted the contemporary also changed, as did the larger art world landscape. In a 1978 reflection on the festival, Beeley discussed the problems of modernities that upset larger global uniformities and prompt their subjugation, asking "for how much longer will it be acceptable to emphasize the basic principles and the impressive continuity of Islamic culture while ignoring so much of the contemporary life of many Muslim countries?"[594] Beeley's question is almost ironic, directly contradicting the festival's position, which he played a role in forming, while acknowledging the changes in London that led to an interest in contemporary art from the Middle East. Yet his wording is

[594] Harold Beeley, "The World of Islam Festival, London 1976," *Museum* XXX, no. 1 (1978): 10. Such a line of thinking around continuity follows Ali's thinking around the letter, but not Dagher. See: Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School."

careful to note he is speaking about the contemporary in "Muslim countries," pushing the diaspora out of his consideration in line with ongoing discourse about a homogenous British identity. Beeley did not aim for a posthumous critique, but in hindsight, his comments reiterate the festival's inherent limits that prompt a reexamination of the contemporary at the World of Islam Festival.

After the World of Islam Festival, the momentum shifted to other alternative spaces, and was taken up by other artists in diaspora to collectively posit a modern and contemporary Arab art beyond the letter, or what is now called *hurufiyyah*. Dia al-Azzawi (Iraqi, b. 1939) is perhaps the most prominent figure in this discussion, and shares a similar biographical trajectory as Ermes, Waqialla, and Moustafa, even though Azzawi did not study in London. Azzawi first studied at various art academies and institutions throughout Iraq, later meeting key Iraqi modernists who collectively fashioned a new Iraqi modernism. These artists inspired Azzawi to take up oil painting.[595] After Qassim's regime fell in 1963, Azzawi's work ruminated on Iraqi politics, and later, the Palestinian situation, authoritarianism, and repression.[596] He wrote the *New Vision* manifesto calling for art to directly respond to politics, something distinctly challenging in Ba'athist Iraq.[597] Simultaneously, he investigated

[595] Catherine David, *Dia Al-Azzawi: A Retrospective, from 1963 Until Tomorrow* (Doha, Qatar: Arab Museum of Modern Art, 2017), 31; Martin Gayford, "Ancient and Modern," *Apollo* (October 2016): 76. The Impressionist painter Hafidh al-Droubi asked him to join the Impressionists in Iraq, and he said no, but Azzawi still worked as his assistant. Other key influences include modernists like Faiq Hassan, Mahmoud Sabri, Kadhim Haidar, and Azzawi's study of archaeology, Mesopotamian art, the art of other civilizations, and folk art.

[596] Ibid., 31-2.

[597] Gayford, "Ancient and Modern," 76.

his own heritage while working at the Iraqi Museum from 1968–70.[598] Azzawi also planned cultural events that promoted Iraq's history, such as the Al-Wasiti Festival (1972), and the First Arab Biennale of Art in Baghdad (1974), both of which I discussed in chapter two.[599] These experiences led Azzawi to form an artistic practice in dialogue with the ongoing interplay between East and West, local and global, and past and present. Notably, his practice sometimes included letters, but like Ermes, he was critical of *hurufiyyah*.[600]

Azzawi arrived in London in 1976 where he remains today.[601] Azzawi asked the Iraqi government for a visa to study abroad, and when his request was denied, he left anyways, and applied to the Royal College of Art.[602] Instead of going to school, Azzawi accepted a job as artistic consultant (or art adviser) for the Iraqi Cultural Centre between 1977 and 1980.[603] He worked there for four years on international exhibitions showcasing Iraqi and Arab artists. From 1978–84, he was editor-in-chief of *Ur*, the Iraqi Cultural Centre's publication, and

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[598] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 33, 36, 39-40; Gayford, "Ancient and Modern," 76. During this time, for example, he put together an exhibition of statues from Hatra, objects from Assyrian civilizations, including the winged bull from Khorsabad, as well as Sumerian artifacts, all which allowed him to tour Iraq for research.

[599] Ibid., 33, 36, 39-40; Ibid., 76. There was a second edition in Rabat in 1976.

[600] See: Shabout, *Modern Arab Art*, 150. Dagher did illustrate Azzawi's works in the Arabic edition of the book. Likewise, Ali discussed Azzawi as an example of combination calligraphy. See: Ali, "A Survey of Modern Painting in the Islamic World and the Development of the Contemporary Calligraphic School," 322-23.

[601] Gayford, "Ancient and Modern," 76. Azzawi only returned to Iraq once in 1980 to see his family and leaving because of the Iran-Iraq War.

[602] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 42-3. Part of his decision was because the dean of the school suggested that, if he wanted to be an artist, his work needed to be taken to a place higher than studying.

[603] Hakim, *Dia al-Azzawi: Taking a Stand*, 113.

Funoun Arabiya, an Arab arts magazine, from 1981–82. Simultaneously, in 1978, Azzawi had his first solo exhibition in London at the Patrick Seale Gallery, which featured work he brought from Iraq.[604] If Azzawi acquired the cultural and historical knowledge in Iraq to inform his work, London was the place where he refined and circulated his visual thinking. It is unclear if he saw the World of Islam Festival, but Azzawi moving to London was formative for his career and for future Arab artists in London.

In his role at the Iraqi Cultural Centre, which opened in 1977, Azzawi actively promoted Arab artists, and as such, he is also a vital part of the network outlined in this chapter that facilitated the dissemination of modern and contemporary Arab art.[605] The center's exhibition program importantly highlighted the diversity of the Iraqi art scene and contemporary Arab artists; exhibited work was not just based on the letter. Many exhibitions had accompanying catalogues, which along with *Ur,* preserved this important activity and initiated a field's historiography. The result of this multifaceted endeavor was that audiences became acquainted with Arab culture. Yet these activities were also plagued with politics, many seeing the center's efforts as a thinly veiled way to counter poor images of Iraq and promote political goodwill through cultural exchange. Later, the center was the site of protests in response to global events, and even hosted Saddam Hussein when he invited artists to participate in an international art festival in Baghdad under the auspices of "art for

[604] David, *Dia Al-Azzawi*, 43; Zainab Bahrani, and Nada M. Shabout, *Modernism and Iraq* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2009), 92.

[605] The centre's self-stated objective was to "explain to the western visitor a little about the Arab and the Arab countries" so they could understand and enjoy the exhibitions. See: *Contemporary Arab Graphics 1978* (London: Iraqi Cultural Centre, 1978), 5.

humanity."[606] Like the festival and other events in London, the Iraqi Cultural Centre was a nexus for meetings between East and West, past and present, and local and global modernisms in the age of diaspora, all intertwined with contemporary politics that shaped perceptions of art.

Many of the artists featured at the Iraqi Cultural Centre later became prominent in London, including Azzawi himself.[607] One of the center's first shows was *Exhibition of Contemporary Iraqi Art* in 1977, the first of its kind.[608] In the same year, influential modernist Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Palestinian, 1919–94, active Iraq) also had a solo show. In 1978, the center hosted *Seven Iraqi Artists,* perhaps one of its most well-known exhibitions. Included were key Iraqi artists like Azzawi and al-Nasiri, both of whom learned from the pioneering Iraqi modernists, and later entered the British Museum's collection.[609] In the same year, there was also *Contemporary Arab Graphics*, including Azzawi, Nasiri, and Marwan

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[606] Naim Attallah, "The Iraqi Cultural Centre," in *The Arab Cultural Scene,* ed. C. Hourani (London: Namara Press, 1982), 121; *The Middle East Abstracts and Index* 3, no. 2 (1980), 118. Citing: Roger Hardy, "Letter from… Baghdad," *Middle East International* 117, no. 16 (1978).

[607] Exhibitions of note include: *Ceramics from Iraq* (1977); *Hashem al Khattat* (1978); *Contemporary Arab Graphics* (part 1 in 1978, part two in 1979, and part three in 1981); *Baghdad International Poster Exhibition* (1979); *Iraqi Art of the 50s* (1979); *Influence of Calligraphy on Contemporary Arab Art* (1980); *Third World Biennale of Graphic Art* (1980).

[608] Edward Lucie-Smith, the noted craft critic from Britain, critiqued the exhibit by noting there was not "any very new or startling revelation," showing "eclectic" work with influences only "partly absorbed." See: Edward Lucie-Smith, "Iraqi Contemporary Art," *Art and Artists* 12 (1977-8): 44. Artists from this exhibition who later became a part of the British Museum's collection include Shakir Hassan al Said, Dia al Azzawi, Souad al Attar, Rafa al Nasiri, and Hafidh al Droubi. Notably, in Dagher's thinking around *hurufiyyah*, he outlines the 1970s-1980s as a key time for this formation in Iraq. See: Dagher, *Arabic Hurufiyya*, 42.

[609] *Seven Iraqi Artists* (London: Iraqi Cultural Centre, 1978), np.

(Syrian, 1934–2016), also acquired by the British Museum. The earliest exhibitions showcased the foundations of Iraqi art which not only shaped Azzawi's practice, but also the history of Iraqi modernism that artists would later experiment with and become the basis for ongoing artistic dialogue.

Subsequent exhibitions broadened their thinking about the Arab world while catapulting the careers of a select group of artists. A series of three exhibitions called *Contemporary Arab Artists* was initiated in 1978 that considered modernism in the Arab world. In part one, artists represented from *Word into Art* include Shakir Hassan al-Said, Kamal Boullata (Palestinian, 1942–2019), and Belkahia. Other featured artists, like Ismail Fattah (Iraqi, 1934–2004), were later acquired by the British Museum. Part two included Suad al-Attar (Iraqi, b. 1942), also a part of *Word Into Art*, as well as Samia Halaby (Palestinian, b. 1936), who is not in the British Museum's collection, but is one of the most important artists of her generation. Finally, part three included al-Attar, Nasiri, Koraichi, Azzawi, and Mohammad Rawas (Lebanese, b. 1951), all in *Word into Art*. Mona al-Soudi (Mona Saudi) (Jordanian, 1945–2022) was also in this display, and joined the British Museum's collection after *Word Into Art*. The centre continued to host solo shows, historically informed displays, presentations of Western artists about Iraq, and contemporary group survey shows throughout its run. The Iraqi Cultural Centre proved to be a key venue for Iraqi and Arab artists to showcase their work, taking up the mantle which began at alternative venues during the World of Islam Festival. Most importantly, the Iraqi Cultural Centre saw these artists and their work beyond *hurufiyyah* and were only inserted in this container when taken beyond a framework of self-articulation into a Western museological context.

The Iraqi Cultural Centre and other alternative spaces were critical conduits for disseminating Arab art, which impacted Western markets and collections. The Iraqi Cultural Centre and its exhibitions exist within the same juncture of past and present, highlighting historical and contemporary forms, as well as the interrelationships between local and global styles as Arab artists traversed the West. Moreover, the questions posed by the Iraqi Cultural Centre about the Arab world, modernity, and the West reflect those still relevant today, and explored in contemporary exhibitions.[610] Concurrent to this, more artists from the Middle East made London their physical and artistic home, including Mona Hatoum (Palestinian-Lebanese, b. 1952), Houria Niati (Algerian, b. 1938), Issam el Said (Iraqi, 1938–88), Hafiz al-Drubi (Iraqi, 1914–91), Anwar Jalal Shemza (Pakistani, 1928–85), Shakir Ali (Pakistani, 1916–75), Leila Shawa (Palestinian, 1940–2022), Zeid, Dana Awartani (b. Saudi Arabia, 1987), Mitra Tabrizian (b. Iran, c. 1960s), and many more, coinciding with London's burgeoning gallery scene. Smaller displays prefaced larger shows that would happen years later on different terms, such as *Contemporary art from the Islamic World* at the Barbican Centre (1989), and *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art* at SOAS (2001), which did not offer early hypotheses on *hurufiyyah*, but were pivotal to the formation of *Word into Art* by creating awareness about new artists. These exhibitions notably put forward arguments around contemporaneity from the Arab world that were novel, but connected to different and shifting conceptions of tradition. The impact London had on the idea of contemporary art from the Middle East via festivals, galleries, alternative spaces, and museums informs the way other global parties engaged with the field, as I will discuss later in this project.

[610] *Ur: Special Issue on Contemporary Arab Art* (London: Iraqi Cultural Centre, 1981).

As contemporary Arab art emerged on the fringe, a place reflecting their position in society and the art world, Arab artists were their own advocates. In the 1980s and 1990s when British multiculturalism questioned the exclusion of artists of color, many Arab artists were left out this reclamation project.[611] These questions were spearheaded by people such as Rasheed Araeen (Pakistani, b. 1935), leading to the advent of *Third Text*, a journal dedicated to underrepresented artists, and *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain* (Hayward Gallery, 1989), which highlighted artists marginalized in the histories of British modernism while offering a corrective to the history presented at *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Pompidou, 1989).[612]

In hindsight, to see London as formative for Arab artists positions them as pivotal to alternative British modernisms resulting from education at British art institutions, and conversations with other British artists. Relegating these artists to the Middle East alone or seeing their emergence as a post-9/11 phenomenon obscures this diasporic nexus, necessitating a redrawing of the constellation of geographies, temporalities, and global art worlds that inform this style. It is in the interstices of Arab subjectivities, national identities, a Western historical inquiry into Islam, a diasporic art world, conflict in the Middle East, and a desire for self-articulation that modern Arab art emerges in London, a boundless mode of modernity meant to upset the hegemony of Orientalism, imperialism, colonialism, racism,

[611] Racz, *British Art of the Long 1980s*, 12.

[612] Ibid., 11-13, 30. At the time, the Tate Modern was also more conservative, and uninterested in this global project. Notably, Araeen and others were involved in the Black British Arts Movement, as well as events like the First National Black Art Convention held at Wolverhampton Polytechnic in 1982. See: Price, "A Radical Decade," 193.

and xenophobia that yet remains a part of thinking about the Middle East and its contemporary art today.

IV. "An Artificially Induced Spectacle"? Crafting National Identity at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, 1973–76

A. Introduction

In the summer of 1976, the Smithsonian presented the Festival of American Folklife (hereafter referred to as FAF), a convening symbolically encapsulated in an unnamed embroidery by self-taught Mississippi maker Ethel Wright Mohamed (see Figure 4-1). Mohamed stitched several simultaneous narratives depicting people gleefully gathering at the festival to celebrate different cultures while commemorating America's bicentennial. Through varying sizes and colors, Mohamed suggests the diversity of attendants. Meanwhile, small flags indicate the festival's subsections: "African Diaspora," "Old Ways in the New World," "Working Americans," "Family Folklore," the "Children's Area," and the "Main Stage." Made prior to the festival's opening, Mohamed's work is an optimistic foretelling of the jovial coexistence the festival aimed to inspire. Yet the design process for Mohamed's work took several months as she brainstormed and collaborated with folks at the Smithsonian, a trajectory which echoed the festival's broader planning process, and the ways representations were mediated to achieve goals related to national identity and diversity—and a process which has also been overlooked in descriptions of the work.

Departing from Mohamed's embroidery, and supplemented by archival documents and oral histories, this chapter explores the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife (or FAF) from 1973 to 1976. Specifically, I consider Arab and Arab-American populations represented at the festival through the program "Old Ways in the New World," which included representatives from Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt, in order to interrogate how Arab identity

was constructed and understood in relation to the idea of the American nation.[613] I argue that the festival carefully selected and staged different cultures to celebrate diversity and project a new landscape that modeled a form of coexistence inspired by people coming together at the festival. The festival worked to achieve this participant-based engagement through a selection process rooted in the idea of the "cultural cognate," a term referring to identifying parallel cultural practices in the US and abroad; I will return to this term later. Subsequently, the festival employed a form of interpersonal education to teach audiences about different cultural traditions through the participants they selected to foster understanding about different lived experiences and build unity.[614] In this way, festival signifies a particular temporal experience rooted in the people and the interactions between them in addition to a particular program of events. As the festival took place on the National Mall, its physical presence not only divorced it from museums and object-based learning, but harnessed the way the city was still in development as a palimpsest to render different visions of culture and national identity. Yet as I will illustrate, the ways diversity was constructed and projected contradicted themselves, creating a spectacle of inclusion where Arab diaspora populations remained nominally integrated into the American nation yet separate from the larger community.[615]

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[613] In this way, the festival functions like a museum as a site for configuring and projecting the nation. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[614] On people to people exchange, see: Sarah-Neel Smith, "Forgotten Geographies of Artistic Diplomacy: Abby Weed Grey and U.S.-Middle East Exchanges in the 1960s," in *Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights from NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection*, ed. Lynn Gumpert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 123-34.

[615] In this chapter, I do not discuss the Smithsonian Folkways Music program. This was an initiative that the Smithsonian took over in the 1980s and then rebranded. While it is

The Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife (now the Smithsonian Folklife Festival) was the brainchild of Ornithologist and Smithsonian Institution Secretary S. Dillon Ripley (American, 1913–2001), who saw the event as a "celebration of America's folk heritage."[616] Ripley's purview proposed folk as an all-encompassing term that simultaneously held cultural and geographical specificities. When Ripley began working at the Smithsonian in 1964, he found the exhibitions dull, curators out of touch, and the vibe of the museum to be dry and "oppressive."[617] In 1967, Ripley began reconsidering how America's national museums could be more engaged with their publics and correct narrow cultural representations in museums, a move that came in part out of the aforementioned distaste for current museum practice and the dormancy of objects. He then said it was time to "take the instruments out of their cases and let them sing," a dictum heralding a new era of different communities showcasing why specific objects and practices were meaningful for themselves, but which also aimed to enliven what was seen by many, including Ripley, as a "dormant and inactive" institution.[618] Ripley's vision foregrounded the human as the bearer of knowledge

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important for the ways it documents music by some of the groups discussed in this chapter, including Pakistani and Tunisian musicians, it is beyond the scope of this line of inquiry.

[616] Press release: 8th Annual Festival of American Folklife Scheduled for Two Weeks on National Mall, February 19, 1974, Folder Part. Selection/Old Ways…, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[617] Neil Harris, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 109.

[618] Ibid., 107; Olivia Cadaval, Sojin Kim, and Diana Baird N'Diaye, "Introduction," in *Curatorial Conversations: Cultural Representation and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, ed. Olivia Cadaval, Sojin Kim, and Diana Baird N'Diaye (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 20; Richard Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," in *Folklife and Museums: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives,* ed. Kurt C. Dewhurst (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 2017), 299. In Kurin's book chapter, he explains

rather than the object, contrary to traditional museum approaches.[619] Individuals or groups were then invited to present their own traditional practices within each festival subsection, upsetting the idea of institution as presenter of cultural practice.[620] Presenters were referred to as "cultural practitioners, bearers, or exemplars," terms that assert the importance of generational and embodied knowledge.[621] Implicitly, the performative aspect also helped to make up for what was missing in the Smithsonian's nascent museum complex. The festival was thus established to protect cultural traditions, awaken the National Mall (and perhaps even the sleepy city itself), and establish interactive ways to present culture, making the festival a venue for testing new forms of cultural representation—and erasing histories of protest.

Ripley's participant-based practice, as opposed to an object-based methodology like the one used at the World of Islam Festival, came together through collaboration, specifically with people who had experience planning people-focused, community-based events. Ripley hired folklorist James Morris (American, 1927–2020) to bring life to the National Mall based on his previous experience producing lively, community-engaged festivals.[622] Morris drew

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that Ripley cited the omission of African American culture in museums and the relegation of Indigenous peoples to natural history museums.

[619] Robert Baron, "Prologue," in *Curatorial Conversations: Cultural Representation and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, ed. Olivia Cadaval, Sojin Kim, and Diana Baird N'Diaye (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 11, 13-14.

[620] Olivia Cadaval refers to this as a "populist vision of culture." See: Cadaval, Kim, and N'Diaye, "Introduction," 20.

[621] Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 298.

[622] The National Mall was considered by festival organizers as a site to project ideas about the nation, drawing on L'Enfant's plans for the city. See: Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By, and For the People* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian

on the participatory nature of the Newport Folk Festival, a renowned musical event, to plan FAF. Morris then hired musician and curator Ralph Rinzler (American, 1934–94) to help lead this new project and research folk traditions.[623] Rinzler proposed that FAF presentations be labeled as "folklife" instead of "folk" to tie these happenings to a serious ethnographic approach.[624] Yet contrary to the institutional narrative, tying folklife to ethnography establishes an observer/participant relationship where one person watches and defines the practice performed by the participant, thus implying a power structure that subsequently runs throughout the festival. The first FAF happened in 1967 with the goal of presenting a "broad cross-section" of American folk culture through music and craft, in turn showing the diversity and beauty of long-held traditions still practiced in many US communities but often ignored in modern urban contexts.[625] Folk craft, though undefined, seemed to describe what Kathryn Umberger calls "tradition-based art forms," only later becoming a way to denigrate

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Institution Press, 1999), 18-23; Robert Cantwell, *Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the Representation of Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 115. Here, Kurin describes the Mall as a national park based on a "conceived relationship to the organization of government, the nation, and the people." On Enfant's larger plan, see chapter 3 of Cantwell's *Ethnomimesis*.

[623] Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," fn. 2-3. According to Kurin, ethnography was the opposite of "scruffy counterculture."

[624] Ibid., 297. To define folklife, Rinzler drew on scholars like Don Yoder, Roger Abrahams, and Henry Glassie.

[625] Ibid., 298; Halle M. Burvin and James I. Deutsch, "Market Forces and Marketplace Economics at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival," in *The Folklorist in the Marketplace*, ed. Willow Mullins and Puja Batra-Wells (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2019), 72. Notably, folk art was previously used to establish genealogies of American modernism, a project no doubt close to the interest in American identity here. See: Angela Miller, ""The People Looks upon Its Own Life": Self-Taught Art between the Wars," in *Boundary Trouble in American Vanguard Art, 1920-2020*, ed. Lynne Cooke (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2022), 64.

other artists.[626] Ripley is a key character in the festival story as the event evolved to continually redefine the character of the nation and upset static museum displays while also harnessing the open-air space in the nascent city to bring people together.

Ripley's initial project in the 1960s, while rooted in a critique of the museum, was also connected to shifting conceptions of public space and current events in a burgeoning city. For one, the National Mall had recently been the site of protests around the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, among others. During the March on Washington, many Smithsonian officials wanted to close the museum. Ripley took note of this, and moving forward, made an effort to keep the museum open in line with his philosophy of making museums more accessible, but despite opinions to the contrary.[627] Furthermore, by connecting the new festival to the Newport Folk Festival, Ripley was working to shift the conception of public space to something not so laden with political connotations. This effort is only furthered by Ripley's interest in creating a more social space around the museums and the National Mall, including a sculpture garden.[628] Collectively, such an idea implies that cultivating spaces of culture, as well as creating special moments for gathering and glee, would dissuade future protests, or perhaps even make people forget about such political issues. Moreover, the

[626] Leslie Umberger, "Housewives, Witches, Beauty Queens, and Conjure Women: Locating the Practice of Self-Taught Women Artists," in *Boundary Trouble in American Vanguard Art, 1920-2020*, ed. Lynne Cooke (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2022), 282-3.

[627] Richard Kurin, "Cultural Policy through Public Display," *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3 (1995): 6; Harris, *Capital Culture*, 292.

[628] Harris, *Capital Culture*, 109.

festival's focus on folk could also bring people back to a simpler time and a time of celebration, one which would also prompt people to take their mind off anything political.

Ripley's program took shape in the 1970s amid a complex web of events. For one, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) also established a new folk arts program.[629] The advent of the NEA did not directly support the festival, but its investment in folk indirectly supported the festival's larger mission. Craft was also somewhat new to festival audiences in the 1970s, as the Renwick Gallery, which focused on American crafts, opened to the public in 1972. In 1976, the American Folklife Preservation Act secured additional funding for the festival that would allow for organizers to collect and preserve festival ephemera and ethnographic research materials.[630] Indirectly, this funding paved the way for researchers today to study the festival through its ephemera. As the Smithsonian's museums continued to grow, however, the festival was also an implicit reminder of the many things absent from the same museums.

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[629] Cadaval, Kim, and N'Diaye, "Introduction," 20-1. This closely followed the period of folk revival and hand-made processes. See: The '60s were also the period of the folk revival. See: Cantwell, *Ethnomimesis*, 52; Richard Bauman, *Reflections of the Folklife Festival: An Ethnography of Participant Experience* (Bloomington: Folklore Institute, Indiana University Bloomington, 1992), 1; Richard Bauman and Patricia Sawin, "The Politics of Participation in Folklife Festivals," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 289; Jenni Sorkin, "Affinities in Abstraction: Textiles, Otherness, and Painting in the 1970s," in *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, ed. Lynne Cooke (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2018), 92-106. Notably, the folk revival was only three decades after the 1930s folk festival movement, which prefaced the Smithsonian's efforts, and the burgeoning interest in self-taught artists. See: Angela Miller, ""The People Looks upon Its Own Life"," 60.

[630] Roger D. Abrahams, "Interpreting Folklore Ethnographically and Sociologically," in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 354; Patricia A. Hall, "A Case for Folklife and the Local Historical Society," in *American Material Culture and Folklife: A Prologue and Dialogue*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 212.

