

"Art is our weapon. Culture is a form of resistance."

Shirin Neshat

Editorial

For Freedom's Sake

When speaking about Islam and Islamic art nowadays, it's inevitable to reflect on one of the most iconic and spread form of popular art: Street Art. Streets belong to people, and this is universally recognized. So it's not surprising if people use streets to express their feelings and opinions, especially when other channels are forbidden.

Last summer I visited Belfast, North Ireland. I wouldn't define it a beautiful city as commonly intended, but it brings the signs of years and years of internal conflicts between Catholic and Protestants. The first, most evident, and eye-catching symbols of these fights are the murals scattered around the city, especially in West Belfast. I was impressed by the aesthetic and semantic power of these graffiti, that are vividly printed into my mind as a powerful, popular form of expression and riot.

Some murals are more symbolic and express positive concepts like freedom, equality, social belonging and solidarity but some others – and we are mainly speaking of loyalist form of art – are extremely cruel and brutal. I was particularly shaken by the fact that loyalist murals often encourage and exalt racism and violence through military images, full of Nazi-Fascist messages.

This experience made me think about the existence of universal forms of social, political, individual expression at a popular level. Cultural barriers are broken by the need of freedom and we can see that we are all equal and similar, a solid single community when it comes to revenge individual and social rights.

That's exactly what happened in Egypt after the Arabic Spring and the latest political upheaval that shook the country: repressed citizens chose the street to rise up and the walls to resist repression and express their deepest feelings and opinions. Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution is illustrated and explicated in the book "Walls of Freedom" by Basma Hamdy and Don Karl AKA Stone, whose work is presented in this issue.

Street Art can also represent a mean to remember contemporary heroes and to ask for truth, as in the case of the mural dedicated to Giulio Regeni, the Italian PhD student who was brutally murdered in Egypt, in still unknown circumstances, almost a year ago. Giulio was killed because he was a free thinker and freedom of information and communication were among his values. He maybe underestimated the power and cruelty of Al-Sisi's regime, but what counts is that he is still a symbol of courage and we need to call for the truth on his murder. His bravery inspired us and this is the reason why we decided to focus on street art and walls of freedom in this issue.

We hope that justice will be served soon, in the meantime we need to keep fighting. Fighting for rights, fighting for freedom. Fighting for a better future, for everyone.

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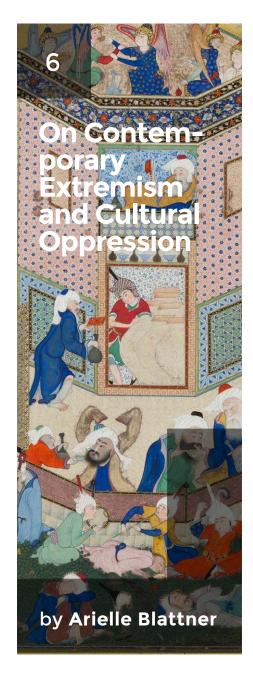
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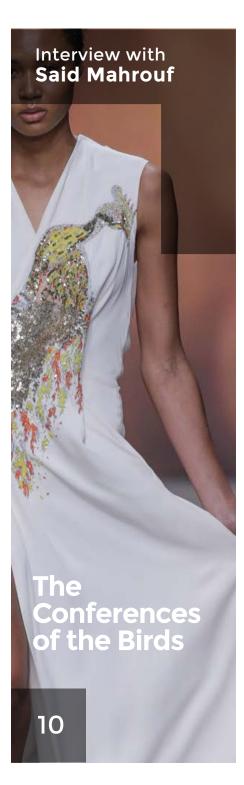
Cover Photo Giulio Regeni, by El Teneen. Photo by Stefano Scaramuzzo

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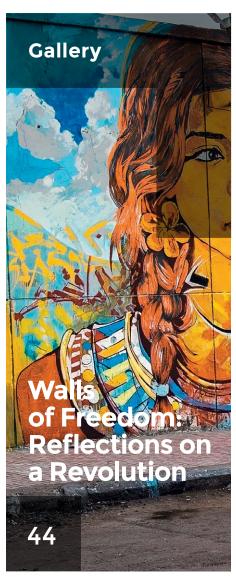






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IWA Islamic World of Art Winter 2017 Vol. 3 - N. 1



On Contemporary **Extremism** and Cultural **Oppression**

and MA Student of Islamic Art

class for art's sake, fostering a more liberal and independent society of artists. With the emergence of ISIS. we witness the complete suppression of critical thought and freedom of thinking

In Medieval times, discrete attempts

were tolerated by the Islamic ruling

to diverge from authoritative ideology



As long as there have been religions, there have been sects. As long as there have been religions and sects, there have been vicious wars between sects. No matter which division, the proclamation of faith written on the flag of ISIS lā ilāha illā allāh ("There is no god but Allah") is the same phrase written on Islamist medieval coins since the 8th century, and continues to be seen on the flag of ISIS. In addition to spreading Islam being the main goal of these regimes, the suppression of free thought (whether non-muslim or sectarian) has also been a constant thread. However, while non-orthodox thinkers were supposedly suppressed by Islamist regimes, we see a flourishing of culture in the medieval period which actually made this time the golden age of Islam.

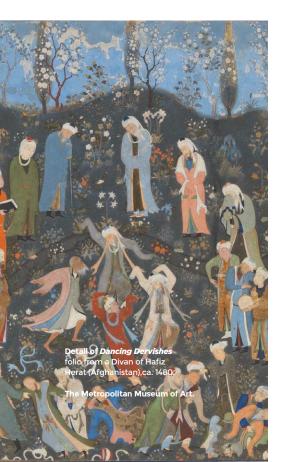
In fact, much of the medieval ruling class was made up of fighters and aristocrats, whose morals were based on either a very specific ideology or no ideology but rather loyalty to whomever was paying. Artisans have always been affected by regimes; however not as much as the warrior or upper class. The medieval artist was always in limbo as he was dependent upon upper class patrons, yet he was less directly involved in the ruling and conquering aspects of society. As the medieval artisan belonged to a mid to lower class, he was less indoctrinated yet needed to produce works of art that appealed to the rulers. Therefore he had to act with a level of caution. While there is not much recorded history that articulates the lives of medieval artisans, it is generally thought that they were part of a skilled and overall perhaps liberal population trying to question the status-quo while not getting killed for it. This led to a surge of creativity as artists, poets, and mystics found ways to express their spirituality while also appealing to the ruling orthodoxy. On the side of the ruling class, hints at non-orthodoxy were allowed as long as they were inconspicuous and underhanded.

For example, Persian Sufi poets would write about drinking wine and the jubilation from drunkenness, however the wine was a metaphor for spiritual awakening and drunkenness on divine love. Similarly, certain symbols found in the fine arts would correspond with non-orthodox cosmology or concepts, such as the seven planets, sun symbolism, or even objects with double uses in



mystic rituals. These unobtrusive and non-overt symbols were considered acceptable to the ruling orthodox class, along with some not so guised outward displays of subverted faiths. In addition, certain strands of liberal orthodoxy were allowed within orthodox regimes.

It is generally thought that medieval artisans were part of a skilled and overall liberal population trying to question the status-quo while not getting killed for it



For example, while many regimes were strongly Sunna, Sufi communities were acceptable as a mystic brand of Sunna orthodoxy. Many Shi'l mystics would hide under the umbrella of Sufism in order to escape persecution. Some would test the boundaries and openly express their views.

ISIS's version of 'appropriate Islam,' however, is so narrow that even other orthodox Sunna may be killed just for one random act like having a beer or speaking to a member of the opposite sex. Their extreme policy means that there are no grey areas, leaving no space for creative expression or interpretation, resulting in the negation of real or lasting culture. In addition, they prey on young impressionable youth and indoctrinate them. Unlike medieval Islamist regimes, discourse and developments in philosophy and the arts is not one of their main focuses

