



CONTEXTUALISING THE ART SALON IN THE ARAB REGION

The Orient-Institut Beirut and the Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock Museum are organizing an international conference on 27 and 28 October 2017 that aims to contextualize the art salon in the Arab region. The symposium, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, brings together researchers and curators, artists and critics to discuss the emergence of the art salon in the region in the colonial and post-colonial context, reflect on knowledge circulations between Europe and the Middle East, and analyse the function of the art salon in relation to collecting practices and the public.

ABSTRACTS

PANEL 1: Early Salons and the Politics of Taste-making

Alain Messaoudi (Université de Nantes): Les Salons Annuels de Beaux-Arts en Tunisie entre 1894 et 1934

À partir des livrets des salons annuels de beaux-arts en Tunisie et des comptes rendus critiques qui en ont été publiés dans les revues et la presse quotidienne, nous proposons d'analyser la transformation d'une forme d'exposition entre les années 1890 et les années 1930 en nous fondant plus spécifiquement sur l'analyse des années 1894-1897, qui sont celles de l'apparition des premiers salons, et 1931-1934, qui nous semblent marquer une transition. Alors que les salons tunisiens constituaient dans les années 1890 la seule manifestation collective annuelle où les artistes pouvaient présenter leurs œuvres, peintures et sculptures étant associées aux objets d'art, les salons du début des années 1930 ont pris une signification différente : les expositions collectives se sont multipliées au lendemain de la Première Guerre mondiale (salon des artistes tunisiens, exposition artistique de l'Afrique française, exposition annuelle des élèves et des anciens élèves de l'École des beaux-arts) et coexistent désormais avec de nombreuses expositions individuelles ou collectives ponctuelles, présentées dans des lieux mixtes (hôtels, grands magasins, organes de presse, clubs, boutiques) ou dans les premières galeries spécialisées (avec l'ouverture de la galerie Art Nouveau en 1927). Nous analyserons les formes de soutien des pouvoirs publics à des salons généralement fondés à l'initiative d'acteurs privés (comme l'Institut de Carthage, association fondatrice du salon tunisien) et le sens qu'on leur prête dans la presse. Constate-t-on une certaine forme de désengagement des pouvoirs publics coloniaux entre les années 1890 et 1930, ou faut-il plutôt souligner la continuité de leur action, sous des formes nouvelles ? La place que la presse réserve aux salons diffère-t-elle entre les années 1890 et 1930,



et peut-on constater des divergences de points de vue, selon l'orientation politique des titres ? Dans les années 1930, un journal de gauche ouvert aux revendications des nationalistes tunisiens comme *Tunis-Socialiste*, un quotidien proche de la Résidence générale comme *La Dépêche tunisienne*, et un journal de droite défendant les intérêts des colons comme la *Tunisie française* conçoivent-ils différemment les salons ? Fondent-ils leurs jugements esthétiques sur des systèmes de valeurs qui leur sont propres ? En répondant dans la mesure du possible à cet ensemble de questions, nous chercherons à dégager la signification politique des salons, à mesurer leur centralité dans le monde de l'art et à caractériser les principaux traits de leur évolution au cours d'une quarantaine d'années que l'on peut considérer comme l'*âge d'or* du protectorat français en Tunisie, entre sa mise en place dans les années 1880 et la généralisation de sa contestation dans la seconde moitié des années 1930.

Nancy Demerdash-Fatemi (Wells College): The Aesthetics of Tastemaking in (and out of) the Algerian Salon

