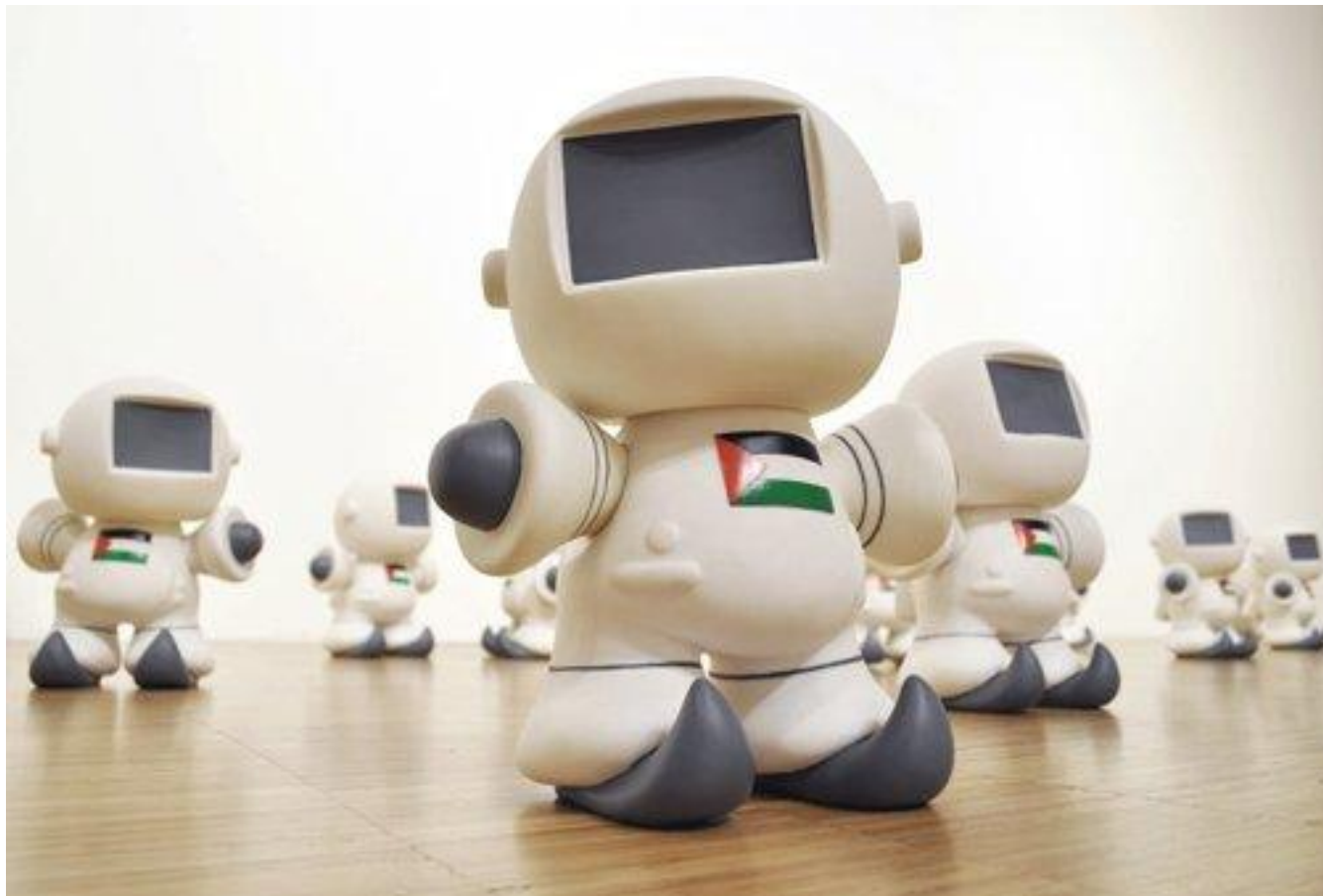


Contemporary Art and Geopolitics in the Arab World

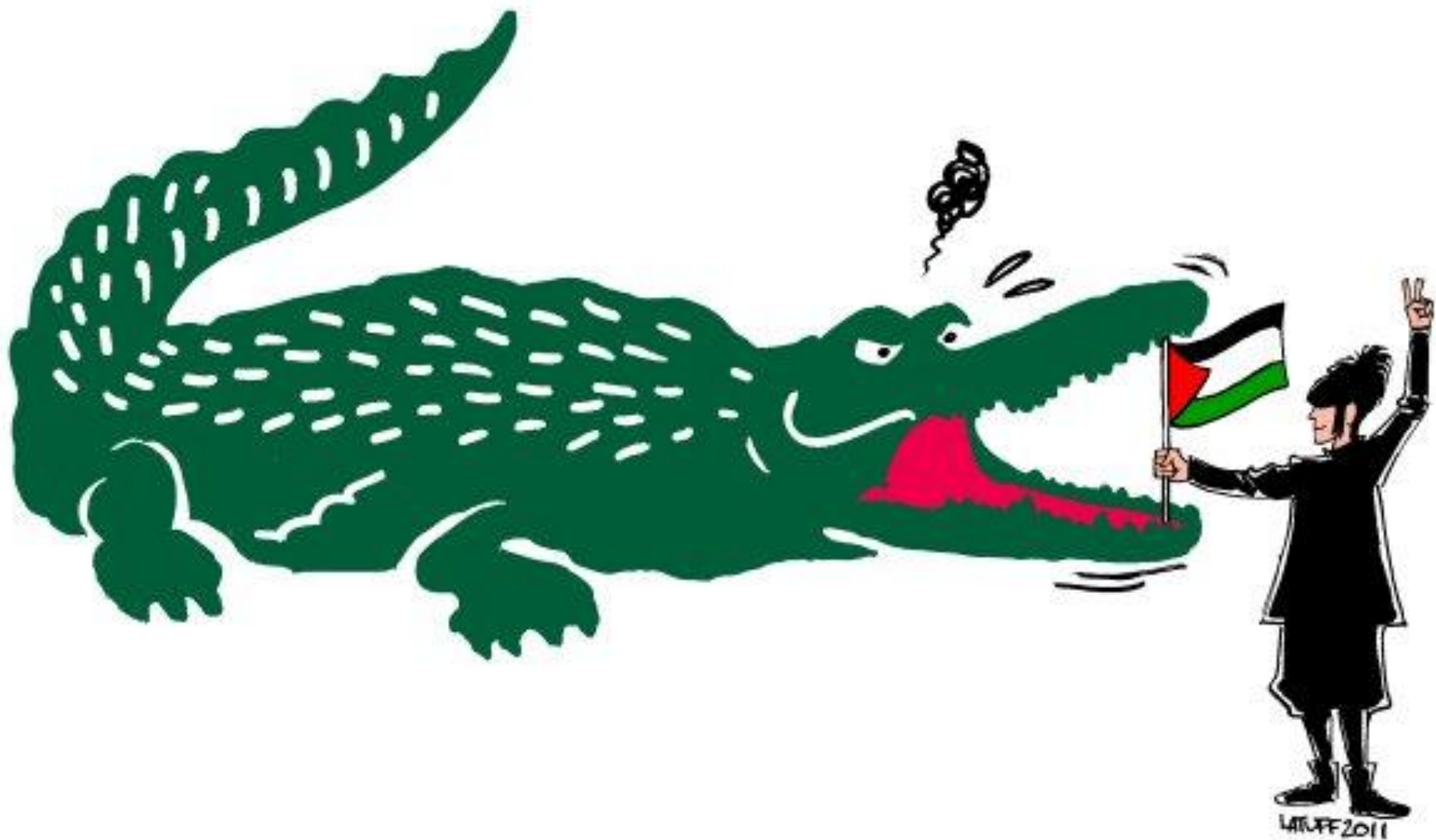
Seminar 1: Overview of Artistic
Practices and of the Arts
Infrastructure in the Arab World

Larissa Sansour (Bethlehem, Denmark)



Palestinants, from the installation 'A Space Odyssey' 2008

In the case of Palestine, there seems to be an eternal sense of forecasting statehood, independence and the end of the occupation. The ambitious ideas we hope to achieve have become so repetitive that the odd mix of nostalgia and self-congratulation that the sci-fi genre often embodies lends itself well to the topic