Furthermore, from 1973 to 1976, FAF briefly added a new section to its program titled "Old Ways in the New World" (hereafter OWNW). OWNW operated along a binary between here (the US), and there, or the "old world," referring to the places from which immigrants came.[631] OWNW sought to teach people about the cultural traditions of immigrant communities abroad in comparison to their practices in the US diaspora.[632] Food, dance, and crafts were the primary examples of these traditions, and became pathways for education and bridge building.[633] Following ethnographic research about different cultural traditions, participants were brought to the US from the Arab world, namely Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt, to present their traditions alongside those of US immigrant communities. Foreign participants were partially identified based on census and immigration data that indicated significant immigrant populations in the US.[634] Always intended as a short-term endeavor to

[631] Notably, the advent of this project followed the important 1965 Immigration Act that ended immigration quotas and allowed for more immigrants to come from places previously banned, largely on the Asian continent. See: K. Lee Lerner, Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, and Adrienne Wilmoth Lerner, eds. *Immigration and Multiculturalism: Essential Primary Sources* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 113.

[632] Richard Kurin, former director of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, describes this effort as one to "research and present the ways in which traditional practices of community and ethnic identity, brought from the "old world," were preserved and transformed there, as well as in the American context." See: Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, 129.

[633] Ibid., 130.

[634] Letter from Bess Lomax Hawes to Old Ways in the New World Supervisory Group, December 1, 1975, Folder Old Ways Advisory Committee, Box 5, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Patterns of participation were not necessarily proportionate to immigration patterns. On Arab immigration, see: Jackleen M. Salem, "Arabs and Arab Americans, 1940-Present," in *Immigrants in American History: Arrival, Adaptation, and Integration*, Vol. 2, ed. Elliot Robert Barkan (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 713-23.

culminate with the bicentennial, the project ended after the 1976 FAF. However, the transition follows and corresponds to the US' political alliances in the Middle East. To this day, the festival continues yearly and welcomes people from within the United States and around the world to share their cultural traditions with everyone who attends the free event.

The 1976 Festival of American Folklife, however, was the biggest and longest festival to date. This bicentennial iteration made an important effort to think through the nation and who can be a part of it by synthesizing two centuries of people, culture, and traditions into a twelve-week event advertised as a venue to celebrate 200 years of America's heritage.[635] Located on the National Mall, the festival was a site for conversation about diversity and how it shapes and improves the nation; this dialogue took place against a backdrop of a city taking shape, and museums in transition. Likewise, as one walked the National Mall to engage with the festival, a movement much like World's Fairs, audiences also traversed a symbolic landscape around a country taking shape. The growing museum sector in DC, however, was never the site for this conversation, nor were the objects it held, but rather the antithesis of what the festival aimed to do, and the antidote to its many lacunae. Rather, the open space was a way to reimagine the conversation through special people and events. The festival's attendant visual repertoire, including Mohamed's embroidery (see Figure 4-1), maps, and advertisements all model different forms of learning and relationship building through and across difference at the festival, yet this visual and material culture has been overlooked in extant literature. FAF should be re-read contrapuntally against the grain of current events and

[635] "Press release, 200 years of American Heritage Celebrated at 1976 Folklife Festival," c. 1976, Folder Press Clippings 1974-1976, Box 216, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

a specific political climate that shaped thinking around immigration to better understand how the festival was a conduit for constructing and disseminating ideas about the nation.

The binary rhetoric around immigrants and place underlying the festival's old-versus-new framework, as well as the perceived need for multicultural education, resonates with the languages of Orientalism, xenophobia, and multiculturalism that pervaded the 1970s and its global socio-political situation. US immigration declined following the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that ended the national origin system enshrined in the 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration Act, yet thinking around immigrants remained tied to stereotypes and racist assumptions about foreign countries.[636] Immigration defined the Smithsonian's celebration of diversity at the festival, as seen for one in the increased number of Arab populations in the US and visibility of Arab American communities.[637] The 1960s and 1970s were also the era of Civil Rights activism and the rise of ethnic studies, which institutions like the Smithsonian acknowledged.[638] The Smithsonian was also in an ongoing period of transition too as Ripley not only took office, but institutions like the National Gallery of Art expanded, and the different institutions often found their values at odds with each other.[639] Multiculturalism was contingently defined and re-defined in this period between celebrating diversity, understanding how it enriched society, foregrounding different perspectives, and

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[636] Diane C. Vecchio, "U.S. Immigration Laws and Policies, 1870-1980," in *Immigrants in American History: Arrival, Adaptation, and Integration*, Vol. 4, ed. Elliot Robert Barkan (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 1495, 1497-8.

[637] Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 10.

[638] Cadaval, Kim, and N'Diaye, "Introduction," 20-1.

[639] Harris, *Capital Culture*, 112.

rejecting any notion of assimilation, each related in part to understanding the nature of the US in a new light.[640]

Despite domestic crises, the US could not, and did not, remove itself from international affairs, particularly as Henry Kissinger pursued peace in the Middle East.[641] As Britain lost its foothold in the region, the US became a major arms dealer, invested in infrastructure, and allied itself with the newly formed state of Israel.[642] Following the Nixon doctrine, there was interest in a diplomatic relationship with Iran that would bolster American interests, and help the US avoid military involvement in the Third World.[643] The shock of the 1973 OPEC oil crisis reverberated after the embargo was lifted; oil prices were exceptionally high, and the US began reconsidering its dependence on Middle Eastern oil providers.[644] During Ford's subsequent presidency, he faced a recession, near 12% inflation, distrust in government, corruption, and an energy crisis, creating a terse environment to celebrate America's bicentennial.[645] Yet as in London, the oil crisis also contributed to incendiary positions

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[640] Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 9-13. Also included in this discourse was representation in history, and as such, the question of diversity became a political question related to rights and education. The conversation became more politicized as activist groups increased, which Chin outlines.

[641] Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers*, 145.

[642] Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 216-7.

[643] Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 137-8, 143.

[644] Ibid., 67, 70; Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 276-7.

[645] Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 1-6, 351.

around immigration in the US, including xenophobic attitudes toward the Arab world, media representations that perpetuated misconceptions, and politicians who promised to fight Islamist extremism.[646] American Missionary movements emphasizing a Holy Land in the Middle East continued to allow people reimagine the Middle East in ways that denigrated Arab populations and justified intervention based on racial and religious hierarchies that began in the nineteenth century.[647] The US' imperial tendencies perpetuated an Orientalist view proposing the Middle East as a region in need of salvation and Arabs as backward while simultaneously positioning itself as the arbiter of presenting the Arab world, such as at festivals. While FAF positions itself as a world apart, the event is in direct dialogue with these current events, intervening by promoting tolerance through education while upholding a degree of difference and separation through its presentation frameworks.

However, these socio-political and economic frameworks and tensions are undertheorized in current FAF literature, as outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, which largely focuses on definitions of the event, its mission, and curatorial praxis, and is conducted by scholars working in history, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and more—but not art history. Likewise, specific representations of cultural groups from the SWANA region and its diasporas have not been the focus of academic studies to date. I contribute to this discussion through an analysis of archival material in the Ralph Rinzler Archives held by the Center for

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[646] Ibid., xi, 10-11, 17; Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers*, 11.

[647] Ibid., 13-15; Fu'ad Shaban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: Roots of Orientalism in America* (Durham: Acorn Press, 1991), viii-x. On this history, see: Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Simultaneously, new literary texts in translation, such as the *Arabian Nights*, contributed to this burgeoning imagination.

Folklife and Cultural Heritage, which have not been the foundation of a scholarly study to date. I focus on papers within the Ralph Rinzler Archives because he had such a prominent role in shaping the festival, and as such, these papers provide important insight into the bureaucratic narrative shaping the event—an ideology not publicly advertised to festival audiences. These papers outline the process of commissioning and conducting ethnographic research in the region referred to as the Middle East and identifying participants in the US, providing scholars today a new insight into an understudied aspect of the festival. Seeing the festival in hindsight is admittedly challenging due to the lack of photographs, or definitively attributed or labeled photographs, the decentralized nature of the archive, and the omission of many key aspects of the festival's development in the remaining documentation, but a re-reading is still possible. Furthermore, given the vast and disparate nature of the Smithsonian's archives, future studies could approach the topic through other archives and propose other perspectives.

Additionally, the festival's visual and material culture have also been overlooked in previous studies, but they provide an important insight into the festival's process of constructing and disseminating representations and ideas of the nation within this sociopolitical context. Specifically, I reconsider the work of Mohamed and artist Lily Spandorf (Austrian American, 1914–2000), both of whom have been marginalized in art history as self-taught artists and "outliers" to the canon.[648] Mohamed's embroideries

[648] Lynne Cooke, "Boundary Trouble: Navigating Margin and Mainstream," in *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, ed. Lynne Cooke (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2018), 4. On the position of self-taught and outsider artists, see: Katherine Jentleson, *Gatecrashers: The Rise of the Self-Taught Artist in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 7-9, 174; Miller, ""The People Looks upon Its Own Life"," 59-78; Umberger, "Housewives, Witches, Beauty Queens, and Conjure Women," 280.

animated her memories through storytelling and conversation, two practices Ripley valued at the festival through his participant-based framework.[649] Mohamed, who was self-taught, was commissioned to make an embroidery for the 1976 festival, though the story of how this came to fruition has not been publicly documented—a gap I address by outlining how Mohamed's biography and beliefs became known to Smithsonian organizers, and in turn, resulted in an artistic collaboration that helped to visualize and disseminate the Smithsonian's goals in 1976.[650] My thinking on Mohamed's work is informed by conversations with the artist's family and a deep dive into Mohamed's journals and sketches, which constitutes an archive held by the family that has not previously been open to scholars. Spandorf, like Mohamed, attended and visually responded to the festival. Her pen-and-ink drawings reflect the ways people engaged with the festival but have not yet been examined within FAF literature.[651] Here, Spandorf's drawings provide insight into the reception of the festival's Arab presenters. In this way, I provide an object-based reading of a series of events whose

[649] Mary Hufford, Marjorie Hunt, and Steven Zeitlin, *The Grand Generation: Memory, Mastery, Legacy* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and Office of Folklife Programs, in association with University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1987), 66. On Mohamed's storytelling, see: Sharon S. McKern, *Redneck Mothers, Good Ol'Girls, and other Southern Belles: A Celebration of the Women of Dixie* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 200.

[650] Christine Wilson, ed., *Ethel Wright Mohamed* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1984); Charlotte Capers and Olivia P. Collins, eds., *My Life in Pictures: Ethel Wright Mohamed* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1976); McKern, *Redneck Mothers, Good Ol'Girls, and other Southern Belles*, 200-6; Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin, *The Grand Generation*, 206; and William R. Ferris, *Local Color: A Sense of Place in Folk Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), 102-31.

[651] Mark Griffin and Ellen M. McCloskey, *Lily Spandorf's Washington Never More* (Washington, DC: Published by the Grew Pub. Co. in association with the Columbia Historical Society, and the National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1988).

foundation was not in objects. Returning to the festival's visuality also invites a reconsideration of individual approaches versus institutional narratives to the festival while also learning more about different ways audiences encountered diversity at the festival.

With this institutional history in mind as well as an understanding about the importance of visual culture, thus chapter follows the formation of OWNW at FAF between 1973–76 as an amorphous conduit for solving social problems based on the core tenet of encouraging people to interact with and learn from each other. This chapter proceeds chronologically by studying the 1973–75 iterations of the festival as individual case studies and comparative points to the bicentennial, as well as the ways food, dance, and craft were used to represent people from Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt. Lastly, I turn to the 1976 festival, which celebrated the American bicentennial, along with American identity and diversity, to reconsider the event as a culmination of a historical process of conceptualizing diversity. Across this period, the fabric of the American nation continually shifted, prompting people to relocate themselves within the picture the festival presented. While the Smithsonian designed a model of people-to-people exchange that shifted the power dynamics of cultural representation, the festival's mission to celebrate diversity collapsed on itself, becoming what the Smithsonian feared it would be: "an artificially induced spectacle."[652] In other words, it was a contrived event that manufactured diversity and spread superficial knowledge while mediating and shaping the traditions it paradoxically wanted people to present on their own terms. The important narratives around conceptualizing Arab identity that emerge from this

[652] Richard Dorson, ed. *Handbook of American Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 461.

study not only impact our understanding of the festival, but the later rise of contemporary art from the Arab world in American museums.

B. 1973: The Advent of Old Ways in the New World

If the 1976 Festival of American Folklife was the culmination of a historical process that considered how to engage with diversity and celebrate the nation, then the years leading up to it were building blocks supporting this goal. Here, I consider the immediate antecedents of this moment as opposed to the deep history of this process.

In 1973, FAF underwent a transformation when it launched "Old Ways in the New World" (OWNW), which paved the way for Arab and Arab American populations to be included in the festival. The festival map for 1973 thus outlined how OWNW fit within the new program (see Figure 4-2). The "Main Stage" marks the start of the festival experience, located at the left of the image, with the Lincoln Memorial in the background. The section devoted to Native Americans is on one side of the Reflecting Pool, which divides the festival landscape, while opposite is a section devoted to Kentucky, closely followed by "Working Americans." Below these displays of Americana on the other side of the "race track" [sic] is the festival's newest section: "Old Ways in the New World." While its footprint spans the festival's width, its labels are vague, and may not be immediately legible to many audiences. OWNW and Native Americans, two areas of the festival focused on diversity, are offset from the main thoroughfare, suggesting that diversity is welcome in the new landscape, but their distance suggests they are not equal participants. The festival experience mimics that of World's Fairs as one traverses the pavilions to understand different cultures, or rather, experiences a microcosm of the world. The festival's location within the city yet separate

from the Smithsonian's many museums visually represents the intellectual break between the ideology of the festival and the museum.

The festival's sections and the relationships between them, as visualized on the festival's map, alludes to questions around national identity and the melting pot that framed the festival. These questions were continually asked and answered throughout the festival's run by constructing different ideas of the nation through its festival participants within the context of the nation's capital. "Old Ways in the New World" began at the 1973 FAF as a way to diversify the festival. This initiative directly aligned with and furthered the festival's larger goal of illustrating the diversity of traditions and practices often overlooked in the US.[653] In his introduction to the festival, Ripley argued that the US was not a homogenizing melting pot, and that everyone was able to retain their cultural roots and observances.[654] Ripley wanted to celebrate this diversity, and OWNW was evidence of his argument that the US was not a melting pot, but a place for different cultures to flourish. For him, to illustrate this diversity required people, not the objects made by different people. The ideology of OWNW transformed into a teaching moment when presenters gave American audiences, the festival's target audience, an opportunity to learn about cultures they might not otherwise interact with in order to consider how other cultures relate to their own.[655] The festival did not claim to do this through representation, but by allowing the practitioners to share their own traditions, implying that representation was too passive, and that objects alone were

[653] Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 298.

[654] *1973 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1973), 4.

[655] Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, 130.

insufficient.[656] Some reviews understood the festival's message, noting that OWNW was not a way to emphasize the "melting pot," but to show that the traditions of the so-called "Old World" were influenced by the "New."[657]

Beyond its place on the map, which does not specify the cultural groups included, OWNW was introduced in 1973 with limited supplemental context. Rinzler, then director, wrote one page in the program book explaining that OWNW is a cooperative project based on research and collaboration with governmental officials designed to share different group identities that are brought to the US from abroad and help establish community.[658] Rinzler does not explain exactly what this governmental collaboration entails, how research is conducted, and why specific groups are chosen.

During the first iteration of OWNW, audiences could learn about two cultural groups: British and Tamburashi. Tamburashi, a Croatian and Serbian American musical tradition, included participants from Yugoslavia and the US. Presenters from England, Scotland, Ireland, and the US paid tribute to the music, song, and dance traditions of the British Isles.[659] There were no Arab or Arab American populations included yet. The initial focus on

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[656] Memo from Bess Lomax Hawes to Supervisory Group: Program Coordinators, December 1, 1975, Folder Old Ways Advisory Committee, Box 5, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[657] Mike Dolan, "Annual Folklife Festival has a Kentucky Theme," *Northern Virginia Sun*, July 2, 1973, Folder Festival Year 1973 7.1 Administrative Files, Box 8, Series 7, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[658] *1973 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 50. Notably here, Rinzler refers to these traditions as "the cultural baggage" brought by immigrants to sustain themselves in new environments.

[659] Ibid., 21-33.

immigration was limited and distinctly white at a moment where the effects of changing immigration laws were felt, and politicians like Nixon were interested in the political impact of ethnic minorities. Yet while the festival ran for two weeks (June 30 to July 8, 1973), OWNW was only present for the first week (June 30 to July 3), later to be replaced by the Kentucky presentation.

The broad yet ambiguous introduction to OWNW, along with the complicated question of the melting pot, generated mixed responses. Around 500,000 people likely attended the festival over two weeks.[660] One writer suggested that the festival was an "antidote for the spiritual funk" caused by Watergate and its incessant coverage, adding that the festival is a reminder of "who we are and where we came from"—more diverse than ever before.[661] This review exemplifies how some festival goers got the message. Others understood it but added commentary. Norman Kennedy, a weaver from Virginia, extolled the festival and people's loving responses to it, but added that "everything here at the festival is out of context."[662] Kennedy's quip alludes to a larger theme in press clippings: that people realized the festival

[660] Bruce Howard, "Festival All Wet," *Star News*, nd. (likely July 3, 1973), np. On July 3, there were roughly 70,000 visitors. See: Don Shirley, "Mood Music on the Mall," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 1973. On opening day, there were over 75,000 people. See: "Festival of Life Goes By Runs Smack into Noisy Present," *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1973. All clippings located in: Folder Festival Year 1973 7.1 Administrative Files, Box 8, Series 7, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[661] "Old Reliable Folk Remedy," *Star News*, nd. (likely early July, 1973), Folder Festival Year 1973 7.1 Administrative Files, Box 8, Series 7, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[662] "Music, People, Fun," publisher unknown, date unknown, Folder Festival Year 1973 7.1 Administrative Files, Box 8, Series 7, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

was a constructed scene, not a microcosm of reality in the sense of both content presented and the social climate.

With this framework and presentation in mind, one can read OWNW in 1973 and its institutional narratives contrapuntally against archival documents about the festival's planning process to understand how representation and participation were realized. Ripley and Rinzler's introductions, for one, overlook the role of foreign governments in shaping OWNW. Governmental representatives negotiated what was on display, either by permitting Smithsonian affiliated researchers to enter the country, providing funds for performers to go to the US, or facilitating connections for further research and planning. At the outset of festival planning, invitations were sent welcoming foreign governments to participate in the bicentennial, and efforts to engage with foreign governments were a key part of broader outreach efforts.[663] Simultaneously, international fieldwork was a way to legitimate OWNW by indicating first-hand knowledge. Foreign governments later paid for their presenters to go to the festival.[664] While the traditions included were based on Smithsonian research, foreign governments decided which practitioners went. These governmental negotiations shape

[663] Letter from Smithsonian Staff to the Government and People of Tunisia, December 1973, Folder Tunisia I '75, Box 57, Series 2; Letter from S. Dillon Ripley to His Excellency Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, Ambassador of Pakistan, nd., Folder Pakistan Old Ways, Box 56, Series 2, Folder Part. Selection/Old Ways…, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[664] The Smithsonian paid for fieldwork in Egypt by Halim el Dabh, in Pakistan by Nazir Jairazbhoy, and in Tunisia by Carole Cornell and Sami Hanna. See: Letter from Shirley Cherkasky to Kennedy Schmerts, December 16, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, October, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

OWNW, but also undermine the festival's totalizing claims about allowing practitioners to share their traditions on their own terms.

Beyond these governmental conversations, there were other guiding factors that are omitted in the bureaucratic narrative provided to festival goers. One pamphlet shared by fieldworkers with potential research subjects suggests that foreign participants are chosen based on surveys, fieldwork, and government-to-government discussions.[665] Missing from both descriptions is the way that comparison was a key methodology based on the idea of the "cultural cognate." This term was defined in a twenty-page guide for domestic and international fieldworkers preparing for the bicentennial, but it was not publicly disseminated. To illustrate the nation's history at the festival as one of immigrants, cultural practices were chosen by researchers based on the "cognate approach," or efforts to identify a "cultural cognate," meaning something which has foreign roots and an American counterpart. Cognates had to be rooted in tradition, not interpreters thereof, suggesting that what existed was unchanging.[666] Including something that was American as a point of comparison was an effort to make the topic more comprehensible and relatable. Although this framework was not explained to audiences, the cultural cognate is premised on the idea that what immigrants brought to the US was their past and history, and its significance lies in the ways it augments what exists in the US, making the comparison distinctly US-centric while overlooking the contemporary contributions made by diasporic populations.

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[665] Folder Fieldworker kit – Sample, Box 31, Series 2; Folder Fieldwork Guidelines, Box 31, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[666] Folder Fieldwork Guidelines, Box 31, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Ethnographic research was the methodology used to identify the cultural cognate, though the role of ethnography was understated in public-facing materials.[667] Fieldworkers assessed different traditions (music, dance, craft, and food), and outlined different factors shaping communities (social, religious, linguistic, economic, and political).[668] Their goal was to understand how a community's values were presented by identifying a body of traditions and practices, or a "repertoire," and the ways they were expressed, or their "styles," which could be shaped by the practitioner.[669] In turn, researchers would uncover community expressions tied to deep-rooted traditions that were then transmitted through families and communities.[670] Although there might have been objects that exemplified these practices or were the products of them, objects were not the focus of the research or its subsequent presentation. While ethnography and the cultural cognate were implemented to promote objectivity, these approaches invited subjective opinions around tradition and community based on the fieldworker's research; these paradoxes are parallel to the ways presentations are mediated, despite being billed as presenters sharing their own practices.

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[667] Notably, the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead, who often used ethnography in her research, was also an early advocate for the festival. See: Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 299.

[668] Fieldwork guidelines, November 5, 1975, Folder OW Guidelines, Box 5, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. There were also separate guidelines around food preparation and craft demonstration.

[669] Draft of fieldwork guidelines, nd. (likely c. 1973), Folder OW guidelines, Box 5 Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Within this, there were exoteric practices performed beyond one's group, and esoteric performances that remain within a group.

[670] Criteria for Selection of Participants, nd, Folder Part. Selection/Old Ways…, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Ideally, individuals would also be self-taught.

While the cultural cognate had a domestic and foreign component, the domestic program was also shaped through the lens of folk and folklore, terms that were integral to the festival since its outset. Folklife and folklore were reiterated as central festival tenets, but they were rarely defined, especially not in public-facing materials.[671] Fieldworker guidelines for the cultural cognate further defined folklife as an extension of folklore that focuses on the verbal; folklore is not defined here. Folklife is specified as "that vast body of knowledge, belief, and behavior in any civilized culture, unsophisticated or sophisticated, which has been created and persists largely without the support of established learning, religion, government, and other formal institutions, and which is transmitted mostly by word of mouth or observation and imitation." Its characteristics include informal transmission, a tradition that is passed on, and something which varies as it is transmitted.[672] Again, objects could be created out of these practices, but that was not the focus of the research or what was necessarily presented at the festival.

The domestic definition of folk and folklore contradicts the aforementioned standards that fieldworkers were directed to use to identify foreign practices for the cultural cognate. The notion of self-taught practitioners carries across the two, while the idea of folk connects the foreign and domestic. However, American folklife is characterized as varying during transmission, but fieldworkers were otherwise directed to find traditions that were unchanging. Most importantly, folklife is expressed by a "civilized culture," meaning if

[671] It was only in hindsight that Rinzler and Kurin reflected on folklife as rooted in ethnographic research. See: Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 297.

[672] Fieldworker guide, Folder Field Research, Box 5021, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

folklife is exemplifies aspects of an American way of life, then that which is American is civilized. Thus, finding a cultural cognate in the US implies fieldworkers are looking for and identifying examples of immigrants who are or became civilized in the US. This developmental rhetoric echoes the temporality of the name "Old Ways in the New World," which posits past against present, implying what immigrants carry is old while the American nation is new. Taken together, the cultural cognate and folk render the select practices of immigrants as civilized so they can be incorporated into larger narratives of the American nation, thus celebrating diversity when it fits within the appropriate parameters. This civilizational rhetoric and all its connotations were only further perpetuated in its ethnographic methodology, which is rooted in the power dynamic between observer and practitioner and can generate subjective scholarship that perpetuates stereotypes.[673]

While Arab immigrants were not yet present at the 1973 festival, understanding the advent of and frameworks informing OWNW is critical to understanding processes of crafting representation in the following three years. To plan OWNW and bring people together not only exemplified the kind of celebration the festival imagined, but also modeled the kind of intercultural understanding the festival hoped to generate among attendees. Encouraging this gathering in an open public space generated a malleable environment for different types of interactions and learning opportunities. The behind-the-scenes negotiation and cooperation signified that individuals and institutions could collaborate, suggesting that ordinary citizens could also learn from their behavior and co-exist—much like the model

[673] For more on the ways ethnography's comparative approaches produced objectifying scholarship, see: Penelope Harvey, *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition* (London: Routledge, 1996).

employed at the World of Islam Festival. While this was exemplified on the macro scale of the festival, it also existed on a much smaller scale, such as organizers ensuring not only visas and travel documents, but that all dietary preferences, religious practices, and so-called "hygienic practices" were accommodated for on festival grounds.[674] These accommodations seem standard now, but at this time, they were extraordinary, and modeled the festival's goals for coexistence.[675]

C. 1974: Between Mississippi and Lebanon

While "Old Ways in the New World" was the primary site to engage with questions of immigration and diversity from 1973–76, there were some exceptions. The larger festival experience by which one navigated the series of events to uncover different aspects of the microcosm of the world remained unchanged.

