

THE AGENCY OF ART AND THE STUDY OF ARAB MODERNITY

By Kirsten Scheid*

“Sir, do I take what you’re saying to mean that people have a right to demonstrate?”

“Yes, of course, this shows people are responsible and aware. An example is the massive demonstration downtown, where a record number of people are demanding the fall of the government....”

As the elderly masculine voice intones his list of demands in *fusba*, my listening dulls. This is a list oft-quoted in Lebanon since December 2006, and the rise in gas prices is infinitely more effective in grabbing my attention at the station where I am filling my car’s tank on Hamra. But then the voice of the young female student returns with an unusual remark, a challenge to her teacher: “But people are saying that it’s a bad demonstration, taking as an excuse its [unattractive] appearance and the garbage everywhere.” Granted I had heard this remark from numerous friends and colleagues, but it was the last thing I expected to hear on Itha`at al-Nur radio station, the official voice of Hizbu’llah, one of the main parties to the demonstration. At the suggestion that the demonstration lacked credibility and merit due to its untidiness, the conversation took an even more unexpected turn:

“Let me explain to you via example. Do you know Leonardo da Vinci’s famous picture, *La Gioconda*?”

“Yes, but it’s so famous, it’s beyond me to comment on it!”

“Exactly,” the professor pounces, his argument apparently clinched, “dust cannot detract from its meaning; it is so invaluable. If people were to focus on the dust and miss the painting, they do not deserve to comment on its beauty. And if people will focus on appearances of the demonstration, they are in no position to comment on its meaning in terms of its civilizational value.”ⁱ (Itha`at al-Nur, March 18, 2007)

In an unpredictable way, the *Mona Lisa* is about gritty, local, sectarian politics of downtown Beirut. It tells us how to understand something of what is going on in the confrontation between government and opposition forces. The understanding of the absolute, non-negotiable aesthetic and civilizational value that this painting seems to crystallize displays reality, relevance, and potency when broadcast on a frequency that many downtown dwellers these days are tuning into, and when deployed on that channel in response to the ad campaigns promoted by a set of former downtown frequenters seeking to discredit the “usurpers” of Beirut’s Martyr’s Square. What this means to me, as a person studying art from a position in the Arab world, is that the value and meaning of what gets called “western art” in Lebanon and like areas cannot be understood by confining its meaning-makers to the West. And yet rarely, if at all, are art histories conducted that look at the construction of “western” art in the colonial margins. Indeed, histories as I have encountered them in my field research or heard them at recent conferences tend to assume that art is a new event in the Arab world.ⁱⁱ While these reviewers differ in

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the extent to which they regard aesthetic production as a crucial part of ancient or authentic Arab history, they agree that “art” as defined in Western academies (the formally stylized, creative expression of a trained, autonomous individual) is at most a century old in Lebanon and like areas.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, the art that is discussed and explored is almost entirely art that seems to reveal a special Arab experience, that which is patently not of the West. One is much more likely to learn about Mona Hattoum or Shaker Hassan al-Sa`id than about Mona Trad Dabaghi or Taleb Al-Doueik. The *Mona Lisa*, then, would have no role towards the deep comprehension of life in contemporary Lebanon. That famed painting or art too closely resembling it, too obviously derivative from it, gets discarded from studies of the production of art. In this essay I will explore the ramifications of this deliberate lacuna, towards the goal of suggesting that not only does a miscomprehension of local identity and agency result but so, too, does a miscomprehension of the non-local. Why should it be that to make a difference, art must express a pre-extant difference?

Before continuing, I want to make a connection between art histories and other histories of the Arab world, and from it, a plea for more attention to the study of activity that has promoted that entity we today display, sell, plunder, memorialize and otherwise bandy around across the globe as if part of a single category: art. The problem is similar to that which has been identified as stemming from a nationalist historiographic paradigm.^{iv} Just as the Mandate *Grand Liban* has commonly been avoided as “a lacuna, a tragic gap between the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the achievement of full independence from the French”^v so un-different art is avoided for being a pathetic gap between ancient aesthetic patterns and modern, individual expression. For a wide variety of Arab nationalist thinkers, the idea that fine-art painting is imported from non-Arab climes has meant often that it is to be scorned for its association with colonialism, which is said to have induced, to quote one, “artistic lethargy and cultural stagnation.”^{vi} Treating (or rather failing to treat) colonial art as unrepresentative of moments in a national biography is not exclusive to Arabs studies. Nora Taylor notes among non-local scholars of Vietnamese art history the same hesitancy to approach the colonial period, the worry that it is less real than the ancient art that preceded it or the nationalist art that followed it.^{vii} Yet, she carefully distinguishes a local art historiography that treats the colonial period as the most real moment, the most flourishing, for how resistance invoked a nationalist form of expression. What is interesting is that in both historiographies, agency is assumed to lie with the colonizer, while the colonized simply reacts, to be dominated and passive or directed and still passive.

The recent interest in art production in former colonies has taken as a premise that modern art was imported fully-fledged from metropolitan capitals and applied by cultural entrepreneurs to peripheral settings as part of a process of modernization.^{viii} This style of analysis relies upon the assumption of a stable quantity, the natives, who at a critical moment absorbed a spreading yet immalleable external substance, the Europeans. There must be a native who can inflect the generic Picasso or Cezanne but neither becomes the genuine quantity nor affect the latter’s social existence. But what exactly was a “native” Lebanese painter in the 1920s or 30s, when Pablo Picasso and Paul Cézanne themselves were local phenomena? How did these enterprising young souls who found it imperative to follow their vocation by sailing across the sea define the boundaries of nativity and the horizons of possible belonging? How did their movement help others define other boundaries, sometimes isomorphic with the first and sometimes not? Nationalist visions of art-making have, therefore, prized art that seemed to offer an authentic or counter-colonial expression of an unpolluted, resilient native self. Artwork by the colonized that closely resembles metropolitan production has been systematically discarded as irrelevant to understanding both the local and the global.

