

Seminar 3 / Contemporary Art and Geopolitics in the Arab World, 2012

Modernism and post-modernity in
the Arab art world

Structure of this seminar

1. The historical evolution of modern Arab art
Egypt, Iraq and Palestine
2. Arab art of the 20th century, Western modernity and post-modernity; the End of History
3. The Orientalist debate
4. Guest presentation: Picasso in Palestine
5. Exile and representation: the case of Iraqi artists
6. Towards a non-Western cosmopolitanism: Dubai and the Indian Ocean in the 21st century

Egyptian Modernism: neo-pharaonic style: rejection of Arab, African and religious influences



Mahmud Mukhtar 1891 – 1934: Egypt Awakening (1919) and Untitled Sculpture

Statue of Saad Zaghloul by Mahmoud Mokhtar in Alexandria (1926)





Mahmoud Said (Egyptian, 1897-1964) - "Les Chadoufs", 1934, 35 x 46 in. Estimate: \$150,000 - 200,000. - Photo: Christie's Images Ltd., 2010

Experimentation with new European art currents (Egyptian art as part of the European artistic sphere)

Manifesto of Egyptian surrealism, 1938
Art and Freedom movement, 1939



above: Ramsis Younan: Untitled (1943)
left: Georges Henein, 1939



Abd al Hadi al Gazzar: *The Strangers* 1961



Gazbia Sirry: *The Kite* 1960

Nasserism
and Arab
Nationalism
(late 1950s
and 1960s)



Search for
authenticity
(asila') in art by
looking for local
roots for modern
art: in palette,
materials,
themes, and
sentiments – in
pursuit of a pan-
Arab identity

Munir Canaan: #`13 et Fleche, 1955

1967

Development of modern art in Iraq:

1: Ottoman military training in arts

2: National policies of Iraq after 1921 to stimulate cultural development

3: Influx of Polish artists in WW2



Abdul Qadir al Rassam: A Military Encampment on the Banks of the Euphrates, 1920s

In 1950 Faiq Hassan established the Société Primitive / Al Ruwad (the Pioneers)