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[674] Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 300. Kurin notes that there had to be "culturally appropriate exorcisms" in certain cases, but he does not define that. Another example of accommodating religious practices is a mandate that pork and pork products could not be served near the Pakistani participants in 1976, that no utensils could touch pork and then touch food for Pakistani participants, that no pork be on the food line that the Pakistani participants used, and that beef, lamb, and chicken had to be kosher. See: Memo from Naiomi Kaits to Betty Beuck, July 19, 1976, Folder Pakistan Old Ways, Box 56, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[675] This model was also exported through the festival's tour program, which sent participants around the country to perform and "extend the Festival experience to a national audience," as described by Director of the Division of Performing Arts James Morris. See: "Foreign Folk Artists to Join in Nationwide Bicentennial Celebration," *Swiss Journal*, June 9, 1976, Folder General 1976 Newsletters, Talk Clubs, etc., Box 72, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

In 1974, the state of Mississippi's festival presentation included its Arab diaspora populations, and the visual evidence for this comes from Mohamed herself.[676] Mohamed attended and presented her work in Mississippi's program, and later embroidered her memories of this celebration on the National Mall (see Figure 4-3). At the top, the Washington Monument is framed by the American flag and the Mississippi state flag (one which bears a remarkable resemblance to the Confederate flag). On either side of the Reflecting Pool, Mohamed depicts numerous people engaged with festival activities: playing music, dancing, eating, talking, and implicitly, learning. Beyond stitching "1974 Festival of American Folklife Smithsonian" in the top left corner, Mohamed also includes the Smithsonian's trademark castle to contextualize the event.[677] To the left of the Reflecting Pool and the Smithsonian Castle, Mohamed illustrates the festival's main stage (see Figure 4-4). The numerous flags identify every participant from Mississippi, including flags atop the purple tent identifying performances by the Askher and Dahduh families in Mississippi.[678] The six musicians, each identified by the colors of their suits, play their instruments, which are difficult to identify. Other visitors dance nearby, while some listen attentively to the music. This scene illustrates how Lebanese American populations, as represented by these musicians, were present at the festival, indicating not only Mississippi's diversity, but the

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[676] *1974 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1974), 3.

[677] Mohamed also took photographs of the festival that served as a reference. See: Slides, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi.

[678] This is reiterated by the archival documents listing state participants. See: Folder Participant Lists, Box 5022, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History; Festival – 1974 Binder, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi.

festival's expansion to include Arab populations. Furthermore, the work visualizes a metonym for the nation where Mississippi's diversity stands in for the diversity of the US. Mohamed's memory was a conduit for depicting a festival defined by its felicitous happenings and congenial conversation exemplified in the interactions depicted between performers and audience members, ones that mimicked the Smithsonian's ideal outcomes.

Mississippi's presentation, however, largely followed different frameworks than OWNW. The Lebanese family band Mohamed depicted was featured under "Regional Americans," a section dedicated to highlighting "grassroots creativity," and which honored the state of Mississippi in 1974.[679] Lebanese music was not chosen because it was a cultural cognate. Instead, its stringed instruments were identified as something which would augment fiddling, blues singing, and as described in one proposal, the music of "Negro spirituals" of Mississippi.[680] These comparisons elide the cultural particularities of people of color who utilize music as a form of personal and familial expression. Music, however, was also a family affair, as the musicians spoke about learning the songs from their families abroad, meaning this selection did align with the idea of sharing inherited knowledge.[681] Music also emphasized the Smithsonian's interest in people as bearers of cultural traditions, and their investment in highlighting and preserving that which is otherwise intangible.

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[679] *1974 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 36. Mohamed also had documentation of this, as seen in one of her scrapbooks located at the Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi. See: "Jackson's Lebanese Band to Perform at Folklife Fest," *The Clarion Ledger*, June 30, 1974.

[680] Mississippi Folklife Brochure, Folder Brochure, Box 5023, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History. The Lebanese band was the Ashker family.

[681] Ibid.

Furthermore, including Lebanese American presenters was not about adhering to OWNW's idea of immigrants and their traditions, but presenting a complete picture of Mississippi. Mississippi was named the featured state for the 1974 FAF in December 1973 following extensive fieldwork that suggested the state was "rich in folklore," a term not clearly defined.[682] Dated September 1973, a proposal for Mississippi to join the festival advertises the opportunity as one which invites participants to be part of a "national tribute to the folk cultures of the United States." Sharing these folk cultures would thus highlight misunderstood or neglected traditions and reveal their contributions to America's national heritage, a line of thinking that furthers the American-centric lens of OWNW.[683] The state's then Governor William L. Waller worked with the Smithsonian on the state's presentation because he believed that the Bicentennial must educate people about the state's historic significance and explore the nation's history.[684] Mississippi's subsequent presentation

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[682] *1974 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 36; Letter from Elbert R. Hilliard to Elbridge O. Hurlbut, April 8, 1974, Folder Budget 1, Box 5021; Text of SB 1826, Folder Contracts 2, Box 5021, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History. This official designation was based on the passage of funding SB 1826, which included $178,400 of support. This fieldwork was also how the Smithsonian came to know Mohammad, in turn perpetuating what might be described as a narrative of discovery that dominates many overviews of self-taught artists. See: Umberger, "Housewives, Witches, Beauty Queens, and Conjure Women," 306-7.

[683] Ralph Rinzler and James Morris, "Proposal to the State of Mississippi," September 1973, Box 17, Series 8, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The cost was over $140,000.

[684] Letter from S. Dillon Ripley to Governor William L. Waller, Oct. 1, 1973, Folder Groundwork 2, Box 5021; Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Elbert Hilliard, April 11, 1974, Folder Groundwork 1, Box 5021, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History. Beyond Waller's ideological investment in participation, there may have also been economic benefits that motivated Mississippi's participation, such as the potential for increased tourism to the state. See: Letter from S. Dillon Ripley to Governor William L. Waller, Oct. 1, 1973, Folder Groundwork 2, Box 5021; Letter from

included the aforementioned musicians along many sub-focal areas that considered Mississippi's economy, including cotton and timber, and involved various collaborators.[685]

Mississippi's celebration of diversity and coexistence, which was a metonym for the US at large, presented a rosy picture that subjugated a state's turbulent past and contentious racial dynamics.[686] Public programs further focused on the positive side of Mississippi's history shaped by a contemporary lens. For example, Emancipation Day events took place in the "African Diaspora" program, the "Native Americans" program highlighted Indigenous peoples in Mississippi, and "Regional Americans" highlighted Mississippi's flourishing economy—one not propelled by the labor of enslaved peoples in the past or present. Furthermore, the state's lack of contextualization of their own presentation omitted the rich history of immigrants from the Levant. Syrian and Lebanese men began immigrating to Mississippi in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (after the end of slavery) to achieve a better life; they often came alone and sent their earnings back to their families. By the late-nineteenth century, these same populations divested from cotton to ensure their livelihoods as peddlers and later proprietors of dry goods stores.[687] Arab populations did not profit from

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Ralph Rinzler to Elbert Hilliard, April 11, 1974, Folder Groundwork 1, Box 5021, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

[685] Folder Proposals, Mississippi, Box 17, Series 8, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[686] Slavery was briefly mentioned in the festival book across three essays exploring architecture in the period of enslavement, the struggled faced by the first generation of emancipated peoples in a slave economy, and the Emancipation Day practices of different cultural groups. See: *1974 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 16, 23, 26-7.

[687] Carl L. Bankston III, "The International Immigrants of Mississippi: An Overview," in *Ethnic Heritage in Mississippi: The Twentieth Century,* ed. Shana Walton and Barbara Carpenter (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 22-6; Stacy Fahrenthold, *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and*

cotton in the same way. However, their economic success came at a price: being classified as "white" in order to immigrate but not "white" enough to achieve an elevated social status, Arab men in Mississippi were not exempt from the violence of lynching or racist assumptions about non-white populations.[688] Mississippi's racial mosaic intersected with its shifting economy in complex ways that the festival and festival book overlooked, but would have helped to present a more acute vision of the nation and its history.

Yet even if the festival did not illustrate this version of history, for the engaged visitor, one could still learn about these complex dynamics through stories from one of the festival's presenters: Mohamed. While Mohamed showing her embroidery marked a unique object-focused moment at the festival, it was the stories that emerged from the object that were more important; the object was a conduit for storytelling by the participant. The goals of facilitating understanding across race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and nationality were not only modeled in her embroidery, but her role as a woman in an intercultural marriage was also a living testament to these possibilities. Born and raised in Mississippi, Mohamed, a white, Christian woman, married a Syrian, Muslim immigrant named Hassan; her marriage and biography was well known to Smithsonian organizers, and possibly festival attendees.[689]

Lebanese Diaspora, 1908–1925 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14-22. Here, Arab encompasses Lebanese and Syrian populations. Those from Lebanon and Syria were often conflated and misidentified due to shifting borders.

[688] Terence Finnegan, "Lynching and Political Power in Mississippi and South Carolina," in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South,* ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 194.

[689] Hassan is erroneously called Lebanese, perhaps due to the shifting borders between Syria and Lebanon. Ripley himself even made this mistake. See: Capers and Collins, *My Life in Pictures*, 6. Ethel also made this mistake in an early interview. See: Ferris, *Local Color*, 114. Also see: Sarah Booth Conroy, "The Craftfolk at the Fair," *Washington Post*, July 6, 1974, Folder 7.6.74.2, Box 5026, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi

The two raised a multicultural, interreligious family in the pre- and post-Jim Crow South, exemplifying the ways people of different backgrounds could build a life together. In her triumphant retellings of their life, Mohamed never mentioned any challenges, such as segregation or discrimination against her husband for being either Syrian or Muslim, painting a rose-colored vision of the challenges of intercultural relationship building in the South—much like the state's narrow perspective at the festival. Mohamad was not only a paragon of the festival's belief in diversity and togetherness, but as the wife of a Syrian man, she became a proxy-bearer of knowledge about Lebanon and the Middle East.

D. 1974: Tunisia and OWNW

The presence of Lebanese American populations within Mississippi's mosaic was contemporaneous with developments at OWNW that included Arab immigrants for the first time.

Tunisia was included alongside Finland, Sweden, Scandinavia, and Norway, juxtaposing the diversity of the African continent as the home to part of the Arab world with white ethnic minorities that were of political interest.[690] A press release heralded Tunisia's participation as a "cooperation with foreign governments" that will show the diversity of America's folk

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Department of Archives & History; Memo from Suzie Cox, Observations at the Arab World Festival, Detroit, Sept. 13-15, September 18, 1974, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[690] The Arab world is a term that refers to the countries where Arabic is the primary/dominant language. It includes 19-22 countries across the Asian and African continents, and roughly corresponds to the Arab League, which began in 1945. For more information, see: Ussama Makdisi, "The Making and Unmaking of the Arab World," in *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents,* ed. Anneka Lenssen, Sarah Rogers, and Nada Shabout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 28-34.

traditions so Americans might better understand them.[691] This cooperation alludes to the US' support for Tunisia when it gained independence in 1956, but also the way that then Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba aligned himself with Western values during the Cold War, leading the US to praise Tunisia as a model for future Arab states.[692] Following the establishment of the Peace Corps in 1962, Tunisia began hosting volunteers in 1962.[693] The Arab League was also headquartered in Tunis from 1979–90.[694] Tunisia's program at OWNW included "folklife traditions of Tunisia" as they exist in their "home country" and by immigrant communities in Montreal.[695] Folklife was not specified at the outset, but the "here and there" framework follows the cultural cognate methodology, which subsequently inscribes binaries of difference.

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[691] Press release: "Participants from Nine Nations will Show "Old Ways in the New World" at Festival," nd. (early 1974), Folder Press Kit, Box 5023, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History; Press release: "8th Annual Festival of American Folklife Scheduled for Two Weeks on National Mall," nd. (early 1974), Folder Part. Selection/Old Ways…, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[692] Kenneth Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 144-46. Tunisia uniquely did not have the oil reserves that many of the other US allies had.

[693] *Peace Corps Tunisia: The Legacy, 1962-1996* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1997), np.

[694] "The League of Arab States," *Arab Perspectives* 5 (March 1984): 17.

[695] Press release: "Participants from Nine Nations will Show "Old Ways in the New World" at Festival," nd. (early 1974), Folder Press Kit, Box 5023, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History; Press release: "8th Annual Festival of American Folklife Scheduled for Two Weeks on National Mall," nd. (early 1974), Folder Part. Selection/Old Ways…, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Why Montreal was selected, which is not in the US, is unclear.

To prepare for Tunisia at OWNW, the Smithsonian enlisted Carole Cornell, a musician and music educator interested in North-African and Spanish folk music, to conduct research in Montreal and Tunis.[696] The Smithsonian gave several key research criteria: participants should show a relationship with the Tunisian community in Montreal; traditions should align with the idea of celebration; and participants must have learned their skills in traditional ways (passed down from family members) and be a part of the community.[697] Cornell then sought help from contacts in Tunisia and Montreal to identify practitioners she might meet with or observe.[698] Of the many musical traditions, she focused on *Ma'luf* music in Tunisia and Montreal because it played a role in congregation and recreation. However, she concluded with little justification that the cultural cognate was not as strong in Montreal, implying that there was not a great resemblance between the two communities she worked with.[699] Echoing

[696] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Elmer Skold, December 13, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2; Letter from Carole Cornell to Carla Borden, October 10, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Notably, Cornell asked to extend her trip and research into Egypt but was denied. See: Letter from Carole Cornell to Carla Borden, September 11, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[697] Letter from Shirley Cherasky to Carole Cornell, February 4, 1974, Folder Tunisia, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[698] Summary report: Festival of American Folklife," nd. (likely late 1974/early 1975), Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. For example, see: Letter from Carole Cornell to John Crockett, December 10, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[699] Memo from Carole Cornell to Shirley Cherkasky, December 4, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Cornell also reported important findings around the survival and migration of traditions, Arabs congregating in coffee shops, freeform dancing, and little evidence of structured social groups.

the Smithsonian's goal of decentering objects, Cornell's research generated a view of Arab identity through the body and musical performances both at home and abroad.

However, it is unclear how or why Cornell was chosen as the best researcher for this project.[700] The archives reveal little about Cornell's background beyond an interest in Western classical music, specifically what she described as the "ethnic music of Spanish-speaking peoples," which led her to Tunisia by way of what she called the Spanish Moors who lived in Testour, Tunisia. She researched Ma'louf music as something that linked Arab and European music.[701] Based in Boston during her Smithsonian research, it is unclear where she went to school, and she did not publish much. There is no explanation in the archives about how the Smithsonian learned of Cornell's research, or why they offered her a position.

Governmental negotiations, as mentioned in the press release, also played a role in translating Cornell's research into the festival presentation, although the details of this, including moments of dissent, were not put in the public facing narrative. Smithsonian staff initially reached out to representatives from the Tunisian government to share information about the festival and bicentennial, specifically highlighting the way folk traditions were included across cultural and national lines. These inquiries emphasized collaborative,

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[700] On the larger history of white researchers working in the Middle East, see: Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), and Teresa Fava Thomas, *American Arabists in the Cold War Middle East, 1946–75: From Orientalism to Professionalism* (London: Anthem Press, 2016).

[701] Letter from Carole Cornell to Carla Borden, October 10, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

ethnographic research in Tunisia and the US that would lead to a presentation at OWNW.[702] How these representatives responded is absent from the archive. Furthermore, the Smithsonian's inquiries do not delineate a definition of folk in relation to Tunisian culture.

Later in the planning process, Rinzler negotiated with the Tunisian embassy in DC to develop a performance of *Ma'luf* and Bedouin music with 30 participants from Tunisia next to their cultural cognate in Montreal. The Smithsonian asked Tunisian officials to pay for Cornell's fieldwork, and promised to pay room and board for Tunisian participants in return.[703] The Tunisian government, however, claimed funds were not available.[704] Dr. Sami A. Hanna, an Egyptian professor and scholar of Tunisian folklore, also helped to identify Tunisian participants in collaboration with Salah El Mahdi, who worked in the Tunisian

[702] Letter from Smithsonian Staff to the Government and People of Tunisia, December 1973, Folder Tunisia I '75, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Examples of people contacted include people who worked at the Tunisian Embassy in the US (Noureddine Fayache. Slaheddine el Goulli, Moncef Riahi, Ambassador of Tunisia Ali Hedda), the Cultural Attache at the US Embassy in Tunis (John Crockett, Jella Ben Smida, William Stephens, Jr., Ambassador Talcott W. Seelye, and David Stratmom), the Acting Foreign Minister (Mahmoud Mestiri), and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Tunis (Dr. Salah el Mahdi). There were also contacts at private organizations and non-profits, and separate visa conversations. See: Letter from Andrew Oerke to the Honorable Slaheddine el Goulli, June 20, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[703] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Noureddine Fayache, December 13, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. This follows a previous letter where Tunisian officials asked for a more specific budget to consider their participation. See: Memo from Shirley Cherkasky to Ralph Rinzler, Meeting with Mr. Fayache, October 25, 1973, Folder Tunisia, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[704] Letter from Talcott W. Seelye to S. Dillon Ripley, March 4, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 75, 74, Folder 2 of 2, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Instead, Tunisian bankers were brought in to subsidize the costs. The Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs were still asked to give their blessing.

Ministry of Culture in Tunisia.[705] Rinzler set the terms of the participation to emphasize the fieldworker's knowledge, in this case Cornell, while requiring the Tunisian government to pay to be represented on the Smithsonian's terms, an approach that left their Tunisian counterparts uneasy. Rinzler also erroneously claimed that a benefit of being a part of the festival was engaging with other Tunisians, not the festival's actual goal of educating Americans.[706] Underlying these negotiations was an implied debate about who decides what is Tunisian, how, and why within the context of the American nation.

The role of both Cornell's research and governmental negotiations both played a role in shaping Tunisia's final presentation, although these details were unbeknownst to festival attendees. According to the public schedule of events, Tunisian presenters showcased many performative practices, including Tunisian dance and costumes, music from regions like Tunis, Montreal, and Qarqannah, devotional chants, narrative songs, and women's folk songs.[707] The program book frames this presentation by explaining that the festival wanted to show how individuals from abroad and their "American counterparts" could come together to

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[705] Letter from Salah el Mahdi to Ralph Rinzler, April 29, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 75, 74, Folder 2 of 2, Box 57, Series 2; Memorandum from Ralph Rinzler to Kennedy B. Schmertz. March 19, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 75, 74, Folder 2 of 2, Box 57, Series 2; Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Sami A. Hanna, March 19, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 75, 74, Folder 2 of 2, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. On his research trip, Hanna notably commented that he "would have better luck riding a donkey than taking a taxi."

[706] Letter from Carole Cornell to Ralph Rinzler, April 3, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 75, 74, Folder 1 of 2, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[707] *1974 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 7-8. These devotional chants are called *Sulamiyyah*, and one can learn about them through a program supplement that describes it as a "religious folk music." Likewise, the supplement offers information on Ma'luf music.

illustrate shared traditions.[708] Yet notably, there were no Tunisian-Americans or Tunisians living in the US presenting at the festival. Participants from Montreal instead stood in for the cultural cognate, and the two were juxtaposed to highlight how immigration affected traditions.[709] While objects were a part of these presentations, it was the bodily, embodied, and performative aspect that was more important to share, and to ensure a collective learning experience at the festival.

These presentations were further historicized in the program book. A brief history identified Tunisians as those called Berbers by the Christians, Tunisia as Rome's rival prone to invasion, and a place where "races and civilizations" mixed.[710] How this history shaped the cultural traditions presented at the festival was left open to interpretation, as *ma'luf* music is only mentioned briefly; Cornell's research seems to be omitted from this history. This version of Tunisia's history was also rhetorically constructed to invite comparisons with the US, even though its traditions were still framed by the cultural cognate. Specifically, Tunisia was positioned as a diverse crossroads in a manner that follows the US' posturing at the festival, thus making Tunisia easier to comprehend when read through a US-centric framework. If the US is a nation of immigrants, so too is Tunisia a place of mixed identities and lived experiences. This characterization also follows from through OWNW to Lebanese

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[708] Ibid., 30.

[709] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Dr. Salah El Mahdi, June 5, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 75, 74, Folder 1 of 2, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[710] *1974 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 31-2. In another handout for the festival, audiences get a recipe for Habib's *Mashwiyya* Salad so they can create their own Tunisian food at home. Likewise, another handout suggests that the coffee house is the meeting place for Tunisians, which also models social relations that can be adapted.

Americans at "Regional America," and serves as an important way to define difference at the festival.

Yet this historicization of Tunisia not only overlooked its rich immigration history, but also whitewashed aspects of the country's diversity and omitted the place of Islam in Tunisia. Tunisia became disembodied as neither African nor Arab, despite Rinzler's request to emphasize Arabic audiences, a term he did not define.[711] The impact of French colonialism on Tunisia was not mentioned, something paradoxical given Montreal's status as a city in a Canadian province of French origin. By explaining that Christians called the Tunisians "Berbers" without further commentary, the festival reiterated the colonial rhetoric around savagery. Further, by presenting Tunisian traditions in dialogue with Norway, Sweden, and Scandinavia at OWNW, the program echoed Cornell's assessment that Tunisia was a European-like country that was "modern, liberal, and progressive."[712] Such a characterization

[711] Memo from Shirley Cherkasky to Ralph Rinzler, et. al., Notes on meetings with Carole Cornell on 10/10 and 10/11, Oct 12, 1973, Folder Tunisia II 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Notably, Arabic departments were also the subject of outreach as organizers sought college students to be interpreters. See: Letter from Dr. Sami Hanna, May 24, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 73 and General, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The interest in interpreters was not specific to Tunisia either. The Smithsonian wanted to hire cultural liaisons for all OWNW participants. See: Memo from Naomi Kaitz to Ed Dye, Contracts for Cultural Liaisons, January 20, 1976, Folder VII Duplicate Correspondence: Old Ways Correspondence and Records 1976 Carbon Copies Vol. 1, Box 58, Series 2, or Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The job description emphasized language proficiency, familiarity with different cultural traditions, and required people to serve as a channel for communicating between different groups and help people to meet their personal needs. See: Job Description for Cultural Liaison, November 24, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, October, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[712] Letter from Carole Cornell to Ralph Rinzler, April 3, 1974, Folder Tunisia I 75, 74, Folder 1 of 2, Box 57, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. This was the outcome of Cornell's February 1974 research trip.

of Tunisia and a comparison with other countries furthered it from any relation to Islam, Arab identity, and the Middle East, all of which were antithetical to the modern liberal US.

These perspectives on Tunisia are subjugated and reframed when Tunisia is placed on the 1974 festival program map, which visualizes a pathway for coming together (see Figure 4-5). Unlike Mohamed's textile representing 1974 (see Figure 4-3), the festival map is horizontally oriented; the festival map also does not depict the Washington Monument, which is what anchors Mohamed's textile. Still divided by the Reflecting Pool, the map's undulating lines show potential pathways through the festival, and their overlaps indicate the festival's desired connectivity. If one drove, which was perhaps a less common way of visiting, the journey began with a section dedicated to Native Americans, which remained on the opposite side of all other happenings. Those who came by other means began at "Family Folklore," and could proceed to "African Diaspora" or OWNW; the latter two are connected by a vertical passage, implying a relationship between the two.[713] Tunisia is named under OWNW, but no further details are given. Next, one arrived at "Working Americans," re-emphasizing the labor that built the nation, before ending at Regional Americans, which focused on Mississippi. Although not labeled, Tunisia performed at the festival and on the main stage adjacent to Lebanese American populations, thus bringing together the Levant

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[713] Press release: "Participants from Nine Nations will Show "Old Ways in the New World" at Festival," nd. (early 1974), Folder Part. Selection/Old Ways…, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The African Diaspora section was a pilot program for presenting Black cultures and materials from African origins. While African Diaspora would likely have been encountered first, the program was conceived of as something which extended from OWNW. See: *The American Experience: Smithsonian Institution American Revolution Bicentennial Program* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1974), 30-1.

and the Maghreb to represent the broader Middle East at the festival. The festival map not only outlined a series of events and ideas about how to engage with the program, but in its ordering, it visualized the nation and its development, a trajectory that takes on additional significance when considering its location on the National Mall. By journeying through the festival, audiences followed this teleological pathway of progress that ended with the current state of the nation, something which was the culmination of everything which preceded it. Yet the festival's grouping still maintained a particular way of thinking about difference in which some people did not get to be "American."

Placing Tunisian and Lebanese American populations in two different sections of the festival reflected both the tensions and ambiguities around representing Arab identity. Frameworks like OWNW were containers that held specific definitions of Arab identity, among other immigrant groups included. Tunisia was the first Arab country to participate, but its relationship to Arab identity and Islam was downplayed. By inviting Tunisian participants and collaborating with the Tunisian government, the Smithsonian could claim objectivity via ethnographic research and legitimize their presentation. Yet Tunisia's place in the US, despite the cultural cognate mandate that was the very premise of their participation, was omitted. While Tunisia was separate, Lebanese Americans were given the opportunity to be a part of the rubric of American by comparison to Mississippi. Presenting diversity across shifting lines and definitions became an artificially induced spectacle that cherry-picked relevancy within certain frameworks to facilitate a grand display for a particular ideological purpose, a problem that would continue in subsequent years.