Yet if art history has imitated other historical trajectories, it must be noted that this problem is particularly pertinent in the study of a field that by definition is assumed to be valuable to the extent that it reveals in the form of expression an inner self, a

cultural essence, unchanging and unaffected by exterior impact. Contrariwise, metropolitan lifestyles and imperial powers are studied in the colonial peripheries as ways of finding out how they came into being, what they consist of, how they work, the argument being that actions on margin reveal truths otherwise obscured.^{ix} Only a few scholars have applied that insight to studying the dominated through their situations of domination, the copiers and mimic-men who gave birth to the “original.”^x What I want to suggest is that these acts in a realm defined for its makers not by place or race but by skill and expression were important acts *in* society rather than reflections *of* it. Yet what “society” meant for the actors or should mean for us who study them retrospectively can only become apparent if we surrender our historical certainty about the eventual outcome of French cultural boundaries (place) and self-sameness (race). Only then can we grasp what really was at stake in the experience of making and viewing painting in peripheral places like Mandate Lebanon.

To apply my argument concretely, I will explore the handling of art, colonial power, and agency in two histories that deal with painting that defined the meeting of Arabs and French. These studies—*Allure of Empire* by Todd Porterfield^{xi} and *Orientalist Aesthetics* by Roger Benjamin^{xii}—are valuable explorations that should be used by any scholar of art at intercultural junctures and particularly of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I discuss them here, however, to contrast their handling of art as social agent and to extrapolate from that difference lessons for a critical history of art and of the Arab world. Thus, I seek to trace a trajectory for studying intercultural encounters through art production in the Arab world, an area that, despite recent scholarly interest in its contemporary art production, has been largely neglected as a site for understanding the role of art in the production of power. The motive for tracing such a trajectory is to provide a basis from which to respond, in these days of consolidating super-power and globalizing art scenes, to two intertwined impulses: on the one hand, the solidification and reification of cultural boundaries that guard the distribution of resources and access to institutions; and on the other hand, the repeated invocation of “civilization” as a justification for acts on society, be they associated with empire-making or resistance-waging.

CONTRASTING STUDIES OF ARAB ART-MAKING

The fact is very few studies of the Arab world specifically employ the lens of art to understand social issues. In part, this seems to be a matter of disciplinary zoning as Lila Abu-Lughod explains, such that the Arab world has not been the site of a long genealogy of literature begetting new Arab art studies each generation.^{xiii} While the medieval Arab world is recognized as having been full of so-called “ornamental” art and aesthetic flourishing, the relevance of artistic production in Arab lands seems to have been eclipsed, according to the standard literature cited above.^{xiv} It is noteworthy that this “eclipse” is held to coincide with the era when European artists are held to have produced a rupture in their disciplines and pursued the path of humanism and individualism as men of the Renaissance.^{xv} But in part, the zone of disinterest is also a matter of disciplinary boundaries that assume art cannot reveal very much about the workings of social power. Given that majority of studies dealing with the Arab world in English have been motivated by a will to understand power, change, hierarchy, and structure, it seems natural that art should take back-seat to more pressing concerns given the agonistic encounter between the countries of English-language scholars and countries of their Arab subjects.^{xvi} It would be useful to know if art historiography followed a similar chronology in other regional studies – were Asian, African, or Polynesian arts embraced for scholarly review once the regions seemed tamed? Certainly this is the case with indigenous North

America and Australia. The purpose of this essay, however, is to suggest what might come of the recent percolation of interest in art production in Arab regions. A subsequent concern would be to grapple with the term “art” itself, to consider what is gained and what lost in its applications beyond the very narrow circles in which it originated.^{xviii}

Does society shape art, or does art shape society? The answer certainly need not be exclusively one or the other, and yet the studies we have on which to base an answer are wholly unidirectional. While sociologists of art have keenly identified the social networks and power relations that make art the production of so much more than a “gifted” individual, they have failed to explain what precisely can be deemed the agency of art in social interactions. As a first step to tracing a new trajectory for studies of art and the Arab world, this essay will review two historical studies of French imperialist art to highlight their provocatively divergent conclusions about the agency of art in social interactions that have resulted in power disparity. Based on this discussion of agency, the essay will move to examine possible new realms of study in art and the Arab world, with an eye to expanding the relevance of this sub-field to social and historical studies generally, and applying its lessons to Arab modernity studies particularly.

It will be clearest to state concisely the difference I detect from the start and move from there through the examples that explain its relevance. The difference between Porterfield and Benjamin’s handling of art production is a methodological one and it involves the direction of the history that is being related. For Porterfield, the history of French modern art is a story that begins in 1798 and comprises the persistence of certain strategies despite their varying political fortunes and uses. For Benjamin, on the other hand, it is a story that looks back from the triumph of modernism and finds unexpected antecedents for it as a strategy and subject matter. In other words, the divergence in the authors’ theories of art-making relates to the opposing stances they take to view history. Ultimately this plays out in a divergent understanding of artistic agency in society: whereas Benjamin holds to the standard line that many, but not all, French artists were complicit with their government’s imperial and colonial aims, Porterfield shows how these artists were in many ways the *impetus* for those aims. In the first reading, art is ever a secondary effect, a symptom of empire that provides the “cultural context” for acts of art-making; in the second reading, art and empire are more intricately tied – a bond that may better explain the imperial French interest in art and the idea it indexed, “civilization.” In other words, the “Orient” as encountered and engaged through brushes, canvases, and systems of paintings, was an important resource for motivating and explaining imperial society as a coalescence of disparate motives and conflicting stances. The result is that in Porterfield’s study, far more than in Benjamin’s, visual culture is shown to have more agency as a resource for social interaction and subsequently for academic inquiry into that social action. Having outlined the differences, it is useful to explore the reasons for and effects of this different handling of visual culture.

Porterfield’s *The Allure of Empire* is not directly about “the Middle East” but about French interactions with that region over the course of half a century – the half of the nineteenth century that was crucial to establishing the basis for an empire that replaced France’s North American possessions. What Porterfield examines is the process by which justifications for this new empire were formulated and circulated among the policy-making elite, which included both governmental officers and the newspaper-reading public. Porterfield’s thesis is that art played a crucial role in the development of French empire, enabling the various opposing regimes that governed France to unite the public around colonizing policies even as they were divided over policies of internal rule. Porterfield refutes the common notion that French investment in the aesthetic productions of the cultures it conquered was mere exoticism. Linking Napoleon’s defeat by the British army in 1798 and the establishment of French control from Senegal to Vietnam at the end of the following century was *Art en majuscule*.