Since the onset of the French occupation and subsequent settler colonization of Algeria in 1830, several arts institutions emerged in tandem with the colonial administration's need for cultural reconnaissance in situ. Apart from museums and departmental divisions for cultural affairs, salons doubly operated as places to feature up-and-coming artists and as spaces for the comingling of elite non-Algerians. But not long after the establishment of the colony, these groups grew to exhibit the work of *peintres noirs*, other minority populations (e.g. both Sephardic and nonMaghrebi Jews, Italians), and eventually, 'native' Algerians as well. The Salon des Artistes algériens et orientalistes (est. 1897), Salon de la Photographie (est. 1934, initiated by the PhotoClub d'Alger), and the Salon d'Hiver (organized by the Syndicat professionnel des Artistes algériens) played a significant role in promoting the artistic trends and vogues of the métropole, all while steering and defining aesthetic shifts in the colony. This paper inquires into the historical transplantation and nature of the salon in French colonial Algeria with a number of entangled questions: How was so-called 'Orientalist' art defined and what was the relationship between this sub-genre and l'art arabe? In the context of the nineteenth century Maghreb, did l'art indigène (also defined as 'traditional and popular arts,' e.g. objects demoted to the status of 'craft,' namely textiles, metalwork, wood carvings, or ceramics) ever figure into the exhibition program of the salon, and if so, what terms merited its inclusion? What was the currency and value of these criteria and how did their usage inform the selection of artists, the formation of exhibitions, and the institution of the Salon in North Africa generally? On what grounds did specific art forms, techniques or subject matter qualify as distinctly 'Algerian'? What was the nature of interactions between these colonial salons and those parallel groups in neighboring protectorates of Tunisia and later, Morocco? Relatedly, how did artworks and artists of the Algerian salon circulate locally and transregionally/transnationally? In what ways did these societies and groups elevate the status and promote patronage of certain artists, such as the Muslim convert Étienne Dinet or the Algerian miniaturist Mohamed Racim, perhaps to the exclusion of others (and relatedly, how has recent historiography, perhaps inadvertently, privileged these figures as a result of the salons' praise of them)? At its core, this paper reconsiders the development of the salon in French colonial Algeria, in part through archival research in popular journals such as *L'Afrique du Nord illustrée*: journal hebdomadaire d'actualités nord-africain, *L'illustration algérienne, tunisienne et marocaine*, and *Les Annales Coloniales*. From these sources and inventories, one can begin to assess the very public but also institutional construction of taste in the context of the Algerian salon.

Maria-Mirka Palioura (Benaki Museum): Archival Testimony for the Early Years of the Cairo Salon (1891-1904)

In the last decade of the 19th century, the establishment of the annual art exhibition in Cairo—the *Caire-Salon*—inspired by the well-known European Salons, shaped the course of artistic production that was to follow in Egypt. It inaugurated the systematic training in fine arts and became the template for the form of organized exhibitions. The documentation of the institution’s history, which came under the khedival auspices almost from its inception, is an interesting field of research, where the presence and activity of European artists are recorded and the echoes of the colonial milieu resound clearly. By the same token, it provides a glimpse of Europe’s cultural influence and relations with its south-eastern neighbors. In its four volumes, the truly valuable personal Archive of the Greek Orientalist painter Theodore Ralli (1852-1909), a student of J.-L. Gérôme, offers a wealth of information—forming a separate corpus in its own right. It provides a detailed picture of this particular artistic organization during the first years of its existence. It also attests to the significant contribution of Th. Ralli as one of the *Salon's* co-founders. The Archive, apart from the artist's works, photographic reproductions and handwritten notes, includes art-criticism pieces, which appeared mainly in the Egyptian French- and English-speaking press of the era. In addition to the names of the participating artists—women and men—and the titles of their works, it holds information regarding the preparations leading to the event i.e. brochures, tickets, visiting hours, details of sales, etc. Furthermore, it bears witness to the parallel existence of different ateliers and the availability of private drawing and painting courses for men and women in Cairo. What is more, it reveals that it was common practice among artists to put up the same works for exhibition at the Paris Salon; this practice became an “art bridge” of sorts between the two cities and strengthened the khedival regime's endeavours to raise the Egyptian capital to the status of European cities hosting similar artistic events. Within this context, my paper will focus on textual evidence drawn from the Archive dating in the years 1891-1904, during which Th. Ralli spent the winters in Cairo. The archival study will also bring to light unknown facets of the institution’s history related to the production of art and its reception—primarily by the communities of the European bourgeois classes in Cairo—allowing for a variety of interpretations within the particular colonial setting of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Dina Ramadan (Bard College): Society of the Lovers of the Fine Arts and the Formation of an Egyptian Artistic Awareness