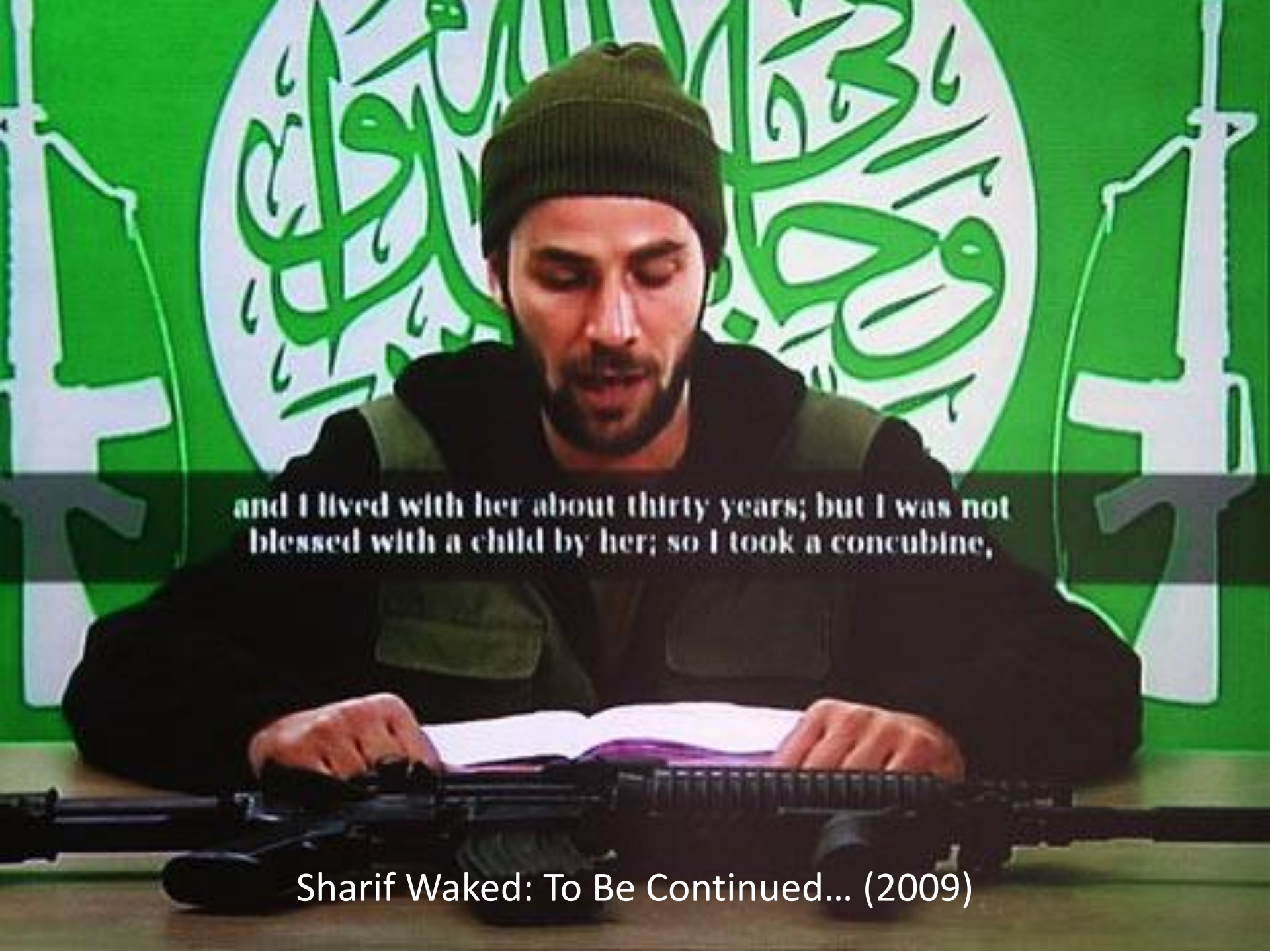


BY- MOHAMMED AL HAWAJRI

“With Israeli settlements leaving very little land for a future Palestine, I decided to explore a vertical solution to statehood . . . Intercity trips previously marred by checkpoints are now made by elevator.”

Sharif Waked (Israel)
Chic Point



A man with a beard and a dark beanie is sitting at a table, reading an open book. He is wearing a dark jacket with a tactical vest over it. In front of him on the table lies a black assault rifle. The background is a green wall with large white Arabic calligraphy. The scene is lit with a greenish tint.

and I lived with her about thirty years; but I was not
blessed with a child by her; so I took a concubine,

Sharif Waked: To Be Continued... (2009)

**Tashweesh
(Ramallah)**



Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou Rahme (Ramallah): The Zone (2011)

The research for the project explores the particular dynamics that have brought about the construction of a consumerist regime out of the remains of an aborted Palestinian struggle.

In previous works we have looked at the failure of the Palestinian resistance movement, but for this project, we wanted to focus on what happened after the failure: the transformation of the PLO into an 'authority' and eventually a 'security' regime.

What struck us as most significant is the way in which this new regime displaced the old collective 'dreams' and gave birth to new political discourses and desires largely centered on consumption.



“Here, new lifestyles, desires, senses of self mingle and collide with a persistent denial of the disasters of Palestine’s current situation.”

معقول.. أربح بيت



بات التوفير (مفاتيح أحلامك)

ت فرصتك بالفوز
على كافة أنواع حسابات التوفير

She has no boundaries



The PLO discourse and propaganda art ...



يسوم الارضنت ٣٠ آذار مارس



شعار الانتفاضة: أبو عمار قائدنا

...remains a visual reference, but with a new message

“Your ambitions cannot be constrained... Jawwal: say no to the impossible”



Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou Rahme: The Zone



“In what would appear to us as one of the darkest moments in Palestinian lived history, a ‘dream-world’ has somehow emerged in the West Bank: a host of commodified desires, semblance of normality, have been constructed atop the debris of political failure and collapse.”

Rabih Mroue (Beirut): Three Posters



Rabih Mroue: Je veux voir (2008)



Ayman Yossri Daydban (Ramallah, Saudi Arabia)



You're a coward!

أنت جبان!

From the Subtitles series, 2008



لا! لا يا (محمد)
ابتعد عن الحبال!



With the name Allah, the Beneficent



The praise belongs to Allah, the Nourisher Sustainer of all that exists



Beneficent, The Merciful



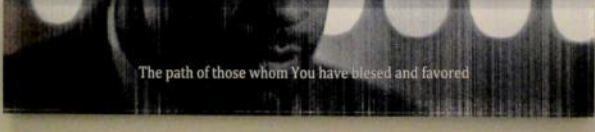
The Master of the Day of Judgment



You alone we worship, and You we call upon for assistance



Guide us upon the Straight Path



The path of those whom You have blessed and favored



Not of those upon whom wrath comes, Nor those who go astray

With the name Allah, the Beneficent
The praise belongs to Allah, the Nourisher Sustainer of all that exists
The Beneficent, The Merciful
The Master of the Day of Judgment
You alone we worship, and
You we call upon for assistance
Guide us upon the Straight Path
the path of those whom You have
blessed and favored
Not of those upon whom wrath comes
Nor those who go astray

Wafaa Bilal (Iraq, USA)
Shoot an Iraqi (2007)