Painting, in particular, was more than government spin, or what Porterfield calls “an officially sponsored and widely broadcast rationale”^{xviii}: painting was the very method by which civilizational status became a social index, demarcating both in its topics and in its style the hierarchy between cultures and justifying the superiority of France over others. Porterfield identifies three strategies continuously used by art-makers (patrons, publics, and artists): 1) setting the French in the role of the historic heir; 2) contrasting the French and their colonized on the basis of moral difference; 3) describing the hierarchy of cultures with an authenticating attention to detail and location. Whether in paintings of battle cycles, decorations of the metropolis, or formulations of new museums, these strategies informed a kind of art-making, that as a national identity project, became a means to promote domination over the colonies *and* enlist support of those among the colonized who also sought to change their societies, while at the same time Art rendered the colonies a point of convergence for the different sectors of French society that were responding in contradictory ways to the legacies of the Revolution.. What is important to note in Porterfield’s account of French social dynamics is that these strategies, given the specific historical conditions, were especially effective because of their special medium. Art, that was understood as a medium for one set of viewers to be visual, creative, expressive, formulaic, descriptive, and objective, rendered the colonies a point of convergence for an over-arching notion of French national unity and a common denominator for French identity. As Porterfield argues, “Each post-Revolutionary government contributed to and called on this new national culture to justify imperialism in the *proche Orient*, as each sought to avoid the political and social fissures bequeathed by the Revolution. Each developed a national project, identity, and culture that fabricated and diffused rationales for imperialism in the Near East.”^{xix}

One of Porterfield’s clearest examples of the agency of art is in the case of that magnificent early example of public installation art: the Luxor Obelisk and the ceremonials of bringing it to Paris. Porterfield shows how the public ceremony of erecting the obelisk in 1833 on the former site of the guillotine became a mass expiatory exercise in participatory science, one devoted not to killing failed French citizens but to establishing French civilizational superiority over the most glorious of ancient empires. With this testimony to French conquering, scientifically and militarily, of ancient and contemporary Egypt, the site of so much internal strife and political division was literally cleansed and rebaptized as the Place de la Concorde. The result, Porterfield reminds readers who think they are examining an “art historical” event, is that the subsequent Algerian campaign came to be conceived nationally as both a project upon which the opposing factions of the French body politic could converge and, also, the proper route for the new “fathers of Egyptian civilization,” as Adolphe Thiers hailed them and as numerous contributors to the French press chorused.^{xx}

A second example of imperial art-making carries forward Porterfield’s interest in the *work* of art: this was a series of paintings that rendered visible and tangible the “allure of a new imperial culture.”^{xxi} Despite Napoleon’s dismal military performance in the Egyptian campaign (1798-1801), the paintings produced in France depicting that campaign are among the most splendid, and most influential, representations of a European civilizational superiority over non-European adversaries. These paintings were perhaps the visual analogue of the famed *Description d’Egypte*, but their graphic character made them influential among a different range of audiences. By detailing the artists’ procedures and methods for creating authoritative battle scenes, Porterfield shows that these visual strategies were singularly available in painting in a way that made the war events—themselves a military failure for the French forces—the basis for the elaboration of a French political destiny to triumph in foreign lands, a destiny that was at once anti-revolutionary, Christian, and scientific. Porterfield provides plenty of evidence of how the pictures were perceived by their contemporary critics who gladly, it seems,

took them as the proof of the wisdom and justice of French imperial ventures despite other, less palpable evidence to the contrary.

Though succeeding French governments would eventually come to differ over revolutionary goals and the extent of external engagement, paintings of the Egyptian campaign, Porterfield demonstrates, “coined a currency that was then converted and reused by succeeding and ostensibly opposing regimes, making the Empire’s artistic deposit an enduring imperial legacy.”^{xxii} So much so that even the Bourbon Monarchy, which took its charge to annul the feats and policies of the Revolution, sponsored the establishment of a Musée d’Egypte. The story of the institutionalization of Egyptology as a national science and public symbol of French national genius provides Porterfield’s third case-study, and this is where Porterfield most strongly makes his case for art as a realm of ideological work with physical and material implications. Nineteenth-century Artists, patrons, critics, and salon-goers converged on Egypt as a “reactionary source for French society,”^{xxiii} as Porterfield shows by analyzing in detail not only the decoration and exhibition program of the museum but, also, the multiple political uses to which the tropes it spawned were put. For example, the racial identity of Egypt versus France was worked out in a series of paintings and prints that came to assert tangibly the whiteness of Pharaonic Egypt against the blackness of its hordes. Porterfield concludes, “The Musée d’Egypte did not so much *reflect* a secure empire as it *cultivated* imperial desire.”^{xxiv}

If the previous examples have mostly been military or institutional art, the case of Eugene Delacroix’s artistic triumph, *Women of Algiers* applies Porterfield’s analysis of the flourishing of Orientalist art beyond the confines of a governmental elite of patrons and critics, even in arenas apparently less deferential to governmental agendas. Delacroix’s painting has been taken by art historians as the originator of the ethnographic Orientalist school, marked by faithful rendering of first-hand observations. Quashing this productive legend, Porterfield traces Delacroix’s seminal work to previously unacknowledged textual precedents, thus showing, in Saidian terms, how dependent it was on prior intellectual structuring of interaction with an East. As Porterfield shows, if Delacroix’s work was not unmediated by antecedent representations of the Orient, it was also not, true to local visual experience, and deliberately so, in as much as it flagrantly relied on the violation of local visibility codes. Thus, the symbol of Oriental despotism, the harem, in Delacroix’s painting was physically penetrated and liberated in an oily medium that not only offered the vicarious experience of liberation to contemporary French viewers but also justified to them the military “liberation” of contemporary Algerians. As Porterfield says, “Part of the success of *Women of Algiers* and its progeny is that it *evoked* both desire for the harem women and repulsion at the Orient’s inferior social and political systems.”^{xxv} What this discussion offers to people interested in studying social dynamics is an understanding of how a medium that is historically cultivated through carefully streamlined codes of representation can at once offer difference, or intelligibility in unfamiliar cultural settings, as well as a firm, apparently nonnegotiable sense of how to respond to that “found” difference. In this way the medium of art becomes an immediate social force.

