The Art Salon in the Arab Region (Beirut, 27-28 Oct 17)

Beirut, Oct 27–28, 2017
Deadline: Jun 5, 2017

Monique Bellan, Orient-Institut Beirut, Max Weber Stiftung

Contextualising the Art Salon in the Arab Region

The Orient-Institut Beirut and the Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock Museum are organizing a symposium on 27-28 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. To disseminate the research findings, a publication will be prepared to be published in time for the Sursock Museum's next Salon d'Automne in November 2018.

Salons, art academies' official exhibitions, started in France under Louis XIV. The academies of art in Paris and London and their annual salons soon became the most powerful institutions in the European art world of the time, patronizing art and directing public taste. Only in the nineteenth century did artists start to oppose the monopoly of the academy, resulting in the creation of new exhibition forums or independent salons, such as the Salon des Refusés, the Salon d'Automne or the Salon des Indépendants in France. In the Arab region, a School of Fine Arts was established in Cairo in 1908 by Prince Yussuf Kamal, who believed that the fine arts could be a means for Egypt to engage with modernity. Graduates of the first group of students of the school soon became successful in Europe's art establishment. The French salons provided institutional models for Cairo's annual Art Salon. Several salons have sprung up in the region in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, including the Salon Tunisien in Tunis established in 1894, the annual exhibition the "Friends of Art" started in Baghdad in the 1940s, and the Salon d'Automne of the Sursock Museum in Beirut that was launched in the 1960s. Institutional forms of art clearly migrated from Europe to the Middle East in the late colonial and early post-colonial context, while artists, both European and Middle-Eastern, circulated between the two regions. The salon often defined the criteria of art production and public taste, while creating new societal practices. The social impact of the salon also lay in its ability to convey specific values, attitudes and aspirations. At the same time, the values and attitudes promoted by the salon were often rejected by avant-garde movements who defied the conceived conservatism of the salon and the art academy.

This symposium and publication project follow up from three panel discussions held in 2016 and 2017 and are the first comprehensive forum to explore the role of the art salon in the Arab region. It examines how the salon had an impact on the formation of public taste and debates on art in

the Arab region, and looks at knowledge transfers and cultural interactions between Europe and the Middle East. Confirmed participants are Monique Bellan, Yasmine Chemali, Jessica Gerschultz, Nadia von Maltzahn, Dina Ramadan, Nadia Radwan, Nada Shabout, among others.
We invite further papers, and are especially interested in papers focusing on the Salon d'Automne in Damascus, on art salons in North Africa and Iraq, on European artists exhibiting in salons in the Arab region, and Arab artists participating in European art salons.

Abstracts (400 words) relating to these or other topics with a clear focus on the symposium theme can be submitted to Nadia von Maltzahn (maltzahn@orient-institut.org) and Monique Bellan (bellan@orient-institut.org) by 5 June 2017, together with a short biography (150 words). Full papers will be due by 30 September 2017.

Reference:

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