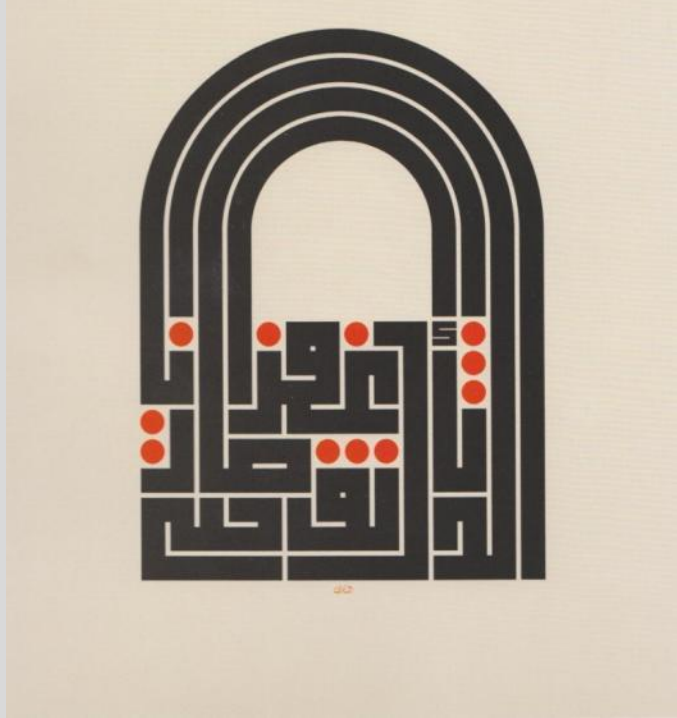
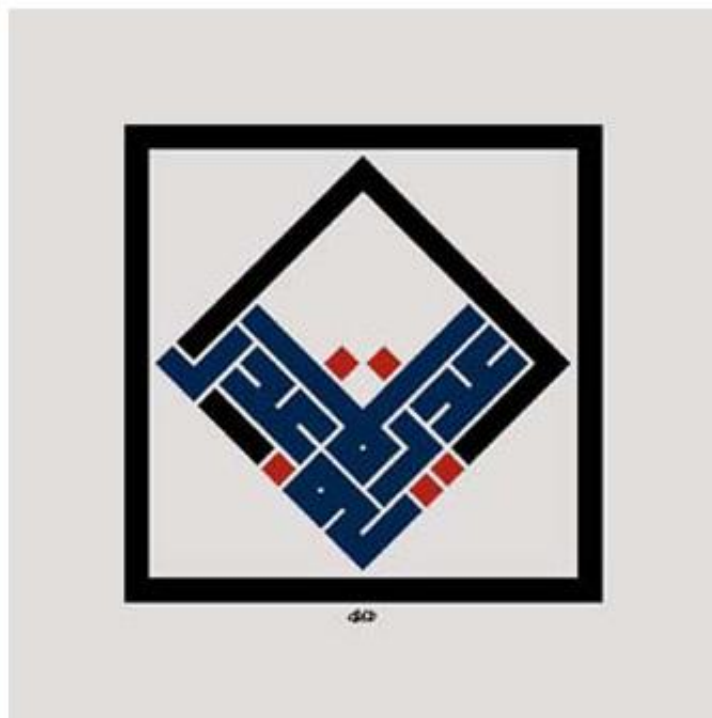
Wafaa Bilal: Virtual Jihadi (2008)



Wafaa Bilal hacked a game previously hacked by Al Qaeda (Quest for Saddam) and inserted his own character into it to avenge his brother. The art project was censored by the Art space in NY where it was scheduled to be shown



Mouneer al Shaarani
(Syria)





El Seed (Tunisia, Canada)

"MÊME IMMOBILE, J'RESTE EN MOUVEMENT..."



SON, WE LI
AND THOSE
MEN WITH
I HAVE A
YOU COULD
THE LUXURY
THAT BEAT
AND MY EX
INCOMPREH
YOU DON'T
DOWN IN PL
PARTIES, YO
NEED ME ON
HONOR, CO
WORDS AS
DEFENDING
PUNCHLINE
THE INCLIN
MAN WHO
BLANKET
PROVIDE,
MANNER IN
RATHER YO
WENT ON Y
YOU PICK U
EITHER WAY
THINK YOU



FIRST COMES THE REVOLUTION
THEN COMES THE MEDIA
THEN COME THE ANALYSTS
THEN COMES THE MERCHANDISE
THEN COMES THE VICTORY
THEN COMES MORE MERCHANDISE

Hassan Hajjaj (Morocco, London)



Fatima al Qadiri & Khalid al Gharaballi (Kuwait, New York)