Orientalist Aesthetics by Roger Benjamin can be read as a sequel to *The Allure of Empire*, although it was not intended as such. Indeed, though Benjamin does not take up Porterfield’s work, many of his findings support Porterfield’s argument that Orientalism, or engagement with a painted Orient, provided a unifying resource for a French society riven with worries about the practices and meanings of being an imperial power or a revolutionary collectivity. For example, one generally ignored aspect of Claude Monet’s Impressionism is the degree to which the painter himself declared its debt to the time he served as a soldier in Algeria. Thus, Orientalism, specifically defined as the belligerent appropriation of the foreign and exotic, could reinscribe the jarring, threatening style of Impressionism in the realm of the patriotic. Benjamin, however, interprets his evidence, much of it mobilized for the first time in the study of early modernist French painting, as proof instead of the

disengagement of “high art” from French politics. In order to give his work due credit, this essay will detail the argument and findings of Benjamin’s wide-ranging and lavishly illustrated work before proceeding to a comparison of the two works and their implications for the study of visual culture.

Seeking to explain “Orientalist art in the time of its historical emergence,”^{xxvi}, Benjamin intertwines two narrative strings. The first string ties together art world debates about the production of painting based on French *outré-mer* possessions as seen through the careers of individual painters. The second links a set of institutions that enabled and responded to that painting -- from the established press, to the Society of French Orientalist Painters with its annual fund-raising dinners and exhibitions, to the Villa Abd-el-Tif and Jardin d’Essai^{xxvii} that provided secure places for visiting painters in Algiers, to colonial administrative funds for “reviving traditional crafts” and travelling scholarships, to museums such as the National Museum of Fine Arts of Algiers that promoted a “European vision” far from the metropole.^{xxviii}

It is important to note that Benjamin's effort to situate Orientalism culturally represents a retraction of his earlier thesis about the centrality of colonialism as a set of practices and ideologies to the oeuvre of the artist Henri Matisse.^{xxix} Previously the art historian had argued that high French modernism was inarguably indebted to invidious politics that it had hidden, thus promoting both the inevitability of colonialism's politics and the triumph of contemporary taste. In his more extensive study, however, Benjamin now asserts that though inescapably inflected by politics, modernist art was never more than a surface for *reflecting* debates raging in society; it could not shape society because it could not create institutions. This retraction represents an affirmation of Benjamin’s way of conceiving of art as the outcome of already structured ways of thinking and doing rather than as a formative medium in itself. In the absence of findings indicating that Matisse or other artists were part of a racist conspiracy to control and degrade the Orient in civilizational terms, Benjamin assumes their art must not have been a factor in the eventual control and degradation that occurred. Art, in this newer reading, is stripped of social agency.

Benjamin’s treatment of art as the product of finalized mental and social processes is unfortunate because it undermines the evidence that he assembles for seeing art as a formative medium of social power. Benjamin details a multifaceted debate among French art critics over the value of Oriental subject matter in French painting, or that entity which when viewed makes “each Frenchman feel he is becoming more French,” to borrow Benjamin’s quote from nineteenth-century critic Antoine Castagnary^{xxx}. A recurring motive Benjamin diagnoses, from Duranty to Marx, is the fear for French authenticity, the fear that merely addressing a foreign topic could pollute the French spirit and vigour. For example, a common refrain among painters travelling south was that the Orient “inverted painting.”^{xxxi} Benjamin takes up the case of Renoir’s Impressionism to examine what “problems” Algerian views posed for painters trained continentally: the cramped urban architecture, the stretched landscape, the brightened palette, the prohibited models, and so on. Detailing at length Renoir’s schemes to circumvent these obstacles, Benjamin outlines the structures that made Orientalist painting possible and characteristic, such as physically controlled and selected space, currency and clothing bazaars, needy models and privileged posers, perspectival grids and most fundamentally, the commitment to a field of prestige based elsewhere, beyond the space allotted to the Orient. If painting could, potentially, make French viewers feel they were not becoming French or were even becoming less French, and if such painting was to be feared and condemned, then we begin to see how style could take on national urgency. Indeed, we begin to see how one may take art about the Arab world seriously to produce understanding of social dynamics instead of dismissing it as seriously flawed (rejected with the pejorative label, “Orientalist”) or trivial (rejected with the belittling label, “just art”).

Contra Benjamin, one could tease from his study of Renoir's negotiations with "tricky" Arab men or his costuming of *pied-noir* children in native clothing to understand the experience of these circumventions as the reinstatement of a style that could be asserted or defended as "European" or "traditionally French." It is in light of such data, that revive the experience on the margins of an "Orient," that we may discern how style, one of the strategies discussed by Porterfield, is relevant on the scale of national structure formation, for to some observers, discussions of it were held to solidify the notion of *a single* French identity. While Benjamin himself does not do this, his research sketches out possible trajectories for the expanded relevance of art research to studies of Arab modernity. Building on Benjamin's reinterpretation of Impressionism, a style of art conventionally seen as apolitical, in terms of the power that made it practicable one can explore how the style was a medium by which certain power was crystallized, naturalized, and made socially relevant.

Benjamin indicates, although he himself does not conclude, that the pictures produced through the negotiations he details are essentially the reinstatement of a fragile, faltering cultural identity. To perceive that identity as fragile and in need of great, ambivalent labor, is to provide a new lens for understanding the alternative identities that conjured up its outer limits, Arab, Oriental, Muslim, Colonized, Independent, and so on. Similarly, such effort may provide a more productive means for coming to grips with the seemingly contradictory identities that were involved in promoting art and civilization throughout the time-zone ambitiously named modernity. In other words, one may see in this art work the "staging of modernity" that Mitchell describes as "the orchestrating of image and imagination, the managing of the place of meaning in the social world and the experience of personhood, and the manipulating of populations and ecologies by their reduction to technical schemes and disciplinary programs."^{xxxii} Studies of art media may add much to this burgeoning literature on the modernity as a non-centralized process of exchange.^{xxxiii} Benjamin inventories the relationship between metropole and periphery in the development of modernity as a cultural and imperial asset: the administrative and mercantile investment in the Society for Oriental Painters; the government burses for artists who could represent France to study in Algiers at the Villa Abd-el-Tif; and the controversial government-sponsored program to "revive" and rationalize Algerian craftwork in the interest of invigorating French industry and commerce. Despite Benjamin's insistence that art cannot create institutions, his research into such programs amply illustrates the agency of art in empire and citizen formation, and in particular, sheds light on the structural nature of that agency.