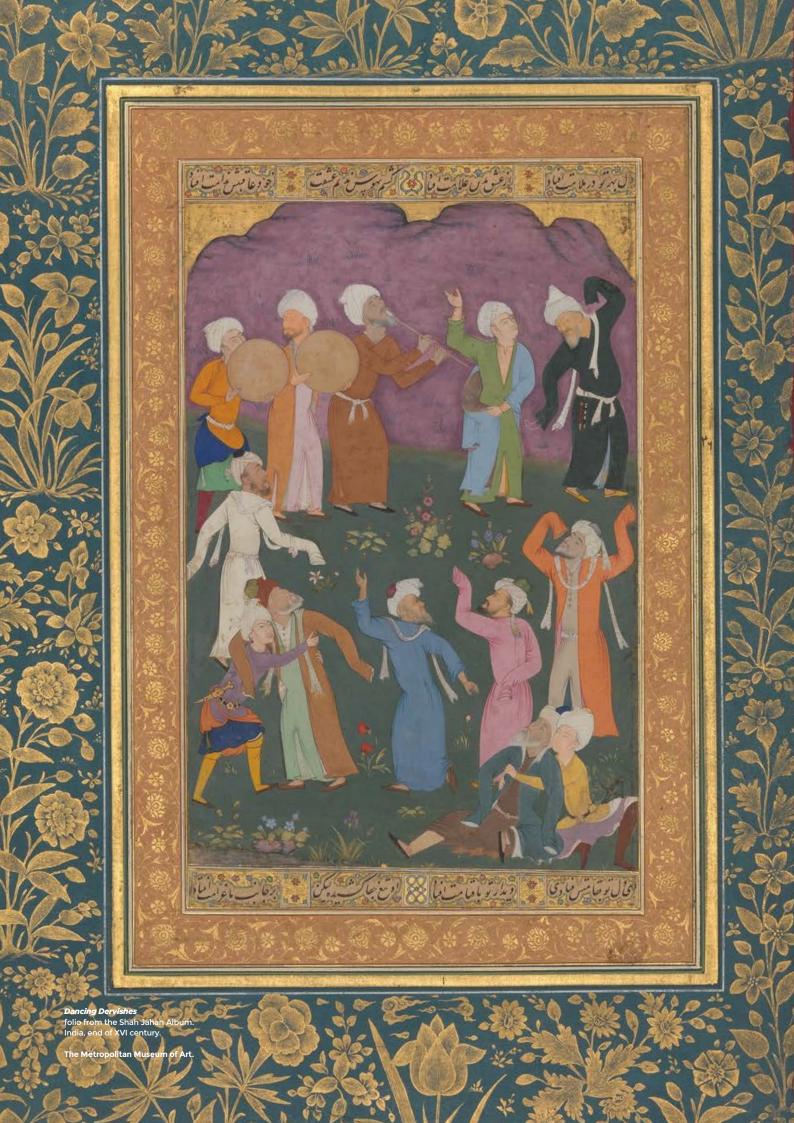
The people living under ISIS are so scared to do anything that will counter the narrow interpretation of Islam that they are unable to create or express their ideas. The result is a traumatized and inhibited community with no local culture, the opposite of medieval Islam where many new ideas, philosophies, and sciences, led to a golden age of Islamic culture.

In modern times, free thought and information are heavily suppressed under Islamist regimes. These range from the extreme ISIS beheadings to less widely exposed Egyptian, Saudi, as well as other extreme sentences for people challenging the status quo. In almost every authoritarian Isla-

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mist modern government, liberal values (human rights, women's rights, animal rights, gay rights, religious freedom, sexuality, intoxication) are seen as anti-religious and destructive.

Many Muslim artists who have an opinion or interpretation counter to that of the ruling Islamist regime within their country are forced to move abroad to the US or Europe.





The Conferences of the Birds



The Conference of the Birds, also known as The Language of the Birds is certainly the most celebrated work of the twelfth-century Persian poet, Farid al-Din Attar.

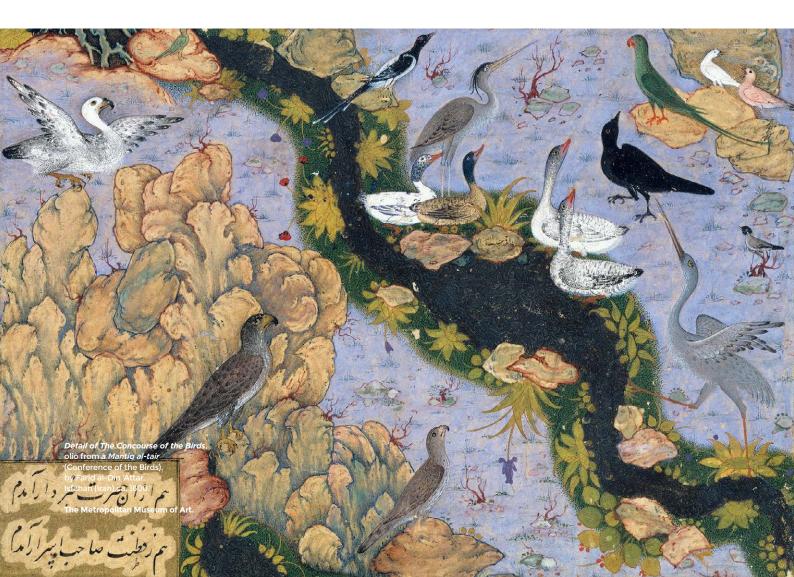
It tells the story of a flock of birds that set out to seek their king and god, the Simurgh. Only thirty of The encounter between fashion design and mystical Persian poem: Conversation with Moroccan fashion designer Said Mahrouf

them survive the perilous path, on which they traverse seven dangerous valleys and reach their ultimate destination: a lake. There they see their image mirrored in the water and recognize themselves as the very god they were seeking.

This mystical poem clearly lends

itself to numerous interpretations and, even if the author is not himself a Sufi,, the tale is full of Sufi references and meaning.

The mystical and evocative nature of the plot has its visual counterpart in an exceptional medieval manuscript of the *Conference*, copied



in Iran in the fifteenth century and now housed at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, where colorful and impressive illuminations and miniatures are on display.

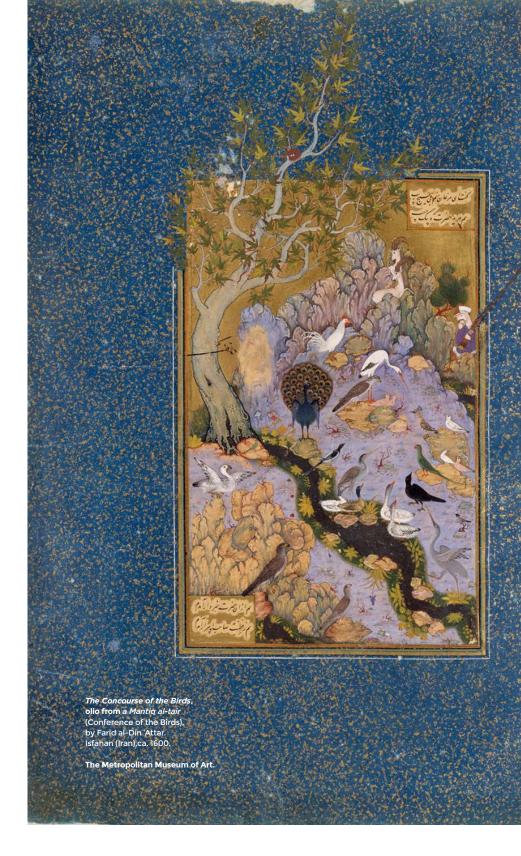
Yet, despite its Medieval nature, it seems that the *Conference* can still be a source of artistic inspiration. This was the case for fashion designer Said Mahrouf, who, while collaborating with artist Yassine Mekhnache, developed a collection inspired by the medieval poem. The dresses in the collection, named after Attar's work, balance the use of color with gorgeous embroideries representing the birds and their journey that recreate the mysticism and beauty of the *Conference*.

What is your background and how did you become a fashion designer?

I am originally from Morocco,born in Asilah but I grew up in Amsterdam in The Netherlands. There, I studied at the Art Academy, then moved back to Morocco.

Before starting my career as a fashion designer, I was an artist developing installations, exhibitions, and performances. Clothing has always played a crucial part in the performances. I used to design costumes inspired by the specific architecture where the performance was taking place, whether it was a museum, a gallery or an historical location.

Yet, when making performances, you need a great sum of money for every project and it got harder and harder for me and my fellow artists since art was receiving fewer and fewer resources. I saw people interested in the costumes I produced, even willing to buy them, and this is how I started as a fashion designer.



Generally speaking, what do you think characterises most your fashion production?

I think that fashion design has not much to do with fine art. In Dutch it is called a *toegepaste kunst* or applied art. So, even if my work as fashion designer can be influenced by architecture, in fact it remains deeply-rooted in the concept of the applied art: giving an everyday object an aesthetic dimension that is not art for art's sake.

Bigger fashion companies have the financial opportunity to invest in statement pieces or purely artistic collections. For me it is important that the dresses that I show on the

runway can be actually bought and worn by people.

Thus, for me it is design, it is not art. The technique that I use for designing my works is the *moulage:* draping the fabric directly on the mannequin. Also this largely influences my fashion production: the drapes and knots in my dresses come from this technique.

In your previous projects, have you ever taken inspiration from Islamic art or traditional crafts?

Before the collection inspired by The Conference of the Birds, I was not really considering Islamic art as a source of inspiration. I remember a client being very curious about this: why wasn't I using the motives of Islamic art in my production? Probably because I was raised in Amsterdam and never took my Moroccan background in consideration when it came to performances or fashion design.

Now that I have moved back to Casablanca I am more and more exposed to Islamic art as a whole and to traditional crafts, which are slowly influencing my production.

How did you have the idea for the collection and how did you develop it?

I got to know, thanks to a client, the embroideries created by French artist Yassine Mekhnache, and I was totally fascinated.

He incorporates in his production this incredibly difficult Moroccan traditional technique of embroidery that takes much time and



attention to detail. Yassine also travelled a lot around Morocco, in far-away and really remote villages, in order to learn and develop an expertise in the traditional craft of embroidery.

In his work, he was using *The Conferences* of the Birds as a source of inspiration for his embroideries.