بني
عيش





هاي

ورق صحي ناعم أبيض

مقاس الورق : 220 x 210

Mi

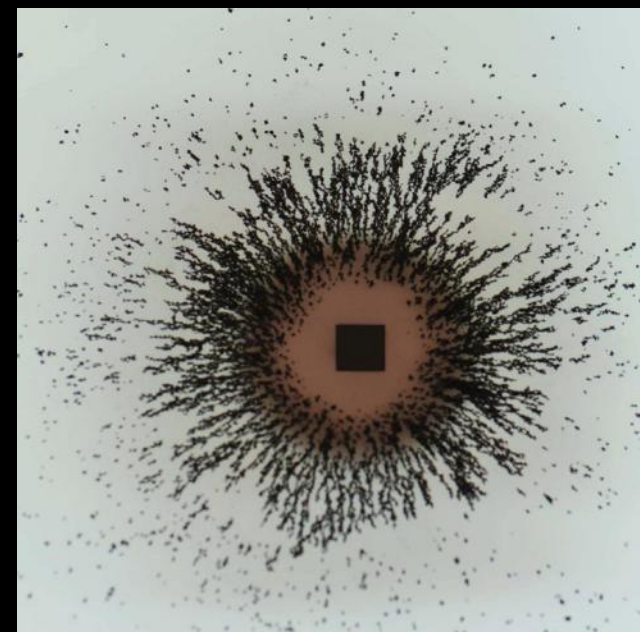
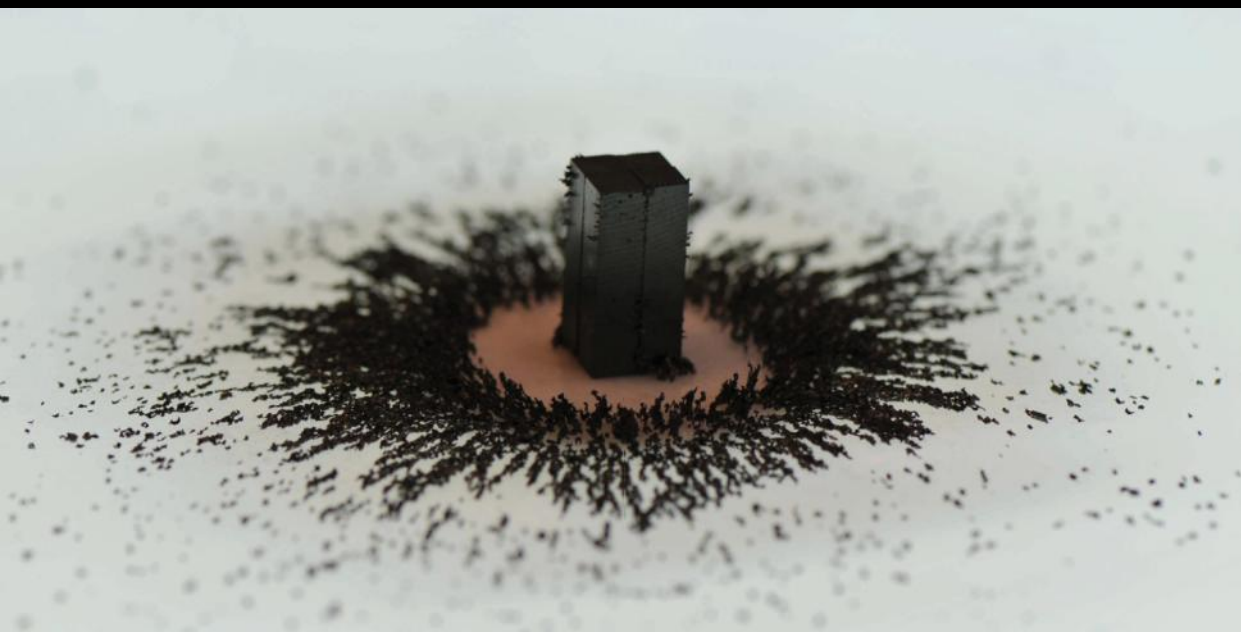
White and Soft
Tissue
200 x 2 ply



**Ahmed Mater
(Saudi Arabia)**

Magnetism (2009)

Sculptural Installation with magnets and metal shards





Ahmed Mater: Mecca, 2012





Main locations of contemporary art in the Arab World

- Old, still thriving artist communities: Cairo, ~~Baghdad~~, Damascus, Beirut
- Palestinian diaspora (focal points Ramallah & Jerusalem) and émigré communities (Lebanese, Iraqis, Syrians etc).
- Emerging art scenes: Arabian Peninsula (United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain), North Africa (Morocco & Tunisia but now also Libya)
- Focal points/events: Sharjah Biennial, Art Dubai, Art Marrakesh, MENASART, Cairo Biennial, Homeworks, Al Riwaq & Jerusalem Biennial, etc.

25 facilitators of contemporary artistic production in the Arab World



- | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Townhouse Gallery (EGY) | 9. Dar el Ma'mun (MOR) | 16. Cuadro (UAE) |
| 2. All Art Now (SYR) | 10. Cinematheque de Tanger (MOR) | 17. Traffic Gallery (UAE) |
| 3. Darat al Funoon (Wijdan Ali, Suha Shoman?) (JOR) | 11. Arab Image Foundation (LEB) | 18. Art Dubai (UAE) |
| 4. Al Riwaq Project Space (BAH) | 12. Bidoun Projects (Library) (UAE) | 19. Art Abu Dhabi (UAE) |
| 5. Al Ma'mal Foundation (PAL) | 13. International Academy of Art Palestine (PAL) | 20. Saadiyat Island (UAE) |
| 6. Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum (EGY) | 14. Arab Contemporary Art Fund (ACAF) (LEB) | 21. Mathaf (QTR) |
| 7. Ashkal Alwan & Homeworks (LEB) | 15. Ayyam Gallery Damascus, Dubai & Beirut (SYR, UAE & LEB) | 22. Edge of Arabia (KSA) |
| 8. Beirut Art Center (LEB) | | 23. Sharjah Biennial (UAE) |
| | | 24. American Universities |
| | | 25. Marrakesh Biennial (MAR) |