And this points us to another trajectory. Given that so much was at stake for artists who proved their ability to embody that vague element called Frenchness, it is unnecessary to accept Benjamin's own end-point for his research which is simply to categorize painters who dealt with Algerian views into different styles: "ethnographic," like Gérôme, or "impressionist," like Renoir. Both stylistic types equally, as he shows, found it necessary to refer to the colony to advance their careers as not just French artists but French-rendering ones. From this convergence, Benjamin concludes that the medium of painting became for French viewers "visual evidence of the strangeness and difference of a distant land that could nevertheless be a home to the French and their proudest cultural achievements."^{xxxiv} Rather than seeing the "strange" land absorbed into given "Frenchness," could we not see that French identity coming into practical realization (being?) through a developing medium? It would be just one step further to suggest that the "unnatural" means to which painters like Renoir resorted in Algeria to carry out painting as they understood it should prompt a reconsideration of the naturalness and experiential reliability of Europe's own amenability to being pictured. In other words, if the Orient *inverted* painting, as the saying went, then studying that inversion could aid in the subversion of the definition of the European-ness of painting.

In summary, with Benjamin and Porterfield we have two approaches to the role of art in intercultural junctures, and specifically European imperialism. As stated earlier, the difference between the two approaches is essentially a one of direction: Whereas art-as-reflection leaves us with a rich discussion of the cultural *expression* of French colonialism – and little sense of what actually fuelled colonialism other than it's not being art – art-as-agent offers a demonstration of how Orientalist cultural production preceded, instead of followed, the material condition of actual imperial control. “Expression” is a tricky term, as it requires the postulation of an originating force that eventually finds exterior form, and yet, it precludes accounting for how that originating force is itself formed. The result in cultural analyses tends to be an essentializing solipsism. What I want to suggest here, is that grappling with this issue in art may provide a model for dealing with it in other realms of cultural study. However, to carve the way for such research, one must be prepared to surrender Benjamin's methodological assumption that there is a boundary between the periphery and the metropole that is fixed, like the one on the map that precedes his introduction and that of so many texts about the region and about art alike.

MODERNITY AND AN ARAB EAST

As Timothy Mitchell argues, by building on a priori maps, researchers limit themselves from considering how dealing in Orientalist art was part of a process of fixing the map, or rather, fixing it at some social levels *and not others*.^{xxxv} Thus it is symptomatic that Benjamin notes only in passing that non-Parisian scenes were just as likely to be served up at the Orientalist salons as were scenes from the Arab East, “almost as if any southern country that was not France was by definition exotic and could be posed as the Other.”^{xxxvi} Consequently, Benjamin describes “Orientalist Aesthetics” as an unsteadily developed cultural system for demarcating access to resources, but researchers could go further actually to analyze it as such in praxis. Were those painters whose fascination with Algerian landscapes revealed to Marxist critic Castagnary a deficiency of patriotism and faith “in the beauty of France and its people,”^{xxxvii} the people whose activity could be seen to pervert the very connection between French birth, French natural environment, and French commitment? What of the *evlués* (native-born painters) who seemed able to adopt that relationship at will? And how important was it to the notion of French universality or Algeria as *Muslim France* that painters came to paint not like the Germans or Italians but “like the French,” as one French administrator avowed at an exhibition which inaugurated Free France in Beirut (see below)?

By taking for granted the geography of colonial interaction, scholars such as Benjamin and Porterfield will inevitably lose a sense of the urgency that faced artists, buyers, and viewers dealing with art in the context of colonial relationships and who were not always certain how to maintain a center. Questions such as those posed in the previous paragraph were loudly debated in the specialized and popular French press, and they provide ample hints to the fact that the very practice of an artistic tradition was part of the nation-making processes. Nations imply capitals, just as disciplines imply codifications and chronologies imply essences moving stably through time. Each of these ways of describing social phenomena relies on a stable notion of a center, or cultural core – that which is often constructed retrospectively. If one is willing to rethink a given centrality by repositioning it in a posited periphery, as Benjamin says he does by placing Matisse, for example, in the midst of colony-bound artists' caravans, then one should be willing to suspend confidence about the relationship between the two. Benjamin's reluctance to do so may well be an unintended consequence of his complete dependence on French sources and his inability to benefit from Arab sources (written or oral). It is a weakness shared with Porterfield's scholarship, but one that points to yet another trajectory by which scholars of the Arab world may read outside their field to benefit from such rich inspiration and contribute to the decentering of traditional art historical and power

analyses. Decentering discourses such as modernity, civilization, and art is not merely a matter of offering a new perspective; it is exigent precisely because of the degree to which such notions rest for their credibility upon an original essence, a central truth.

If, taking cue from Porterfield and Benjamin scholars of Arab modernity relinquish their certainty about the outcome of French cultural superiority and security, we may grasp finally what really was at stake in the experience of making and viewing painting. From this perspective “copies,” or paintings with advertised antecedents, will no longer appear redundant or unoriginal. Realizing that at each moment society is being created through unbounded (though structured) interactions, we may attend with a little less distaste to the innumerable Arabic-language tracts in Algerian, or Syrian, newspapers which asserted to 1920s-40s readers that renditions of the local landscape in perspectival easel-painting format proved that there was no inherent Arab civilizational inferiority, especially if the artists executing such scenes were “sons of the country.”^{xxxviii} It is relevant to note that the common phrase for the positionality that validated agency in society was genealogical and not territorial. Likewise, we can distance our analysis from Benjamin’s belief that modernist art styles developed in conjunction with the conviction that “easel-painting could be used to claim the colonies as a vehicle for the arts,”^{xxxix} seeing this belief as the view from a Paris-dominated perspective, and a view based on the assumption that art-making is a symptom of prior agendas. Reading the Arabic journals of the period, one may appreciate that from another perspective perhaps, that of people promoting easel-painting in other locales, modernism was formulated and realized as a “global” project by people acting on the conviction that art-making was a realm for establishing a political and cultural agenda that assumed parity with the *would-be* colonizers. Their agency, then, helped give colonial discourses their aspect of assumed centrality.

Towards this goal of exploring the construction of centering discourses in Arab modernity, it is particularly helpful to consider Benjamin’s biography and analysis of Azouaou Mammeri and Mohammed Racim, two indigenous artists who made easel-painting their profession after having learned it in French schools. Benjamin is able to track their careers from their earliest training to official and popular reception using both administrators’ accounts and those of popular French magazines. Although many such painters through the colonies attained great popularity among both colonial officials *and* local audiences, they have been steadily ignored by both nationalist and metropolitan scholars. Neither completely defined as indigenous nor metropolitan, such painters posed a challenge to the boundary between those categories which has led to their being swept under the academic rug. It is important to note that in analyzing Mammeri’s and Racim’s art, Benjamin takes short-cuts that lead him to contradictory conclusions. For example, he posits a sort of Arab cultural uniformity when he reads Mammeri’s landscapes as “participatory” celebrations in contrast to European-rendered “predatory” appropriations.^{xl} And yet, because of this very notion of cultural uniformity, Benjamin never really wonders why men like Mammeri and Racim *had* to paint (we are left to assume it is due to some alignment of tastes), why colonial administrators felt the *need* to encourage them with an extensive support apparatus, and why they were taken to exemplify rather than undermine boundaries dividing centers from their margins.