I then read the *Conference* and I was fascinated by the story and its meaning. That's how the idea of the whole collection has been developed.

I prepared the dresses, than gave them to Yassine for the embroideries. We did not design the dresses and decorations beforehand: I created the dresses and sent them to Yassine to be embroidered. It was open to him to interpret the designs with the embroideries. After that we judged the result and made any adjustment.

Which features of *The Conference* of the Birds do you think most influenced the design of the dresses and the collection as a whole? As a designer I seek perfection: perfection in composition, perfection in shape and in color. Nature is perfect: colors' juxtaposition you find in nature is perfect, and the same goes for its shapes and proportions. Thus, as a designer I try to get as close as possible to nature's perfection.

The *Conference*, in this sense, provided me some tools towards reaching this goal. For instance, the colors used reflect the colors of the birds described in the narration.

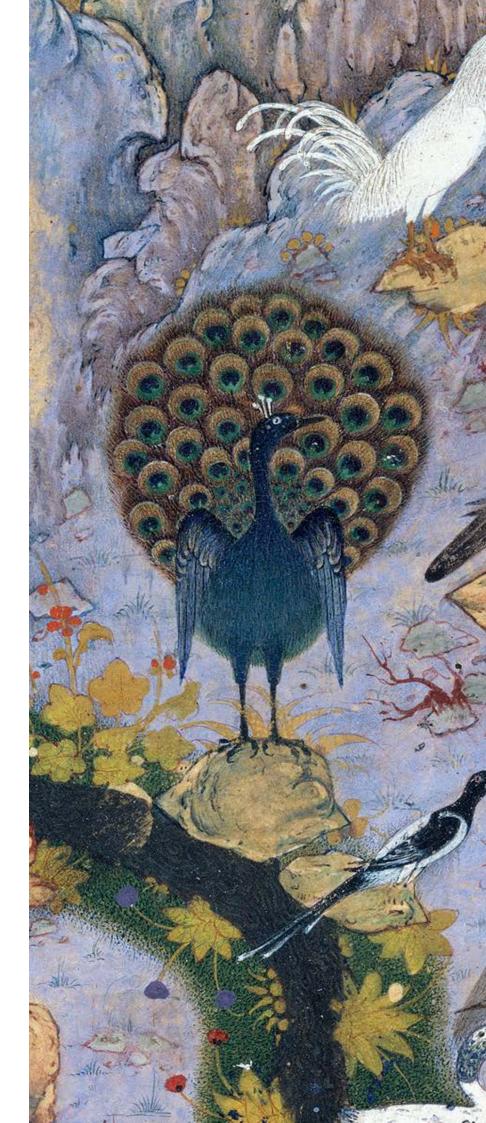


How did you have the idea for the collection and how did you develop it?

This project started as an experiment. I have collaborated with a variety of artists when producing performances and installations: choreographers, dancers, composers. This was actually the first time I was collaborating with another artist to produce a fashion collection.

Also, it was an experiment since it was the first time I clearly matched Islamic cultural and artistic themes with the dresses I produced.

I showed the collection for the first time at Fashion Forward Dubai and at the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in Amsterdam, where we presented four additional models. The reactions were incredibly positive: the collection was appreciated, both in the design and because of the embroideries.



Detail of The Concourse of the Birds, olio from a Mantiq al-tair (Conference of the Birds), by Farid al-Din 'Attar. Isfahan (Iran),ca. 1600.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art.







"Existence is resistance," says a Palestinian translator at the Balata refugee camp near Nablus. "Education and restoration," he adds, take priority in his life over everything else. For this young Palestinian, education is the surest means of resisting the totalistic "overcoding of social life" that accompanies the occupation. Arguably the most potent emblem of the Israeli occupation in recent years is the Barrier that is rapidly enclosing the West Bank on itself. A Palestinian retiree from Abu Dis. a town that borders on Jerusalem and is located on the wrong side of the wall, states in concrete terms this overcoding of social life that the wall has inaugurated. "It's so depressing that I can't stay at home anymore," he says, while standing under the wall's shadow, "The wall changed everything, even the quality of the light."

Bethlehem, a West Bank town close to Jerusalem, has historically been one of the world's most hospitable spaces. The city is enriched and even sustained by tourism, which made up at least sixty percent of its economy before the wall. But, in a regime dominated by the Barrier, those very qualities that in normal times would prove a boon to a tourist-driven economy are a burden and a source of economic strain.

Referred to locally as the *jidar al-fasl al-unsuri* (wall of segregation) and by the Israeli state as the *ha-frada geder* (separation fence), the Barrier is defined by its architects as essential if terrorist attacks are to prevented. For Bethlehem, it is hard to understand how this structure, made of concrete lined with barbed wire, could be described as

a mere fence. Viewed from outside the Occupied Territories, however, the label makes more sense. The wall appears less intimidating from the vantage point of an Israeli road, where it resembles a highway barrier looming in the distance, or a mirage that flickers according to the angle of the sun.

The material substance of the wall varies according to the territories it intersects. In some places, it is a series of electric fences, and in others a configuration of wires and cameras topped by a watchtower, which, however, is only rarely staffed by a guard. For most of its length, the wall is a tall concrete slab fronted by wires and surveillance mechanisms aimed to prevent anyone from touching it. The wall in Bethlehem affords something of an exception to this pattern, in that large





swathes of grey cement are left unprotected by barbed wire, making it easier to approach and to turn into a work of art.

By virtue of its overreaching architecture, as well as by wide semantic range that is employed to describe as well as to engage with the wall, this structure offers several valuable lessons in the politics of scale and location. As an international symbol

As an international symbol of occupation, the wall circulates through aestheticized international circuits of political activism

of occupation, the wall circulates through aestheticized international circuits of political activism. As a material and symbolic intrusion into Palestinians' everyday lives, the wall is also intimately entailed in the experience of occupation. Bisecting houses and backyards, dividing families from each other, and radically restricting Palestinians' freedom of movement, the wall ends by cutting through the self as powerfully as it bisects Palestinian land. The first-time viewer of the apartheid wall will naturally wonder why it is necessary to bisect Palestinian territory with concrete. Far from promoting peace, the most palpable effect of the wall, which runs through rather than around the West Bank, is to separate Palestinians from Palestinians. The wall's primary function is to intimidate.

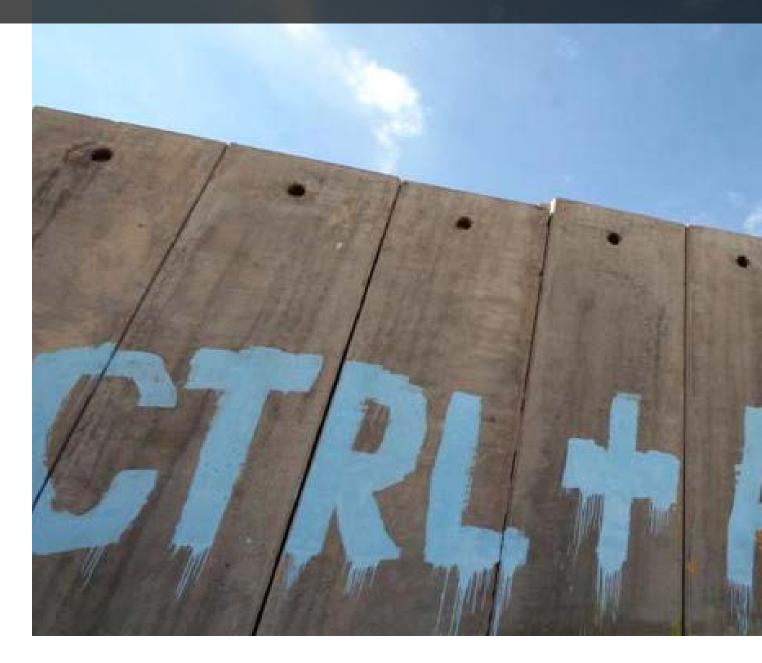




Resistance as Capital

The multifarious and multilingual graffiti on Palestine's segregation wall are often seen to unilaterally express resistance. The language of much of the wall's graffiti is English, a linguistic medium that presupposes an audience residing outside the Occupied Territories. When not written in English, protest is rendered in other languages of Europe and the Americas: Spanish, French, Italian. Unlike the graffiti of the first intifada, Arabic rarely punctuates this literature of resistance. Where Arabic occurs in the wall's surface, its function is largely decorative.