In its founding bylaws, *Jam'iyat Muhibi al-Funun al-Jamila* [Society of the Lovers of the Fine Arts] outlines its mission as “the revival/promotion of the fine arts and working towards its development, spreading artistic awareness and participating in the international fine arts movement.” The bylaws further state that “It is not permitted for the society to debate political and religious matters.” Established in Cairo in 1922 by land baron and art collector Muhammad Mahmud Khalil and Prince Yusif Kamal (patron of the School of Fine Arts), *Jam'iyat Muhibi al-Funun al-Jamila* becomes the most significant forum for the discussion of the fine arts throughout the early decades of the 20th century. The society’s annual salon became a key fixture in Egypt’s art calendar. By examining some of the foundational documents, as well as catalogues and reviews of the earliest editions of the Salon, this paper maps out the ways in which the Society sought to carry out its mission of the reviving/promoting and developing the fine arts, its strategies for “spreading artistic awareness” and the nature of its engagement with an “international” arts discourse. As an association that brought together some of the country’s most powerful elite, I will focus specifically on the role it played in shaping a middle class aesthetic sensibility. I am particularly interested in how pieces exhibited in the annual Salon came to

produce a catalogue of aesthetic measures for audiences over the years. In what ways did discourses about art and taste promoted by the Society and its Salon intersect with larger discussions about the formation and education of the Egyptian subject during this late colonial moment, and what was the specific importance assigned to the fine arts in this educational process.

PANEL 2: Defiance and Alternatives

Monique Bellan (OIB): The Poetics and Politics of Display: The Egyptian Avant-Garde defying the Salon

This paper looks at the surrealist movement and their exhibition practices in general and the *Art et Liberté* group more precisely, which was active in Cairo during the late 1930s and 40s. The surrealists challenged aesthetic, moral and social conventions and tried to translate this attitude into their exhibitions by redefining the idea of subject and object, the way of displaying objects, and the notion of the “art work” itself. The very idea of an “order” was to be disturbed and the habitual perceptions of art and life deconstructed. The surrealists’ aim was to erode the art institution that contributed to a consolidation of power, and the return to a spiritual experience of art. The museum and its conventional exhibition concepts and formats such as the salon were to be undermined and desacralized. The use of new media, the concept of the *objet trouvé* and its *détournement*, the interest in so-called primitive art, and the development of a new aesthetic repertoire questioned the established aesthetic and moral categories and the role of the artist in society. The members of also acted as curators of their own exhibitions and some of them also wrote critical essays. I argue that by creating alternative exhibitions concepts, surrealists were transforming the exhibition space (including invitation cards, catalogues etc.) into a political space where the perspectives and relations of subjects and objects towards each other were redefined and places redistributed: the more or less passive beholder was to become an active individual who explores the exhibition space – sometimes at the risk of getting “lost”. The poetic dimension was achieved through dreamlike exhibition-landscapes and the radical juxtaposition of hitherto unrelated things, especially from the realm of “non-art”. The conventional system of classification and categorization was replaced by a “spherical” approach that related artists and objects in a non-hierarchical manner. As such, the surrealist movement was an important element in the artistic and literary landscape of the time as it defied the liaison of artistic display and political power.

Amin Alsaden (Harvard University): Alternative Salons: Cultivating Art and Architecture in the Domestic Spaces of Post-WWII Baghdad

Prior to the annual exhibitions organized by the Al-Mansur Club and the Iraqi Artists Society, both launched in 1956, it is implausible to talk of a rigorous art salon culture in modern Baghdad. And yet, the city’s community of artists and architects came together regularly within a constellation of other spaces—primarily domestic—that fostered candid exchanges, circulated the latest production, and formulated taste. This paper demonstrates how these domestic spaces became incubators of progressive art and architectural cultures that paved the way for subsequent institutionalization. Indeed, it was at artists’ and architects’ residences that some of the first exhibitions were organized, where debates raged, patronage evolved, art groups formed, and professional associations were born. The paper argues that these spaces—frequented by artists, architects, and their friends and supporters, and successful partly due to their informality and inclusiveness—constituted safe places where artistic discourses and practices developed and

unprecedented forms of collectivity emerged. These interiors represented alternative art salons, a hybrid model bringing together the famed European salons, to which Iraqi artists were exposed during their education abroad, and traditional literary and religious gatherings (or Diwans), common to middle and upper class Baghdadis. Complementing a series of spaces that constituted the public sphere in mid twentieth century Baghdad, including cafés and bookstores, among others, these gatherings played a pivotal role in pondering the role of art and architecture and their public reception. In addition to providing an overview of the context, the paper will present three palpable outcomes of the exchanges that occurred within these domestic spaces: the cross-pollination between ostensibly competing artistic collectives, namely the Al-Ruwad (SP) Group and the Baghdad Group for Modern Art; the transfer of key ideas from artists to architects during the 1950s and 1960s; and the overall shift toward the expression of local specificity that came to characterize art and architecture in modern Baghdad.

