

Islamic Art and the Politics of Museum Display (online, 30 Nov 21)

online / Session at MESA Annual Meeting, Nov 30, 2021

Registration deadline: Nov 29, 2021

Philip Geisler, Berlin

Virtual panel at the 2021 Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association

Sponsored by the Historians of Islamic Art Association (HIAA)

Organized by Philip Geisler and Constance Jame

Chair & Discussant: Dr. Fahmida Suleman, Curator, Islamic World, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto & Assistant Professor (status only cross-appointments), Departments of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations and Art History, University of Toronto

Online - November 30, 2021 - 11:30 AM (EST), registration required

Registration:

This panel is part of the virtual program of the Middle East Studies Association's Annual Meeting. The panel takes place online on November 30, 2021 at 11:30 AM (EST). For information about the registration, please visit MESA's website: <https://mesana.org/annual-meeting/registration>

Since the early 2000s, many Islamic art museums and galleries around the world have reorganized their displays. During the same period, methodological interventions building on post-structuralist and post-colonial theory began to challenge long-standing formal and regional categories defining the field of Islamic art history. These new developments have impacted the display strategies of new museums and exhibitions of Islamic art. As a central interface between the academic study of the Middle East, its global representation, and the general public, the approaches these museums use to mediate between art, material culture, and Islamic/regional cultures play a central role in shaping discussions about the region. This includes its designation through religious and/or cultural, national, ethnic, and geographic parameters. At the same time, Islamic art displays are also embedded in heterogeneous local politics and social discourses. This particularly concerns how museum making is entangled with cultural diplomacy and the production of alterity, diversity, and collective identity that serve regional or national agendas and negotiate the recognition of local diasporas as well as minority and/or majority communities.

Based on museum case studies from Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, Western Europe, and Canada, this panel of doctoral students examines the politics of museum display and art discourses from 2000 until today. Rather than interpreting Islamic art displays as passive and neutral representations of the past, this panel theorizes them as a contemporary cultural practice that stages spatialized and immersive, ideological narrations of culture. Through bridging the gap between

the often-separated realms of art historical research, curatorial practice, and critical museology, this panel aims to examine the new ways, in which museums of Islamic art communicate broader ideas about the region in various global contexts. For this, the panel assesses curatorial practices and displays in both public and private museums including the Malek National Library and Museum (Tehran), the National Museum and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts (Istanbul), the Louvre Museum (Paris), the Alhambra Museum (Granada), and the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. Grounded in these accounts, the panel illuminates the politics of these displays and narrations vis-à-vis their local environments and shifted forms of national and/or religious self-fashioning. Through fostering an interdisciplinary and critical discussion, this panel ultimately argues that Islam has become a decisive global marker that enables states across the world to pursue local needs and actualize constitutive socio-political paradigms through cultural institutions and art displays.

11:30 AM - Papers

“Between the Transnational and the Local: Assessing the Changing Profile of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul”

Beyza Uzun, Doctoral Student, Scuola IMT Alti Studi, Lucca

“The Cultural Diplomacy and Contested Modernity of Museological Development in Qatar: A Case Study on the Museum of Islamic Art and the Qatar National Museum”

Abdelrahman Kamel, Doctoral Student, Queen’s University, Kingston

“Hybrid Objects in the Louvre: Witness of French Transcultural Identity”

Constance Jame, Doctoral Student, Universität Heidelberg

“Islamic Art as a Multicultural Mythology in Spain and Canada”

Philip Geisler, Doctoral Student, Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies

“The Malek National Library and Museum: Negotiating Curatorial Agency in an Iranian waqf”

Leila Moslemi Mehni, Doctoral Student, University of Toronto

1:00 PM - Response

Dr. Fahmida Suleman

1:15 PM - Discussion

Chair: Dr. Fahmida Suleman

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Panel link and abstracts:
https://mesana.org/mymesa/meeting_program_session.php?sid=346cfbc1467051348469531b5e172c0d

Reference:

CONF: Islamic Art and the Politics of Museum Display (online, 30 Nov 21). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 24, 2021 (accessed Jun 30, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35406>>.