Together with adopting international languages such as English and Spanish, many insignia transplant allusions to European history onto Palestinian territory. Turning to Germany as the ever-present comparative foil for Palestine, a mural alludes to John F. Kennedy's 1963 visit to West Berlin to offer US solidarity with the free world in the face of the communist threat. During this visit, Kennedy famously defined the city on the western side of the Berlin Wall as an outpost of freedom facing a Communist border

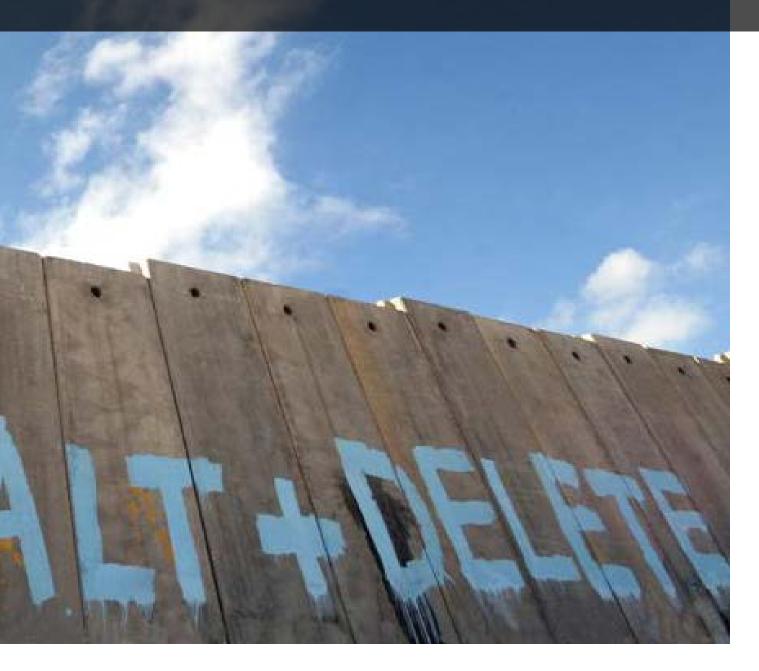


zone. "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin," Kennedy declared, "and therefore as a free man I am proud to declare 'Ich bin ein Berliner'." The parallels between the two walls are prescient.

In another case, Abu Dis is equated with the Warsaw ghetto. Both this message and the "Ich bin ein Berliner" inscription are more obviously rooted in German than in Palestinian pasts. While such graffiti attest to the interconnectedness of a world in the age of the world picture, they also call into question

the tendency to incorporate the insignia into a homogenous narrative of local resistance. Collectively, these images show how European history is redeemed and avenged on Palestinian territory, often without the knowledge, consent, or participation of local actors.

While the majority of graffiti on Bethlehem's wall is anonymous, there are exceptions, the best known of which is the UK-based graffiti artist Banksy, whose reputation was already well-established when he arrived in Palestine in 2002 to paint the wall.

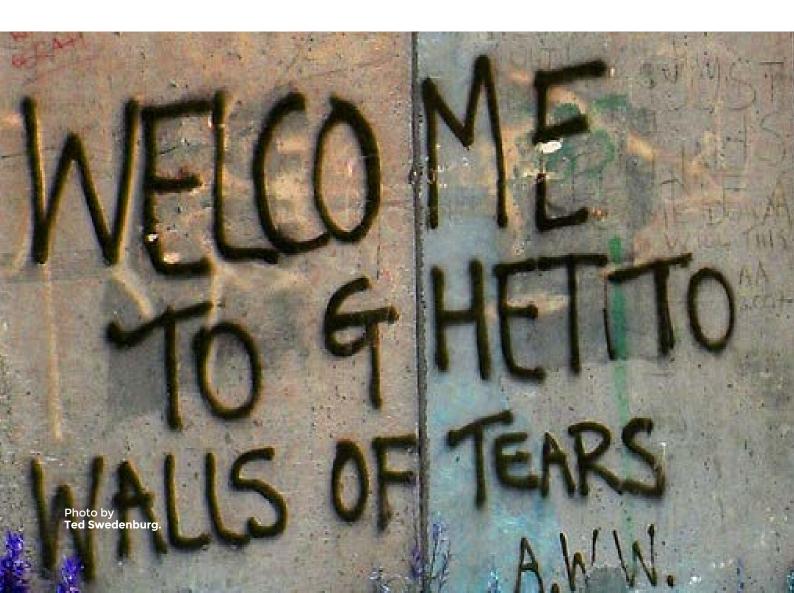


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Banksy's distinctive style has aroused considerable controversy among the local Palestinian population. By contrast, the international reaction has been more uniformly positive. Partly through the murals

of Banksy and his cohorts, Bethlehem was transformed into a new tourist destination: every day, Palestinian minibuses of organized tour companies bring small groups of tourists to specific parts of the wall on which international graffiti artists left their mark. By 2011, touristic interest in the graffiti on the wall seems to have faded. The attention span of the international community has in this instance characteristically while the long-term political effect of the international activist community's rendering up of the segregation wall as a global canvas have yet to be ascertained.

When Banksy painted murals on the wall during a tour of the West Bank, he encountered negative reactions from local Palestinians who were displeased by his aestheticization of their suffering. "We don't want beautiful," complained one man, "we hate this wall. Go home." Banksy's representations are provocations that are as likely to disturb local Palestinians through their trivialization of the wall and thereby of Palestinian suffering as to awaken the political sensibilities of his western audience. To the artist's credit. Banksy occasionally foregrounds in his art the ethical ambiguities intrinsic to his aestheticization of the wall, and does not sentimentalize his politically comprised intervention. However, the fact that the artist registers these ambiguities does not relieve the viewer of the imperative to confront the political limitations of such forms of artistic expression.



The globalization of representation is nothing new. Audience is key: a global public overdetermines the content, form, and substance of what is recognized as representable. Reflecting on the almost exclusively Arabic-language graffiti of the first intifada (1987-1993), anthropologist Julia Peetet noted how, on the rare occasions when graffiti was inscribed on Palestinian walls in English rather than Arabic, it was deployed to speak to the West. In keeping with its intended audience, the frequency of English-language graffiti increased with the arrival of foreign delegations. By encoding themselves as globalized testimonies, Palestinian graff iti, Peetet argues, "took their place among other forms of resistance" and came to constitute "a voice for those who

A global public overdetermines the content, form, and substance of what is recognized as representable

felt voiceless in the international arena." Such graffiti also anticipated the post-intifada West Bank wall as a global canvas.

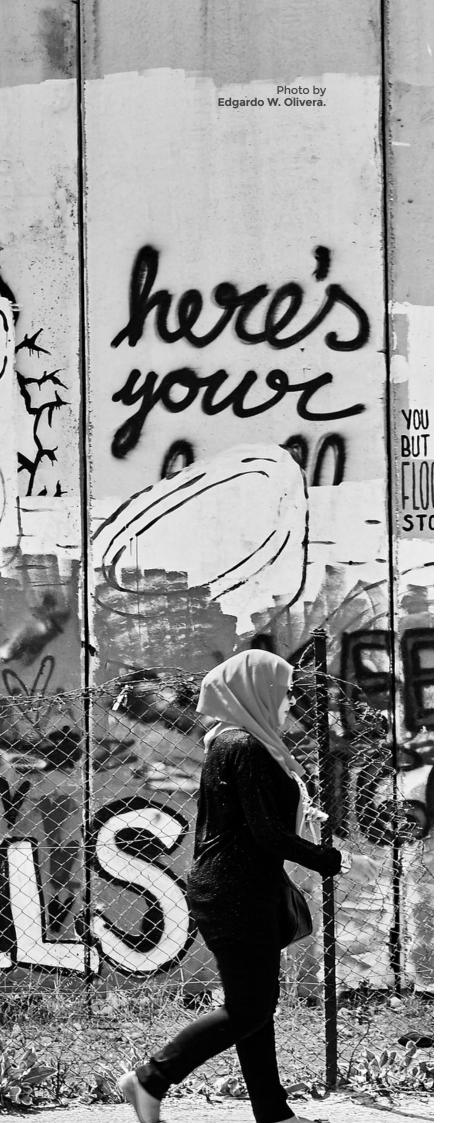
Due to the complications of language choice and the historical allusions described above, the graffiti adorning the segregation wall today cannot be rendered so transparently in terms of a lexicon of resistance. Narratives of dispossession are inscribed on the wall, but these visual renderings are heavily interpolated by the perceived expectations of a globalized public sphere.

Bethlehem's canvas has been superimposed against the will of local inhabitants. As if in response to the coercive imposition of a massively politicized structure, the images on the wall pursue different representative strategies. They evoke domesticity and daily life while often—if not always—avoiding the paraphernalia of conflict.