Nada Shabout (University of North Texas): Art Salons and the Baghdad Avant-Garde

The story of modern art in Iraq was started by art groups. Their activities to promote modern art in Baghdad included organizing exhibitions as private endeavors. Lacking the infrastructure, it had become popular for artists to exhibit in private homes with the establishment of the “Friends of Art” in 1941. The first exhibition of Jemaat al-Ruwad (The Pioneer Group, SP) in 1950, initiated a more structured system of exhibitions that would become more regular and vibrant with Jemaat Baghdad lil Fann al-Hadith (the Baghdad Group of Modern Art) for the rest of the 1950s and most of the 1960s. More importantly, these exhibitions signaled the artists’ awareness of the need for artistic and intellectual gatherings to construct a new culture capable of sustaining innovation in art. It thus initiated their role as key players in encouraging modern art and influencing public taste within the Baghdad middle class culture. Modern Iraqi artists during the 1940s and 50s were instrumental in creating art consciousness and interest in Baghdad that instigated a culture that appreciated and collected modern Iraqi art before an official institution was established. Iraqi modern art became an important identity marker for Iraqis. This alternative unofficial artistic gathering persisted as the main format even after the founding of the Gulbenkian Museum in 1962, which served as the Iraqi National Museum of Modern Art until the establishment of the Saddam Center for the Arts in the 1980s, along with a new structure of official exhibitions, such as Maaridh al-Hizb, the Baath Party exhibitions. This paper examines and historicizes this notion of alternative salons in establishing a different norm in Iraq within an evolving socio-political culture, and its role in developing an emerging middle class interested in Iraqi art as a national product, which in turn initiated the desire to collect. Moreover, the system had a decisive role in the trajectory of modern art in Iraq.

PANEL 3: Circulations

Camilla Murgia (University of Geneva): Patterns for Glory: The Reward System in Northern African Salons

In May 1895, the *Revue Tunisienne*, an official Tunisian journal, published a review of the newly founded Salon Tunisien, the first edition of which took place just in 1894. The journal carefully reported detailed accounts of the speeches given by different political and cultural representatives on the opening of the show, scheduled for May 8. Among them, General Servonnet, president of the Institut de Carthage, proudly claimed that visitors would be assuredly impressed by the remarkable role played by “les oeuvres d’origine locale” (*Revue Tunisienne*,

vol.2, 1895, p.282). A little later, in a second speech, the same General Servonnet insisted on France as an artistic model, in an seemingly contradictory way (p.290). The Salon Tunisien, as well as other Salons of Northern Africa, such as the Salon of the Société des Artistes Algériens, much relied on the structure of the French official Salon. However, while art exhibitions raised in Northern Africa from the 1890s onwards, the official Salon started to decline in France. African Salons evidently developed from a French background but evolved leading to different issues. Within this context, the reward system, generated according to the same structure than the Parisian Salon, is representative of this transformation. The purpose of my paper is precisely to investigate this mechanism of reward and to understand to what extent it was crucial to the development of Northern Africa Salons. In my paper, I intend to demonstrate that the number of prizes awarded helped these events to gain a national and international reputation, and that they also contributed to shape local art as an autonomous cultural entity, different from France. In a first instance I will focus on the relationship between these Salons and the impact that African art had in France. Particularly, I will discuss the artistic exchanges that the system of rewards, scholarships and subventions determined. The fact that, for instance, the Algerian government endorsed the Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français with the establishment of the Prix de la Villa Abd-el-Tif is representative of the intense exchanges between these two cultural entities. Secondly, I will show how this system affected the rise of a national art and how this art became progressively different from the French model. I am interested in this process of autonomy and in the construction of nationhood through artistic productions.

Morad Montazami: Ecole de Paris: Critical study and wanderings around the Pan-Arab breach

Regarding the role of Arab artists within the famously known Ecole de Paris movement and networks, we should probably take the question of marginality not at the front but from the back door, that is to say to ask ourselves how one inhabits the margins, eludes the margins or eventually survives the margins – more than the question what is marginality or who is marginal. By doing so, different modes of encounters seem to prevail, whether at the margins of the Ecole des Beaux-arts studios in the 1950s, of the art galleries resume along 1960-70s, or it could be obviously at the margins of a Parisian exhibition catalogue, whenever and especially during those time. Ahmed Cherkaoui, Jilali Gharbaoui, Mohammed Khadda, Shafic Abboud, begin to appear as almost renowned names, behind which a lot of unheard names of Arab artists can be indexed “in margins”. Are we talking about a backlash to a Western movement – broadly embracing “art informel”, “abstraction lyrique”, “tachisme”, “art brut” –, uneasy to say if it happens from the inside, or do the experiments exposed by those names embody a dialectical and transcultural movement? What visual counter-narratives to Ecole de Paris’ institutional heads did the Pan-Arab ideology and iconology oppose?