Faiq Hassan: At the Market, 1951

1951: Jewad Selim establishes the Baghdad Group of Modern Art



Jewad Selim: A couple, young man and wife, 1953

Jewad Selim: Monument to Freedom, 1961



New Vision: Maturity of the Iraqi art scene in the late 1970s



Dia Azzawi: Red Sky with Birds, 1981



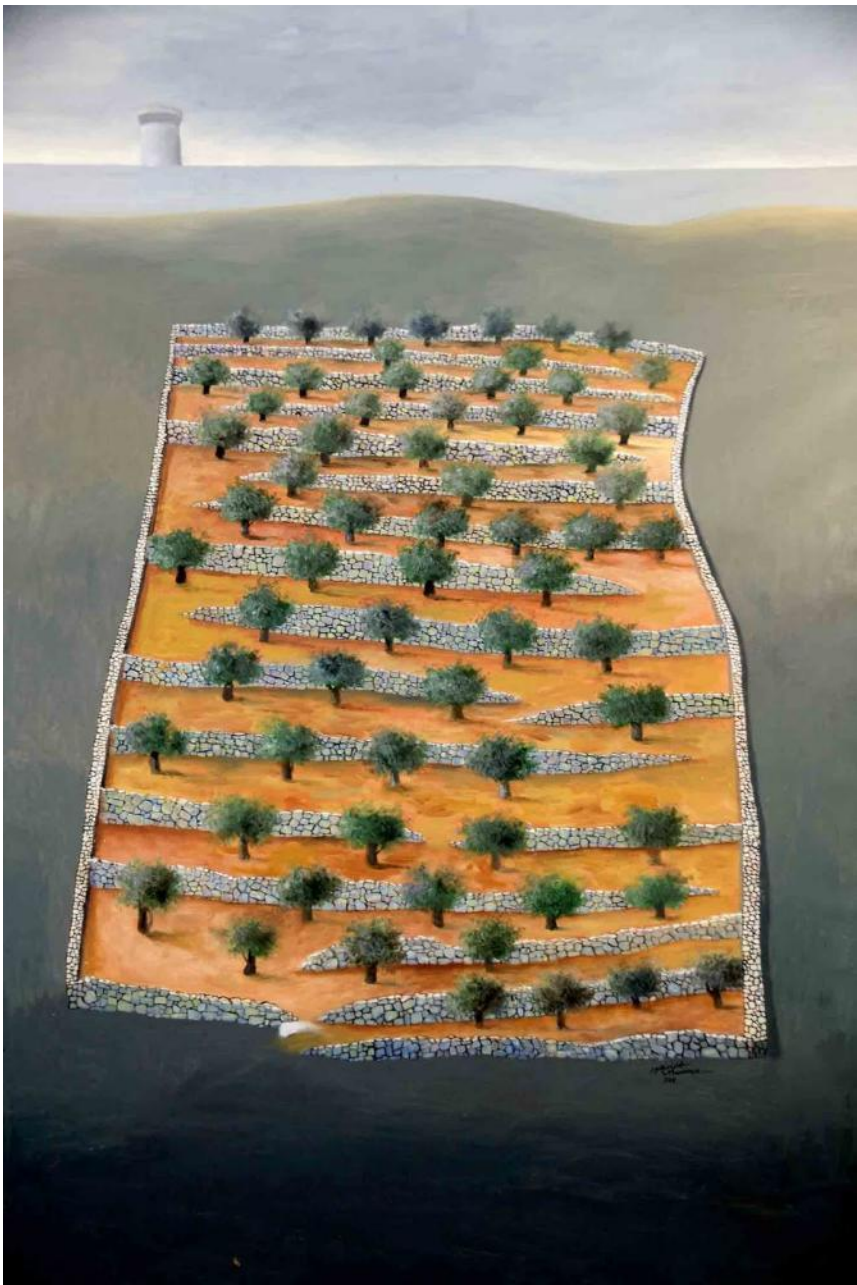
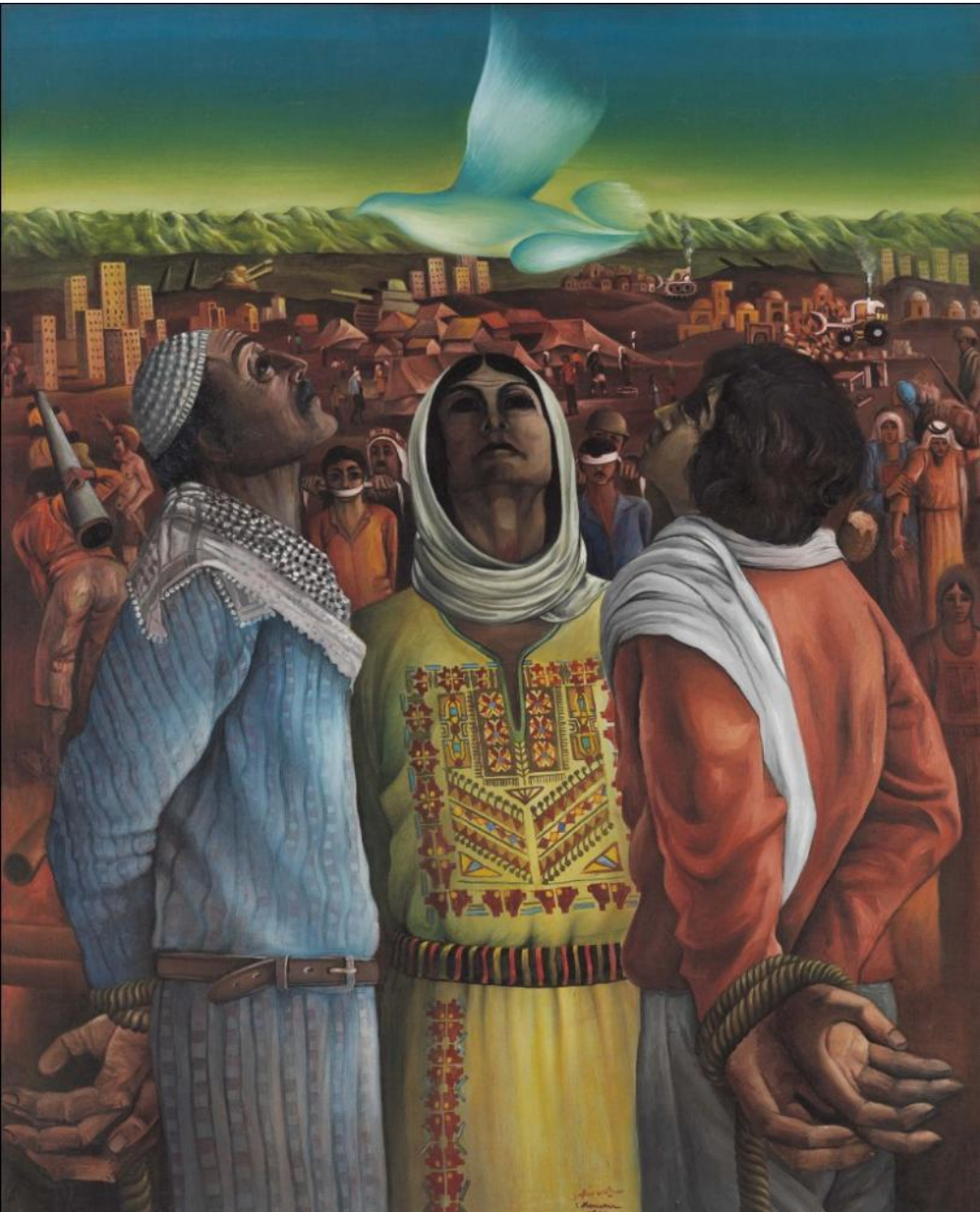
Example of Book Art: Rafa al Nasiri