Likewise, Benjamin finds that stylistically “Western” renditions of Arab nationalist leaders *express* the “double-bind” of colonialism for the colonized (referring to Benedict Anderson’s study of liberation movements), but he does not see that certain painters may have been re-drawing maps of identity through such apparently paradoxical activity. Consequently, when confronted with the phenomenon of “North African, Saudi, and other non-European[s]”^{xli} buying Orientalist canvases, Benjamin simply discards Said’s insights into the force of culture at political junctures and declares them nullified.^{xlii} If Arabs themselves, he asks, can buy and like this art, does that not mean that Said was wrong about the meaning the art

conveyed for cultural evaluations? Here Benjamin lapses into ethnic essentializing to explain the paradoxical activity of members of one ethnic group vis à vis the representation of other members of that group. Benjamin's astonishment at Arabs' "self-Orientalizing" presumes the existence of a stable, uniform, and unchanging group self. Geography has so determined his analysis that he understands art audiences to be acting out their identities rather than creating them in relation to an array of resources.

Building on original data such as gleaned by Benjamin, scholars of Arab modernity could ask many more productive questions that are bound to lead out of the essentialist morass. Exactly who was participating in landscapes like those of Mammeri? Through what processes does Mammeri come to stand for Arabs, or other identities? Could not some people who identified themselves as Arabs have felt that Mammeri was imposing his interests on their relationship to their social space? For example, one of Mammeri's paintings discussed by Benjamin shows young boys at a Koranic school gathered around their teacher and leader in prayer. But had Enlightenment conceptions of space and subjecthood simply revealed their naturalness to Mammeri's subjects and non-European viewers so that even pious men and boys would agree with Mammeri's decision to "participate" in modernist philosophies by appearing in physical form on an imported canvas? What internal boundaries were being drawn as Mammeri claimed this imported format for his social intervention?

Similarly, one may learn much from the very process by which these artists came to such prominence in French-compiled archives. In Algeria, Benjamin quotes the response to Mammeri's work made by Léonce Bénédite, the great Orientalist art organizer: "This is the first time that a Muslim artist offers us an exhibition of painting and of painting fully conceived with our Western vision and methods".^{xliii} Meanwhile from archives relating to the French Mandate in Lebanon, we learn that Gabriele Bounoure, the advisor for public education to the general delegation of Free France introduced the 1941 colonial exhibition in Beirut with the following: "A Frenchman can say this, undoubtedly, without being accused of chauvinism... *Not only is French painting the honor and glory of Europe, but also it is fair to advance that one could not paint but in Paris or according to Paris*".^{xliv} To appreciate fully the implications of these assertions, we must not fail to keep in focus the debate recorded by Benjamin over the very notion of a consolidated entity such as "French painting," let alone "Western vision." Focusing on the debates in which easel-painting intervened, however, requires allowing theoretically and methodologically for the possibility that art is not simply reflective of social action but central to it. Locally made paintings, which established the universal feasibility of continental formulae, compel reconsideration of "local expression" and translocal reality. If Mandate subjects participated in the universalizing of a "French modernity," then how did that modernity become French, and how did it shape Arab self-conceptions? If paintings are the subject of strategic moves to demonstrate global affinities and national merit, then whose self do they express?

Scholars of modernity have long noted the centrality of the visual to social action.^{xlv} Mostly, however, studies of a visually experienced modernity have confined themselves to European societies. Studies of modernism in the Arab world face a complex situation. This is because many of the very strategies and claims used to colonize the region such as the strategy of asserting its cultural inferiority or intractability, were the same ones taken up passionately by the people suppressed by modernist movements, and taken up in ways that deliberately emphasized the similarity of motive rather than some deep cultural difference. We can study this either as a confluence of aesthetics ("some Arabs just like French art") or as a convergence on activity posited to have cultural and political agency (people of different social positionings have found certain techniques useful and have contributed to their promotion). Embracing the latter, agential view is to suggest that Bénédite and Bounoure were not so centered in French society via art-making

as they were invested in the formation of marginal modernities and far-flung, multiply motivated selves when they looked to people they categorized “Arabs” painting in a style they had learned to call and think “French.” To perceive the effort involved in this interpretation by these French administrators, it is important to recall that the very Frenchness of the art being viewed was itself a product of art-making and negotiations formed, as Porterfield revealed, through art. Therefore, we must be very cautious about naturalizing the outcome of the style’s Frenchness and, similar, allow for it to belong to and be the product of other makers, too. The point is that Frenchness was formed for Bénédictine and Bounoure outside its alleged boundaries and in social interaction that cannot be retrospectively termed simply “French” in origins.

Indeed, seeing art as formative of social actions, rather than reflective of them, may release scholars of universalizing projects such as modernity, civilization, and empire from the analytical boundaries of essentialism. If Orientalist art-making became a sort of national identity project for Imperial France, it would be useful to know how people practiced the project based on their different social backgrounds, at some remove from the originally intended audiences. Though Porterfield, for example, astutely notes the ambivalences at the very heart of the project, and embedded in the art works themselves, he concentrates on the convergences, only to whet the reader’s appetite for learning more about the ways unexpected audiences interacted with the images. Likewise, it would be worthwhile to know how diverse sectors of the society that could be called “Arab” or “Syrian” in relation to the portrayed Oriental world of Matisse or Renoir, responded to the portrayals. Again, while we have histories of other “European” imports and their reception (a word I find limiting of analysis from the outset), we do not have it in art. This lack, specifically because of the creative and expressive meaning assigned to art (and other indices of civilization), assigns in advance a derivative position prior to having fully analyzed the construction of art as a universal category.