They work through metaphors and historical allusions—above all to both pre and post WWII Germany—while avoiding incendiary calls-to-arms. The graffiti on the apartheid wall too are the graffiti of resist-







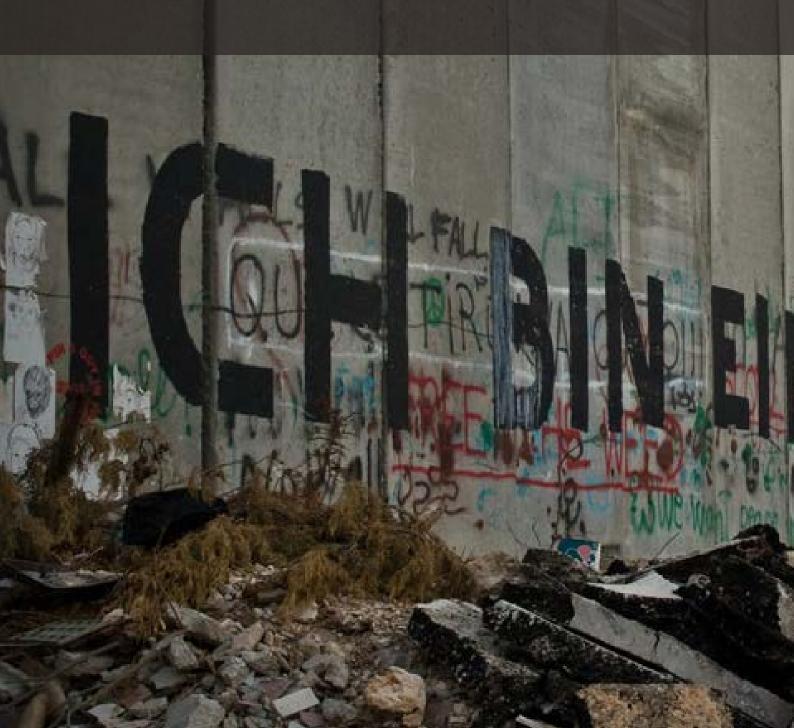
ance, but the resistance they narrate is mediated by a constellation of audience expectations more globally implicated than that which informs other graffiti elsewhere in the world.

At the same time, this representational difference, which is fundamentally a difference in reception, attests to the many transformations undergone by the Palestinian resistance, together with its objects and subjects, since the first intifada. As has been shown, the apartheid wall's graffiti consists largely of anarchist slogans, deliberately ironic depictions of domestic bliss, and learned allusions to the speeches of John F. Kennedy. For the most part, it would seem to include everything other than what one might expect to find on Palestinian territory: the local voices of resistance.

Simply getting by

Instead of resisting in the stereotyped sense, Palestinians are often most concerned with simply getting by. For this reason, Bethlehem's ingenious local entrepreneurs have turned to the wall as a space for posting advertisements. With the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2001 and the subsequent stranglehold that followed on Bethlehem's economy, local resident Joseph Hazboun shut the doors of his restaurant, which he imaginatively called Bahamas Seafood Restaurant, thereby himself evoking the global circulation of meanings that is Bethlehem's forte. As his restaurant directly fronted the wall at one of its highest points, Hazboun temporarily lost his entire customer base. Unable to keep his restaurant afloat financially, he relocated to the United States. Hazboun returned to Bethlehem in 2008. As he explains in a brief narrative posted directly onto the wall facing his restaurant, Hazboun decided to make the most out of a bad situation and painted his restaurant's menu over the blank concrete surface. Hazboun's entrepreneurship has extended to using the wall as a screen to project the World Cup games for the viewing pleasure of his customers. After posting the Bahamas Seafood Restaurant's menu to the wall, Hazboun rebaptized the southern extension of his restaurant as the "Wall Lounge." He used this newly conceived space to showcase vistas of the barrier, fulfilling the principle that the death of a natural view encourages its artificial recreation, whether as an act of resistance or through sheer necessity. Hazboun's initiatives inspired other local business owners. Complementing local endeavors to use the wall to stimulate rather than to destroy their businesses, the wall is replete with commercial slogans that draw on the tropology of American

capitalism. Highlighting the fabricated nature of the wall, visiting graffiti artists have added slogans such as MADE IN AMERICA and MADE IN KOREA beneath their designs. Another commercial slogan concealing a deeper message is an oversized prize ribbon painted by the Brooklyn-based artists' collaborative Faile. The ribbon is emblazoned with the inscription WITH LOVE AND CARE: NOTHING LASTS FOREVER formed to shape a heart. The message suggests that, as a foreign imposition, the wall is destined to fall. Such artifacts underscore the paradoxical death wish driving most art on this wall. Such murals, which are political in intent if not always in execution, fulfill their mission most thoroughly when they help to bring about their destruction.



The Barrier

Declared illegal under international law in an advisory opinion issued by the UN's International Court of Justice in 2004, the Barrier is just over 60 percent complete. In the years since its construction began in 2002, Israel's Supreme Court has received hundreds of civil lawsuits from Palestinians protesting the path of the Barrier through their land and homes. Occasionally the Barrier had to be rerouted to cut less deeply into Palestinians' houses and backyards. The Barrier is a site of continued contests, not only in respect to how it is defined, but also the path it follows, and especially the images that are painted on it. Alongside the many conflicting agendas surrounding this structure, the Barrier exacerbates the tension within Israel between the judiciary and military over issues pertaining to the occupation.

Already nearly 500 miles long, the Barrier is more than twice the length of the Green Line, which has served as Israel's recognized border with the West bank since 1949. Fully 85 percent of the Barrier crosses through, and not merely alongside, Palestinian territory. Even greater than the damage from preventing Palestinian access to Israel is the effect of the Barrier in keeping Palestinians from visiting family and friends, schools, and places of work in neighboring Palestinian cities and villages. And in many instances, the paths closed by the Barrier have deprived Palestinians of their livelihoods.



UNTRANSLATABLE

by Rebecca Gould
Assistant professor at
Yale-NUS College (Singapore)

How to read the (lack of)
Arabic graffiti on the Wall

By contrast with the proliferation of the insignia of resistance in English and other European languages, only in rare instances are Arabic-language graffiti inscribed on Bethlehem's apartheid wall. This linguistic shift from the Arabic graffiti of the first intifada to the English graffiti of the post-intifada apartheid wall attests to the reconfiguration of the demographics of the graffiti artist and of the graffiti's intended audience. Beyond the obvious linguistic shift, the representations of resistance diverge in other ways as well. Whereas English-language graffiti is configured as a didactic discourse, bent on improving international relations, the Arabic-language graffiti that adorn the segregation wall adopt the representational strategy of allegory. Mired in the immanence of unmediated experience, they suggest no concrete solution, and promulgate no message of hope. Not unlike the Arabic graffiti of past centuries, including the fascinating specimens collected in the Book of Strangers (Kit b adab al-ghurab') attributed to the prolific litterateur Ab al-Faraj al-I fah n (d. 967), contemporary Arabic-language graffiti is less concerned with making sensational claims and more interested in representing everyday life. Among the many mediations through which Palestinian suffering is represented, allegory, the representational mode best suited for injustices that cannot be rendered transparently, plays a prominent role.

The contrast adduced so far has been primarily between English graffiti that, while radiating a simulacrum of transparency, is overdetermined by its many layers of reception, and Arabic graffiti that, while enmeshed in the language of allegory, intimately renders the experience of Palestinian suffering. This distinction, which exists in the form of a continuum rather than as an absolute opposition, generates a paradox: graffiti in English tend to be more overtly politicized than graffiti in Arabic, which utilizes the arts of indirection. It is as though the intifada has become tired of itself, weary of mobilization, and skeptical of the very possibility of change. Meanwhile, Palestine's international supporters have taken to addressing constituencies far removed from the theaters of Palestinian suffering for the sake of building transnational solidarity.

Reflecting bleakly on the aestheticization of Palestinian suffering enacted by foreign artists who incorporate the wall into their art, Eidelman observes that the wall can only be "attractive for artists who do not have to live with its results." When they aestheticize the wall that cuts through their daily lives, Palestinian artists do not fetishize it in the way that foreigners do, because, according to Eidelman, "the reality of the wall can only be sexy for artists not affected."

Even though the distinctions between participant/observer and insider/outsider often dissolve when the art on the wall is absorbed and recontextualized in unpredictable ways by Palestinian observers, the aesthetics of international activism was frequently contrasted to the aesthetics of everyday life in my conversations with local Palestinians. "You are one of the lucky ones," a resident from the neighboring village of Beit Jala said to me one day towards the end of my Bethlehem sojourn in 2012, "you can come and go as you please, observing how we live, and then leave. You see the wall, but you do not have to live with it every day."

Whereas Palestinian-built walls inspired Arabic graffiti during the first intifada, Israel-built barriers are more likely today to evoke only silence in Palestinians, or, alternately, exasperation. The vast majority of canvases that cover the apartheid wall are the work of foreign artists and activists from outside Palestine, who address their slogans to an international arena wherein Palestine figures as only one theatre among many global injustices. Thus has representation—the rendering up of the world as a picture of itself—complicated the ascription of agency within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is not to say that the graffiti of resistance have vanished any more than have the political movements that underwrote political mobilization, but merely that these art forms have gone underground, to spaces where English is not spoken and where local idioms resist translation. Taking translation as a general paradigm for the representation of suffering, the inscriptions on Palestine's apartheid wall suggest that resistance is that which evades representation.

Theorists of translation have long studied how the rendering of foreign texts deepens our epistemic and ethical capacities. When studying the idioms of resistance in Palestine, it is important to attend to the untranslated, the untranslatable, and to everything that resists translation. Resistance to translation is in fact the surest indicator of a perspective that needs to be heard. Although the many idioms of the graffiti on the apartheid wall originate in different ways and for different reasons, one of their collateral effects is to assimilate Palestinian resistance into global English. Inevitably, failures in translations proliferate. Allusions to the Warsaw Ghetto and the Berlin wall are mistranslations in many respects, and their relevance to everyday aspects of the Israeli occupation is at best opaque for many Palestinians.