'Traditional' and 'Western' visual artist career paths

Traditional

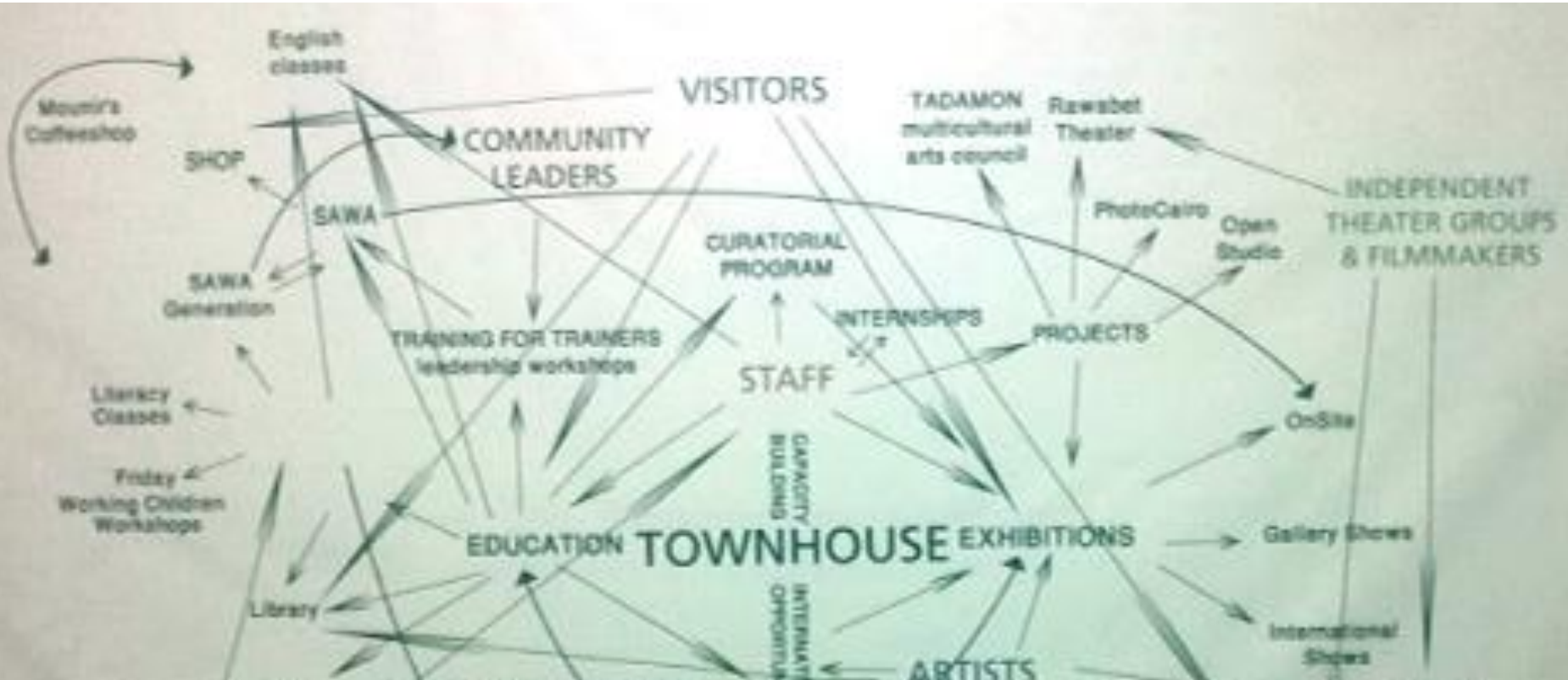
- Comes from a family steeped in culture
- Displays artistic vocation from an early age
- Self-taught, or follows a course with a master (apprenticeship). Sometimes classical art training (oil painting and/or sculpture) in a renown art academy in one of the 'old world' centers
- Not dependent on revenue generated by art.
- Recognition and patronage often found within own social circles (cultural elite)

Contemporary (Western or Beuysian)

- Can come from any social environment
- Acquires an interest in art while at school
- Follows an art-training in an accessible art school
- Attempts to continue art education through master programmes, workshops, residencies and artistic exchange programs until established as an artist
- The artist is a professional who aspires to live from revenue generated by art. Market or alternative source of income (subsidies, grants, participation fees etc.)
- Seeks recognition from critics and curators in the global art world through exhibitions, publications, museums and biennials.

In the Arab world the traditional model is still prevalent but there is an effort by all actors in the contemporary art sector to move towards the 'Western' model
=> Attempt to build a comprehensive artistic infrastructure

Example of an incubator of artistic infrastructure (NGO)



Characteristics:

1. Heavy reliance on foreign funding despite attempts to increase local funding
2. Attempt to fill in the gaps in local artistic infrastructure leads to expansion of activities
3. Professional management and qualified staff always an issue
4. Hub for local production, becomes regional hub (and model)
5. Eventually becomes a node of an international network of artistic production

Examples of art incubators (artists' collectives)



98 weeks in Beirut (Mar Mkhael) and All Art Now in Damascus (Jewish Quarter, old city)

Characteristics:

1. Low budget activities supported by local artists' community
2. Issue of expansion into NGO (to receive foreign funding) always a question
3. Focus on artistic production and exchange, for the original artists' community
4. Attempt to link horizontally to foreign art initiatives through residencies, workshops etc
5. Requirement: a lively artistic community and minimal state interference
(i.e. freedom of association, minimal censorship etc.)

