

Installing Islamic Art: Interior Space and Temporal Imagination (IJIA)

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CALL FOR PAPERS

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Special Issue on Installing Islamic Art: Interior Space and Temporal Imagination

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With the establishment of new cultural institutions in the Middle East and Africa, major Islamic art collections have relocated across the globe during the past decade. A number of Euro-American museums, too, have embarked on remodelling their decades-old gallery configurations for presenting material remains from the Muslim-majority societies of the Arab lands, Iran, Turkey and South Asia and have continuously sought compromised, if not ideal, display modes. On the other hand, such efforts have revitalised the following contentious debates concerning the display genre of "Islamic art": to what extent fragmental archaeological finds, restored objects and detached manuscript painting pages can be installed as the unified image of Muslim civilisation within a self-contained space; how such decontextualised objects might speak for themselves; and how they reflect current politics of representation in the midst of global transformations.

The installation of Islamic art has gone through a series of vigorous changes over the centuries. As a display genre, nineteenth-century Orientalist fantasies articulated at world's fairs served to define static, timeless images of the "Orient" for popular consumption and formed the basis of exhibitory concepts in which the world of Islam ought to be represented in the Euro-American museums during the first half of the twentieth century. In recent years, however, a number of cultural institutions worldwide, particularly those with the adjective "Islamic" in their names, began to be involved in a growing sociological and historical debate as to the function and meaning of the display of Islamic art. It has been increasingly argued that both public and private museums should be designed to offer opportunities for wide public engagement for a better understanding of Muslim civilisation.

What remains to be considered within these larger debates, however, is the design of Islamic art installations itself? the interior space as a three-dimensional, mixed-media construction or as an architecturally unified space (different from the display of separate sculpture or other individual art works). While these topics have been well explored in other fields, the display of Islamic art installation as a form of visual and spatial expression on its own terms remains largely understudied.

A number of potential topics surrounding Islamic art galleries and their exhibitions can be proposed, such as the interactivity of its space, as well as its commitments to the needs of non-specialist visitors, and the question of self-expression on the part of curators and exhibition designers.

This special issue invites papers that explore the history, culture and politics of the interior space in the field of Islamic art and architecture from the eighteenth century to the present, as well as to those that extend discussion into the future. Preference is given to topics dealing with global trends, covering a wide area of the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America, but new approaches to the installation of Islamic art in well-established Euro-American museums would be welcome as well.

Themes may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1) The relationship between internal space and the permanent galleries that this space holds—how does the container itself shape what “Islamic art” means to the viewer?
- 2) What are the representational politics at stake in preparing temporary exhibitions (within standing museum buildings or mobile architectural environments such as biennales) dedicated to the presentation of Muslim cultures and societies—relationships between objects, their textual commentary, spatial layout and design, as well as modes of display?
- 3) What are some of the dominant theoretical or methodological debates (e.g., modernity vs. revivalism, secularisation vs. spiritualisation, neo-Orientalism vs. neo-Occidentalism) that have animated discussions concerning galleries and their display in general, and specifically in relationship to “Islamic art”?
- 4) How can “Muslim civilisational” agendas be represented in the contexts of ethnographical, archaeological or fine art museums?
- 5) What kind of organisational layout was in the past popular or is currently dominant in the display mode of Islamic art (chronologically, geographically, thematically or according to types of objects—e.g. ceramics, metalwork, textiles, manuscript painting), and what were/are the advantages or disadvantages of each layout?
- 6) What are the roles of architectural models, reconstructions or replicas in museum installations, and how are they integrated into the image-making of Islamic art and architecture in exhibitory contexts?
- 7) What are the voices of curators and exhibition designers, and how are they reflected (or suppressed) in the design of Islamic art galleries?
- 8) What are possibilities for the display of Islamic art without objects through digital interfaces and remote connection?
- 9) How can and should the display genre of “Islamic art” evolve in the future as increasing pressure is placed on the need to represent the religion to a global public?
- 10) What are new trends in museum architecture, with special reference to its gallery space or/and the relationship between the exterior and the interior, and in particular those spectacular buildings that are designed by leading architects and interior designers, and their ability (or limits) to convey messages about the nature of Islamic art and/or Muslim civilisation?

Essays that focus on historical and theoretical analysis (DiT papers) should have a minimum of 5,000 words but not more than 8,000 words, and essays on design (DiP papers in the context of

this special issue would ideally come from participants in curating museum spaces or developing theoretical models for assessing the impact of museum space/design and layout on visitors) can range from 3,000 to 4,000 words.

Contributions from scholars of Islamic art and architectural history, scholars of museum studies, anthropology, ethnography, archaeology, sociology and political theory in the broadest sense, as well as critics of exhibition history and design are welcome. Contributions from practitioners who have experienced with the designing of art exhibitions and galleries (with Islamic or non-Islamic themes) or who wish to propose a new installation scheme are particularly welcome, and should bear in mind the critical framework of the journal.

Please send a 400-word abstract with the essay title to the guest editor, Dr Yuka Kadoi (ijia.installation@gmail.com), by 31 January 2017. Those whose proposals are accepted will be contacted soon thereafter and requested to submit full papers to the journal by 30 June 2017. All papers will undergo full peer review.

For author instructions regarding paper guidelines, please consult: www.intellectbooks.com/ijia.

Reference:

CFP: Installing Islamic Art: Interior Space and Temporal Imagination (IJIA). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 16, 2016 (accessed Oct 30, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/13687>>.