For example, Porterfield’s discussion of twentieth-century artists who have responded from a colonized position to French Orientalist art could stimulate more studies of the strategies for engaging an imported concept of modernism that were to some extent attempts to claim space for intervening in and redirecting the importer’s own society. An example of such intervention is the 1958 staged public unveiling of Algerian women, under the slogan, “*vive l’algerie française*,” which Porterfield interprets as an ideological and visual descendant of Delacroix’s painting *Les Femmes d’Algers*. His analysis indicates why, decades after decolonization, debates about de-veiling “Oriental women” could be so potent even among supporters of veiling. This returns us to the radio dialogue that initiated this essay. The very invocation of an art so universal that anyone should recognize its aesthetic (and spiritual) value and indexicality of civilizational merit (let alone the right to sovereignty and the rest of the long list the *ustaz̧* recited) demonstrates that that art-centering discourse is still very much alive and kicking, in the sense of having material impact among peoples not known as creators of the *La Gioconda* but certainly known as heirs to it through *al-umm al-banuna*, or France as the protective mother, a common phrase by which Lebanon’s experience of colonialism is referenced. This is not to suggest that “North African artists were influenced by French artists – and vice-versa”^{xlvi} as one reviewer blithely summarized Benjamin’s narrative, for that would disregard the differing valences of “modern European art” and “indigenous decorative arts” – so clear in their mere titles. Rather, to tune out the discursive life of “fine art” on Itha`at al-Nur would be to cast from view the dispersed and debated process by which fine art has become and is maintained as a civilizational index and an instrument of modernity. Whether or not young female students aligned with the opposition will be granted the right to comment on globally famed paintings or locally framed politics, the ability of globalized art to demonstrate and secure one’s right to comment at all has been, again, secured in

such exchanges. How, by talking about *L. Giavonda*, art, aesthetics taste, and civilization broadly, do people perpetuate their marginality from access to power? If, as Porterfield has shown, Empire was not merely reflected in fine art but was actually instigated, justified, and consolidated by it, then the art as agent thesis may prompt deeper consideration of the role of forms of “expressive culture” in the formulation and perpetuations of historical movements that have put people in antagonistic contact. The bind in which the colonized find themselves vis à vis modernism, of which they are partners in production but not partners in benefit or ownership, is a legacy that has not left the region. Recent studies have taken up this situation in relation to political movements, workers’ mobilizations, residential patterns, and administrative institutions.^{xlvii} Given the plethora of visual imagery that has accompanied colonization, decolonization, and post-independence movements, the fact that only one of these has dealt directly and primarily with visual arts is astonishing. (Irbouh’s book deserves its own discussion, but its basic argument that—French art education in the colonies supported the colonial agenda—means that again art is held to be shaped by social forces and not vice-versa). Studies of visual culture have much to offer the topic of modernism and the Arab world precisely because they tap a field that historically did not adhere to the map-making that came to divide Oriental and European identities in an apparently natural way.^{xlviii} The motive and relevance of such studies would not be to appease a perverse will to find agency where it has been denied but to prompt more careful consideration of all the factors that seems to have necessitated interactions that cannot be circumscribed by the maps and chronologies of the present. Much as Chakrabarty has found of the investment rational historical consciousness makes in the notion of anachronism, there is a binary opposition invoked implicitly by current art studies between art-less and art-full cultures, and it is this premise which threatens to obscure attention to the “plurality of the now.”^{xlix} Although the idea of a civilizational unity is appealing as a call to social intervention, scholarly and political danger lies in naturalizing Bounoure’s assertion that twenty nations have been unified into one with a convergence on a painting style. Perhaps the least of these dangers is that scholars overlook the processes by which plurality inhabits the unifying notion of civilization (for Chakrabarty it is “time”), and, moreover, civilization as a powerful notion lives through that very plurality. A greater danger, however, is when human lives are crushed or dehumanized by the appeal to a discourse that tries to standardize, evaluate, and determine access to resources. In this sense, Itha`at al-Nur’s invocation of *Mona Lisa* is important to note and confront with a sceptical interest in the production of the potency of social concepts such as fine art and civilization. Regarding the confrontation of government and opposition forces in downtown Beirut, we can see that both are invoking a legacy of *mission civilizatrice* in order to justify their politics, and that in relation to that legacy there will necessarily be a group of people defined excluded from deserving access to valuable national resources.

Lastly, it is important that historical studies and explorations of the formation of modernism plunge into history via art sources, lest the growing interest in contemporary Arab art replicate unwittingly the very discourse that condemned Arabs to colonial status on grounds that civilization would have to be brought across a cultural boundary to them. Indeed, it should be noted that at the forefront of those promoting the idea that art is new in the Arab world and comes to it from inherently foreign sources are many Arab artists themselves. For them, this statement is strategic, but for scholars and ordinary people, it can be tragic, as is shown by the systematic plundering of Iraq since the imposition of sanctions in 1991. Art studies and descriptions of peoples as art full or art free do have political ramifications. While Benjamin and Porterfield were limited to French sources, their own attention to the polyvocality of those sources prompts dealing with Arabic, Turkish, Berber and other sources as archives of social processes rather than reflections of ethnic essences. Along the same trajectory, focusing on art, and

perhaps other areas of material media involving combinations of traditional and imaginative thought-processes, as agent of the process of social formation, not an expression of pre-formed social entities, will advance studies of social processes in the region.

ENDNOTES

The author gratefully acknowledges the close, attentive, and thoughtful reading Maha Yahya provided in the course of this article's preparation for publication.

ⁱ This translation is based on paraphrasing notes that were taken while listening to Itha`at al-Nur's transmission at 2 pm, Sunday, March 18, 2007.

ⁱⁱ For examples see Wijdan `Ali, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World* (London: Scorpion Publishing, 1990); Wijdan `Ali, "Modern Arab Art: An Overview," in *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, ed. Salwa Mikdad Nashashibi, (Washington DC: The International Council for Women in the Arts and The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994), p. 72-116; Silvia Naef, *A la recherche d'une modernité arabe: L'évolution des arts plastiques en Egypte, au Liban et en Irak* (Geneva: Slatkine Editions, 1996); `Afif Bahnasi, *Al-Fann AL-`Arabi AL-Hadith: Bayna AL-Hawiyya wa AL-Tab`ija* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab AL-`Arabi, 1997). This assumption also undergirded the workshop Silvia Naef organized with Nada Shabout at the Robert Schuman Centre in 2006 under the title "From Local to Global: Visual Arts in the Eastern Mediterranean between International Markets and Local Expectations" and the roundtable Nada Shabout and Ella Shohat directed at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting in 2006 under the title, "Exhibiting the "Orient" in the Age of Globalization."