When it comes to the apartheid wall, to translate is all too often to be coopted by a global English that conditions political as well as linguistic possibilities. When symbols of local oppression are rendered in this universalist idiom, they tend to be homogenized under an international message that often fails to connect with local realities.



Such brutal realities are not registered on the wall's global canvas. When, unlike the European graffiti artists and activists who address a global Anglophone audience, Palestinian artists face in their engagements with the wall the daily consequences of the occupation, their observations are allegorical and opaque by comparison, and are therefore less attractive to the international media. This may help to explain why the graffiti of Palestinian resistance has been inventoried less frequently than that of foreign artists such as Banksy.

Edward Said famously began his Orientalism (1978) by citing from Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire (1852): "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." Slightly turning Marx's formulation on its head, we might say that, when it comes to the apartheid wall, "They cannot be represented; so they refuse representation."

Before it can become a political statement, the wall is an obstacle, a barrier, a threat to medical health, an eyesore, a drag on the Palestinian economy, and a narrower of passageways.

The internationalization of Palestine is attested on multiple fronts, in citations from the speeches of Kennedy, parodies of American capitalism, and in the photographs by the Belgian photographer Karl Deckers, which cover the easternmost portion of the wall. These photographs of children from around the world accompanied by statements in their native languages, aim to promote the artist's belief that his pictures demonstrate the "unity, resem-

blance and the richness of diversity." Deckers could not have selected a more globally visible space on which to showcase his art. The internationalization of the Israel-Palestine conflict is deeply etched into the spaces that are made available for the representation of Palestinian suffering and resistance. These forms of globalization tempt the uninformed to conflate touristic commentary with lifetimes of suffering and displacement, and to merge the minor discomforts encountered by transnational activists with Palestinians' uprooted lives. Minimally, the graffiti on the apartheid walls shows us that contemporary technologies of representation have forever altered the nature of global resistance, in Palestine, as elsewhere around the world.

With the apartheid wall now serving as a global canvas on which passersby of all backgrounds inscribe their impressions, and with these impressions now symbolizing "Palestine resistance" to an international audience, one wonders what will become of the spaces between the walls, the spaces uncontrolled by the advanced technology of the colonial state. If, as John Collins puts it, we inhabit a "globe that is becoming Palestinized," even as Palestine is becoming globalized, one hopes that the cooptation of the Palestinian narrative by international constituencies does not end by silencing voices that evade representation. Were that to happen, it is not only the Palestinians who would suffer; the history of Europe too would be short-circuited, inasmuch as European history continues to be played out in the politics of the Israel/Palestinian conflict, which are in turn shaped by Europe's collective guilt surrounding the Shoah. Opaque to the global imagination, the spaces between the walls, beneath the cracks, and on the other side of the border, resist representation even when they refuse to comment on or otherwise allegorize occupation.

Rather than critiquing the globalization of Palestine and of activism on behalf of the Palestinians, I have sought here to suggest that we would do well to attend to representations that resist representation, so as to prevent technological modernity from silencing our consciences.





Mysterious Symbols in Islamic Philosophy

L.W.C. (Eric) van Lit

Council on Middle East Studies, Yale University. Blogger of Digital Orientalist

www.digitalorientalist.com



Suhrawardi's philosophical text al-Mashari' contains three mysterious symbols that the author himself claims to be the key to his own system of thought. After centuries of doubt, digital tools may be able to help understand their hidden meaning

Copies of Islamic philosophical manuscript consist of seemingly endless pages of walls of text. Readers of Islamic philosophy were not interested in embellishments or illustrations. Neither were the writers; only very seldom did they make use of graphics or symbols to get their points across. All the more exciting than that Suhrawardi (d. 1191) made use of symbolism in order to express the essence of his philosophy. In this article I will examine Suhrawardi's use of these symbols, discuss the struggle later transcribers experienced with them, and propose an improved interpretation of this symbolism using digital tools.

The Suhrawardi I am speaking of is also known as *al-maqtul*, 'the executed one,' to distinguish him from his namesakes. He was executed on the order of no one other than Saladin, the great warrior fighting the Crusaders, for his heterodox beliefs and his penchant for non-reticence.

He only lived to be 36 years old, but produced an extraordinary philosophical body of works in which he advanced a great number of innovations. He himself describes these innovations in terms of an entirely new system of thought, which he dressed up with a vocabulary around terms such as luminosity and light. Accordingly, his magnum opus is called Hikmat al-ishraq, 'The philosophy of illumination.' In a text he wrote later, al-Mashari' wa-l-Mutarahat, 'The paths and havens,' the previously-mentioned symbols appear in the introduction. The passage can be translated as follows:

When the student has fully grasped this way of thinking, then let him commence with scintillating practices according to the judgment of the Custodian of Illumination, until he himself may see some of the principles of illumination so that the foundations of the matters become resolved for him. As for the three before- mentioned forms

in 'The philosophy of illumination,' they are X Y Z. Understanding them is only granted after illumination.

I used X, Y, and Z, as placeholders for these symbols. The text in which they appear, al-Mashari', has been edited by Henry Corbin, and in Figure 1 you can see how Corbin rendered the symbols in his edition. The whole passage finds an equivalent in Hikmat al-ishraq, which I will cite here too, to make the passage more understandable:

I exhort you to preserve this book, to keep it safe and guard it from those unworthy of it. [...] Give it only to whoever has fully grasped the method of the Peripatetics, a lover of the light of God. After commencing, let him practice for forty days, abstaining from meat, taking little food, concentrating upon the contemplation of the light of God, most mighty and glorious, and according to what the Custodian of the Book commands him.

He only lived to be 36 years old, but produced an extraordinary philosophical body of works in which he advanced a great number of innovations. He himself describes these innovations in terms of an entirely new system of thought

These passages describe certain instructions for Suhrawardi's students about the circulation of his book Hikmat al-ishraq. This book is not to be handed out until a person is already an advanced student of philosophy, with knowledge of books by for example Aristotle and Ibn Sina. Suhrawardi sets up a difference between the philosophy of everybody else and his own. The former is considered Peripatetic and discursive, his own is illuminative and intuitive. For Suhrawardi they are not in fact competing but different stages; one first needs to master peripatetic philosophy before illuminative philosophy can be practiced. Then a forty day trial period begins of asceticism and meditation. The final decision whether to admit a candidate to the next round is ultimately in the hands of a 'custodian' (qayyim); a term seemingly implying Suhrawardi nominated an heir to lead a group of initiated followers. In this context, Suhrawardi disseminates three symbols which are supposed to convey a key message about Hikmat al-ishraq, and knowledge of the symbols is only granted to the initiated.

When we take a look at the evi-

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dence in manuscripts, we can learn that these symbols were cause of confusion among those copying the text. In all the three manuscripts that I consulted, the symbols do not appear in the body of the text. In a manuscript from the Topkapi palace in Istanbul, dated 1460, the symbols are added (presumably later) in the margin. In a manuscript held in Leiden and finished in 1307, the symbols are also in the margin, this time sideways and as part of a larger segment. A manuscript held in the Iranian National Library, finally, is the best evidence for the controversial relationship of the symbols with the text: where the symbols are supposed to be we only see a space left empty.

The controversy deepens when we look at the symbols themselves. I recreated these shapes on the computer so that we may take a closer look at them (figure 1). Note that Arabic is read from right to left and hence the symbols represented by X, Y, and Z are arranged in reverse order. What is instantly clear is that the shape of the symbols is not uniformly agreed upon. This is of course a big problem because now we are faced with a double-layered puzzle. We need to find out the original shape of the symbols, and we want to figure out what those shapes could mean. Further, by comparing Corbin's version with the two manuscript versions we can recognize what Corbin did when he prepared his edition. The symbols in Corbin's edition are probably not faithful reproductions of what he found in the manuscript but idealized versions. Corbin apparently saw them as geometric shapes and therefore emphasized this in his rendering, only making use of straight lines, squares and circles.

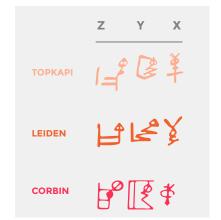


FIGURE 1
The graphic representation of the three symbols in three different edition of Suhrawardi's work.

FIGURE 2
Break down of the symbol's constituents.

Image by L. W. C. (Eric) van Lit.

Now that we have the symbols in digital format we can manipulate them more easily to decipher what they may mean. The first step is to break them down into their constituents. We can arrive at figure 2. from which we see that even at the level of smallest parts there is fluctuation among the different versions, with some parts of one version missing in the others. Breaking them down as such also reveals that Topkapi X and Corbin X are closely related. In fact, upon noticing this I used Topkapi X to breakdown Corbin X, as Corbin Xwas on its own containing indistinguishable small blobs everywhere. With help of Topkapi X it can be seen that even the smallest features of Corbin X likely rely on

> Now that we have the symbols in digital format we can manipulate them more easily to decipher what they may mean

manuscript evidence, which proves that Corbin was looking at something that looked like *Topkapi X*. Readers with knowledge of Arabic will by now have noticed the most important aspect which this breakdown easily demonstrates: the symbols are probably not meant to be seen as geometrical shapes, but instead they are constructed out of letters of the Arabic alphabet.

