Reinterpreting History&Memory: Contemporary Art of the MENA (London, 12 Oct 24)

SOAS, University of London, Oct 12, 2024

Hamid Keshmirshekan, SOAS

British Academy Conference: "Reinterpreting History and Memory: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)".

The topics of how artists and art activists approach history to question and contest authoritarian ideologies, revealing alternative narratives, and how their practices represent the traumatic history of the recent past while challenging hegemonic narratives shaped by local and global forces, are highly relevant to the recent socio-cultural dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa.

This British Academy international conference aims to explore how history and memory are reflected through contemporary art in the MENA region and how art discourses intersect with broader social, political and intellectual practices in recent times. It delves into themes that examine distinct facets of how artists actively engage in debates on historical narratives by challenging and addressing current affairs, thereby shaping their own truths. The speakers analyse the works of artists who challenge and, at times, deconstruct the dichotomy between historical and contemporary discourses. They will explore how artists articulate their theoretical and aesthetic perspectives through reflections of self, using the narration of history and collective memory. The discussions highlight that referencing history and memory inevitably involves engaging with the interpolation of our present, often to reveal truths about both the past and the present.

The conference, furthermore, aims to establish a new conceptual framework for the examination of contemporary art and its connection to the concepts of history and memory. Rather than isolating art-critical and art-historical approaches, the conference will explore these topics within their social, political and psychological contexts in the contemporary MENA region. By engaging a diverse array of professionals, including art historians, cultural theorists, anthropologists, literary scholars, curators, journalists and art critics, the conference will offer interdisciplinary perspectives on the study of contemporary art from the MENA region.

Hosted by the Centre for Global Media and Communications, SOAS, University of London

Conference convenor:
Dr Hamid Keshmirshekan, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)
Venue: Lecture Theatre, The Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1B 5DQ, UK

Conference Programme

Day One: Saturday, 12 October 2024, 09:00-17:00
Registration: 09:00-09:45

09:45-10:00
Welcome and Introduction
Professor Dina Matar, Chair of the Centre for Global Media and Communications, SOAS
Dr Hamid Keshmirshekan, Conference convenor

10:00-12:00
Session 1
Artists Reclaiming Authority: Challenging Dictated Ideological Frames
Chair:
Dr Stephen Murphy, SOAS
Speakers:
Dr Nada Shabout, University of North Texas
'Regenerating History from Ruins: Contemporary Iraqi Artists Reclaim their Past'

Vasif Kortun, Research & Curatorial Advisor, Mathaf, Doha
'100 Years'

Dr Hamid Keshmirshekan, SOAS
'Haunted Narratives: Reinterpretations of History in Art Practices of Post-Revolutionary Iran'

Q & A and discussion

Tea & Coffee Break: 12:00-12:20

12:20-13:40
Session 2 (part I)
Referencing the Past: Artist's Position as Subject of History
Chair:
Dr Venetia Porter
Speakers:
Driss Ksikes, HEM Research Center, LCI Education, Rabat
'The Real and the Fictional as An Imaginary Fabric of History'

Professor Siobhán Shilton, University of Bristol
'Art, Activism, and the Tunisian Revolution'

Q & A and discussion

Lunch: 13:40-14:40

14:40-16:00
Session 2 (part II)
Chair: Dr Simon O'Meara, SOAS
Speakers:
Dr Sarah Rogers, Middlebury College

‘Strategies of Dislocation and Embodiment: Generational Trauma in the Work of Mona Hatoum and Beyond’

Dr Charlotte Bank, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich
‘Reclaiming History: Reflections of Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Art of the MENA Region and its Diaspora’

Q & A and discussion

Tea & Coffee Break: 16:00-16:20

16:20-17:00
Keynote speech
Professor Hamid Dabashi, Columbia University
History, Memory, and the Uncanny: Portrait of the Artist as the Invisible Subject

18:00-20:00:
Conference Dinner (Invited speakers and chairs only)

Day Two: Sunday, 13 October 2024, 09:00-17:00
Registration: 09:00-09:40

09:40-11:00
Session 3 (part I)
Impacts of Trauma and Painful Collective Memory of the Recent Past
Chair:
Professor Iftikhar Dadi, Cornell University
Speakers:
Professor Sarah Wilson, The Courtauld Institute of Art
‘Najah Albukai with Boris Taslitzky, 2022: from Damascus to Buchenwald’

Professor Kirsten Scheid, American University of Beirut (Lebanon)
‘Unscorched Earth:’

Q & A and discussion

Tea & Coffee Break: 11:00-11:20

11:20-12:40
Session 3 (part II)
Chair:
Dr Nada Shabout, University of North Texas

Dr Isabelle de le Court, Independent scholar
‘Echoes of Beirut: Navigating Art, Trauma and Memory’

Serubiri Moses, Hunter College, CUNY
‘The Contemporary Captive: Reza Aramesh's Art After Saint Sebastian’

Q & A and discussion

Lunch: 12:40-13:20

13:20-14:40
Session 4 (part I)
Approaches to Past Truth and Historical Records: Resonance in the Present
Chair:
Professor Silvia Naef, University of Geneva
Speakers:
Professor Iftikhar Dadi, Cornell University
'An Avant-Garde Take on the 1947 Partition of South Asia'

Dr Wendy Shaw, Independent scholar
'Wow! Writing the Trace of Virtue in Modern Turkey'

Q & A and discussion

Tea & Coffee Break: 14:40-15:00

15:00-16:20

Session 4 (part II)
Chair:
Driss Ksikes, HEM Research Center

Speakers:
Professor Silvia Naef, University of Geneva
'"Making Images Without Making Them" (Zoulikha Bouabdellah): Creating A Visual Memory Through Script, Ornament, and Gestures'

Dr Ismail Nashef, Doha Institute of Graduate Studies
'On Nazar: El-Labbad and Visualizing the History of Vision'

Q & A and discussion

16:20-17:00
Closing remarks

Reference:
CONF: Reinterpreting History&Memory: Contemporary Art of the MENA (London, 12 Oct 24). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 12, 2024 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/42615>.