

On Taḥwīr or the Inherently Incomplete (Beirut, 20–21 Oct 23)

American University of Beirut, Beirut

Deadline: Aug 1, 2023

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The Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies and the Department of Fine Arts and Art History (FAAH) at the American University of Beirut invites abstracts for the conference:

On Taḥwīr or the Inherently Incomplete

Recent scholarship in anthropology and art history has recalled attention to the historical term taḥwīr by contextualizing and theorizing it within moments of overlap between Arab Modernist artistic practice and nation building projects in the 20th Century.

In 1951, the Iraqi artist Jewad Selim (1919-1961) published an essay in which he gives the name taḥwīr or fan al taḥwīr to modern art practice and defines it as a form of speech addressed to the public. This act of definition can be seen as a reconceptualization of a term with a long history and a shifting conceptual grammar, and in part instrumentally attached to the cultural project of an Arab yaqza or awakening and the freedom to fashion new images that artists must now shoulder and deploy. But it is also an attempt to manage or structure an uncertainty constitutive not only of that historical moment but also of practices of the image that while initiated by the artist depend upon a viewer for their prospective realization.

In her book titled *Fantasmic Objects*, anthropologist Kirsten Scheid unfolds taḥwīr over three decades of art making and reception in Lebanon under French mandate and leading up to its first decade as an independent nation state. For Scheid taḥwīr is a temporally laden technology of molding, forming, shaping, and fashioning images by a sociality discursively interdicted from the high values of European art and yet engaged in an aspirational fashioning, or what she calls an imaginal striving – taḥwīr – in a realm of interaction between a nation's coming into being and becoming meaningful. Boldly articulated, Scheid writes that to engage in taḥwīr is to stop not being aware of ongoing possibilities.

The modern itinerary of taḥwīr and its analytic conceptualization by Scheid brings to the fore a concept that introduces contingency in artmaking, not by suspending the intentionality of the artist, but by contextualizing its production within historical moments defined by uncertainty. A ḥura or the fashioned thing is located within a network of making, reception, backward leaning historical scripts and forward leaning ideological striving. The modernist work of art or ḥura, the artist or muḥawwir, the spectator, colonial imprisonment and competing nationalist revolutionary

projects, constitute the complex differential power field of taʿwīr. How fitting for ʿura to be defined by Scheid as inherently incomplete.

The conference On Taʿwīr or the Inherently Incomplete invites scholars and artists to ponder over the ongoing possibilities of this concept in its practicable current permutations and potential future extensions as well as revisit its many shifting pasts.

Conference date: 20-21 October 2023.

Please submit an abstract of 300 words on your intended contribution and a short CV to bo00@aub.edu.lb and ws03@aub.edu.lb not later than August 1, 2023.

Do not hesitate to contact us for further inquiries.

The Conference is funded by the Center for Arts and Humanities and the Sheikh Zayed Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut.

Travel and accommodation for the invited speakers will be covered by the Sheikh Zayed Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut.

Reference:

CFP: On Taʿwīr or the Inherently Incomplete (Beirut, 20-21 Oct 23). In: ArtHist.net, May 24, 2023 (accessed Sep 15, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/39367>>.