االكاب الانسلاخ عنالدتنا واوسطهمتنا هدهالا نوالالحبة واحزه لانه والمطارحات لعبارالأول فيمتيارع المستبرءا لاول لأنصوري وتصديع تروان الموصا الهماالقة إلا وصلان والمفردات لتي تركيان منه والهدالي المقدو بامذالي على إحدالشسان بجيء العلوم وحرى للعار المطلق والدلاعلوم الني ع ع مطلف فات العدالمطلق لانه قوّ م يخراً مه واعتبار علمه المنط

Particular of a copy of Suhawardi's text

Iranian National Library.

Using this interpretative angle, I propose that a combination of Leiden X, Leiden Y, and Topkapi Z leads to an improved version of these symbols, illustrated in figure 3. The entire sequence of these symbols then would consist of lam. alif, hamza, ha (٥), ha(८), ha, alif, ha, mim. ba. ba. and alif. The two has are ambiguous, as these shapes are also used to write the letters kha, and jim. The two bas are even more ambiguous as the way they are drawn here is not their exact form so perhaps this is not what is meant. Further, even if the form of ba was meant it could also be ta or tha as these letters have the same shape.

The use of letters to construct a symbol may be significant for an anagram or a sign of the use of numerology. If it were an anagram, I can only read Ikhuat bab al-Hama in it, 'The brothers of the gate of Hama.' But this would suppose one more letter, the waw. Hama is a city in Syria, about 120 km south of Aleppo and about 45 km north of Homs. I do not know what its significance might be, other than a name for the initiated group of followers which Suhrawardi alludes to in his al-Mashari' and Hikmat al-ishraq. If the significance lies in numerology, then we can compile figure 4. X amounts to 101, Y to 22, and Z to 50, combining for a total of 173. I do not see significance in this. When we start to explore all the sequences that arise when we disambiguate systematically the ambiguous letters, we get, predictably, results that could be

meaningful. If we read one of the bas as a tha, and read one of the has as a jim, we get a total of 666, the importance of which is obvious. If we change both bas for tas, and both has for jims, we get a total of 959, which is the same number as al-Shahrazuri huwa al-qayyim abadan, which means "Shahrazuri is the custodian forever," which would be a reference to the passage in Hikmat al-ishraq. Shahrazuri is the name of Suhrawardi's most important commentator and perhaps this is a message about the appointment of Suhrawardi's heir, as leader of the group.

Of course, numbers are notoriously easy to manipulate to get seemingly meaningful results. To know exactly what Suhrawardi wished to convey with these symbols remains a mystery.

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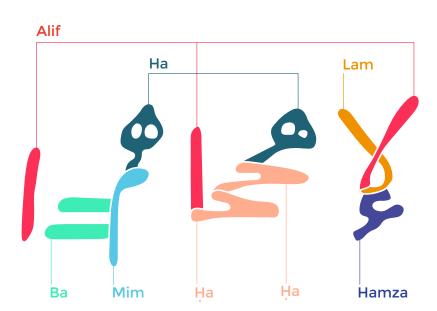


FIGURE 3
The symbols as clusters of letters.
Image by L. W. C. (Eric) van Lit.

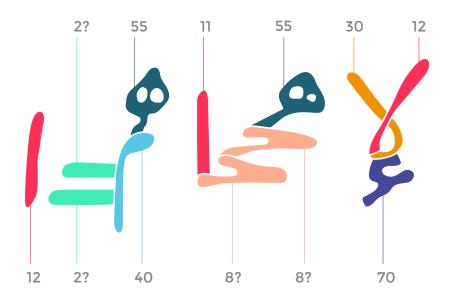


FIGURE 4
The numeric values of the letters contained in the symbols.
Image by L. W. C. (Eric) van Lit.

في المنظمة المنابعة وفي الجارانط في ما دة الموصلين في صورتما الصحب في والأنظمة المنابعة والمنابعة وفي الجارانط في ما دة الموصلين في صورتما الصحب في الفاسلة المنابعة والمنابعة والمنابعة

The Bookshelf

Walls of Freedom Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution



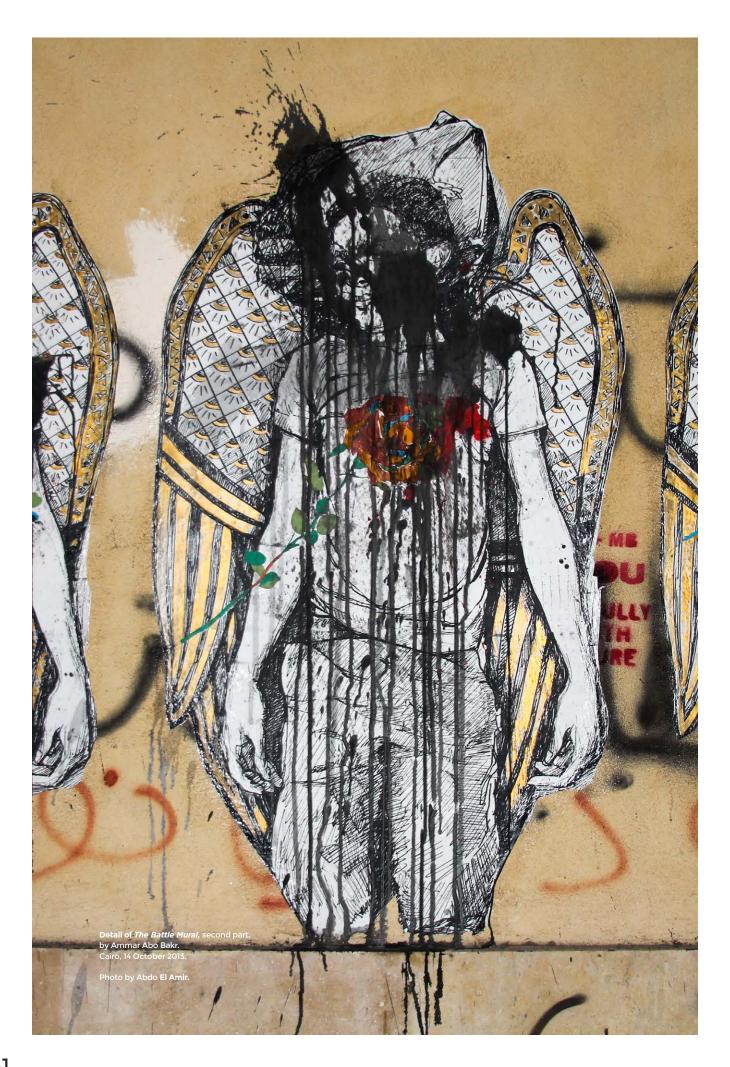
Walls of Freedom is a powerful portrayal of the first three years of the Egyptian revolution that began on January 25, 2011. The story is told through striking images that transformed Egypt's walls into a visual testimony of bravery and resistance. Created in close collaboration with artists on the frontlines of the battle, the book documents how they converted the streets into a dynamic newspaper of the people, providing a much-ne-

eded alternative to the propaganda-fueled media. This comprehensive survey of iconic street art of the Egyptian revolution includes a chronicle of the day-to-day volatile political situation as it rapidly unfolded. Wal-Is of Freedom traces the revolutionary journey from the early pinnacle of extraordinary hope and inspiration to its decline into today's violent Orwellian nightmare. Haunting images of key events captured by acclaimed photographers and activists set the stage for this political drama. Enriched with essays by artists and experts across many fields, Walls of Freedom contextualizes the graffiti in the historical, socio-political, and cultural backgrounds that have shaped this art of the revolution.

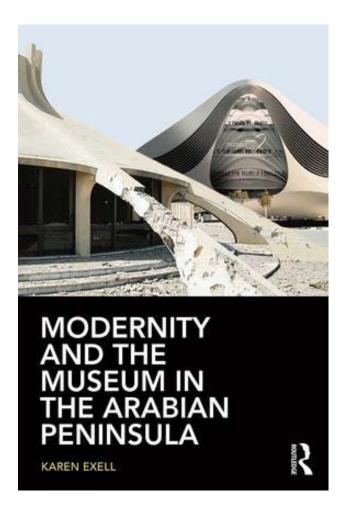
Curated & edited by Basma Hamdy, Don Karl Foreword by Ahdaf Soueif Booker prize finalist, novelist, political & cultural commentator.

Walls of Freedom. Street Art of The Egyptian Revolution

A project by Basma Hamdy & Don Karl From Here To Fame Publishing Publication date: March 2014
ISBN: 9783937946474
Hardcover, 240 full color pages, ca. 750 photos & illustrations
€ 34,95



Modernity & the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula



Museums on the Arabian Peninsula are undergoing rapid high-profile development. In many states in the region, such as in Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and the Emirates, modern Western-style museums are frequently now being announced, designed and opened. Among these, the Museum of Islamic Art of Doha, Qatar, is likely the best-known example; however, it does not stand alone. The planned Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Museum of Middle East Modern Art of Dubai and other similar projects have attracted worldwide attention for their size and scope.