The map's visual proposal of a nation coming together was echoed in press coverage, much of which reflected an uneasy engagement with multiculturalism and groupings between

people. Some writers overlooked these divisions as anything indicative of a larger meaning, instead suggesting that groupings ensured crowd control and open space.[714] On the other hand, one festival announcement, for example, is called "'Melting Pot' in a Heat Wave."[715] The title alludes to the era's multicultural rhetoric that explored the nation as a melting pot where people came together, and in turn, assimilated.[716] Propagating this ideology wove different cultures into the fabric of daily life to counter xenophobia while maintaining the dominant narratives around identity. The melting pot rhetoric was not entirely indifferent from the festival's strategy of bringing together different groups to celebrate something larger: American identity and history.

However, Ripley's festival welcome explicitly rejects this rhetoric by arguing "No one any longer believes that America is the great melting pot."[717] Refuting the assimilationist undertones of the melting pot, Ripley instead called on readers to celebrate diversity by attending the festival and learning from the pluralistic nature of society that appreciated varied cultures, peoples, and creativities.[718] The festival's different sections could be

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[714] "Festival on the Mall," *Washington Post*, July 8, 1974, Folder 7.8.74.2, Box 5027, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

[715] Emily Fisher, "'Melting Pot' In a Heat Wave," *Washington Post*, July 3, 1974, Folder 7.3.74, Box 5023, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History. The article goes on to note many of the logistical failures and problems at the festival, such as people not arriving because of visas.

[716] Israel Zangwill, "The Melting Pot," in *Immigration and Multiculturalism: Essential Primary Sources*, ed. K. Lee Lerner, Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, and Adrienne Wilmoth Lerner (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 125.

[717] *1974 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 3.

[718] Ibid., 3. This is also reiterated in the fieldworker guidelines that suggest the festival is about celebrating cultural pluralism and encouraging cultural variety at a grassroots level.

interpreted as indicative of the way Ripley valued difference, even if these categorizations elided difference and specificity in other ways. The melting pot rhetoric Ripley rejected still appeared throughout the festival along with other language around assimilation. In another review titled "Everybody is Folk," folk is posited as the great equalizer, much like the melting pot is the assimilator.[719] This language takes the power of folk and pushes it to an unintended extreme, while the problems embedded in this language only came to the fore later. In her review, journalist Emily Fisher interrogated the melting pot to suggest that "the festival is a melting pot of folk cultures showing just how their different native styles have not been melted into American life…"[720] Caught between the festival's unity and diversity, the writer highlights individualism while recognizing larger frameworks. Other writers also saw the American nation as the ultimate metric of identity against which immigrants were considered for their contributions.[721] The perpetual presence of the melting pot speaks to the challenges of coming together that were glossed over in the festival's joyous mood.

Astute audiences also saw what was missing at the festival while beginning to come to terms with their own biases by witnessing particular embodied acts. In one story titled

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See Folder OW Guidelines, Box 5, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[719] "Everybody is a Folk," *Mississippi History Newsletter* XVI, July 1974, Folder 7.19.74, Box 5027, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

[720] Fisher, "'Melting Pot' In a Heat Wave."

[721] "Festival of American Folklore opens in Washington," *Jackson Daily News*, July 3, 1974, Folder 7.3.74.2, Box 5023; "State to Be Featured in Washington in July," journal name unknown, April 7, 1974, Folder 4.7.74, Box 5025, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

"Music on the Mall from Tunisia," the writer describes the Tunisian musicians as "orthodox Moslem," and argued that "their music is loaded with the sense of Moslem ceremony."[722] The article does not elucidate what features make the music religious, instead makes assumptions based on place of origin. However, the story still mentions the aspects of Islam that were otherwise downplayed. The same article goes on to suggest that the Tunisians were the most popular at the festival, but press coverage of their performance is much less than their counterparts.[723] Most if not all press around Tunisia overlooked the critical perspectives of the Tunisian performers, who were embarrassed by the attire of young American women, and were perpetually hungry and exhausted from their tiresome performance schedule.[724] These stories point toward further challenges of presenting diversity at the festival: that while festival presenters had the unique opportunity to share their own traditions, according to Smithsonian narratives, this opportunity also created an additional burden on them to create understanding that was physically draining in addition to the general challenges of racism and xenophobia, while audiences, many of whom may have had derogatory views toward these groups, could leisurely enjoy the day, and perhaps shift their perspectives in time. These challenges continued in later iterations of the festival.

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[722] Emily Fisher, "With a Belief in Fate and Feeling for Folklife," *Washington Post*, July 5, 1974, Folder 7.5.74, Box 5023, Festival of American Folklife 1973-1975, Mississippi Department of Archives & History. The writer also describes immigrant Tunisians as "wilder" and freer, suggesting the changes were wrought by the West.

[723] Ibid. Fisher also uses Orientalist language to note the heavily bejeweled women dance in golden slippers, and that the men wear shoes like that of a genie.

[724] Cantwell, *Ethnomimesis*, 87-8.

E. OWNW in 1975: A Celebration

In 1975, the Festival of American Folklife expanded again, as seen in the map published in the yearly program (see Figure 4-6). The Lincoln Memorial, the Reflecting Pool, and the site that would become the World War II memorial remain as key markers, creating a familiar landscape for returning audiences. The event landscape remains physically, and in this way, metaphorically and ideologically separate from the Smithsonian's museums. The curved lines are pathways that guide visitors through the augmented festival experience. After audiences entered the festival at the Lincoln Memorial with the hospitality tent on the left, they could go to "African Diaspora" or "Old Ways in the New World"; a small line connects the two much like in 1974, allowing people to pass between the sections while establishing their connection. Next, one encounters "Working Americans," which has the largest footprint of any festival section. The penultimate area is dedicated to Native Americans, now on the main festival thoroughfare for the first time. The experience ends with Regional Americans. The inclusion of Native Americans notably reminds audiences who first existed on the land, thus shifting the historical narrative as the festival progresses toward the bicentennial. Collectively, the festival's trajectory follows a similar progression that begins abroad before moving home while maintaining a major emphasis on labor, furthering a familiar perspective about the nation and its history, a conversation that happens to take place at the nation's capital.

Within this landscape of encounter, Lebanese populations participated in "Old Ways in the New World." Their presentation is marked by a small rectangle at the edge of OWNW by the bathrooms on French Drive on the left third of the map. Lebanon was only present for the first week and was included alongside German immigrants. Lebanon's traditions

encompassed music and dance, but not craft, even though craft was a key part of the festival's program.[725] The same presentations were repeated daily, including: village dances from Mtein and Marjayoun; liturgical and secular music by the Kaslik group; music and dance by Lebanese-Americans; Arab solo dance; instructions on how to *dabke*; and cabaret, or improvisational song and dance.[726] The schedule was shared with little context, describing the performers as illustrating the "diversity of traditional music and dance, urban and village, sacred and secular," and brought together to represent the *haflah*, which the Smithsonian defined as a "Lebanese party with music, song, food, and dance."[727] Notably, the sectioning of the program in 1975 echoed that of OWNW in 1973, while the emphasis on celebration here through the *halfah* followed the theme of OWNW in 1974, showing both patterns across and relationships between OWNW programs.

Lebanon's presentation, which was rooted in performance, took shape over time following fieldwork and governmental negotiations, much like Tunisia's participation the year before. In early conversations with Lebanese embassies and officials, Rinzler wrote that the goal of Lebanese participation was to "give to the Lebanese a sense of the richness and variety of their own multi-cultural folk heritage as it survives at the grassroots level."[728] In

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[725] For more on craft and design in Beirut, see: Marco Constantini, *Beirut: The Eras of Design* (Beirut: Kaph, 2022).

[726] *1975 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1975), 18-27. This schedule is reiterated in the preparatory fieldwork documents as well. See: Folder Lebanon – written," Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[727] Ibid., 41. The *haflah* was also the theme of the tour.

[728] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Senator James Abourezk, May 22, 1975, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2; Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Fouad Najjar, May 22, 1975, Folder

late summer 1974, the Lebanese government confirmed their intent to participate.[729] Throughout late 1974 and early 1975, governmental conversations continued, including obtaining approval from the Foreign Minister and the Cabinet for participants to travel.[730] The Smithsonian sought assurances that the Lebanese government would provide funding for international travel.[731] Fiscal assurances had to be made before the Smithsonian agreed to put Lebanon on the program.[732] However, extant archival documents do not verify if Lebanon covered all proposed costs, including international travel and research subsidies. Following established precedent, the Lebanese government may have paid for performers to travel, while the Smithsonian covered lodging and meals in the US. These negotiations were not publicly addressed in detail.

Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[729] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Melhem Salman, August 7, 1974, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2; Letter from Melhem Salman to Ralph Rinzler, July 31, 1974, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[730] Cable, March 18, 1975, Folder Lebanon – written, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[731] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Najati Kabbani, May 5, 1975, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers; Letter from Shirley Cherkasky to Melhem Salman, October 10, 1974, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Previously, they also asked for support to subsidize fieldworker travel to Lebanon.

[732] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to His Excellency Najati Kabbani, May 5, 1975, Folder May June 1975, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. An August 1975 memo suggests the cost for research and festival expenses was over $27,000. See: Costs for Lebanese Program, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, August, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers.

Following the Smithsonian's guidelines, fieldwork in the US and Lebanon informed decisions about how to present Lebanon.[733] There were two key figures. Anthony Shay, a dancer and researcher studying the history of dance in the Middle East, led fieldwork in collaboration with Louis Hage, a professor of musicology in Lebanon, who helped choose instrumentalists; Hage's role was partially to ensure that an appropriate Lebanese image was presented abroad.[734] Shay's fieldwork led him to identify and assess the state of tradition and folklife in Lebanon, terms he left undefined.[735] The resulting display emphasized celebration, music, and dance, choices that perhaps not coincidentally echoed the festival's larger emphases over the years, particularly its focus on performance.

Archival documentation around Shay's research reveals more of Shay's concluding assessments than his individual findings or his research process. These documents also do not list who the craft experts were that he visited, nor are there any remaining photographs of his research trip(s). Shay's final report described Lebanon as a country in a distinct state of

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[733] Though the methodology remained undoubtedly ethnographic, the Smithsonian notably shifted its public-facing terminology, arguing in the program book that the research was neither "demographic or ethnographic." See: *1975 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 2.

[734] Notably, Hage was perturbed by this process of picking participants, which required sending tapes to the Smithsonian. See: Letter from P. Anthony Hage to Anthony Shay, February 1975, Folder Hage, Louis 1975, Box 195, Series 2, SFF Papers; Cable, March 18, 1975, Folder Lebanon – written, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Hage was later deemed a person that the Smithsonian did not wish to work with in the future because he too abrasive and difficult to work with. See: Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Corinne Heditsian, August 15, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, August, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers.

[735] Rinzler also conducted fieldwork, though he did not report on it or come to conclusions like Shay. See: Itinerary, Ralph Rinzler, Folder March Field Trip Transcripts – Italy, Lebanon, Poland, France, England, Box 5, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

change. For him, "Western and Soviet" influence on music, dance, and craft, along with new craft designed to meet Western tastes, was evidence of this transformation. He saw dance as shaped by "Caucasian and Russian" practices. Shay contrasted these practices with those who adhered to tradition, as seen in the prominence of traditional clothing and resistance to the "bastardization" of "Lebanese traditional arts."[736] Much like the festival defined the traditions of immigrants in their home countries against their adaptations in the US, Shay set up a binary between tradition/heritage and the biproduct of Western influence. Furthermore, his assessment did not consider the role of Islam, the Arabic language, or the French mandate/protectorate system, all critical elements of the country's history, an approach remarkably similar to that of Tunisia the year prior.

Shay's research led him to propose the *haflah*, or celebration, as the primary framework for understanding Lebanon and its traditions at the festival. Shay decided this would include musical performances that he deemed most representative of Lebanese traditions in Lebanon and the US, including people in Kaslik and Mtein; Kaslik is a Maronite village, and Mtein is primarily Christian and Druze. When Shay presented this idea to people he met during his fieldwork, they responded with concerns about the Smithsonian putting forward an "accurate and authentic presentation of Lebanese folk arts," adding that people were "sensitive about their image in the United States."[737] Here, the folk arts were undefined, as was the

[736] Anthony Shay, Report on Fieldwork in Lebanon, nd. (likely 1974), Folder Lebanon – 75, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[737] Ibid. Notably, Shay also compares the *haflah* to the *maharajan*, the Arabic word for festival, noting the *haflah* has a shorter duration. *Maharajan* was the Arabic word for festival used at the World of Islam Festival; See: Anthony Shay, Domestic Field Report on Lebanese-American Communities, nd., Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Notably, Shay was also

relationship between arts, craft, and music. Shay also participated in meetings that led to what he called "quasi-diplomatic ties," suggesting that government officials were engaged with these conversations at multiple levels.[738] Yet the responses to Shay's research indicate the tensions derived from the paradoxes of the Smithsonian's research project: while the Smithsonian claimed to allow people to present their own traditions, the choices around what was included at the festival were still highly mediated.

Shay's focus on the *haflah* quizzically divorced it from its Arab identity and religion. *Haflah* is an Arabic word meaning party or celebration that implies a gathering of community and family for a special occasion, thus referencing the social nature of the region. As Shay considered tradition, he emphasized the local, such as what existed in small villages, and a national Lebanese cultural identity. Despite being part of the Arab world, the connection between Arab and Lebanese identity is overlooked, as is the Arabic language. Islam is not discussed, in turn overlooking religious diversity and coexistence in the country, one which could model tolerance for the US in line with the festival's goals. These choices both depoliticize and secularize Lebanon at a moment when Lebanon was engaged in a Civil War. Like with Tunisia's presentation the previous year, Lebanon's history and diversity was

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criticized for not engaging with the appropriate Lebanese contacts. See: Notes on meeting with Mr. Salman, Mr. Metelits, Bess Lomax Hawes, Ralph Rinzler, Pat, and Suzie, August 20, 1975, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2; MEMCON re: Lebanon, August 21, 1975, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[738] Anthony Shay, Report on Fieldwork in Lebanon, nd. (likely 1974), Folder Lebanon – 75, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

whitewashed as nuanced cultural traditions were distilled into essential concepts that were seemingly yet misleadingly all encompassing.

The *haflah* in Lebanon was one half of the cultural cognate. Researchers sought its counterparts in Michigan, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, California, Illinois, Ohio, Maryland, California, Virginia, Texas, and New York.[739] In the end, dancers from Springfield, Massachusetts were invited to participate and teach the *dabke*.[740] Choosing who would represent the US part of the cultural cognate was influenced by how these practices helped maintain "authenticity."[741] Authenticity was not defined, but suggests a reconsideration of what was "Lebanese" and carried between places without changing. Shay and the Smithsonian were arbiters of this authenticity, suggesting that Lebanese tradition and culture were defined in a top-down fashion in line with, or in light of its ethnographic research methodology. However, there was little to no discussion of how or why Lebanese populations immigrated to the US, a conversation that would likely shape how traditions changed.

Beyond the place of Lebanon on the festival's map and visualizing the nation, the Smithsonian's language also continued to grapple with questions of diversity. Rhetoric around the 1975 festival more strongly emphasized the insufficiency of the melting pot

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[739] Folder IRFs, Box 199, Series 2; Letter from Shirley Cherkasky to Ruth Jordan, August 27, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, August, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Despite Mississippi's presentation the previous year, Shay did not consider Mississippi when looking for a cultural cognate.

[740] *1975 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 41.

[741] Cable, March 18, 1975, Folder Lebanon – written, Box 27, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

ideology. Instead, an announcement for the 1975 FAF defines it as a celebration of the ways that "we are not a melting pot, but the most diverse society to exist in the history of man."[742] In his preface to the festival, Ripley reiterated that neither the festival nor the nation were melting pots, instead arguing that the festival presented cultural activities in line with what he called "cultural diversity" or "pluralism," citing OWNW as an example.[743] While Ripley avoided assimilation and emphasized difference, the festival still elided some differences, such as generally grouping the traditions of immigrants under OWNW, and homogenizing large cultural groups through specific cultural practices, like Lebanese or Lebanese-Americans. The problems of this system paradoxically also attempt to put forward windows into cultures that would be more comprehensible and digestible to audiences.

Corporations also played a new role in helping the Smithsonian achieve its goal of educating people to promote tolerance and understanding beginning in 1975. For example, one advertisement on the inside cover of the program book simply reads "Bringing Americans together is one of the things we do best" (see Figure 4-7). Appearing as a promotion for American Airlines, the corporation filled an otherwise blank page with a large block of text in sans-serif font sharing their excitement about and public support for people coming together at the festival. By stating that they wanted to bring *Americans* together [my emphasis], their choice of language reiterates the festival's US-centric framework, and sidelines those who do not fit under this rubric. As one of two corporate sponsors in 1975,

[742] Announcing the 9th Annual Festival of American Folklife, 1975, Folder Publicity, Newsletters 75, Box 26, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[743] *1975 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 3-4.

the company stipulated they were to be the sole sponsoring airline and identified on all festival-related activities. The company's sponsorship was designed to make their employees feel personally invested in the festival's celebration, and if that was enough, American Airlines employees also participated in "Working Americans."[744] American Airlines advertisement not only put a new spin and face to the Smithsonian's goals, but they also co-opted this opportunity for their own marketing and employee morale.

General Foods was another corporate sponsor, and their involvement similarly reiterated the festival's goals of coming together. At the end of the program book opposite the American Airlines ad, General Foods announced their support by calling the festival "a mirror of the strength our nation has in its diversity" (see Figure 4-8). General Foods followed a similar aesthetic with a sans-serif font, now adding blue and pink, two colors not in the festival's color scheme. General Foods' 1962 logo was stitched onto a pillow in the ad, cleverly translating the company's brand into the language of craft at the festival. The ad goes on to mention its delight in bringing the festival "to our fellow citizens," suggesting the festival is not for non-citizens. The language used by General Foods directly echoed Rinzler and Morris' celebration of cultural diversity, not the melting pot. Furthermore, as where American Airlines drew on the festival's American tone, General Foods instead focused on diversity. Together, the ads create a dialectical pair that represents not only the full spectrum of festival participants, but also the range of audiences required to achieve understanding.

[744] Letter from R.L. Crandall to James R. Morris, May 1, 1975, Folder Festival of American Folklife Working Americans Program, Box 26, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

More importantly, corporate support legitimized the festival's efforts by showing its broader resonances while helping to reach a broader audience.

Through corporate sponsorship, institutional ideologies, and different performers, the Smithsonian propagated the importance of diversity while positioning itself as the arbiter thereof, an agenda that did not go unnoticed. One attendee from Maryland wrote that they "Really enjoyed the diversity. In the future, would like to see more ethnic food."[745] While there were an array of culinary options, this comment is one of many that reflects how audiences recognized and celebrated diversity.[746] Much like Shay's Lebanese collaborators were concerned with their depiction, inclusivity was not always well received, nor were representations always mutually agreeable. Someone from the Society of Lebanese Heritage Folklore Art & Culture wrote to Rinzler and said the festival did not have a cross section of Lebanese American populations and volunteered to bring together a more representative presentation.[747] Conversations like these point to the problems of top-down diversity as put forward by the Smithsonian.

If the festival's mission was that people come together and celebrate diversity, then to some degree, it succeeded. For example, one reporter noted that the festival "disproves any

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[745] Anonymous Comment Card, Summer 1975, Folder 1975 Festival, Box 2, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Another comment from an unnamed attendee from Virginia wrote that "More cheapie ethnic food with fewer lines could be added."

[746] Notably, these cuisines were also discussed in other press coverage. See: "Delectable Mall Eating," June 26, 1975, Folder Press Clippings 1974-1976, Box 216, Series 1, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[747] Letter from the Society of Lebanese Heritage Folklore Art and Culture to Ralph Rinzler, March 13, 1976, Folder Lebanon I, Box 66, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

idea of [the US as] a cultural melting pot," a comment which implicitly denied assimilation and affirmed Ripley's argument.[748] Audiences and reporters alike took away the idea that individual traditions remained alive and well. When the performers went on tour, there were also a variety of responses, such as continued concerns about representing Lebanese Americans.[749] Likewise, when leading figures like Betty Ford visited OWNW and enjoyed treats like Lebanese pastries, she modeled the festival's desired intercultural understanding.[750]

In both 1974 and 1975, OWNW propagated representational frameworks that obfuscated Arab and Muslim identity in the US. Diversity from the SWANA region was included, but only in piecemeal, and in ways that upheld the dominant narrative in the US. This was a result of the Smithsonian mediating diversity and representation, despite their claims to let performers represent themselves on their own terms. Perhaps things could have changed for Lebanon. Originally, Lebanon would have been a contributor to bicentennial festivities, but the project was "quietly shelved," as described by Rinzler, because the war made fieldwork and embassy negotiations nearly impossible.[751] The patterns and frameworks set forward in

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[748] Boris Weintraub, "Festival Proves Folk Cultures Don't Melt," *Star*, Washington, DC., July 3, 1975, Folder Administrative File – Publicity, Box 91, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[749] Letter from Shirley Cherkasky to The Society of Lebanese Heritage Folklore Art and Culture, March 23, 1976, Folder VII Duplicate Correspondence: Old Ways Correspondence and Records 1976 Carbon Copies Vol. 1, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[750] J.Y. Smith, "Betty Ford Visits Folk Festival," *The Washington Post Metro*, June 29, 1975, Folder Press Clippings 1974-1976, Box 216, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[751] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Nadia el-Zain, January 29, 1976, Folder VII Duplicate Correspondence: Old Ways Correspondence and Records 1976 Carbon Copies Vol. 1, Box

1974 and 1975 also continue into the 1976 bicentennial iteration of the festival, and the project of representing diversity would continue as a spectacle of inclusion.

F. 1976: Visualizing the Melting Pot

The effort to represent different cultures between 1973 and 1975 was part of a larger plan for the 1976 bicentennial iteration of the Festival of American Folklife, which was also the festival's tenth anniversary.[752] The bicentennial festival planning trajectory was not a secret.[753] Congress began urging the Smithsonian to plan a Bicentennial program starting in 1965. This led to a project called "The American Experience," which was a roadmap for programming that would illuminate "our American heritage" by exploring its history. The festival was one aspect of this, and it was designed to focus on living folk traditions—folk here being undefined in both a material and ideological sense. Within this, OWNW reconsidered what immigrants brought to the US.[754] Beginning in 1973, the Smithsonian sent

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58, Series 2, SFF Papers; Letter from Ralph, Bob, and Bess to Jim Morris, November 12, 1975, Folder Chron File 1976 #2, Box 3, Series 2, SFF Papers; Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Richard H. Curtiss, December 19, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, October, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[752] This iteration had a roughly 9-million-dollar budget. See: Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, 131; Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 300. The dates were June 6-September 16.

[753] For example, in 1975, James Morris said that the 1975 FAF was a dress rehearsal for the bicentennial in the ways it brought people in, set up a stage for them, returned them to their homes, and then repeated the cycle with new participants. See: Interview with James R. Morris, *Star*, Washington, DC, July 12, 1975, Folder Festival of American Folklife Working Americans Program, Box 26, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[754] *The American Experience*, np. The American experience also outlines a timeline for development.

invitations for "Foreign Governments to Participate in the Bicentennial Festival."[755] The invitations advertised OWNW as a way to "celebrate American life" and the US as a nation of immigrants who contributed to American culture.[756] Rotating cultures each year of the festival allowed for a broad view of the nation over several years. This disposition aligned with Morris' description of the bicentennial festival as a "truly international celebration of our cultural origins and traditional expressions," thus emphasizing plurality in relation to American identity.[757] Like in years prior, the question of diasporic cultures is asked and answered through an American-centric lens through ambiguous terms that are undefined, like folk.

With this trajectory in mind, the 1976 iteration of the FAF should be seen as a culmination of the festival's transformation during this period with its focus on immigration and multiculturalism. The 1976 FAF lasted an unprecedented twelve weeks, as compared to 2–4 weeks in years prior, and included participants from every US region, 38 foreign governments, numerous Indigenous groups, as well as several different labor

[755] Invitation to Participate, nd., Folder Festival Rationale/Position Stmts., Box 25, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. There were also other ideas for how to celebrate the Bicentennial. See: William Walker, *A Living Exhibition: the Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), chapter 5.

[756] Ibid. As evidence of their ability to execute these activities, the Smithsonian cited ongoing projects in India, Pakistan, Egypt, Israel, and Tunisia, among others. The Smithsonian also clarifies that governments must pay their own fare to participate, and recommends they offset costs for US fieldwork.

[757] Letter from James R. Morris to S. Dillon Ripley, December 6, 1972, Folder Bicent. '75 Funds, Box 2, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

organizations.[758] Gathering a diverse array of participants was a means to achieve the festival's goals, as set out in the program book, which emphasized learning about new cultures, celebrating one's own culture and heritage, acknowledging the laborers who made America, valuing diversity, and fostering community.[759] Each of these goals was connected to two larger initiatives: for one, on a micro scale, to recognize American identity and history; the other, on a macro scale, to respond to narrow cultural representation in museums by "[telling] the story of the diverse peoples who populated the nation but whose cultural achievements were not represented in the museums or their collections."[760] The 1976 festival both added a new dimension to these initiatives by including new cultural groups, but those who participated in years prior were equally part of the picture presented in 1976 based on the festival's cumulative logic.