Other examples of art incubators

Artist-led initiatives

- [Ashkal Alwan](#), Beirut
- Artellewa, Cairo
- [Makan](#), Amman
- [Al Mahatta](#), Ramallah

Curator-led initiatives

- [L'appartement 22](#), Rabat
- [Al Ma'mal Foundation](#), Jerusalem
- [Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum](#)
- [Dar al Ma'mun](#), Marrakesh

Patron-led initiatives

- [Darat al Funun](#), Amman (Khalid Shoman)
- [Al Riwaq](#), Bahrain (Kanoo family)
- [Al Mansouria Foundation](#), Jeddah (Princess Jawaher bint Majed)



Not for profit art sector

- All the examples above concern not-for-profit organizations that receive no or insignificant state support.
 - They all try to provide a public function (in the field of arts) with private means, which imposes a limitation on their activities.
 - Each of them reflects the status of the contemporary art world in the city they operate in: individual artists or patrons will rarely invest in projects that are too large for the scene they take place within.
- => These initiatives therefore are a reliable indicator of the level of development of the local art scene

Independent platform to bring art to a larger audience



Specific not-for-profit activities: Cinemathèque de Tanger

Established in the city of Tanger upon an initiative of the Moroccan artist Yto Barrada to 'present world cinema to Morocco and Moroccan cinema to the world'.

Rationale: to revive the moribund artistic and cultural scene in Tanger;
to create a cultural attraction point in the city centre that appeals to a large audience;
and to deepen visual culture as a background to appreciation of the arts



Specific not-for-profit activities: Arab Image Foundation

Established in Beirut to collect photographic documentation produced in the Arab World or in the Arab diaspora. Around 400.000 photographs up to date. Research and Conservation.

Rationale: to preserve the memory in a part of the world that tends to bury it. Arabs are, generally speaking, not very proud of their recent past;
& to provide a visual history of the Arab world which can function as a resource for artists



Specific not-for-profit activities: Bidoun Library

Bidoun is a magazine produced in New York about contemporary art&culture in the Middle East.

Bidoun Projects is a spin-off based in Dubai. It includes curatorial projects, critical art writing and documentation of recent cultural and artistic history of the Middle East.

One such project is the 'pop-up' Bidoun Library that provides an alternative cultural and artistic history of the Middle East. It has traveled throughout the Middle East, the USA and Europe.



Art Education in the Arab World

Four types of art education available in the region:

1. Classical art academies (painting & sculpture) in the old cultural centers. These state-run academies are often staffed by traditional artists, and they have little appreciation or sympathy for new media, political subjects etc . These art academies often lack the facilities and tools needed to produce art in new media.
2. The American Universities in Sharjah and Beirut offer courses in contemporary art, but not in all fields. Currently they offer the best art education available in the region. The American Universities in Cairo, Dubai and Kuwait offer less art education.
3. Privately-run academies such as the International Academy of Art Palestine, that operate with foreign funding and local support. These follow curricula and organizational strategies of Western art academies and offer BAs and eventually MAs. Only example known IAAP.
4. Courses in graphic design, video & film, art history, architecture, ICT and other art-related fields are widely available throughout the region but orientated towards the commercial sector.

With the exception of artists living in Lebanon, Palestine or the UAE, most young artists follow courses of the last kind to acquire some artistic skills. But generally speaking, all artists and art professionals try to acquire an art education in the West (USA, London, Paris, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands...)

Writing and publishing about art

Why is writing and publishing about art important?

- Documentation: building up the artistic memory of the region/situating art against the past
- Information: knowing what's happening now, understanding current trends / situating art in the present and towards the future.
- Research and criticism are essential for the development of a culturally 'competitive' art sector
 - art based on research is often more relevant intellectually, socially and culturally
 - feedback is essential for the development of artists , but also for the development of an art scene
 - ⇒ self-reflection is needed for any kind of development

(Conferences/symposia/workshops also play an important role)

Examples of documentation: Bidoun Library, Arab Image Foundation, [Nafas](#) online magazine

Examples of information: [Canvas](#) magazine, [Bidoun](#) magazine, websites and blogs

Examples of art criticism: [Contemporary Practices](#) magazine, websites and blogs

The commercial art sector

- Art has historically almost always relied on patronage by private individuals. State patronage of individual artistic creative expression (as opposed to propaganda art) is a new phenomenon, intimately linked to the social democratic state and its 'open society' ideal.
- This state patronage is being rolled back presently in the Western world. There is no reason to assume, as has become the norm in Europe, that artists can be or indeed should be shielded from the market.
- The 'creative cities' theory has yet to be proven.
- The art market has its own logic, and does not obey all the rules of the 'normal' market:
 - the value of art is symbolic. Acquiring art = acquiring cultural capital. Example of the businessman who earns his money selling toilets but becomes an esteemed member of the cultural elite by judiciously collecting art.
 - who determines the value of art? At first glance it seems the law of supply and demand rules the art market (auctions). However the assigning of value to art is not a transparent process. Critics, fashion, cultural beliefs (idiosyncrasies) all play a role in determining the value of a specific work of art
 - technical criteria also play a role: longevity, value of components of the artwork, skill in execution (art history standards) are important but not decisive

The role of galleries

- Most basic function of galleries: a shop to buy art. The artist offers his work, the gallery selects according to commercial criteria, and tries to sell the work. Typical commission: 50% artist, 50% gallery
- This provides an incentive to coach the artist, to make work that will sell well. A relationship is thus established between the artist and the gallery. The gallery wants to protect its investment in the artist and thus tries to bind the artist in a contractual relationship.
- Like a shop, the gallery will succeed better if it has a specific identity (pop art, or abstract art, etc). It will thus try to attract and bind the best artists in their chosen field, and further develop them.
- To find new and better clients, the gallery tries to attract media attention, participates in art fairs or develops relations of mutual exchange with similar galleries in other countries.
- Galleries are often run by art lovers. Commercial success is rarely their only motivation. Critical acclaim is equally important.
- Therefore galleries at the high end reinvest part of their earnings into activities that are not immediately profitable: artists whose work is not easy to sell, support of non-commercial exhibitions, educational activities etc. This can eventually feed back into commercial success, as per the logic of cultural or symbolic capital.