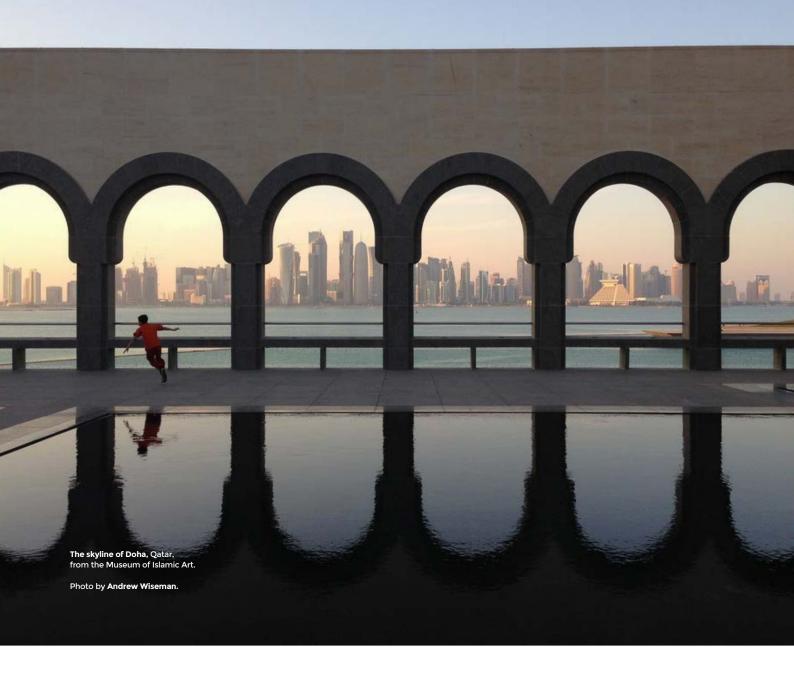
The central features of such projects and museums include spectacular architecture, world-class collections, intense international speculation, as well as a distinctive Western-orientated approach to both curation and art history. The common perception inherent in this development trend perceives the Arabian Peninsula as tabula rasa in terms of culture and tradition, where any kind of 'in-house' museological knowledge is absent.

A new book by Karen Exell challenges such preconceptions.

The result of a 4-year-long study examining museological strategies in the region, it brings to light neglected observations in the field including the emergence of smaller museums and festivals and performances reflecting aspects of local culture. Less well-known to the international public, yet culturally relevant in the region, these initiatives form components of the ruling class's general cultural strategy, which should be understood in context by global art circles. . In fact, the region is rich in heritage, but could it be that the Western world has trouble accommodating within its paradigms an art that is both intangible and performative? For this reason, its value is less well-comprehended outside of the Arabian Peninsula. Museological practices do exist in the region, following a well-designed agenda that combines local, regional and international spheres.

Lastly, alongside these public developments, there is a rich world of collection and displaying of material culture in homes and smaller, private museums: also this, a practice hardly known to the outside world.

According to Karen Exell, global and international collections are only one aspect of a much more complex cultural heritage in



practice being deployed by the ruling families. A twofold political agenda aims at retaining cultural and traditional identity while balancing it with aspects of a more secular modernity, thus promoting both large-scale and internationally relevant museums and locally significant cultural events.

The central thesis of the book is that international and local cultural productions in the sphere of museums exist simultaneously and each is a product of the regional engagement with globalization processes with each articulating aspects of the regional contemporary identity.

The book is probably the first one presenting a coherent overview of the landscape of museums and heritage projects in the Peninsula, while providing a critical evaluation on the nature of contemporary museum and culture-related projects.

Modernity & the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula

By Karen Exell
Routledge
Publication date: March 2016
ISBN: 9780415744911
Paperback, 230 pages
£ 29.99

Walls of Freedom: Reflections on a Revolution

Constitution of the State of th

The graffiti of the Egyptian Revolution began with scrawls on the walls of Cairo, demanding 'bread, freedom and social justice', that were painted by protestors and revolutionaries in order to mobilize people against a 30-year old oppressive regime. In Egypt, the act of writing and painting on the wall dates back to the time of the pharaohs, when artists created satirical works against rulers and authority figures. Before the recent revolution, however, the oppressive Egyptian rulers had restricted this type of freedom of expression. Marching through the streets of Egypt and pouring into Tahrir Square, Egyptians were occupying public space, marking their territory and restoring their freedom. At the time, it seemed that the revolution was a happy ending to a long and arduous journey and that those scrawls marked the end of a turbulent chapter in Egypt's history. However, the creation of graffiti continued to expand, echoing the tumultuous events of the revolution, transforming the walls into an explosive and powerful visual commentary and becoming a testimony to Egypt's journey of resistance.

In the battles of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, as protestors were tear-gassed and shot, and injured and killed, their voices found their place on the walls of many cities. Artists painted and stenciled the faces of Egypt's martyrs, honoring and commemorating their bravery and sacrifice. But the martyrs' faces were whitewashed and destroyed in an attempt to tarnish their reputations and stifle the spirit of the revolution. The graffiti started with the face of Khalid Said, the icon of the revolution, who was followed by hundreds of faces of young men and women who chose to resist a brutal and oppressive regime.

Walls were not only a commemorative space, but also a platform for public shaming, a space to ridicule and expose those who betrayed the revolution. They were a space to document important events, announcing ideologies and predicting things to come. When the dust settled, the conspiracy theories were fabricated, and the promise of economic stability took precedence over the promise of human rights, graffiti became the last remaining testimony of the revolution. But eventually even the graffiti was erased, the walls were demolished, and the power of graffiti was undermined. Despite this, the revolution lives on through the meticulous documentation recorded in archives, publications, and films that will continue to tell this story to future generations.

Basma Hamdy

Assistant Professor of Conflict Graffiti and Cultural Preservation







The third installment of the famous mural *Illi Kalif Ma Matsh*, "He who delegates authority has not died". Here the half Mubarak / half Tantawi face includes Mohamed Badie, the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, who was said to control President Mohamed Morsi and in effect run the country.

An army of Mubarak Central Se-

curity policemen are labeled with ACAB (all cops are bastards).

The word bardo, meaning still, was added to the original phrase indicating both persistence on the artist's part and highlighting that things were yet to change in Egypt's government.

At the bottom is a poem that reads: "You, a regime that is scared of a brush and a pen / And you act

unjustly, and step over those you have wronged / If you were doing things right, you wouldn't have been afraid of drawings / This is the most you can do, fighting walls, pretending to be powerful in the face of lines and colors / But inside, you are a coward. You will never build up what has been destroyed".

Top: "Revolution Artists Union".





















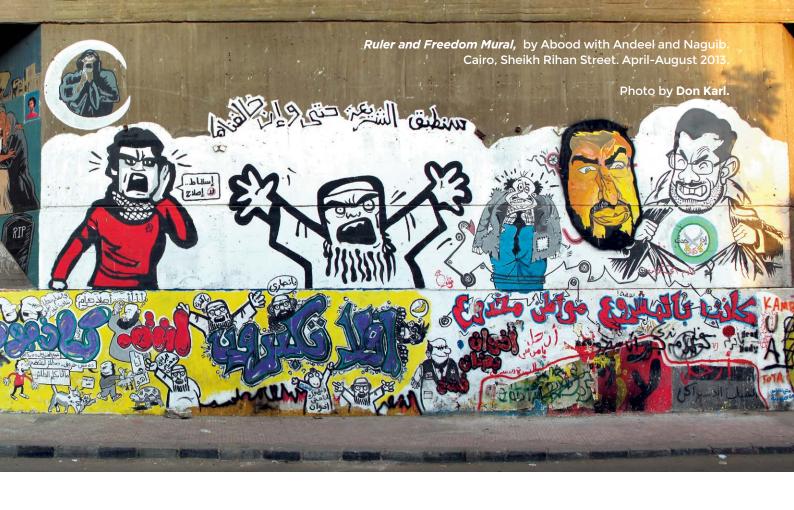


















Martyr Bassem Mohsen Wardany was a 20-year-old revolutionary who left Suez in February 2011 to join anti-Mubarak protests. He lost his left eye at the hands of a sniper in the Battle of Mohamed Mahmoud on 21 November 2011. He was sentenced before a military court in early 2012, beaten by MB supporters and finally joined the Tamarod movement and was its leader in Suez. He quickly

became disenchanted with the new leaders after their violent crackdown on Islamists. On 20 December 2013 he was shot at a pro-Muslim Brotherhood protest and died two days later. His story summarizes the revolution, for he was both its product and victim. Unlike previous portrayals of martyrs as angels, he is depicted metamorphosing into a fly to reflect his resilience as a revolutionary.

In Egypt's New Kingdom (1550 - 1069 BC) the fly was used as military decoration awarded for bravery in battles and named the "order of the golden fly" (or fly of valor) because of its persistence in the face of opposition. The artist likens protestors to flies because, despite their fragility, they are a nuisance and difficult to kill. Bassem's portrait is based on a photo by Ahmed Hayman.

