Mohamed's aforementioned embroidery (see Figure 4-1) was thus a commission that both symbolized the festival's overarching logic of interpersonal education and the 1976 festival. Her invitation came after the 1974 FAF where she participated in the program celebrating the state of Mississippi.[761] Mohamed then worked with Janet Stratton, Art

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[758] Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, 131; Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 300. The dates were June 6-September 16.

[759] *1976 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1976), 2-7.

[760] Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, 54; Heather Diamond and Ricardo D. Trimillos, "Introduction: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Smithsonian Folklife Festival," *Journal of American Folklore* 121, no. 479 (2008): 3. Here, Diamond and Trimillos define the festival as part "zoo, museum, theme park, carnival, concert, community center, and traveling theater."

[761] The Mohamed family, conversation with the author, May 2021. Her official invitation did not come until a few months before the festival, and it was actually a letter inviting to her attend stating that her embroidery would be used as the festival's centerpiece. Later, she was

Director at the Smithsonian's Division of Performing Arts, to map out her embroidery. The 1976 FAF program book explains that Stratton visited Mohamed in September 1975 to commission the work, spending two days outlining the festival using glossies of previous festival maps, and discussing how to depict people in the work.[762] The direct relationship between festival maps and Mohamed's embroidery is further implied when Kurin describes Mohamed's embroidery in hindsight as "a tapestry illustrating the diversity of American and world cultures based on the previous years' festivals."[763] Six working months later, Mohamed produced five feet of vignettes filled with characters conversing and celebrating at the festival and enjoying its celebratory landscape.

The public facing story of Mohamed's commission and collaboration, however, does not elucidate why organizers chose Mohamed in the first place. Ripley read widely about embroidery and wrote that he and his wife bonded with Mohamed over her needlework.[764] This, taken with her participation in the 1974 festival and the festival's emphasis on craft, might be taken as sufficient to substantiate her invitation. However, one can uncover a

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told the work would become a part of the Smithsonian's collection. See: Letter from Alan M. Lester to Ethel Wright Mohamed, February 11, 1976; Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Ethel Wright Mohamed, July 1, 1976, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi.

[762] *1976 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 2. The timing of this visit is reiterated by a letter from Stratton sent on September 12, 1975. Mohamed also wrote that it took her 3 months to make the work, but 2-3 months to ideate before because she wanted to think about how to put the story together. See: Festival – 1976 Binder, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi.

[763] Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, 51.

[764] Capers and Collins, *My Life in* Pictures, 5.

clearer rationale when her biography and her previous embroideries are read against the official narrative.

For one, events in Mohamed's life exemplified the festival's ideals of intercultural understanding. Mohamed married a Syrian immigrant named Hassan who left the Ottoman Empire and arrived on Ellis Island in 1911. He made successful businesses for himself in Mississippi first as a peddler and then a dry goods store owner.[765] Hassan's story resembles the American dream of rags to riches and success in the US. Mohamed also frequently spoke about her and Hassan raising an intercultural, interreligious family in the Mississippi Delta; Mohamed was Baptist, and their children were raised Baptist, but Hassan remained Muslim and told their children about his faith. Her life story exemplified the way people of different backgrounds and life experiences could come together to form something new based on mutual respect and understanding while maintaining and respecting others' beliefs. The Smithsonian was keenly aware of her story, which prompted Ripley to describe Mohamed's work as a juxtaposition between her life story, America's mid-South, and "the world's Mideast."[766] Mohamed's life experience not only epitomized the festival's ideology, but her experience as the wife of an immigrant made her a perfect proxy to both share knowledge about the US, "the world's Mideast," and how coexistence was possible.

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[765] Mohamed also researched Islam and Syria, largely in relation to Hassan's heritage. Her children were then taught this history, making it part of their family identity. See: Rachel Winter, "Arabian Nights in the Mississippi Delta: The Embroideries of Ethel Wright Mohamed," *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2022); Ethel Wright Mohamed's Journals, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi.

[766] *1976 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 2.

Furthermore, Mohamed herself believed in the festival's goals, and her embroidery was a testament to that even before the commission. For example, her work *Sacred Harp Singing* was what she saw as a scene of "Our American Heritage," and is one of many instances where she studied and depicted American history because she saw it as valuable and important (see Figure 4-9).[767] After attending the 1974 FAF, Mohamed journaled about the way the festival "was designed to make Americans aware of the beauty and value of the traditions which form so large a part of our national culture," showing her cognizance of and support for the festival's educational mission in line with her own investment in American history.[768] She then created an embroidery depicting her fond memories of the event, but which has a similar character to *Sacred Harp Singing* (see Figure 4-9) in the ways it depicts people coming together through music, for one (see Figure 4-3). Craft was not only Mohamed's media of choice, but integral to the festival's program as a medium representative of grassroots cultures; that she learned embroidery from her mother also exemplified the festival's interest in informal learning and generational traditions.[769]

Mohamed sharing knowledge about the so-called Middle East, and Ripley's understanding of her in relationship to the "Mideast," deserves further attention. Mohamed

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[767] Binder, 1973-1975, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi. For example, she also wrote in her journals about the "beauty and value of the traditions" that formed American culture. See: Festival – 1974 Binder, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi.

[768] Festival – 1974 Binder, The Ethel Wright Mohamed Stitchery Museum, Belzoni, Mississippi.

[769] On the relationship between craft and the nation, see: Glenn Adamson, *Craft: An American History* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021). Mohamed learned embroidery because her mother would give her a needle and thread to make her sit quietly. See: Capers and Collins, *My Life in* Pictures, 11; Ferris, *Local Color*, 123.

was not the first woman to be in an intercultural marriage. However, she also never saw herself as attempting to appropriate or take on her husband's identity or culture. After they married, Mohamed began reading to learn about Hassan's Syrian background, culture, and traditions. She simultaneously read about her own religion's history as well as American history and immigration history in an effort to think about how the many threads of her life could be woven together. Likewise, she listened to and learned from Hassan. When scenes from the Arab world appeared in her embroidery, it was a way to document her memories, which certainly were of a multicultural household, but also of her research. Both her research and her embroidery were meant to be deeply personal practices for her that, when she started, she thought would never be shared or displayed. When her work became public vis-à-vis the Smithsonian, this was based on Ripley and Rinzler's understanding of her work and life. Mohamed was not trying to appropriate her husband's identity as her own or claim herself as Syrian/Lebanese either in life or her art, but to document her experiences, which happened to include knowledge about the region and its cultures through her own observations, research, and experiences as Hassan's wife; she was not trying to speak for the region or its complexities. Yet for the Smithsonian to adopt her and her work was to position her as speaking for the culture. Moreover, her life as a woman in an intercultural marriage raising an inter-religious family exemplified the Smithsonian's goals; she was a woman from the hegemonic way of thinking who was open minded to different experiences, and as such, respected other ways of thinking and welcomed them into her life while maintaining her own identity and beliefs. Her story exemplified integration, not assimilation, and her work reflected this as it depicted her memories; the Smithsonian's choice to present this work was thus to make her a model for coming together.

While reading Mohamed's biography and her oeuvre against the Smithsonian's public, bureaucratic narrative help to understand why she was commissioned, the same narrative also only tells part of the story about the Smithsonian's involvement in the design process. Upon receiving the commission, Mohamed offered her embroidery of the 1974 FAF (see Figure 4-3). As mentioned, rather than depicting everyone at the festival, Mohamed details every Mississippian by name who was a part of the program. Mississippi's presentation acted as a metonym for the larger festival's happenings. However, organizers declined Mohamed's offer because of the work's vertical orientation, citing concerns that the relationship between the embroidery and the festival map would not be legible.[770] In addition to Stratton's on-site collaboration with Mohamed, this decision to deny her previous work, which was rooted in her lived experience, was another way the Smithsonian intervened into Mohamed's work. Furthermore, this reconfiguration shifted Mohamed's work from a regional focus vis-à-vis Mississippi's diversity to national identity.[771] These choices were not shared with the public but are integral to understanding how the Smithsonian worked to propagate their specific vision of the nation with and through Mohamed.

The amalgamated idea of the nation proposed through Mohamed's embroidery was both displayed at the festival and fragmented to create an iconography for the 1976 program; it was an object that visualized the ideals of the event, and in its simultaneous narrative, could be shared in part or whole to propagate the festival's message. One excerpt graced the 1976 program book cover, a nearly 300-page tome written by the festival's organizers that outlines

[770] The Mohamed family, conversation with the author, May 2021.

[771] Mohamed maintained some regional hints by stitching Catfish that represent her home in Belzoni and the nearby Yazoo River.

the festival's goals, ideology, and schedule for the public (see Figure 4-10). Anyone could read this program for free. The Reflecting Pool frames scenes of people enjoying festival activities, and functions as the background for the festival's signature font, which announces the event: "1976 Festival of American Folklife." Two figures in pontoons, who represent the festival's organizers, float on, while Rinzler, then director, feeds birds on the far right—his identity denoted by the "R." The flags indicating the festival's sections have been removed in favor of signs for places of congregation: the Main Stage, "Family Folklore," and the "Children's Area." Though unlabeled, the section dedicated to Native Americans is at the center, demarcated by a horseshoe outline, and identified by a teepee. In lieu of a signature, Mohamed stitches herself underneath a tent where she displays her work. When a section of her work was on the cover of the program, Mohamed's embroidery artistically models how audiences should conduct themselves at the festival and participate in a celebration of nation that would inspire unity and propel the country forward.

Mohamed's embroidery was also excerpted by corporations to market the festival. Upon opening the 1976 program book, one encounters an excerpt of Mohamed's embroidery from the Regional Americans section in an advertisement for American Airlines (see Figure 4-11).[772] Here, three musicians in salmon, teal, and pale green suits play for two couples in red, white, and blue who are dancing. Written from the voice of American Airlines, the advertisement repeats the same refrain from the campaign in 1975: "Bringing Americans together is one of the things we do best." The act of Americans traveling to gather is visually and textually paired with the way song and dance unite people at the festival. The ad also

[772] The support of American Airlines is also noted in the press. See: "Folk Festival," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 12, 1976, 2.

emphasizes the ways "different people" come together, a rhetorical move following the Smithsonian's investment in pluralism, but shifting from the company's previous strategy. The figures not only exemplify the act of coming together, but also provide a way for audiences to imagine how they fit in the scene, and thus, at the festival.

General Foods also repurposed Mohamed's figures from the OWNW section of her embroidery (see Figure 4-12).[773] Here, a group of men and women circle up as if preparing to dance. Similarly written from the corporation's voice, the advertisement expresses the company's "pleasure" in helping with the festival, repeating their previous description of the event as a "mirror of the strength our nation has in its diversity." Like American Airlines, General Foods employs the same language as it did in its 1975 campaign, only changing its imagery to include Mohamed's work. Taken with the stitched figures, the ad illustrated and advocated for diversity, including the tokenistic inclusion of one Black person. The sections of the festival and embroidery that specifically emphasize diversity are translated into an ad where people dancing together symbolically represents diversity as the foundation for a strong nation.

In part or in whole, Mohamed offers an example of how the festival will allow people to learn and build relationships while also making visible the nation's structure through the festival's components. By giving each individual distinct attributes, she illustrated the diversity of the nation, which paved the way for both the festival and corporations to utilize her work in different ways. Harnessing embroidery for this message, even if photographed and reproduced, appropriated the ideology of craft and community propagated throughout the

[773] General Foods' support is also noted in the press. See: Carla Hall, "Showing Off the Festival," *Washington Post*, June 24, 1976, B3.

festival. In its boundless scenes of people joyfully singing, dancing, talking, and eating, diversity coalesces into a vision of the US today, and a model for the ways that citizens should act and engage with each other as they participate in a larger effort to build a landscape of coexistence. The process of making this embroidery is, most importantly, a metonym for the way the state shaped identity and dialogue around diversity throughout the festival.

G. Egypt at the Bicentennial

Mohamed's embroidery also points to the Arab populations included at the 1976 festival in OWNW. Like in previous years, participants in OWNW were selected based in part on government negotiations, as well as which groups were deemed culturally important, a rubric not defined.[774] Across the festival's twelve weeks, OWNW included presenters from Israel, Egypt, Pakistan, India, as well as Eastern Europe and East Asia. Israeli and American Jewish populations were present during the first week alongside Romanian representatives; Egyptian participants were on site during week six with Belgian participants; and Pakistani representatives attended week seven with German performers.[775] All groups had special concessions available.[776] Increasing the number of participants in OWNW helped to achieve

[774] These considerations were also complicated by issues like unrest in Lebanon, and security concerns presented by Israel. See: Letter from James R. Morris to Ralph Rinzler, Bess Lomax Hawes, and Bob, November 12, 1975, Folder 1975 Chron File, Box 2, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Here, Turkey and Pakistan were deemed low priorities.

[775] *1976 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 44.

[776] Elizabeth Dahlin, Report of Concessions Manager, 1976, Folder FAF Concessions 1976, Box 5, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. These concessions generated over $100,000 in revenue for the Smithsonian.

the festival's goal of depicting the US as a "country of immigrants" by bringing together those who immigrated with those who remained abroad.[777] Although the program book does not use the term cultural cognate, the idea of home and abroad follows from the ideological framework used in previous years.

Egypt's participation reflects an expanded scope and way of thinking about identity. The schedule of events in the program book shows that the Egyptian presentation included Coptic religious music, Arabic songs, different forms of singing, shield and sword dances, religious ceremonies (or Islamic *dhikr* meditation), instrumental music, storytelling, folk songs, Arabic classical music, Egyptian crafts, and an example of a wedding procession.[778] The cumulative program displays a greater portion of Egypt's diversity of religion, culture, and tradition. Several things were unique about this program: Islam was explicitly evoked; the idea of something Arab entered the conversation by sharing music as an Arabic tradition; and craft was a stated part of the program. However, there was no supplemental information in the program around Egyptian or Egyptian-American cultural practices or immigration, or what it means for something to be Arab or Islamic.

Egypt's presentation, like Lebanon and Tunisia, was similarly shaped by governmental negotiation and fieldwork. Ripley invited the Egyptian Ambassador to visit the 1974 festival and learn about OWNW; the Ambassador responded positively, and conversations ensued.[779]

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[777] *1976 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, 12.

[778] *1976 Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)*, Festival Supplement Book (July 14-25), np. Some of the Coptic performances were even on the main stage.

[779] Letter from S. Dillon Ripley to His Excellency Ashraf A. Ghorbal, nd. (likely May or June 1974), Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2; Letter from Ashraf A. Ghorbal to Ralph Rinzler, May 24, 1974, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Specific collaborators include those from the Egyptian

The Smithsonian then officially invited the Arab Republic of Egypt to participate.[780] Later, the Egyptian government confirmed government funding for participant travel, and promised support for Smithsonian fieldworkers to go abroad.[781] Itineraries, however, had to be reviewed prior to conducting fieldwork.[782] While this collaboration was ultimately realized, miscommunications between representatives and governments nearly ruined the project, as for some time, Egypt was unaware of the invitation and program.[783]

Embassy in the US (Dr. A Fathy Bahig. Ambassador Ashraf A. Ghorbal, Dr. Ezzeldin A. Moustafa, Ahmed Sadek El-Kosheri), the US Embassy in Egypt (Hermann F. Eilts, Edward T. Penny, Thomas A. Homan), and the Egyptian Ministry of Culture (Kusur al-Saqafa, Ahmed Abdul Halim Helmy). Notably, Ripley also had fond recollections of Egypt from his travels as a child. See: Harris, *Capital Culture*, 99.

[780] Letter from S. Dillon Ripley to Hermann F. Eilts, nd. (likely early 1974), Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2; Letter from Hermann F. Eilts to S. Dillon Ripley, March 28, 1974, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The invitation also included a detailed outline of the Bicentennial plans. Here, the American Ambassador to Egypt was quick to mention that Egypt had not previously sponsored an event because of the relationship between the US and Egypt.

[781] Letter from Shirley Cherkasky to Willem Simonsz, Embassy of the Netherlands, January 23, 1976, Folder VII Duplicate Correspondence: Old Ways Correspondence and Records 1976 Carbon Copies Vol. 1, Box 58, Series 2; Letter from S.P. Belcher to Dr. Ahmed Fathy Bahig, May 16, 1975, Folder May June 1975, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The American Embassy likely also reached out to American oil companies for support, though the results of these conversations, if they happened, is unclear. See: Memo from S. Cherkasky, to Ralph, Bob, Shirley, nd. (likely mid-August 1974), Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[782] Letter from Dr. A. Fathy Bahig to Director General, Foreign Cultural Relations Department, March 12, 1974, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[783] Memorandum from Alan, March 4, 1975, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Alan here is likely Alan Lomax.

Throughout the planning process, Egyptian officials expressed trepidations about how folk artists would be represented and adapt to American culture; likewise, there were concerns about how Americans would help Egyptians overcome culture shock.[784] Though not stated, perhaps this hesitation was partially in response to the Orientalist ways ethnography denigrated non-Western populations, including the presentation of Egypt at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.[785] Likewise, the concerns about culture shock clearly echo the concern Tunisian presenters had in 1974. In response to these concerns, the Smithsonian continually offered general assurances of its preparedness to host people from Egypt, especially those who did not speak English, citing support from their Cultural Liaison program.[786]

Simultaneously, the fieldworker responsible for shaping Egypt's presentation was Halim el Dabh, an Egyptian ethnomusicologist who was teaching in Ohio at the time.[787] Prior to his

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[784] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Dr. Ezzeldin A. Moustafa, October 4, 1976, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2; Memo from Naomi Kaitz to Ed Dye, Contracts for Cultural Liaisons, January 20, 1976, Folder VII Duplicate Correspondence: Old Ways Correspondence and Records 1976 Carbon Copies Vol. 1, Box 58, Series 2, or Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[785] On this, see: Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[786] Letter from Shirley Cherkasky to Dr. Ezzeldin A. Moustafa, Cultural Counselor, April 28, 1976, Folder 3 Duplicate Correspondence: Old Ways Correspondence and Records 1976 Carbon Copies Vol. 1, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[787] Halim el Dabh Curriculum Vitae, nd. (likely 1973), Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. El Dabh also had support from Magda Saleh, particularly in the US, but her contributions are overlooked. See: Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Magda Saleh, October 6, 1976, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

collaboration with the Smithsonian, el Dabh grew up in Egypt where he gained a rich education in music, collaborated with artists, participated in musical events on behalf of the state, and even won a Fulbright to the US, later pioneering new forms of electronic music with his colleagues at Columbia.[788] It is difficult to fully understand how and assess the way El Dabh's research translated into the festival, as much of the fieldwork documentation remains unavailable to researchers, and what does exist are unlabeled photographs that are not easy to tie to a particular region or cultural group.[789] Initially, Egyptian representatives were not involved in research or planning, prompting them to resist el Dabh's proposal due to concern that the governates would not send participants.[790] Later, the Egyptian government approved the program, citing their belief that the group will "give a good impression" in the US.[791]

El Dabh conducted fieldwork both in the US and Egypt, and his focus was on performative practices. For three weeks, he traveled throughout Egypt in Cairo, Abu Sinbel,

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[788] Denise A. Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim el-Dabh* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 1-21, 47-62. He even worked on music for Martha Graham, who was discouraging him from his electronic music foray, which Seachrist describes. For more on the relationship between el Dabh's agricultural projects in Egypt as formative to his later experience with music in the US, see: Michael Khoury, "A Look at Lightning: The Life and Compositions of Halim El-Dabh," in *The Arab Avant-Garde: Music, Politics, Modernity*, ed. Thomas Burkhalter, Kay Dickinson, and Benjamin J. Harbert (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 165-84.

[789] Folder SI DPA OWNW 1976 Fieldwork, Box 199, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[790] Letter from Pat Belcher to OWNW Committee, April 5, 1976, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[791] Letter from Dr. Ezzeldin A. Moustafa to Shirley Cherkasky, April 28, 1976, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Aswan, Luxor, Menia, Mansourah, Dumiatt, Tanta, Damanhour, and Alexandria, generally pursuing a broad investigation up and down the Nile.[792] After his trip, he proposed highlighting community gatherings through song and dance from the Aswan region, memorial ceremonies, and remembrance practices, or *mawalid*; he tied each practice and its exemplars to a region in his report.[793] Despite this extensive research, the participant list in the program book did not clarify where performers came from, or how these practices correlated to Egyptian-American communities—the culture cognate.[794] As a result, many of the nuances of Egypt's diversity and traditions are conflated. Separately, research on Egypt's cultural cognates was conducted in New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles, and Milwaukee.[795] However, the outcome of this research also remains unclear both from an archival and an official perspective.

The decision to include Egypt and acknowledge Arab and Islamic identities in the festival landscape should not be divorced from then current events. Egypt was a stand in for "pan-

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[792] Letter from Dr. A. Fathy Bahig to Director General, Foreign Cultural Relations Department, March 12, 1974, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[793] Letter form Halim el Dabh to Ralph Rinzler, August 22, 1975, Folder SI DPA OWNW 1976 Fieldwork, Box 199, Series 2, or Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. What Rinzler received was also sent to the Egyptian Minister of Culture in Arabic. See: Letter from Halim el Dabh to Ralph Rinzler, August 25, 1975, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[794] Only in the archives do we see a list of proposed participants and their regions. See: List of requested individuals, April 5, 1976, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[795] Letter form Shirley Cherkasky to Ruth Jordan, August 27, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, August, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Arab culture," something which as discussed here, was somewhat overlooked.[796] This choice allowed the Smithsonian to tap into Egypt's history of pan-Arab nationalism, which advocated for unity in the Arab world rooted in Arab identity, ethnicity, and language. This Nasserist ideology was closely followed by Sadat's efforts to bring Egypt into a global economic network. Both Sadat and Nasser promoted cooperation between the US and the Middle East, including through art and culture. Egypt's goal of unity and global relationship building not only aligned with the festival's ideology, something signaled by their financial support and participation in OWNW, but Egyptian officials were also optimistic that the program would generate good publicity in line with their ongoing public image campaign.[797] USIS in Cairo proudly advertised Egypt's participation as Americans flocked to learn about Egyptian traditions.[798] Seen with Israel's participation at the festival, the US also used FAF and OWNW to project its political alliances with two countries who were victors of the

[796] Walker, *A Living Exhibition*, 186. Citing: Summary: Supervisory Group Review, Old Ways Program, Nov. 20, 1975, Folder OWNW, Box 3, Acc. T90055, Smithsonian Institution Archive. In their thinking, Israeli populations were also included to represent Jews around the world with an emphasis on Eastern Europe.

[797] Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Thomas A. Homan, October 5, 1976, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Simultaneously, Egypt pursued its own political agenda and political relationship building through art and culture, as seen in exhibitions like *Treasures of Tutankhamun* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1976. The exhibition was thought of as a way to build peace in the Middle East. See: Meredith Hindley, "King Tut: A Classic Blockbuster Museum Exhibition That Began as a Diplomatic Gesture," *Humanities* 36, no. 5 (September/October 2015); Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[798] USIS American Embassy in Cairo, Press Release #84, July 28, 1976, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

recent 1973 Yom Kippur or October War.[799] Thus, the festival surpassed relationship building to instead model Arab-Israeli solidarity during ongoing conflict over the Palestine, and highlight the US as a global superpower capable of mediating conflict on and through its bicentennial program.

The festival map illustrates how audiences could engage with Egypt at OWNW, as well as Egypt's place within the larger nation. Both the 1975 and 1976 maps follow a similar series of framing devices, schematics, and approaches; specifically, the Lincoln Memorial remains an anchor, while the festival is still distinctly separate from the larger museum complex. In 1976, the many curvilinear shapes and lines propose a degree of flexibility in traversing the festival (see Figure 4-13). On the left, a small bus and text identifying the Visitor Information Center implies the starting point of the festival experience near the Lincoln Memorial. From there, the pathway takes visitors first to the "African Diaspora" section, and from there, people could visit "Old Ways in the New World" to explore immigrants and their traditions, or "Working Americans" to see the laborers who built the nation. Like in previous years, "African Diaspora" and OWNW are connected. The central placement of "Working Americans" again indicates labor as key to the nation's development. One could then go to the festival stage or to procure concessions, either choice providing opportunities to experience different cultures through music or food. The penultimate section

[799] Other evidence of this relationship can be seen in the way the Prime Minister of Israel visited the US in early 1976. See: *Bicentennial Ethnic Racial Report: International Participation in the Biennial* (Washington, DC: American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, 1976), 1. There were also distinct challenges and misunderstandings about how to plan and fund Egyptian participation. See: Letter from Ralph Rinzler to Dr. Ahmed Bahig, August 18, 1975, Folder Old Ways Correspondence Carbon Copies – 1975, August, Box 58, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

was dedicated to Native Americans, outlined in a horseshoe like Mohamed's. Lastly, one ended their festival experience at "Regional America," which explored different states and regional identities. All audiences finished here, much like everyone arrived at "Working Americans," thus concluding the festival experience at what would later be the World War II Memorial. In this plan, OWNW is the only section that audiences are not required to pass through to reach other parts of the festival, a subtle yet telling indication of the actual importance of immigrant communities at the bicentennial.