Some of
the better
galleries
in Dubai:

Ayyam



The Empty
Quarter

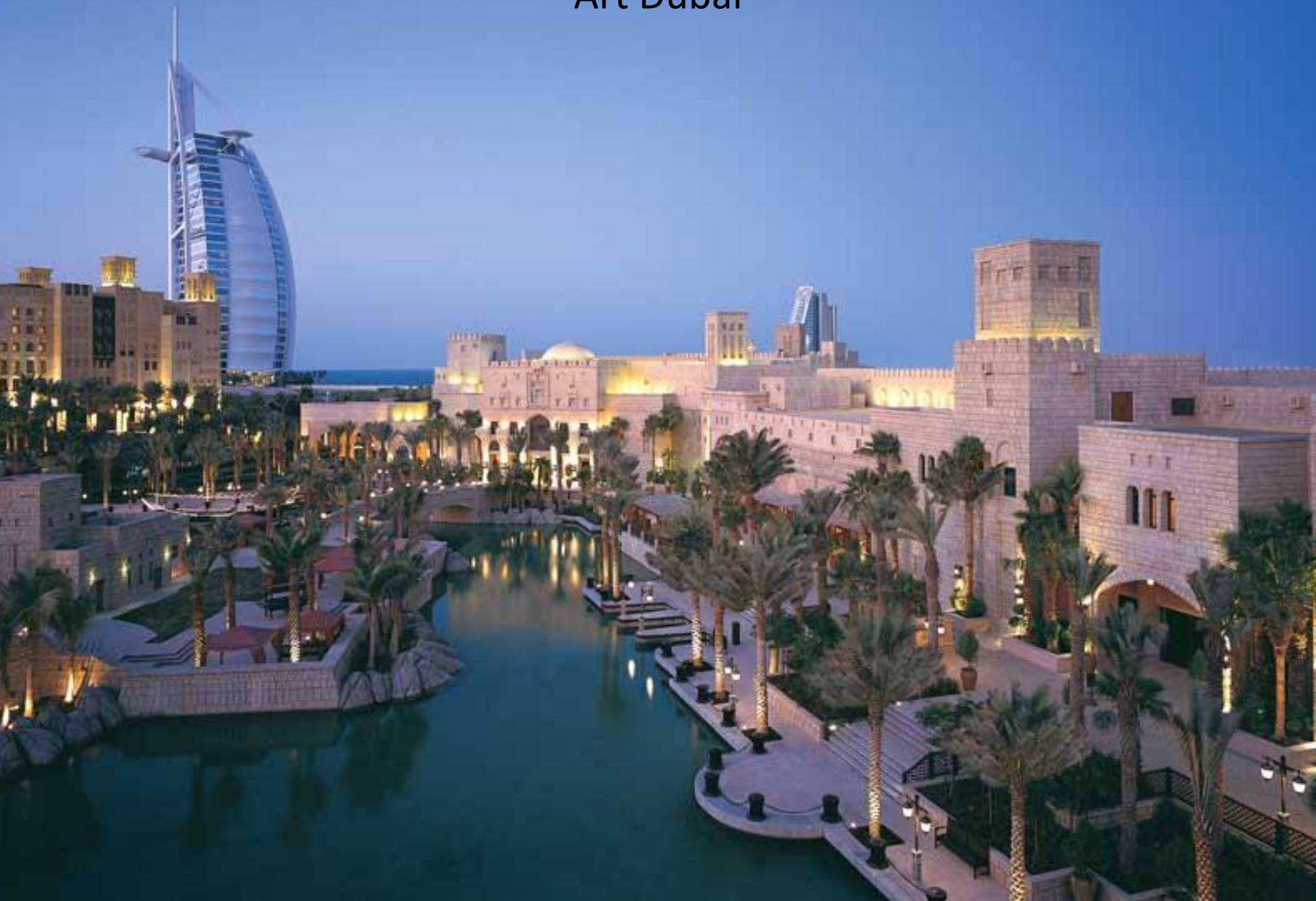
Cuadro



Traffic



Art Dubai



Creating an art infrastructure in Abu Dhabi

Sheikh Zayed National Museum by Foster + Partners

Maritime Museum by Tadao Ando

Performing Arts Centre (by Zaha Hadid)

Classical Museum (the Louvre Abu Dhabi by Jean Nouvel)

Modern Art Museum (the Guggenheim by Frank Gehry)



Saadiyat (Happiness) Island being built in Abu Dhabi

Museum building in Doha (Qatar)



Mathaf museum of Modern Arab Art

Sharjah Biennial

Marketing the State through art?

Acquiring symbolic capital?

Long-term investment in a culturally dynamic environment?

