

Abstraction Unframed (Abu Dhabi/Sharjah, 20–25 May 16)

Abu Dhabi and Sharjah, May 20–23, 2016

Deadline: Oct 31, 2015

Jessica Gerschultz

Abstraction Unframed

Fourth Annual Conference of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Turkey and Iran (AMCA) in partnership with Barjeel Art Foundation and NYUAD

Our art historical account of modernism has long been rooted in an idea of dissatisfaction with representation, in a twentieth-century impatience with perceived distance from 'real' material, emotion, or knowledge. While Western scholarship privileges one network of European artists with the invention of abstraction in 1910, this dissatisfaction with representation permeated other disciplines as well. Modern architects ceased concerning themselves with historical styles as a *métier*, instead designing machines for living, and for knowing. By mid century, the methods of postwar sociology and planning shifted in the direction of producing data sets which, offering ways to manipulate experience apart from the singularity of good taste or the frame of the individual, became material to the art object (and its deconstruction) as well. At stake in these multiple abstractions was the dream of true being, as might exist outside the specificity of language or culture.

There is no monopoly on this dream. Nomenclature to describe the transcendence of the singularity of appearances in fact proliferates in translation – the Arabic word *tajreed*, the Persian *entaze'e* or the Turkish word *soyutlama*, and other names – to denote formal states beyond natural likeness such as a lasting structure or eternal concept. And yet, still tethered to the very word abstraction—as it is used in the narrow disciplinary frame of artistic modernism—is a concept of representation that has been formed within the particular historical context of the European tradition of illusionistic painting. Abstraction acquired its sense in reference to a lack, a pulling away from visual representation, an absence of the figure. If this is our disciplinary inheritance, what can be made of work with traditions that never placed emphasis on the icon, or never submitted to the representational limits of the painterly frame? How can we attend to the multiplicity of other artistic problems, or modes of creation, found in modernism writ large? To the many strands of Eastern mysticism and vitalist philosophy that provided an impetus to abstraction, on all shores? What history can we write for the artists who made their own mobility a ground for new abstractions, moving from discipline to discipline, and circulating around various cities and countries?

The fourth AMCA conference seeks to open the concept of abstraction up to inquiry across multiple disciplinary formulations, so as to probe both the frame of modern abstraction and its promise to unframe. Papers might engage a range of subjects, including and not limited to (1) crit-

ical accounts of the concept of abstraction; (2) case studies of artistic practice; (3) critical analyses of interactions between artists and architects, or art and calculation; (4) reinterpretations of global conditions for abstract art in the twentieth century. As a whole, the conference is intended to highlight transformations of abstraction in the non-West, including the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey, and the history of aniconic ornament in their spiritual landscapes. Equally it aims to take other impetuses into account: the abstract calculations of colonialism, economics, and planning that produced the modern condition, as well as ethical issues surrounding the abdication of the figure or the non-figure (such as sincerity of practice or lack thereof).

The conference will take place at two institutions: NYU-Abu Dhabi and the Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah. By convening the conference in conjunction with a collection of art assembled outside national boundaries, and within a new institution of higher learning located between the Middle East and Asia, in which Europe is de-centered, we anticipate that our discussions in the United Arab Emirates will enable us to un-frame abstraction as an artistic process, goal, and critique. To that end, the conference will conclude with a day of "unconference", when the questions raised in the conference may be applied to the collection of art in the Barjeel Foundation. This collection includes work by Etel Adnan, Mohammed Melehi, Mona Saudi, Hugette Caland, Shakir Hassan Al Said, Omar El Nagdi, and others may be viewed at <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/u/0/collection/barjeel-art-foundation>.

All proposals to be submitted by Oct 31st 2015

to: info@amcainternational.org. Responses will be emailed on December 1st, 2015

Organizers:

Saleem Al-Bahloly (EUME Fellow 2014-2016, Forum Transregionale Studien)

Jessica Gerschultz (University of Kansas)

Anneka Lenssen (UC Berkeley)

Nada Shabout (University of North Texas)

Reference:

CFP: Abstraction Unframed (Abu Dhabi/Sharjah, 20-25 May 16). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 19, 2015 (accessed Jul 24, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/11042>>.