The festival map also lays out a distinctly different landscape of encounter when read against Mohamed's embroidery (see Figures 4-13 and 4-1). The official map clearly identifies the National Mall as the site of encounter framed by the Reflecting Pool on top and the Lincoln Memorial on the left but omitting the Washington Monument. All events take place between the boundaries of the Lincoln and what would be the World War II memorials, visual landmarks that locate the festival between two struggles for freedom: the struggle for enslaved peoples to gain their freedom; and the struggle to remain free from autocratic regimes and Communists following World War II. This framing, though overlooked in Mohamed's rendering, posits that being American and celebrating American history at the festival is intertwined with freedom, and audiences who traverse this landscape find themselves between and among these monuments that testify to historical questions of how people coexist. The festival map both historicizes and contextualizes the encounters Mohamed depicts. While the state vis-à-vis the Smithsonian outlined how people would navigate these different contexts and interactions and provides the stage for these encounters, Mohamed visually represents the festival's unifying ideology and forecasts the festival's intended outcomes by depicting the imagined actors in this performance.

One image provides some insight into the ways audiences may have seen Egypt at the festival, although there is no one way to summarize audience reception to Egypt or FAF given the event's prolonged duration and high attendance (see Figure 4-14). Austrian American artist Lily Spandorf was a festival fixture who drew her festival experience through gestural pen-on-paper sketches. While many of her drawings are undated and unlabeled, she sketched her encounters with Egyptian participants in 1976. She drew fragments of three people: a seated man's body, half a man's torso, and another man's quizzical yet disembodied facial expression. The performer on the left has something on his head and looks down casually while the man in the center is more upright and attentive. Spandorf did not indicate what these individuals performed, or where they were from. Much like the festival's ideology itself, Spandorf focused on the people in her drawing as opposed to the objects that were integral to their performances. Yet her quick drawing suggests a brief and incomplete encounter where people and their practices are only understood in part, perhaps because of the brevity of the encounter. Spandorf's drawing can be read as indicative of a broader sentiment where many festival audiences may have experienced something new, but only gathered part of the story. Spandorf's drawing is also detached like a viewer at a distance, utilizing a perspective that mimicked the ethnographic viewpoint shaping the festival.

Other written responses also reflect visitor reception from a distance. Paul Hume's review of the Egyptian performers suggested the music dates to the "pharaohs," and when performed by young men and their grandfathers, shows the longevity of tradition.[800] While

[800] Paul Hume, "Egypt on the Mall," *Washington Post*, July 22, 1976, np.

describing his experience, the writer separated himself from the events and practices as if they had no contemporary component while repeating Orientalist stereotypes around Egypt and pharaohs—no doubt influenced by the Tutmania of the time. Journalists and participants also took note of diversity. Some were neutral-adjacent in their tone, simply explaining that audiences could see an Egyptian marriage procession or a Coptic mass at the festival.[801] One writer lamented the diversity on the mall, including a quote from Lucille Dawson, a participant in the Native Americans section, who noted that "we don't have anything to celebrate," instead suggesting people come to break down stereotypes. In the same text, the author explained that performers from the "African Diaspora" section participated to show the contributions of Black life to the US in an effort to offset the Revolution as the festival's historical marker.[802] While each attendee responded to the festival differently, it also seems that participants also had their own reasons for being a part of the project that did not necessarily align with the festival's overarching mission in an act of subtle subversion. Yet these tensions around coexistence and history were precisely the ones the festival aimed to resolve.

In the final year of OWNW, FAF importantly considered the nation and who fits within it by commemorating 200 years of history in twelve weeks. Beyond interactions with the performers, Mohamed also made the nation immediate, something which people could envision themselves in while projecting an optimistic multiculturalism for a new era of

[801] Harry Kelly, "A Festival of Global Proportions," *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1976, Folder Press Clippings 1974-1976, Box 216, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[802] Jacqueline Trescott, "American Folk Fest: Diversity on the Mall," *Washington Post*, May 30, 1976, 137.

American history. In the process of crafting the nation, in part through embroidery, the Smithsonian imposed a top-down view of diversity and an ethnographic view of the nation. Within these practices, the Smithsonian engaged with specific aspects of identity based on a larger agenda. While Tunisia and Lebanon's histories were whitewashed, Islam and Arab identity was embraced for Egypt at a critical moment of US foreign engagement. Despite its rhetoric to the contrary, the festival was not just cultural or educational, but a pathway for foreign relations, one which required highlighting diversity from around the world. In the end, it prompts a more important question: is the festival the venue to solve the conflicts of the nation and the tensions of a society in flux?

H. Conclusion: What about Now?

Following the 1976 Festival of American Folklife, "Old Ways in the New World" was disbanded, and the festival overall was in danger of ending too. There were conversations about the festival's long-term viability because of the resources it required, but the decision was made to continue the event in a condensed form because of its broad popularity and the ongoing importance of cultural investigations.[803] There was also broad public support, as seen in letters to the Smithsonian advocating for the importance of sharing and learning across cultures.[804] However, much of the festival's ethnographic research never went on

[803] Report: "The Festival of American Folklife After 1976 – where do we go?," Folder James Morris, Box 26, Series 2; Boris Weintraub, "Will There Be a Folklife Fest In '77?," *The Washington Star*, September 12, 1976, Folder Press Clippings 1974-1976, Box 216, Series 2; Letter from Shirley Cherkasky to Ali Akbar, October 19, 1976, Folder Pakistan Old Ways, Box 56, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[804] Letter from Lyle Mayfield to President Ford, July 7, 1976, Box 5, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

display, and financial challenges necessitated the termination of certain fieldwork projects.[805] In 1986, the Smithsonian acquired Folkways Records & Services Co., a small record label invested in sharing world music, as an arm of the Smithsonian's research project and a way to disseminate both folk and world music.[806] In 1996, the festival changed its name to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, divorcing itself from the many problems of what it means to be "American."[807] And in 2005, the Omani Pavilion was the first ever Arab pavilion at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.[808] The festival's form shifted over time to a structure that relied less on the categorizations seen from 1973–76 while still creating focused representations of specific countries or cultural groupings. The Smithsonian Folklife Festival continues today to uphold its mission of allowing people to present their own cultures.

The civilizational narratives of progression embedded within the Smithsonian's festival landscape as it unfolded on the National Mall reveal the very paradox of the festival's representational paradigms and now invite future questions about constructing Arab identity at the festival. Liberal pluralism shaped the festival's system of representation, which former

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[805] Letter from James R. Morris to Julian Euell, April 3, 1973, Folder Bicent. '75 Funds, Box 2, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[806] "About Us," Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, last modified unknown, https://folkways.si.edu/mission-and-history.

[807] Notably, this name change came following feedback about the lack of an American emphasis at the festival. Following the 1975 festival, an unnamed participant commented "Too much foreign. This is no longer a festival of American folklife" (emphasis in original). See: Anonymous Comment Card, Summer 1975, Folder 1975 Festival, Box 2, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[808] Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 654.

Smithsonian ethnographer Richard Bauman describes as one which "promulgates a symbolically constructed image of the popular roots of American national culture by traditionalizing, valorizing, and legitimizing selected aspects of vernacular culture drawn from the diverse ethnic, regional, and occupational groups seen to make up American society."[809] This can be seen in what the festival chooses to display, and how it arranges this content. In its topographical proximities and relationship, the festival maps propagate a relationship between immigrant and American identities from the nation's founding to its present diversity, positing a relationship where one gives way to the other.[810] While the Smithsonian argues that the festival allows people to present their own cultural traditions, what is showcased and how people navigate those displays is still mediated by the Smithsonian in its capacity to decide who participates and in what capacity, which is further influenced by governmental negotiations. As a part of this project, the festival brings overlooked cultures and traditions to the fore to foster dialogue that will lead to greater social cohesion. Yet inadvertently, the festival reiterates the power dynamics it aims to subvert, including that of museums, ethnography, and top-down representation, by mediating these representations and interactions; the festival's visual culture illustrates and expresses the power dynamics that facilitate this construction of the nation, and provide a framework for viewing previous iterations of the festival.

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[809] Bauman and Sawin, "The Politics of Participation in Folklife Festivals," 289; Bauman, *Reflections of the Folklife Festival*, 1.

[810] Such a rhetoric of progress brings FAF into dialogue with late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century World's Fairs. See: Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, 23; Anthony Shay, *Choreographing Identities: Folk Dance, Ethnicity and Festival in the United States and Canada* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), 157.

Despite its educational missions, the reality that FAF and OWNW were also diplomatic missions, something undoubtedly connected to its location in DC, was omitted from the public narrative, and now remains overlooked in scholarship on the subject.[811] If governments could negotiate festival collaborations, then audiences and performers could learn from each other, reiterating the people-to-people cultural democracy integral to the festival's planning.[812] In this way, the festival is actually an exercise in "cultural democracy" where art and culture are tools to equalize populations and build relationships.[813] While the public narrative did mention governmental negotiations were involved, the extent to which this was true was downplayed. Rethinking this aspect of festival planning ultimately shifts the ways that we understand how the festival allows participants to present their cultural traditions on their own terms.

Yet as this project studies representations of Arab diaspora populations in the 1970s, the Festival of American Folklife should be considered within a larger dialogue about how Arab identity was understood through festivals and museums in dialogue with the contemporary art world. While advocating for diversity and ensuring various forms of inclusion, the

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[811] Unclassified Memo, USINT Cairo, January 1973, Folder Egypt, Box 63, Series 2, SFF Papers, Ralph Rinzler Archives, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[812] This is also emphasized in the ways that international officials attended the festivals, such as the Queen visiting the Smithsonian. See: https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/when-queen-elizabeth-ii-visited-americas-castle. Ripley also went abroad to speak at the Smithsonian. See: "News from the Society: How the Smithsonian does it," *The British Museum Society Bulletin*, no. 22 (July 1976): 4.

[813] Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," 299. For Diamond, this notion of cultural democracy that Kurin discussed was pivotal to representations of Hawai'i, and the way the festival brought culture from the margins to the center to invite dialogue. See: Heather Diamond, *American Aloha: Cultural Tourism and the Negotiation of Tradition* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 3.

cultural hegemony of the institution and the US remained the primary framework for this representation. This was further mediated by American exceptionalism and interventionism that created an artificially induced spectacle of inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism. The Smithsonian obscured Arab identities, an omission that resonated with exclusionary American art world practices of the 1970s. Yet as institutions and governments engaged with Islam and the Arab world, Arab artists were actively working in the US to articulate their own identity and find their place in a proto-global art world. If the Festival of American Folklife co-opted the festival's form to teach people about Arab identity through history and traditions, then its dialectical pair is a generation of Arab artists who fashioned their own identities in alternative spaces that rejected or subverted the Western, colonial artistic styles that were transmitted to them. Festivals in the US, much like in the UK, offered a contrapuntal turn for artists to consider their identity and fashion resistance to the homogenization and institutionalization of identity. It is these tensions in identity and representation across institutions that contributes to the rise of contemporary Arab art in the US.

V. "It is definitely a lost opportunity:" Contemporary Arab Art in Washington, DC

A. Introduction

In 1994, *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World* opened at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC. Revolutionary in its conception and formation, the exhibition highlighted more than 50 women artists from the Arab world and its diasporas. Curated by Dr. Salwa Mikdadi, the pioneering scholar of modern and contemporary Arab art, the show was not only the first of its kind to highlight women artists from the Arab world in the US, but it was also unique in its emphasis on contemporary art from the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey broadly, a subject otherwise marginalized in mainstream American museums and commercial galleries. The artists who participated in the show are now at the forefront of the field and exhibited more often in Western museums, including Etel Adnan (Lebanese, 1925–2021), Huguette Caland (Lebanese, 1931–2019), Saloua Raouda Choucair (Lebanese, 1916–2017), Simone Fattal (b. 1942, Damascus, active Paris), Samia Halaby (Palestinian, b. 1936, active New York), Mona Hatoum (Palestinian-Lebanese, b. 1952), Helen Khal (Lebanese-American, 1923–2009), Mona Saudi (Jordanian, 1945–2022), and Laila Shawa (Palestinian, 1940–2022).[814]

An astute review of *Forces of Change* by Anne Mullin Burnham noted the exhibition's profound and innovative perspective, adding that while many of these artists would be new to

[814] Salwa M. Nashashibi, *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World* (Washington, DC: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994). Notably, Saudi was a close friend of Halaby, and the two often invited each other to participate in exhibitions and/or showed their work together.

American audiences, some might be familiar from their previous exhibitions at the Alif Gallery in Washington, DC.[815]

This chapter thus explores the little-known but formative Alif Gallery, a non-profit exhibition space and cultural center in Washington, DC, as another node within a constellation of alternative spaces supporting Arab artists in diaspora across the US and the UK. I argue that the Alif Gallery was a platform for Arab artists to share their subjective experiences and innovative artistic practices while simultaneously countering the exclusionary practices of mainstream museums and galleries, a mood shaped by xenophobic sentiments in the 1970s and beyond. As an artist-run space, the gallery was a critical venue for self-articulating identity, specifically hybrid identities for diasporic artists situated between intellectual and aesthetic frameworks around concepts of Arab, Arab-American, American, Islamic, modern, and contemporary, all of which were imbued with reflections on contemporary socio-political events. Although DC was not a hub for contemporary art at this moment, its proximity to the New York art world, with which many artists felt frustrated, and DC's political happenings, was pivotal to this moment; also important was the history of Arab artists studying in DC, which I will discuss later. While the gallery faltered due to financial challenges after eleven years, the space remains an important venue to understand the many ways artists created awareness about their work, and how these efforts impacted their future place in museum exhibitions and collections.

[815] Anne Mullin Burnham, "Reflections in Women's Eyes," *AramcoWorld* (January/February 1994): np. See: https://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/199401/reflections.in.women.s.eyes.htm.

The Alif Gallery was important in its time, but it was not the first venue in DC to present work by Arab artists. Beyond Madiha Umar's (Iraqi, 1908–2005) exhibitions mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the Committee of Arab Cultural Attaches with the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME) presented *Contemporary Arts of the Arab World* in 1960.[816] Umar was featured in this exhibition alongside notable members of the Casablanca School Farid Belkahia (Moroccan, 1934–2014) and Mohamed Melehi (Moroccan, 1936–2020), as well as Taïeb Lahlou (Moroccan, 1919–72) (whose work was featured contemporaneously at the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London), and Effat Nagui (or Nagy) (Egyptian, 1905–94), who was later included in *Forces of Change*. The organizers' goal was to teach people about the "cultural life of the Arab countries."[817] The Islamic Cultural Center in Washington, DC, also hosted exhibitions, including a solo show by Ali Omar Ermes (Libyan, 1945–2021) in 1976. The Catholic University in DC presented an exhibition by Kamal Boullata (Palestinian, 1942–2019) in 1982.[818] These are a few of many shows in the late twentieth century that existed throughout DC's unique landscape, one which was not yet a hub for contemporary art or a node within the art market constellation.

[816] Notably, "The Committee of Arab Cultural Attaches within the American Friends of the Middle East" started in 1958 to teach Americans, as mentioned, and in an effort to "present a true picture of various developments in the Arab world." Such a rhetoric around "true" representation recalls that of the World of Islam Festival and follows a similar approach and positionality. See: *Contemporary Arts of the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Committee of Arab Cultural Attaches, 1960), 1. AFME was later linked to the CIA, and was known for its pro-Arab position critical of American support of Israel.

[817] *Contemporary Arts of the Arab World*, 1, 10-15. For more information on the Casablanca School, see: Holiday Powers, "Geographies of Research, Geographies of Modernism," in *Knowledge Production: Examining Arab Art Today*, ed. Eline van der Vlist (Amman: Darat al funun, 2020). 33-7.

[818] Kamal Boullata, *Drawings for a Text* (Washington, DC: Attiyeh Foundation, 1982).

When viewed in tandem with these exhibitions and the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London, it does not seem like an accident or a coincidence that the Alif Gallery was established specifically in Washington, DC. At the time, DC was a political nexus, including for international diplomats and ambassadors from the so-called Middle East. The city also boasted an impressive National Mall with an array of museums that signaled to political visitors and tourists alike that they had arrived at a cultural mecca, one which still less diverse than today's National Mall. Yet simultaneously, DC's contemporary art scene was significantly less developed than its neighboring museums or the nearby panoply of galleries and alternative spaces in New York. Through the festival and other museum projects, DC established itself as a place for events dedicated to fostering understanding between populations; simultaneously, the city was trying to build its reputation as a museum city via the Smithsonian institution and support from private funding.[819] Likewise, it was a short train ride away from New York, where many Middle Eastern artists were living and working, like Halaby, Ahmed Morsi (Egyptian, b. 1930), and Nicky Nodjoumi (Iranian, b. 1942).

More importantly, Washington, DC was also establishing itself as an academic hub for the study of the so-called Middle East. A new building for the School of Advanced International Studies was finished in 1964, and the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University was established in 1975.[820] Beginning in 1995, Georgetown

[819] For a more thorough overview of this history, see: Neil Harris, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[820] Zachary Lockman, *Field Notes: The Making of Middle East Studies in the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), ix. "About," Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, last modified unknown, https://ccas.georgetown.edu/about/. The center is now housed within the Walsh School of

University also became the leader of Arabic language teaching and learning with the publication of the textbook colloquially known as *Al-Kitaab*, which is now the most commonly used Arabic language textbook—though not without its fair share of criticisms.[821] This academic transformation no doubt aligned with the city's political nature particularly following the psychic shock of the OPEC crisis that made the Arab world visible—and pictured it as a source of fear.

Returning to the Alif Gallery generates an opportunity to locate this venue within a larger network of alternative spaces, galleries, exhibitions, and a sphere of influences that shaped a specific rationale for engaging with art from the Arab world. The Alif Gallery was a venue for rendering experiences of diaspora, dispossession, self-exploration, and identity formation that made these questions both available and legible on a larger scale. The gallery's larger program resonates with a continued struggle for recognition and individuality seen for one in the 1970s at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, but now taking on a new persona. Yet the function and reception of the space was also impacted by the US' growing investment in the Middle East, prompting specific socio-political and religious frameworks for understanding.

Foreign Service. Lockman's book is excellent for understanding the new field of Middle East Studies in the United States.

[821] Anaïs Salamon, "Al-Kitaab fii Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya (Part Two): Book Review," *Middle East Librarians Association,* August 23, 2016, http://www.mela.us/2016/08/23/al-kitaab-fii-taallum-al-arabiyya-part-two-book-review/; Nancy Coffin, "*Al-Kitaab fii Taʿallum al-ʿArabiyya: A Textbook for Intermediate Arabic: Part Two, 3rd ed.* by Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal, Abbas Al-Tonsi," *Al-'Arabiyya* 48 (2015): 175-77. Students who have used *Al-Kitaab* know the quirks of the language program and its subtle political leanings all too well, such as in the way students learn how to say "veil" or "hijab" and "United Nations" as some of their first vocabulary words.

Simultaneously, this reconsideration of the Alif Gallery, like the careers of many of the artists it featured, is plagued by absence: of archives, photographs, and other extant materials that help to compose a comprehensive picture. To date, there has not been a scholarly study of the gallery. While the gallery published a few catalogues that provide some insight into its exhibitions, many other checklists remain unknown. Likewise, at present, the full history of exhibitions can only be gained by cross-checking periodicals and advertisements, which may omit certain projects. In what follows, I endeavor to outline the gallery's formation and purpose, identify its key actors, and analyze one exhibition while situating it within a larger context through a contrapuntal reading of these press records and narratives about artists' careers.

B. Founding the Alif Gallery

Amid DC's political and academic transformation, the Alif Gallery's parent organization was established in 1978: the Arab American Cultural Foundation. The foundation described its purpose as "devoted to extending and deepening the knowledge of Arab culture, particularly modern Arab culture, among the people of the United States. Toward this end, the Foundation sponsors programs which introduce audiences to the works of gifted Arab Americans and of Western specialists on the Arab world."[822] Reviewers responded by focusing on the foundation's goal of reaching the average American, not the academic or the politician.[823] The foundation's first project was to publish literature, including that of notable

[822] Gregory Orfalea, *US-Arab Relations: The Literary Dimension* (Washington, DC: National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, 1984), 44.

[823] Dima Zalatimo, "Alif Gallery: A Washington, DC Window on the Art of the Mideast," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* IX, no. 9 (Feb. 1991): 48.

Palestinian writers like Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) and Boullata, in addition to conducting a broad range of programs.[824] The foundation continued efforts by festivals and museums to educate people about Arab culture, but shifted its locus of articulation to emphasize contemporary Arab and Arab American voices, and more explicitly addressed contemporary art and culture than previous endeavors in the city. In its desire to build knowledge, the gallery foundation also located itself within conversations about cultural pluralism and multiculturalism in the US by working against any homogenizing or assimilationist views of Arab or Arab American populations.

As an extension of the foundation, the Alif Gallery opened in 1983, and was later revitalized in 1989 after financial issues threatened the gallery's livelihood in 1986.[825] One of the gallery's founders, Hisham Sharabi, suggested that the gallery was the first space to focus on Arab art.[826] The gallery's history coincides with a political transition where Arab

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[824] See: Adonis, *Adonis* (Washington, DC: Arab American Cultural Foundation, 1981); Kamal Boullata, *And Not Surrender: American Poets on Lebanon* (Washington, DC: Arab American Cultural Foundation, 1982); Sargon Boulus, *Arrival in where-city* (Washington, DC: Arab American Cultural Foundation, 1982); Mahmud Darwish, *Stranger in a Distant City* (Washington, DC: Arab American Cultural Foundation, 1981); Samuel John Hazo, *The First and Only Sailing* (Washington, DC: Arab American Cultural Foundation, 1981). In some instances, Boullata and his partner, Lily Farhoud, did the design and layout for the books.

[825] Zalatimo, "Alif Gallery," 48; *Middle East Organizations in Washington, DC* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 1989), 11. Carol Malt erroneously wrote that the gallery opened in 1984. See: Carol Malt, "An Overview of Islamic Art: Museums and Educational Opportunities in the United States," in *Islamic art resources in central Asia and eastern and central Europe: proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar for Islamic Art and Architecture,* ed. Wijdan Ali and Khalid Deemer (Amman: The University, 2000). This revitalization is also discussed as a brief closure due to financial constraints. See: Nuha Tabbara Hammoud, "Women Artists in Arab Countries," *Al-Raida* VIII, no. 44 & 45 (May-August 1988): 9.

[826] Hisham Sharabi, *Hishām Sharābī yarwī qiṣṣat thalāth mudun ʻāsha fīhā ʻAkkā wa-Bayrūt wa-Wāshinṭan* (Koln: Al-Kamel Verlag, 1994), front matter. The book title is

Americans were beginning to be recognized for their contributions to American life, including President George H.W. Bush proclaiming National Arab American Day in 1989.[827] The gallery's location also coincided with changes in the city and its key constituents. When the gallery opened, the foundation's location shifted from Virginia Avenue near Foggy Bottom and George Washington University to a new home at 1204 31st St. NW in the heart of Georgetown, a move that coincides with the academic affiliations of the gallery's collaborators.[828] Notably, Sharabi joined Georgetown University after completing his Ph.D. in 1953, and then co-founded the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies in 1975, and became the Umar Al-Mukhtar Chair in Arab Culture in 1977.[829] With this in mind, the gallery's program was largely rooted in the local, emphasizing partnerships and connections with those in the larger DC metro area, and thus advertising accordingly.

"Hisham Sharabi tells the story of three cities in Akka, Beirut, and Washington. Other periodicals of the time list other key players at the Alif Gallery, later including artist Helen Khal who joined around 1995. See: *Washington* (Washington: Potomac Books, 1995).

[827] Fayeq Oweis, *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), xiv.

[828] Joseph R. Haiek, *Arab American Almanac* (Glendale: News Circle Pub. Co., 1984), 76, 284. This book also lists other sites focused on Arab and Arab American culture throughout DC.

[829] Patricia Sullivan, "Arab Intellectual Hisham Sharabi, 77, Dies," *Washington Post* (January 15, 2005): https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2005/01/16/arab-intellectual-hisham-sharabi-77-dies/05d92fee-2e4a-4206-8dfa-fc3327c8b4d4/. Notably, Sharabi's endowed chairship was funded by the United Arab Emirates, as was some of the center itself. See: Lawrence Feinberg, "United Arab Emirates Gives GU $750,000 for A Chair in Arab Studies," *Washington Post* (May 12, 1980): https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1980/05/12/united-arab-emirates-gives-gu-750000-for-a-chair-in-arab-studies/be4813de-0d01-4438-8c03-2cd29bbbefad/.

The Arab American Cultural Foundation sent out a press release in October 1983 to announce the gallery's opening, which set the stakes and expectations of this new endeavor. The foundation heralded the gallery as the "first gallery in the United States devoted to art from the Arab world." The release goes on to explain that the gallery will highlight contemporary artists from the Arab world as well as Western artists who have taken an interest in the region to "promote cultural interaction" between the US and the Arab world.[830] Absent from this statement is a thorough overview of the Arab American Cultural Foundation's mission, including a summary of its proposed audience. Furthermore, even though the gallery is run by the Arab American Cultural Foundation, the press release does not mention Arab American audiences or art, instead explaining that this space and its programs will interest Arab and American audiences, language suggesting that there are two separate identities, but not a hybrid or marriage of the two.