ⁱⁱⁱ Clearly, I perceive difficulty in articulating a term to describe and circumscribe the region of history and experience to which I am referring to in this article. From a very local perspective, the region is Lebanon and environs (Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunis, Morocco) wherein a sense of history being structured through specific encounters seems to be replicated due to common factors. However, from a less-territorially based perspective, the region is much broader and less contiguous. This is a perspective that prizes experiences in the abstract – colonialism, modernism, globalism—and in this term sections of Asia, Africa, rural North America and Europe would be combined, along with certain classes of the Arab world, and so on. See my discussion of this in "Introduction" to Edited File "Al-Khalq Al-Mutabadal: Al-Fann wa Mujtama`at Janubiy al-Mutawassit"(Mutual Creation: Art and Societies South of the Mediterranean)," in *Al-Adab* 52:1-2 (January-February, 2004); see also Nasser Rabat's reply for more discussion of this troublesome but productive issue, the response to which is absolutely fundamental to the art historian's project in "Fann Janubiy Al-mutawassit Ma Zala Akhar" (Art of the Mediterranean South Remains an Other" in *Al-Adab* 52:3-4 (March-April, 2004).

^{iv} See also Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Nadia Abu el-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

^v Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, p. 3.

^{vi} `Ali, *Contemporary Art*, p. xi.

^{vii} See Nora Taylor, "Whose Art Are We Studying Anyway? Writing Vietnamese Art History from Colonialism to the Present" in *Studies in South East Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*, ed. Nora Taylor (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p.143-157.

^{viii} See for example, `Ali, *Modern Arab Art*, 1994; Naef, *A la recherche*; Silvia Naef, 2003 "Peindre pour être moderne? Remarques sur l'adoption de l'art occidental dans l'Orient arabe" (Painting To Be Modern? Remarks on the adoption of Western Art in the Arab East)," in *La multiplication des images en pays d'Islam* (The Multiplication of Images in the Countries of Islam) Bernard Heyberger and Silvia Naef, eds. (Istanbul: Orient-Institut, Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2003), p. 189-208..

^{ix} Illuminating studies in this context include, Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 319-352; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1-59; Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Anna Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

^x Several scholars who have provided productive insight into the issue of mimicry or apparent similarity are Eric Gable, "Bad Copies: The Colonial Aesthetic and the Manajaco-Portuguese Encounter," in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 294-319; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

- ^{xi} Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism, 1798-1836*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- ^{xii} Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- ^{xiii} Lila Abu-Lughod, "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World," in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 18, (1989), p. 267-306.
- ^{xiv} Examples of such standard accounts are Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, *Islamic Art and Architecture, 650-1250* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); John Hayes, ed. *The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983); Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- ^{xv} For more on the premises of academic art study as developed since the sixteenth century see Nanette Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins Omission," in *(En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists in Academe*, ed. Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), p. 222-236; Nanette Salomon, "The Venus Pudica: Uncovering Art History's 'Hidden Agendas' and Pernicious Pedigrees," in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 69-87; Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 33-59; Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits – Gender and the Color of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992); and Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- ^{xvi} For broad characterizations of academic study of the Arab world, see Abu-Lughod, "Zones of Theory" and Michael Gilson, "Very like a camel: the appearance of an anthropologist's Middle East," in *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic*, Richard Fardon, ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press).
- ^{xvii} For more, see Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- ^{xviii} Porterfield, *Allure of Empire*, p. 4.
- ^{xix} *ibid.*
- ^{xx} Thiers quoted in Porterfield, *Allure of Empire*, p. 41.
- ^{xxi} *ibid.*
- ^{xxii} *ibid.*, p.45.
- ^{xxiii} *ibid.*, p.95.
- ^{xxiv} *ibid.*, p.115, emphasis added.
- ^{xxv} *Ibid.*, p.134, emphasis added.
- ^{xxvi} Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, p. 3.
- ^{xxvii} The former was a hillside villa requisitioned by the French government in 1907 to host artist *boursiers*, and the latter was an experimental garden situated directly below the villa.
- ^{xxviii} *Ibid.*, p.249.
- ^{xxix} See Roger Benjamin, "Matisse in Morocco: A Colonizing Esthetic?" *Art in America* (November, 1990) p.157-165, 211-213.
- ^{xxx} Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, p. 27.
- ^{xxxi} Eugène Fromentin as quoted by Benjamin, *Orientalist aesthetics*, p. 48.
- ^{xxxii} Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.17.
- ^{xxxiii} See Mitchell, *Questions*, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000),
- ^{xxxiv} Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, p. 60.
- ^{xxxv} Mitchell, *Questions*.
- ^{xxxvi} Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, p. 91.
- ^{xxxvii} As quoted by *ibid.*, p.24.
- ^{xxxviii} I review Arabophone and Francophone press responses to Beirut-based exhibitions of painting between 1920-40 in Kirsten Scheid, "Painters, Picture-Makers, and Lebanon: Ambiguous Identities in an Uncertain State" (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2005).
- ^{xxxix} Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, p. 110.
- ^{xl} *ibid.*, p.234.
- ^{xli} *ibid.*, p.102.
- ^{xlii} See for example, Roger Benjamin, "Post-colonial Taste," in *Orientalism from Delacroix to Klee*, ed. Roger Benjamin, December 6, 1997 – February 22, 1998 (Sydney, Australia: The Art Gallery of New South Wales), p. 32-40.
- ^{xliii} *ibid.*, p.228.
- ^{xliv} Gabriel Bounoure, "Introduction," *Le Salon des Amis des Arts* (Friends of the Arts Exhibition), Exhibition Catalogue, December 13-31, 1941, Beirut, (Archived material, Joseph Matar Archives, 'Ida, Lebanon)
- ^{xlv} One of the most outstanding works in this respect is Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
- ^{xlvi} Taken from reviews listed by publisher on book's back.
- ^{xlvii} See for example, Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Thompson,

Colonial Citizens; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Leila Fawaz, ed., *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) and Hamid Irbouh, *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco, 1912-1956* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005).

^{xlviii} Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); also, Maha Yahya, "Unnamed Modernisms: 'Oriental' Filiation or 'Mediterranean' Affiliation in Beirut's Urban-Architecture (1888-1943)" (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, History, Theory and Criticism Program, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, 2004).

^{xlix} Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 243