Modernism in Palestinian Art in the service of the national cause



Ismail Shammout: Where to? 1953... and part of the Palestine: Exodus and Odyssey Murals, 1997-2000

Sliman Mansour: Perseverance and Hope 1976; depiction of Palestine, 1980s



Palestinian / PLO propaganda art



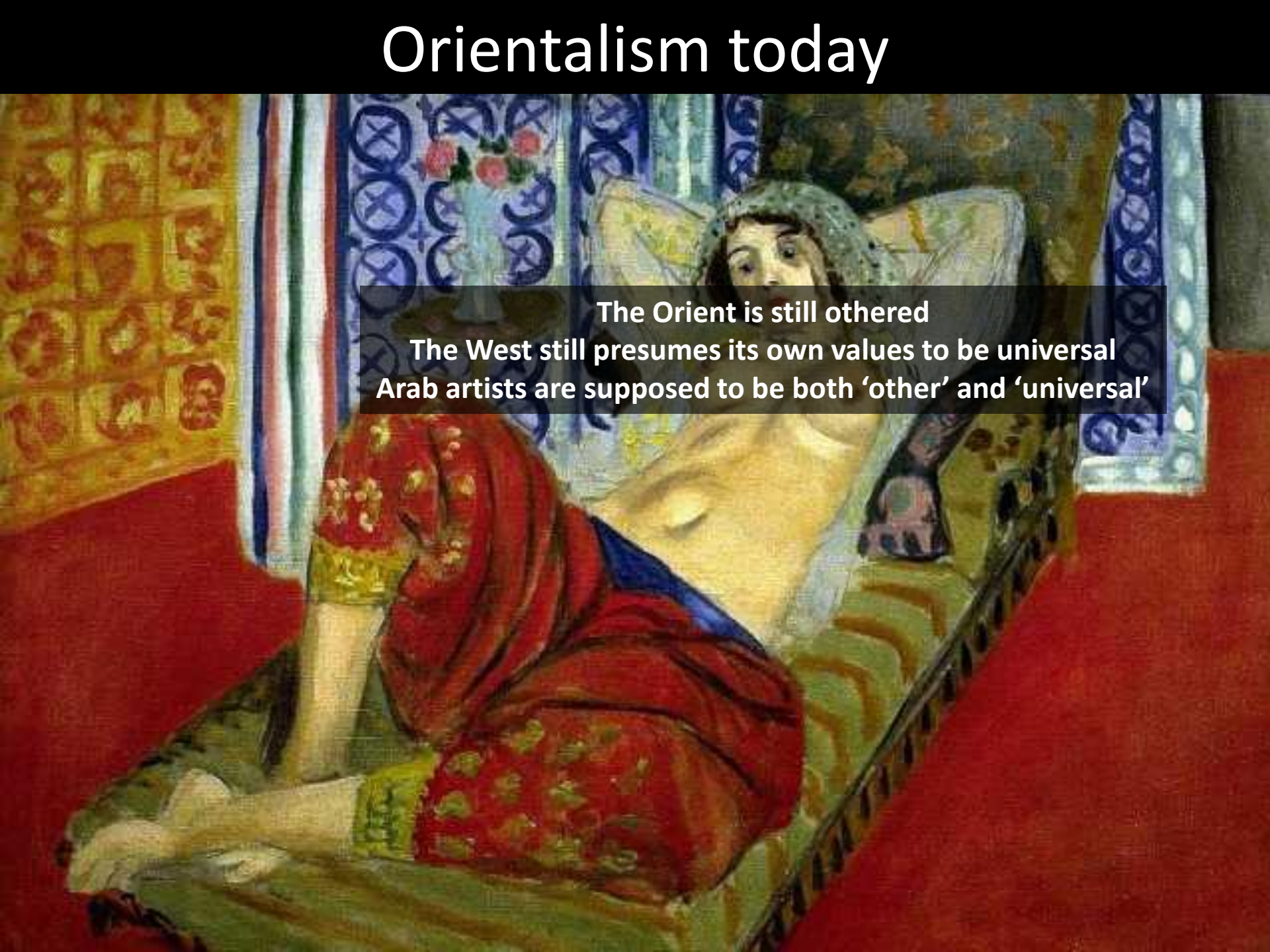
Historical influences on 20th century Arab art

- The demise of the Ottoman Empire & the rise of nationalism (e.g. pan-Turkism) 1914-1923 and establishment of 'nation-states'.
- The Bolshevik revolution & the spread of Marxism
- The moral bankruptcy of the West in WW2 & continued colonialism
- The Palestinian Nakba 1948
- The Egyptian revolution 1954 & Nasserism (Suez canal crisis)
- The brutal but successful Algerian liberation struggle 1954 – 1962
- The Arab defeat in the 6-days war (1967)
- The rise of the Baath Party in Iraq (1968) and Syria (1970)
- The first oil crisis (1973) and the rise of the Arab Gulf
- The Lebanese civil war (1975+)
- The Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel (1978)
- The demise of Arab nationalism and the rise of political Islam (1979+)
- The first Gulf war and the sanctions on Iraq (1991+)

The debate about modern Arab art

1. Are the roots of modern Arab art in Islamic Art?
 - If so how can one explain the transition from traditional Islamic art to the art made in the 20th century?
 - If not, are these roots in Western modern art?
2. Is modern Arab art derivative of Western/universal modern art?
 - If so, what is its value?
 - Does it have a local audience?
3. Did modern Arab art have any influence on the development of culture in the Arab world? If so, why do we hear so little about it today?
 - Discontinuity between 20th and 21st century Arab art

Orientalism today



The Orient is still othered
The West still presumes its own values to be universal
Arab artists are supposed to be both 'other' and 'universal'