One additional sentence from this press release deserves further attention in relation to the gallery's program and audience: "The last four decades have witnessed a renaissance in contemporary Arab art which has been acknowledged in Europe and in Asia and will now be presented to American audiences."[831] The earlier part of the sentence speaks to an artistic turn that informs the necessity of the gallery, and which is the foundation of this field's historiography. Both the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism profoundly impacted Arab artists as they invented new artistic styles; starting in the 1930s, the number of Arab

[830] "Press release: Opening of New Gallery in Georgetown to Feature Art from the Arab World," October 15, 1983, Alif Gallery (Washington, DC), Arab American Cultural Foundation, Art & Artist Files, Smithsonian American Art and Portrait Gallery Library, Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, Washington, DC.

[831] Ibid.

artists who studied abroad in the West greatly increased. At the same time, American collectors, such as Abby Weed Grey, also went abroad, returning with art from the Global South that was then shared with cultural institutions. These many factors are implicitly reference through the notion of a renaissance, which thus results in new visual languages derived from local, regional, and international dialogues, which the gallery will show. Venues like the Alif Gallery importantly created space for this line of inquiry by highlighting these artists, in turn upsetting Orientalist notions that persisted into the 21st century that there is no such thing as contemporary art from the Arab world and its diasporas.[832]

The latter part of the sentence points toward a history of exhibitions in Europe and Asia that the US will now follow through the Alif Gallery. This lineage is more complicated and dialogical than the original sentence suggests. Contemporary Arab art received a great deal of attention in Europe as seen in exhibitions like *Word Into Art* at the British Museum in 2006. This was likely because of the framework used to connect contemporary and historical Islamic art, but the history of Arab artists studying abroad in Europe was not irrelevant. Additionally, mainstream galleries in the UK, such as Patrick Seale, represented Arab artists before American galleries. However, contemporary Arab art had a much earlier history of being exhibited in the US, which is often overlooked. For example, Kahlil Gibran (Lebanese, 1883–1931) showed his work at Wellesley College in 1903, followed by a solo show hosted

[832] For example, a 2005 exhibition catalogue wrongly asserts that "There has never been any history of art in Arab countries," erroneously implying that there had been both no contemporary artistic practices and no effort to document them. See: Karin Von Roques, and Dieter Ronte, *Languages of the Desert: Contemporary Arab Art from the Gulf State* (Koln: DuMont, 2005).

by Fred Holland Day the next year.[833] Umar's earliest exhibitions in the US date to 1949, and continued sporadically throughout the 1950s and 1960s with both solo and group exhibitions. Halaby showed in Hawai'i, Missouri, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois throughout the 1960s and 1970s.[834] Umar participated in group shows like *Abstract Painting and Arabic Calligraphy* at the Corcoran Gallery in 1949, and *Arab Artists* at the Middle East Institute in 1960, among others. These events all prefaced those in London discussed in Chapter 3 and the Alif Gallery's formation. While the Alif Gallery was the first gallery dedicated to Arab art in the US, it inherits an extensive history, which is still being written, of efforts to present Arab artists globally.

The last function of the press release was to outline the gallery's inaugural exhibition program, which emphasizes abstraction. The 1983–84 season, as the release explains, focuses on "modern interpretations of Arabic calligraphy" as an ongoing source of inspiration for both decoration and self-expression.[835] Artists featured in the exhibition program included Adnan, Boullata, Dia al-Azzawi (Iraqi, b. 1939) (discussed at length in chapter 3), and Saudi, respectively. Calligraphy as a thematic organizational device is important for several reasons. First, by emphasizing Arabic calligraphy, the gallery harnesses a familiar subject to engage audiences with something new. Arabic calligraphy not only features prominently in the

[833] Isabella Kapur, "A Chronology of Kahlil Gibran's Life and Work," in *A Greater Beauty: The Drawings of Kahlil Gibran* (New York: The Drawing Center, 2023), 181, 183.

[834] Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert and Rachel Winter, "From Jerusalem to New York: Biography and Timeline of Samia Halaby," in *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, ed. Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert and Rachel Winter (Munich: Hirmer, 2024), 172-5.

[835] "Press release: Opening of New Gallery in Georgetown to Feature Art from the Arab World."

collection of the National Museum of Asian Art (neé the Freer-Sackler), but was also the subject of then-recent exhibitions like *Art of the Arab World* (Freer-Sackler, 1975).[836] Secondly, these four artists reflect multiple perspectives on life in diaspora across the US and Europe, as well as that of artists who remain in the Middle East. Such a program exemplifies the subjectivity and diversity of experiences that the gallery wished to promote while avoiding any homogenizing tendencies. This curatorial choice is an important preface to those used in subsequent decades to guide both collecting practices and exhibition frameworks that rely on calligraphy to present new artists by thinking about the relationships between past and present. Furthermore, for each of these artists, abstraction is their primary artistic approach, much like in London, thus illustrating the ways abstraction's malleability made it a conduit for engagement across audiences and contexts.

The Alif Gallery's educational cultural program emphasized the everyday American and put forward a public-facing narrative that glossed over its political connections. Through its co-founder Sharabi, the gallery was connected to Georgetown University. Although the gallery did not benefit from it in any obvious ways, Georgetown's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies was flush with funding from the UAE and connected to contentious gifts from Libya and Iraq.[837] Here, art, politics, education, and money collided. While the gallery did not have its own publication as the Iraqi Cultural Centre did with *Ur*, the Alif Gallery worked with journals like *Arab Perspectives* to publish exhibition reviews, and feature work

[836] See: Esin Atil, *Art of the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1975).

[837] Gene I. Maeroff, "University Returns $600,000 Libyan Gift," *New York Times* (February 24, 1981): https://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/24/us/university-returns-600000-libyan-gift.html.

exhibited at the gallery on its cover.[838] *Arab Perspectives*, however, was published by the Arab Information Center Main Office in Washington, DC, which was registered as an agent of the League of Arab States based in Tunisia.[839] The goal of the Arab Information Centers, much like the aforementioned Committee of Arab Cultural Attaches, was to "cater" to a new interest in the Arab world by Americans, and show a "true picture of Arab life, culture, development, aspirations and involvement in world affairs."[840] In this way, the foundation and gallery's goals echoed that of a government-related project, thus miring a cultural endeavor in a political realm, one reflective of DC's climate at the time—and one similar to the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife's program and its paradoxes.[841]

With the history, motivation, and networks informing the Alif Gallery in mind, in what follows I will consider the career of one artist who played a key role in the gallery and study his exhibition within the context of articulating identity and experience at the gallery.

C. On the role and exhibition of Kamal Boullata

Like Azzawi, who played a key role in the Iraqi Cultural Centre's development, Boullata was a significant figure in the Alif Gallery's formation. In the 1960s, Boullata relocated to

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[838] See for example *Arab Perspectives* 7, including the February-March, April-June, and Winter 1986 issues. How this partnership came about is unclear.

[839] *Arab Perspectives* 7 (February-March 1986): front matter. This volume also features a work by Egyptian painter Ahmed Maher Raef on the inside cover.

[840] *Arab Perspectives* 5 (January 1984): front matter.

[841] Richard Kurin, "The Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Museological Perspective," in *Folklife and Museums: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives,* ed. Kurt C. Dewhurst (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 2017), 298; Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By, and For the People* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 129.

DC. There, he began working in a new artistic style for which he is now known—colorful abstractions dominated by geometric reinterpretations of Arabic calligraphy. Boullata was the foundation's program director and Curator of the Alif Gallery from 1982–92.[842] In the initial gallery announcement, Boullata is listed as the gallery's program director, but not the curator, and Afaf Zurayk (Lebanese, b. 1948) is listed as the "art manager."[843] Zurayk stayed in the position for two years, but her role remains unclear, as her tenure at the institute has been overlooked in comparison to Boullata.[844] Boullata's job was multifaceted, including programming exhibitions, coordinating events, and laying out books, sometimes even illustrating publications (often with his partner Lily Farhoud). He also played a key role in procuring funding for the gallery, including testifying at Senate hearings.[845] During this period, Boullata intermittently taught about Arab art at Georgetown, a role that partially elucidates the reason Georgetown was a frequent collaborator.[846] Boullata also gave many guest lectures on Islamic and contemporary Arab art throughout the DC area.[847] Following

[842] Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, *In/Visible: Contemporary Art by Arab American Artists* (Dearborn: Arab American National Museum, 2005), 16; Oweis, *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists*, 66.

[843] "Press release: Opening of New Gallery in Georgetown to Feature Art from the Arab World."

[844] Nashashibi, *In/Visible*, 23.

[845] US Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, 98th Congress, 2nd sess., 1985, np. The hearing included the Department of the Interior and related agencies and considered appropriations for fiscal year 1985 related to H.R. 5973.

[846] Oweis, *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists*, 66. Boullata also designed the logo for what is now the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown. See: https://ccas.georgetown.edu/about/mission/.

[847] Finbarr Barry Flood, *There Where You Are Not: Selected Writings of Kamal Boullata* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2019), fn 8.

the gallery's dissolution, Boullata became a member of the Arab American Cultural Foundation's board.[848]

Boullata oversaw ten years of exhibition programs in his capacity as program director and curator. The gallery's exhibition program, under Boullata's watchful eye, holistically reconsidered the past and present of the region and its diasporas, which in turn offered audiences the opportunity to gain a semi-comprehensive understanding of the region through its visual and material culture. The Alif Gallery hosted numerous solo shows of artists both in diaspora and who remained in the region, such as Suad al-Attar (Iraqi, 1942–2022) and Sari Khoury (Palestinian, 1941–97). There were also thematic shows that reconsidered key artistic themes, such as *Beyond Arabesque* (1985), highlighted underrepresented artists, as seen in *Arab and Arab American Artists* (1985) and *Four Iraqi Artists* (1994), and occasionally, focused shows on historical questions, such as about Bedouin Weaving (1992).[849] For Boullata, artists like Khoury were close friends, meaning he spent a great deal of time learning about their work, and developing deep relationships that exceeded the gallery's walls.[850]

With Boullata's central role in mind, it is also not surprising that he also had an exhibition at the gallery within its first year. Following the gallery's inaugural exhibition

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[848] *Washington* (Washington: Potomac Books, 1995), 662. Helen Khal was also a board member at this time.

[849] For more on *Four Iraqi Artists*, see: Charles Pocock and Dia al-Azzawi, eds., *Art in Iraq Today* (Milan: Skira, 2012), 280.

[850] The Estate of Sari Khoury, conversation with the author, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, July 2023.

featuring Adnan, Boullata's show ran from early December 1983 until January 14, 1984.[851] The show primarily featured prints, and it was advertised in both local and national periodicals, such as *The Washington Post*, perhaps to draw in a local and national audience.[852] As a successor to Adnan's exhibition, which focused on contemporary interpretations of poetry, Boullata's show ruminated on similar questions; these questions and answers were each translated into visual forms featuring unique interpretations of Arabic calligraphic shapes. After it closed, Boullata's show was supposed to travel to the Middle East and Europe, but I have not found any archival evidence to suggest this came to fruition.[853]

Press published at the time helps to reconstruct a sense of what Boullata exhibited in the absence of a checklist and curatorial statement. The Alif Gallery's press release described Boullata's show in vague terms, noting that "words have become the subject" of his art, which makes Arabic "seen as much as read" by considering the "structural, geometric aspect of Arabic calligraphy."[854] Although it is not clear who wrote the press release, it is possible Boullata contributed to or even wrote the description of his work. Furthermore, the

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[851] "Press release: Opening of New Gallery in Georgetown to Feature Art from the Arab World"; "This Week," *The Washington Post* (December 22, 1983): VAB9.

[852] "This Week," VAB9; "Galleries," *The Washington Post* (December 23, 1983): WK30; "Galleries," *The Washington Post* (December 9, 1983): W50; "Galleries," *The Washington Post* (December 16, 1983): WK49. Only one of these ads varies from the description as one of prints to one of calligraphy.

[853] Michael Welzenbach, "The art of Kamal Boullata," *Arab Perspectives* 4 (February 1984): 8. It is possible Lily Farhoud might have photographs or records, but I was not able to contact her within the time available.

[854] "Press release: Opening of New Gallery in Georgetown to Feature Art from the Arab World."

description is one which blurs the previously discussed boundaries between *hurufiyyah* as a visual element and calligraphy as possessing semantic meaning. Later, Boullata described his exhibition in hindsight as reflecting a decade of experimentation with prints inspired by and interpreting Arabic text.[855] After the show, *Arab Perspectives* profiled Boullata in 1984 and reproduced some of the works that were likely exhibited, including: *La Ana Illa Ana* (There is no I but I) (1983); *The Alif and the Ya* (1983); *Kun Fayakun* (Be and it becomes); *Wa Fi Anfusikom Afala Tubsirun* ("And it is within your own selves, will you not then see?" from Quran 51:21); and *Lam Alif*; *Ana-l-Haqq* ("I am the Creative Truth" – Al-Hallaj).[856] Another review mentioned the works *Light upon Light* and *Here and Now*.[857] There are no photographs remaining of the exhibition or the gallery, and Boullata's archives are not readily available to researchers, making it difficult to understand the narrative arc of the exhibition, or how audiences encountered his work.

One work that was likely featured in Boullata's exhibition is now ubiquitous within contemporary art historical discourse: *La Ana Illa Ana* (There is no I but I) made in 1983—the year of the exhibition (see Figure 5-1). As such, this work deserves further attention. The print is divided into two sections of color, one a muted Azul, the other a green-tinted gold. Parallel evergreen lines define the upper half of the composition and give way to fragmented shapes and lines first against an evergreen background, then an Azul one; the lines and colors on the top and bottom are the inverse of each other. On a formal level, Boullata's

[855] Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art, 1850-2005* (London, Berkeley: Saqi, 2009), 254.

[856] Welzenbach, "The art of Kamal Boullata," front matter, 2, 8-12.

[857] Michael Kernan, "A Light Within," *The Washington Post* (December 28, 1983): B7. The verse from the Qur'an is also reiterated as an exhibited work.

composition plays with the relationships between color and perception. Boullata's geometric abstractions also extend to a conceptual level by reinterpreting the Arabic phrase "La Ana Illa Ana," or "There is no I but I." The elongated shapes of the letters *lam*, *alif*, *nuun*, and *alif hamza* (all of which comprise the words la, ana, illa, and ana) are transformed into the elongated parallel lines that dominate the composition. The breaks between lines, which feature small interjecting squares, represent the singular dot that tops the *nuun*. *Lam* and *alif* are connected when written, which is now depicted through the horizontal connections between parallel lines. The curvilinear lines of Arabic calligraphy, as seen in something like the Qur'an, are transformed into unique angular, geometric segments that toy with and surpass the elongated nature of historical Kufic scripts. Contemporary interpretations of Arabic calligraphy are not only typical of Boullata's work, but also resonate with a larger inquiry posed by different artists at the time into the Arabic letter as a malleable artistic form, including at the Alif Gallery.

Through his semantic and aesthetic reinterpretation of the phrase *La Ana Illa Ana*, Boullata makes words into his subject, to return to the language of the press release. He does this by taking the shapes of the letters that make up the words and making it the primary visual feature of his work. As one reviewer noted, and as this work exemplifies, the text featured in Boullata's exhibition engaged with sayings from the Qur'an and other common phrases.[858] On Boullata's mind, however, was also his father's house in Jerusalem, and defining thresholds through geometry to symbolize a longing for return to his home in Palestine.[859] The idea of threshold and return is also evident in the formal characteristics of

[858] Welzenbach, "The art of Kamal Boullata," 12.

[859] Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 96.

his work: between legible and illegible, abstraction and realism, text and image, semantics and aesthetics. His approach to the text mimics the ways that elongated iterations of texts, such as the name of a ruler or a Qur'anic benediction, could mark the entrance to a space or adorn a threshold, such as at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Boullata's work similarly operates between thresholds where one passes from seeing calligraphy as a source of information to a contemporary aesthetic marvel or innovation. Collectively, these visual sources and modes of interpretation also speak to his life at a threshold between home and away, neither of which is bound to one location, as well as crossing between different aesthetic sources, and longing for return but finding himself displaced. *La Ana Illa Ana* represents not only Boullata's individual artistic ruminations and experimentations, but his exhibition also provides a window into an intersection of styles, many of which draw on personal experience, that are emblematic of larger presentations that question diaspora and new artistic styles at the gallery.

The notion of the threshold was also invoked around the reception of Boullata's work. Noting the work's contemplative qualities that reveal themselves in time, Michael Welzenbach wrote that viewers may be "struck" by the "Western appearance" of Boullata's calligraphic prints.[860] In the same review, Welzenbach cites Boullata saying that, having lived in the West for 20 years at that time, that Western art had influenced him, but his roots and primary inspiration remain in calligraphy, explaining that his self-expression remained "Arab."[861] In Michael Kernan's review, he similarly posits Boullata's work and historical art

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[860] Welzenbach, "The art of Kamal Boullata," 12.

[861] Ibid.

more broadly as the solution to Western art's problem of being unable to "reconcile the word and the picture."[862] For Kernan, "Arabs… made pictures out of the words themselves," as exemplified by the work of Boullata, language which echoes the description of Boullata's work in the press release and Dagher's description of *hurufiyyah*.[863] By employing the tools of Western abstraction, many perceived Boullata's work as shifting from something solely "Arab" or "Islamic" into a hybrid that drew together different life experiences and artistic styles into a visual composition.

Boullata's work operated at a threshold between different artistic styles, and in turn, lived experiences, exemplifying the very learning and exchange the gallery and foundation were interested in exploring and sharing further. In this way, Boullata's practice is paradigmatic of the gallery's larger exhibition program as it highlighted those who adopted, adapted, and appropriated different artistic sources to render experiences of diaspora, exile, and hybrid identities in all their nuances. While abstraction is certainly utilized throughout the Arab world, seen in examples ranging from Dome of the Rock to other modern artists of Boullata's generation, Boullata and his contemporaries also argued for a new version of abstraction, as did subsequent artists. For example, Saudi's gestural abstract sculptures presented in 1985 considered themes of relationships and families. Also in 1985, Khoury's abstract paintings interpreted the iconography of his home in Palestine into a rumination on his then-present experiences in exile and Michigan. Khoury's abstraction endeavored to subvert geometry and color fields while rejecting Western claims to non-referentiality. Artists like Boullata and his

[862] Kernan, "A Light Within," B7.

[863] Ibid.

contemporaries thus reclaimed the potential of modern abstraction to share their lived experiences, making the language of Western abstraction a pliable means to articulate identity while rejecting its past life as a marker for asserting difference or metric for denigrating their artistic practices.

Boullata's role at the Alif Gallery reaffirms a larger finding of this research: that the investment in highlighting Arab artists was led by other Arab artists. In other words, it was not curators or board members who broke ground in this initiative. Rather, Boullata, along with Zurayk and others, made the seemingly unthinkable happen: Arab artists shared each other's work and built awareness about new artistic practices when opportunities were otherwise not available. In turn, these artists liberated themselves from mainstream museum and gallery structures that failed to see or understand Arab art. These considerations arise from the potential to share subjective experiences through abstraction, and the role of artists, like Boullata in others, as historiographers, archivists, and art historians of this shifting movement.[864] And indeed, these artists not only created shared frameworks for conversation around diaspora and identity through their exhibitions, but also through larger writing projects that addressed the struggle to overcome alienation and isolation in diaspora, and general disillusionment about being an Arab artist in the US while struggling to identify a style or find a venue to share their work.[865] If only for a short time, the Alif Gallery at least

[864] See: Flood, *There Where You Are Not.*

[865] On these feelings, see: Wasma' Khalid Chorbachi, "Arab Art Twenty Years Later," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 1989): 143-54; Helen Khal, "Contemporary Art in the Arab Middle East." *The Social Studies* 72, no. 4 (1981): 165-9; Sari Khoury "Immigrant Arab Artists: Themes of Alienation." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 1989): 167-72.

helped artists to overcome the problem of finding a venue to share their work by implicitly validating their artistic endeavors.

D. Between the Festival and the Gallery

While the Festival of American Folklife ended its engagement with the Arab world before the Alif Gallery opened, there was an ongoing connection between the two venues throughout the gallery's short life. For one, Halim el-Dabh, the important Egyptian American composer and ethnomusicologist, was a shared collaborator. From 1975–81, el-Dabh periodically worked as a consultant on behalf of the Smithsonian who researched parts of the Middle East and the African continent as well as their parallel cultural practices in the US. El-Dabh's fieldwork and scholarship framed the presentation of Egyptian populations at the Smithsonian bicentennial festival.[866] Following this, el-Dabh was invited to perform at Georgetown in 1991 in a program sponsored by the Arab American Cultural Foundation designed to promote Arabic poetry. He performed a poem and invited dancers to accompany him in an effort to reveal the relationship between music and poetry. Notably, and contrary to the festival, the work el-Dabh performed considered the falling of empires.[867] Transitioning from the place of Egypt in the US mosaic, el-Dabh's subsequent work with the Foundation and gallery shifted discussions of Egypt back to its own terms, considering not only the roots of its identity, but also that which has imperiled it.

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[866] Denise A. Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim el-Dabh* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 119-25. Ripley supposedly wrote a letter saying that anyone who was helping el-Dabh was also assisting the US government.

[867] Ibid., 137. The program and its thinking were documented in a publication. See: *Music of the Nile* (Washington, DC: Arab American Cultural Foundation, 1991). This book was another designed by Boullata and his partner Lily Farhoud.

The other parallel between the two organizations also occurred in a subsequent edition of the Festival of American Folklife. In 1990, the festival and gallery mutually supported each other in the Arab American Cultural Foundation's "Musics of Struggle Program." While the foundation launched the program, the festival provided additional support, and the two collaborated on different events at the festival. The program's goal, in conjunction with the festival's theme, was to consider how communities in the US and abroad used music to make their voices heard amid social and political struggles.[868] This intersection, however, is paradoxical. For the Smithsonian, presenting the music of social justice aligned with its efforts to highlight underrepresented voices in struggles against injustice, including those in the US. However, this was within the context of the US nation, which has not always been welcoming of Arab and Arab American populations. Meanwhile, at the Alif Gallery, programs like this were similarly designed to highlight underrepresented voices outside of imperial frameworks. Much more remains to be studied about this event, how music and struggle were defined, how the two different institutional frameworks coalesced, and what the lasting impacts of this partnership were.

Future scholarship should also more broadly consider the way the Alif Gallery and the Festival of American Folklife operated within a similar cultural sphere. Both institutions began from a similar premise by noting the absence of spaces to support a particular group and their cultural practices. Each institution constructed their own venue to address this problem. In their own way, each also allowed for creative practitioners to share their work and find support previously lacking: while the festival did this through performances and

[868] 1990 *Festival of American Folklife (Souvenir Program)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 6, 56.

people, the gallery did this through objects and exhibitions. Both strayed from normative ideologies around festivals and galleries. The resulting questions of identity incited ongoing conversations whose impact remains ripe for further consideration.

E. Conclusion

Over 50 exhibitions and numerous programs later, abundant fiscal issues finally reached their breaking point, and the Alif Gallery closed in 1994. Reflecting on its closure, former director Lama Dajani lamented that "At a time when America was really ready to listen and experience our activities, we had to close down… it is definitely a lost opportunity."[869] And indeed, it was a lost opportunity as a platform to rethink art historical discourse on a larger scale, not least of which because it was the only venue of its kind in DC.[870] It is not difficult to imagine the types of shows and dialogues that could have emerged from the gallery in subsequent years, including those it could have hosted alongside or following the turning point that was *Forces of Change*. Yet our studies of Arab American artists and Arab artists in diaspora remain underdeveloped, in part because the archives of critical venues, like the Alif Gallery, are now lost.

Read in comparison to the Iraqi Cultural Centre, the Alif Gallery shows the many ways in which alternative spaces operated and survived in the late twentieth century. Both were largely artist-run spaces, and helped to bring attention to their contemporaries in ways that had a lasting impact. While the Alif Gallery did not have the same kind of direct political

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[869] Carol Malt, "An Overview of Islamic Art," 182.

[870] In his list of resources for Arab American artists, Oweis does not list any other contemporaneous resources in DC. See: Oweis, *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists*, 273-9.

affiliations, the gallery still ended up adjacent to political concerns. Furthermore, while the Alif Gallery did not have the same publication capacity as the Iraqi Cultural Centre, it still found a way to disseminate its exhibitions and adjacent thinking through other venues.[871] While the Alif Gallery had the support of private foundations, it was still not enough to survive, but nor was the government support the Iraqi Cultural Centre received. More importantly, both spaces uniquely created exhibitions that would be formative to larger historiographies of the field, thus prompting the need for further study of alternative spaces from a global perspective, as well as a study of their institutional structures.

The Alif Gallery, however, still served its purpose in its short life by giving Arab and Arab American artists a space to show their work, articulate their identity, and have a platform for discourse about individual and collective pressing issues when institutions would not otherwise consider their work. In this way, artists could work through their style in dialogue with others, and in turn, process and share their own experiences. If individual shows put forward a series of case studies, then group shows created a larger framework that synthesized this material to support future study. Group shows like *Arab Artists* in 1985 and *Contemporary Arab Art* in 1990 endeavored to present a broader field not as something homogenous or singular, but as something distinct yet overlooked and worthy of consideration.