Catherine Cornet: From Egypt to Europe and Back: Artistic circulation within Egyptian state patronage structures

Egypt has proposed artists to the Venice Biennial since 1938 and holds a pavilion since 1952. Being nominated as curator or artist for the Egyptian pavilion and being displayed in one of the most important artistic arenas of the world clearly represents a crucial career path for Egyptian artists. Similarly, becoming a laureate of the Academy of Egypt in Rome – a unique institution for Egypt’s soft power – is an important reward for young artists offering the possibility to study abroad especially for those coming from peripheral regions and backgrounds. Starting from an analysis of the archives of the Biennial on the Egyptian pavilion in Venice, and those of the Academy of

Egypt in Rome that is participating in the selection of the artists, the presentation partially uncovers the role of Egyptian cultural institutions in producing public taste and identity through the international patronage of its artists. Building on the seminal work of Jessica Winegar who separates the aesthetic positions of the Egyptian artists under the Mubarak era between artists who emphasise 'indigenous sources of authenticity (*asala*)' and those who privilege 'international sources of authenticity (*Mu'asira*)', the presentation also scrutinizes the nexus and links between the national salons, such as the Youth Salon, and the international arenas. Finally, from Egypt to Europe and back, I question key state policies such as the issues of *tathqif*, or "culturalisation", the ideas of authenticity, nationalism and modernity and uncover the dissemination patterns between national art salons and international arenas while drawing a few conclusions on the internationalisation of the discourse on state cultural policy.

PANEL 4: The Afterlife of the Salon in Lebanon

Yasmine Chemali (Sursock Museum): Sursock Museum's permanent collection through the gaze of the Salon d'Automne

The establishment of the Salon d'Automne at Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock Museum came as a statement when the museum opens its doors to the public on November, 18, 1961. Its mission was inspired by the 19th century Parisian exhibitions: embracing all production made in the art field presenting artworks selected by a jury for their purely artistic value, or their value of testimony. Since 1961, with its 32 editions, the Salon d'Automne has exhibited around 3,000 artworks from an average of 79 artists by Salon. 121 Prizes and Awards were attributed to confirmed artists (Shafic Abboud, Aref el Rayess or Saloua Raouda Choucair), mid-career artists (Rima Amyuni or Samar Mogharbel), and new generations (Flavia Codsí, Charles Khoury, Joe Kesrouani). Purchased by the museum or donated by the artists, the artworks have entered the museum's premises following the Salon d'Automne and constitute the foundations of the permanent collection. Basically, one third of the Sursock Museum's collection is made up of Salon d'Automne works, and almost every artist featured in the collection took part in a Salon.

Through the museum's archives, application folders, photographic documentation, annual Salon catalogues, critical articles published in the Lebanese press and interviews, this paper analyzes the success and importance of the Salon as the heart and soul of a modern and contemporary institution such as the Sursock Museum. If the model advocated in the 1960s needs to be redefined within a new context of heightened competition and renewal of the art scene, the Salon d'Automne remains a breeding ground for research and debates on artistic movements and tendencies as well as a component of the acquisition process of the museum.

Ghalya Saadawi (Independent): The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same: Salon, Anti-Salon, Contemporary Art

From representing the beaux-art and bourgeois establishment, to becoming a modern and contemporary art museum, the shift to contemporary art that the Sursock Museum has undertaken, reflects broader global, and hence local, conditions in art. The art establishment of the previous era is currently the contemporary art regime of present. The contemporary (and its cultural auxiliary, contemporary art) could be said to be the time that erases and replicates times, allowing for example, for the phenomenon and logics of the art salon, to exist contiguously with, or, to be contemporary art. The talk tries to theorize these changes through a discussion of Lebanese art and institutions in the morphing face of what can now be counted as established,

official and canonical. If the immediate post-Taef period was marked by sets of moves and works that could be qualified in opposition to the claims of the art and political establishment – via their forms, content, media – how can we historicize the recuperation of these, and the artistic and extra-artistic changes in the decades leading up to the present? The presentation seeks to investigate the conditions, as well as the material and ideological effects of these shifts in the Lebanese context.