The effort of alternative spaces like the Alif Gallery to share this material and foreground artists' voices later paved the way for major institutions to collect and curate contemporary

[871] For examples, see: Kamal Boullata and Suad al-Attar, "Speaking Of," *Arab Perspectives* 5 (December 1984): 22-3; Helen Khal, "Exhibition Shows Development of Modern Arab Art," *Arab Perspectives* 8 (January 1986): np; Helen Khal, "The Art of Saloua Choucair," *Arab Perspectives* 6 (March 1985): 26-31.

artists from the Middle East. In its 1980s heyday, Arab artists in diaspora were just starting to be featured in mainstream museum collections or gallery shows. Towards the mid-to-late 1990s, this began to change as people like Ali Omar Ermes entered the collection of the Smithsonian and more. This number would only increase in the early 2000s and beyond. Those artists featured in early shows at the gallery like Adnan, Attar, and Khal would go on to be featured in *Forces of Change*, and later become a part of major museum collections. If the goal was to create awareness, then in this manner, it succeeded. To reconsider venues like the Alif Gallery is to attend to the ways that not only artists sought to speak to their own experiences, but the ways that artists and alternative spaces were their own greatest advocates in the late 20th century, which had major ramifications on 21st century art world happenings.

VI. Conclusion

A. Future Lines of Inquiry

This dissertation outlined a preliminary overview of the multifaceted network of forces that played a role in shaping museum collections in the late twentieth century, which then influenced twenty-first century exhibitions. While the 1970s was a time when new artistic practices and alternative spaces proliferated, this period also illustrates the unique conditions of possibility that defined and informed a proto-global art world.[872] This art world is not confined to museums and galleries, nor was the one Howard Becker outlined, but includes festivals (both mainstream and alternative), alternative spaces, and other independent activities as interconnected creative pathways. Reconsidering this period and recovering its underrepresented voices thus requires a contrapuntal reading of both archives, institutional narratives, and personal or familial recollections to see the bilateral artistic exchange occurring at this time and its lasting effects. This study is one example of that, the results of which contribute to the histories of museums, alternative spaces, festivals, American art, SWANA art, and diasporic artists while also expanding definitions of cultural diplomacy, rethinking the historiography of alternative publications, and shifting the locus of enunciation

[872] Although not addressed in detail here, the 1970s is also a part of a larger reconsideration of the avant-garde in transition. See: Jean-Thomas Tremblay and Andrew Strombeck, eds., *Avant-gardes in crisis: art and politics in the long 1970s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021).

in museums and art history.[873] In what follows, I reiterate the main findings of this project in order to offer initial thoughts on future lines of inquiry and their broader relevance.

B. On Festivals

Chapter 2 explored the 1976 World of Islam Festival held in London. I argued that the festival's broader argument for unity between Muslims and Christians during a period of racial and religious tensions was visualized, refined, and propagated through the festival's anchoring exhibition *The Arts of Islam* (Hayward Gallery). The visual features of Islamic art, when narrated through the lens of unity in diversity in the exhibition, modeled new possibilities for coexistence in contemporary Britain. Such a project was made possible in part by the complex network of museums scattered throughout and constitutive of the city, thus constructing a stage for which to display and disseminate this object-based narrative. Through its loans from what organizers referred to as "Moslem governments," the many exhibitions also served to highlight the wealth of visual culture held by the sites of Britain's imperial reach (as opposed to the objects already housed in Britain). The primary site of learning was in museums, and objects were the primary bearers of knowledge, making the larger moniker of a festival an umbrella term to encompass a series of exhibitions and its accompanying programs. The festival, while unique and impressive in its scope and scale, was a spectacle of inclusion in the way it presented and theorized Islamic art as a world apart from London's museological ecosystem.

[873] On the locus of enunciation, see: Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Returning to the World of Islam Festival invites a broader study of festivals in the late twentieth century from a global perspective where festivals are read contrapuntally against each other, current events, and institutional narratives. This research would bolster more recent scholarship on World's Fairs in the late twentieth century, such as by Arthur P. Molella and Scott Gabriel Knowles.[874] On one hand, the World of Islam Festival expands our current understanding of the ways British festivals imagined the nation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; this transition can also be studied in relation to the evolving form of World's Fairs. On the other hand, when considered in comparison with the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, major differences emerge in the festival's form as it shifts from object to performance, museum to park, city to city, and global to domestic. These differences are parallel to the way select visual cultures are employed at different times to achieve specific goals, including Islamic art.

However, I would advocate that there are two pressing questions to consider further. First, in what ways does the seemingly neutral façade of festivals as cultural and educational endeavors mask the workings of cultural diplomacy? While the World of Islam Festival was advertised as a purely cultural event entirely divorced from politics, negotiations between festival organizers and foreign governments were integral to ensuring the festival's success. Furthermore, governments in the Arab world were critical to the festival's financial health. Yet Arab governments were not given an opportunity to shape the festival or have a say in how they were represented. As such, the case of the World of Islam Festival is a catalyst for

[874] See: Arthur P. Molella and Scott Gabriel Knowles, *World's fairs in the Cold War: Science, Technology, and the Culture of Progress* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

thinking about how festivals were venues for cultural diplomacy at both interpersonal and governmental levels. This line of inquiry pushes beyond the current literature, which is focused on exhibitions, as well as beyond popular case studies involving Iran and King Tutankhamen, to include new types of objects and events that were appropriated for the sake of relationship building.[875]

Secondly, how was the festival's adopted and adapted by different state and non-state actors globally during the era of decolonization? And in what examples of this did the focus shift from objects to people, or vice versa? The World of Islam Festival is one example, and its rhetoric around nation building resonated with previous events in London, like the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition and the 1951 Festival of Britain. As demonstrated, the World of Islam Festival is also part of a larger constellation of independent festivals engaged with questions around individual and collective identity. While Amin Alsaden is actively working in this field, including his recent study of the Arab Biennial in Baghdad, there is more work to be done related to outlining the scope, content, and approach of these festivals across the late twentieth century, and to read these festivals contrapuntally against each other as they articulated their own locus of enunciation.[876] A comparative reading of these festivals in both a SWANA and a global context will augment the broader work on events like PANAF,

[875] On exhibitions for cultural diplomacy, see: Edith Porada and Richard Ettinghausen, *7,000 Years of Iranian Art* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1964). On King Tutankhamen, see: *Treasures of Tutankhamun: Held at the British Museum, 1972* (London: British Museum, 1972); *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[876] Amin Alsaden, "Baghdad's Arab Biennial: Regional Subversions, Global Ambitions," *Third Text* 33, no. 1 (2019): 121-50.

FESTAC, and Latin American biennials as well as broader theorizations of festivals and exhibitions, like that by Caroline Jones.[877] Collectively, these questions are the foundation for a larger study of festivals in the third world from a decolonial perspective that subverts the hegemony of nation states and festivals in the West, which thus has the potential to alter the Western nation-state-centric history of festivals by illustrating the capacity of festivals to be malleable and subversive.

C. On Alternative Spaces

Chapter 3 provided a second contrapuntal reading of the World of Islam Festival in relation to questions of contemporary art. I argued that the festival's neglect of contemporary art was the dialectic pair to the way alternative spaces engaged with contemporary artists in diaspora from the SWANA region during and after the festival, particularly artists from countries who felt the direct impact of Britain's declining imperial rule. While Arab artists had been working in Britain prior to the 1970s, as discussed, this moment marked a turn where there was increased interest in their work, which prefaced their later place in major institutional exhibitions and collections. This specific moment was not the spectacle inclusion, but the major thematic survey exhibitions that these artists were later featured in became the spectacle as it proclaimed the novelty of art from the SWANA region in the Western art world through a Western lens.

[877] Caroline Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Alejandra Uslenghi, *Latin America at Fin-de-Siècle Universal Exhibitions: Modern Cultures of Visuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

This chapter's focus on the Iraqi Cultural Centre offers a point of entry into a larger history of alternative spaces in a global, diasporic context that has yet to be fully written. Such a study requires a redefinition of alternative spaces in the context of SWANA artists and their diasporas, but also a constellational mapping of the locations, dates, and actors involved to understand the networks that connect these venues, many of which were run by artists. While the Iraqi Cultural Centre had other outposts globally that may be of interest, this line of thinking also intersects with the mobility of artists' groups as they met in new locations, but which were also transnational by nature.[878] In this way, SWANA artists and their diasporas made art worlds for themselves both to create the support they needed for themselves and each other, but also to defy the systems that excluded them.[879] A similar contrapuntal, constellational methodology can be employed here; this methodology will also help to transcend the archive in order to sketch a fuller picture.

A global inquiry into alternative spaces, however, is not divorced from the question of cultural diplomacy and festivals. In the case of the Iraqi Cultural Centre, its survival was in no small part thanks to the Iraqi government, who wished to improve their image abroad. Some contemporary festivals likewise benefitted from government support. As such, it is

[878] For one example of both alternative spaces and the relationships between artists and artists groups, see: Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti, eds., *Past disquiet: Artists, international solidarity, and museums-in-exile* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2018).

[879] On the definition of art worlds, see: Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Another way of thinking about such a fabrication of art worlds and spaces is to compare the practices discussed here to that of the way Black women artists in Britain during the 1980s curated each other's work as a means of survival and support. See: Amrita Dhallu, "What is the Strategy? Towards Breaking the Cycle," in *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–90*, ed. Linsey Young (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 288-89.

important to reconsider how alternative spaces were shaped by government involvement, and in this vein, how contemporary art becomes entangled with the project of cultural diplomacy.[880] Such a reconsideration promises to reshape both the fields of cultural diplomacy and alternative spaces in a global perspective.

D. On Festivals Redux

Chapter 4 questioned the place of Arab and Arab American/Arab diaspora populations at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife (FAF) within the program "Old Ways in the New World" (OWNW) from 1973–76. I explained the festival's method for identifying participants from the Arab world based on the "cultural cognate" in order to argue that the festival constructed a specific notion of Arab identity within a US-centric lens to project a restricted idea about the American nation on the occasion of its bicentennial. As an up-and-coming city, one whose museums were not engaged with contemporary art from the SWANA region, the festival's definition of identity required a different approach. Like the World of Islam Festival, FAF also put forward ideas for a new social order, but it did so through a performance-based program instead of object-based learning, in part because of the perceived and actual inadequacies of museums and objects. This mode of representation dipped in and out of the melting pot as it visualized and modeled different possibilities for multicultural coexistence in the US. Furthermore, FAF was a spectacle of inclusion in the

[880] A recent study in the question of modern/contemporary art and cultural diplomacy relates to Abby Weed Grey. See: Sarah-Neel Smith, "Forgotten Geographies of Artistic Diplomacy: Abby Weed Grey and U.S.-Middle East Exchanges in the 1960s," in *Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights from NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection*, ed. Lynn Gumpert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 123-34.

ways it constructed a space apart for specific non-Western populations leading up to and for the bicentennial, only later to exclude them.

As the first study to focus Arab populations at FAF, there are several questions prime for further research. Within the context of the festival itself, there is more work to be done understanding how Arab diaspora communities were included in the festival after the conclusion of "Old Ways in the New World."[881] Furthermore, OWNW can be analyzed from the field of musicology, and its adjacent touring program should also be reconsidered. Likewise, the role of performance could be studied both within OWNW and across the festival writ large, particularly as it brings a contemporary face to the ways World's Fairs featured performances by non-Western audiences. The inclusion of Arab communities at the festival also prompts a larger question: in what ways did the nation-state model of festivals and World's Fairs continue or transform at the Festival of American Folklife (or the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, upon its name change)? Although the Smithsonian did not employ national pavilions, participation remained rooted in national affiliations, suggesting an evolution and adaptation of the nation-state model in a contemporary context.

Questions around the nation are the foundation for a new study of festivals and World's Fairs in the late twentieth century, both in a domestic and a global perspective, but more importantly, in relation cultural diplomacy.[882] The World of Islam Festival is also a part of

[881] Heather Diamond's study on Hawai'i can be a model for this study. See: Heather Diamond, *American Aloha: Cultural Tourism and the Negotiation of Tradition* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

[882] Much of the basis for this thinking can be traced by to Joseph Nye's description of soft power. See: Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

this line of inquiry. FAF similarly relied on intergovernmental negotiations to shape its program. Similarly, both programs projected a purely cultural, educational message, yet politics distinctly shaped the programs. FAF's iteration of cultural diplomacy was bilateral, meaning both parties were participating to project a specific image abroad in relation to their own goals, thus expanding our thinking about cultural diplomacy and the methodologies used to frame these studies while pushing these questions towards contemporary case studies.[883] As this study has suggested, festivals promoted new ideas about the nation-state, but did not use contemporary art to do so or promote contemporary art as related to or indicative of national identity.

Finally, taken together, both festivals prompt further questions about the role and definition of art and craft at festivals versus in museums. This question augments recent studies of craft, such as at Crystal Palace.[884] Objects of Islamic art, which were defined as "art," were used at the World of Islam Festival as a teaching device within the museum. The medium of these objects, including textiles and ceramics, were defined and employed as examples of craft at the Festival of American Folklife, including with Ethel Wright Mohamed. As such, how are objects from different cultures made in a similar manner and from a similar medium defined as art or craft depending on the space in which they are utilized, and along what rationale? This inquiry will extend the recent museological work in

[883] For an example of recent thinking on this, see: Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Baden: Lars Muller, 2008).

[884] Jason Busch, Caroline Futter, and Regina Lee Blaszczyk, eds., *Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (New York: Skira, Rizzoli, 2012).

Islamic art history, but also the question of craft at festivals, and the perennial question of the boundary between art and craft.[885]

E. On Arab American Art Histories

Finally, chapter 5 studied the Alif Gallery in Washington, DC as a corollary to London's Iraqi Cultural Centre. I argued that the Alif Gallery was an important space for artists to articulate their identities and share their experiences, which also laid the foundation for a new historiography of Arab diaspora artists through their exhibitions and adjacent publications by acknowledging the myriad influences on these artists. The Alif Gallery, much like the Iraqi Cultural Centre, struggled to remain separate from politics, specifically because of its programming around Palestinian liberation more so than its source of funding.[886] The lack of an archive complicates our understandings of this space and hinders a comprehensive view of its history, yet the space is important in no small part because of its location within a burgeoning city that lacked a major contemporary art infrastructure.[887] A small and

[885] On the question of craft's hierarchies, see: Glenn Adamson, *Craft: An American History* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021); Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019).

[886] On the Alif Gallery's relationship to Palestinian liberation, see: Keith P. Feldman, "Zionism and Anti-Zionism: A Necessary Detour, Not a Final Destination," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (December 2015): 1067-73. In particular, the controversy around the film *Days of Rage*. See: Howard Rosenberg, "'Days of Rage' Deserves All the Attention," *Los Angeles Times* (September 6, 1989): E1.

[887] For example, in a recent conversation with Samia Halaby, the artist mentioned she recalled showing her monumental thirty-foot painting *Transitions* in Washington, DC, but could not remember the name. I asked if it was the Alif Gallery, and she said yes. I have not, however, found any documentation to support this exhibition in a public facing archive or press document. See: Samia Halaby in discussion with the author, June 3, 2024.

somewhat understated venue, the space was a spectacle of inclusion by its own design, specifically through its specific marketing strategy as the first and only gallery of its kind.

These preliminary findings on the Alif Gallery not only invite further writing about the history of alternative spaces, but also put forward a plea for scholars to invest in Arab American art histories. To date, there are two primary texts in this field: Fayeq Oweis' *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists* (2008) and the exhibition catalogue for *In/visible: Contemporary Art by Arab American Artists* (Arab American National Museum, 2005). These texts enumerate a range of artists who fit within the field and set preliminary frameworks for thinking about these artists' work. However, a larger history has yet to think holistically about where artists lived in diaspora, what and where they studied, what influenced their early work, and more broadly, how their artistic formation was shaped by life in diaspora.[888] Such a study also requires deep consideration of what it means to be "Arab American," a term that is loosely applied to Arab communities living in the United States, but which may not be one that artists past or present identify with, in part because of its fraught relationship to whiteness.[889] Furthermore, writing this study will also help to

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[888] For an example of what this might look like, I mention my recent interview with Samia Halaby. See: Rachel Winter, "On Place: A Conversation with Samia Halaby," in *Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy*, ed. Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert and Rachel Winter (Munich: Hirmer, 2024), 37-55.

[889] For recent work in Arab American studies, see: Louise Cainkar, Pauline Homsi Vinson, and Amira Jarmakani, eds., *Sajjilu Arab American: A Reader in SWANA Studies* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2022). On whiteness, see: Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); James Thomas, "Mississippi Mahjar: The Lebanese Immigration Experience in the Delta," in *Ethnic Heritage in Mississippi: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Shana Walton and Barbara Carpenter (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012); Stacy Fahrenthold, *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019);

outline the networks of support and solidarity that artists formed, but also how artists found their way into institutions through each other's connections.

To write this diasporic art history also expands the ways we think about American art history. Recent books in American art history have already started rethinking the field along thematic lines, as well as bringing forward historically marginalized voices.[890] However, Arab artists remain a very small part of this conversation. For example, by studying artists like Sari Khoury (Palestinian, 1941–97) and Samia Halaby (Palestinian, b. 1936, Jerusalem, active New York) and including their work in a new American art history, the field might begin to shift beyond its coastal biases to think about the Midwest as a formative artistic space. Many of these artists have also written parts of this narrative, from which we can launch a new line of research that centers their voices and experiences.[891] Such an approach not only works towards a more inclusive American art history, but also repositions the American art world as a transnational, bilateral field of exchange, thus imagining a more global way of thinking about the field.

Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

[890] For example, see: *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2019); Erika Doss, *American Art of the 20th-21st Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); *The Land Carries our Ancestors: Contemporary Art by Native Americans* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art and Princeton University Press, 2023); Denise Murrell, ed., *The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2024); Keri Watson and Keidra Danials Navaroli, *This is America: Re-Viewing the Art of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[891] For examples, see: Wasma' Khalid Chorbachi, "Arab Art Twenty Years Later," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 1989): 143-54; Samia Halaby, *Liberation Art of Palestine* (New York: HTTB Publications, 2001); Helen Khal, "Contemporary Arab Art," *Arab Perspectives* (March 1981): 12-17; Sari Khoury, "Immigrant Arab Artists: Themes of Alienation," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 1989): 167-72.

F. A Plea for Relevance

As a brief coda, the broader questions raised throughout this dissertation are not simply the domain of historical analysis but remain highly relevant to understanding current art world events. Specifically, the idea of the festival remains a pliable conduit for addressing social conflict and building understanding, especially when it involves artists from the region referred to as the Middle East. Furthermore, the question of cultural diplomacy is still central to this conversation because foreign governments aid with planning and/or funding these projects.

A very notable recent example was in 2018 when New York was the site of the Arab Art and Education Initiative (AAEI), a yearlong program designed to foster cultural exchange between the US and the Arab world—an oft repeated refrain. Many of the key events were concentrated within a 10-day period in October 2018, which formed a mini-festival. Organized by the Saudi art initiative Edge of Arabia, the event was partially funded by the Saudis via the Misk Art Institute and planned in collaboration with the United Nations. Yet the event's reception was colored by then President Trump's travel ban, and the Saudi murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.[892] AAEI's mission of education and exchange echoes that of festivals in the 1970s, but also early galleries, like the Alif Gallery in DC, illustrating the rhetorical cycles that are propagated around Arab artists. While festivals like AAEI can

[892] Andrew Chow, "Initiative Brings Arab Art to New York Museums," *New York Times*, August 24, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/24/arts/design/arab-art-new-york.html; Eileen Kinsella, "Missing Saudi Journalist Casts a Shadow Over an Arab Art Initiative's Launch in New York—Some of Which Is Saudi Funded," *ArtNet*, October 16, 2018, https://news.artnet.com/news/major-new-york-museums-affirm-commitment-arab-art-initiative-amid-crisis-missing-saudi-journalist-1372615; Arab News, "Arab Art and Education Initiative Kicks Off in New York," *Arab News*, October 15, 2018, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1387521/art-culture.html.

bring attention to otherwise underrecognized artists, they can also pigeonhole their work within the framework of building bridges, and in turn, their potential to entertain a Western audience.[893] Simultaneously, festivals like the Shubbak Festival in London and the Arab Film Festival in the San Francisco Bay Area foreground Arab voices while upholding their educational ambitions. These are a few examples of the many ways festivals can be adopted, adapted, employed, and re-employed in different contexts and with shifting loci of enunciation, all of which must be understood in relation to their historical parallels.

Furthermore, Arab artists in diaspora continue to make spaces for themselves and their work. Following a renovation in 1998, the Jerusalem Fund Gallery opened in DC, and while it exhibited the work of Arab American artists broadly, it focused on Palestinian art and culture.[894] The Middle East Institute (MEI), a well-known think tank in Washington, DC, opened the MEI Gallery in 2019 to highlight modern and contemporary art from the region. Although it is not an artist-run space, the larger function of the MEI Gallery parallels the Alif Gallery. Likewise, the Middle East Institute's mission to educate American citizens directly follows that of its predecessor and the Alif Gallery's parent organization: the Arab American Cultural Foundation. In New York, the Institute of Arab & Islamic Art (IAIA) is similarly dedicated to promoting dialogue between New York and the Arab/Islamic world through art, an initiative that partially responds to ongoing misperceptions and stereotypes about Arab and Muslim identities. In London, the Mosaic Rooms, founded in 2009, is a contemporary

[893] Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 651-81.

[894] Holly Arida, "The Arts," in *Daily Life of Arab Americans in the 21st Century*, ed. Anan Ameri and Holly Arida (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2012), 205. Arida's list draws on Fayeq Oweis's list of resources.

iteration and reimagination of the Iraqi Cultural Centre's emphasis on Arab artists. Funded by the A.M. Qattan Foundation, the Mosaic Rooms highlights contemporary culture from the Arab world in London. They also have an educational focus and are one of the only venues in London with such a goal. Furthermore, there are new commercial galleries in the US and Europe that specifically support artists from the SWANA region, such as Advocartsy, Emergeast, and HUNNA, not to mention the booming gallery scene in Dubai, and the numerous commercial galleries in the US and Europe who feature prominent artists from the SWANA region in their program.[895] Lastly, while I discussed *Ur* and *Arab Perspectives* as key publications in the late twentieth century, there are now new publications similarly dedicated to Arab artists, writers, and thinkers, including *Mizna*, *Bidoun*, *Canvas*, *Al-Jadid*, and more.

As such, the study of global alternative spaces and institutional representation is one whose subject matter is continually evolving, and which also requires attention to the bodies of writing that similarly bolster this network to fabricate new art worlds.[896]

[895] These spaces are also discussed in: Amin Alsaden, "Countering Erasure: Producing Knowledge on Arab Art Today," in *Knowledge Production: Examining Arab Art Today*, ed. Eline van der Vlist (Amman: Darat al funun, 2020), 18-19.

[896] Another publication contemporaneous to *Ur* and *Arab Perspectives* was *Al-Raida*, published by the Lebanese American University in English. See: *Al-Raida* 8, no. 44-45 (May-August 1988). Likewise, these publications can be compared to state/governmental writing, such as Saudi magazines covering Saudi artists, for example. See: "Breathing New Life into Bedouin Jewelry," *Saudi Arabia* 7, no. 12 (December 1990): 5; Piney Kesting, "Presenting… Saudi Arabia," *AramcoWorld* 40, no. 6 (November/December 1989): 6-19.

G. Conclusion

There is no one answer to the question of how art museums in the US and the UK became interested in the idea of contemporary art from the Middle East. Such a conversation is not as simple as cause and effect, nor is it a one size fits all answer. However, this does not mean that the role of festivals should be minimized or excluded from this discourse. Festivals responded to the *zeitgeist* of their time and created opportunities for Western audiences to learn about different cultures and religions. They did so with the tools of their time and in response to current events, and in hindsight, their entanglements with cultural diplomacy reveal a great deal about the politics that shaped both the production and reception of visual and material culture from the Arab world and its diasporas. While the World of Islam Festival was a one-off, the Smithsonian's festival continues today, and both events have new contemporaries. These festivals are important for what they did: drew interest in things less recognized and started a new conversation. More importantly, it was perhaps what they forgot that had the most impact: contemporary art.

Contemporary artists and alternative spaces acted on momentum generated by festivals to share their work when it was otherwise out of view of mainstream audiences and excluded from hegemonic institutions. It is this history that is pivotal to understanding the place of these artists in art museums today, a story that goes from entirely absent, to in collections but not exhibited, then highlighted in special exhibitions that resonate with political ambitions to achieve certain goals, to in some cases, eventually becoming a small part of canonical displays. Perpetually, and to this day, these artists are often the spectacles of inclusion, present in aggrandized fashions from time to time, or existing as the token Arab artist to fulfill a diversity checklist. Such displays are not perfect and could do more to recognize the

artistic merit of these artists on their own terms, but they are a step in the right direction that was made possible, in part, by artists being their own advocates, writing their own histories, and making spaces for themselves against the odds. It is this question of how Arab artists made art worlds for themselves that is now imperative for future scholars to explore further.

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