

Introduction to the Course

Seminar 1, 2016



What is the point of contemporary art?





Magdi Mostafa, [Sound Cells \(Fridays\)](#)



Huda Lutfi: Democracy is Coming (2010)

A red triangular road sign is mounted on a grey, textured wall. The sign features a black and white photograph of a man's face, which is the portrait of Osama bin Laden. The words "no more tears" are printed in a yellow, sans-serif font across the man's face. The sign is positioned in the center-right of the frame. A red rectangular box with white text is overlaid on the sign.

No or Bad Signal

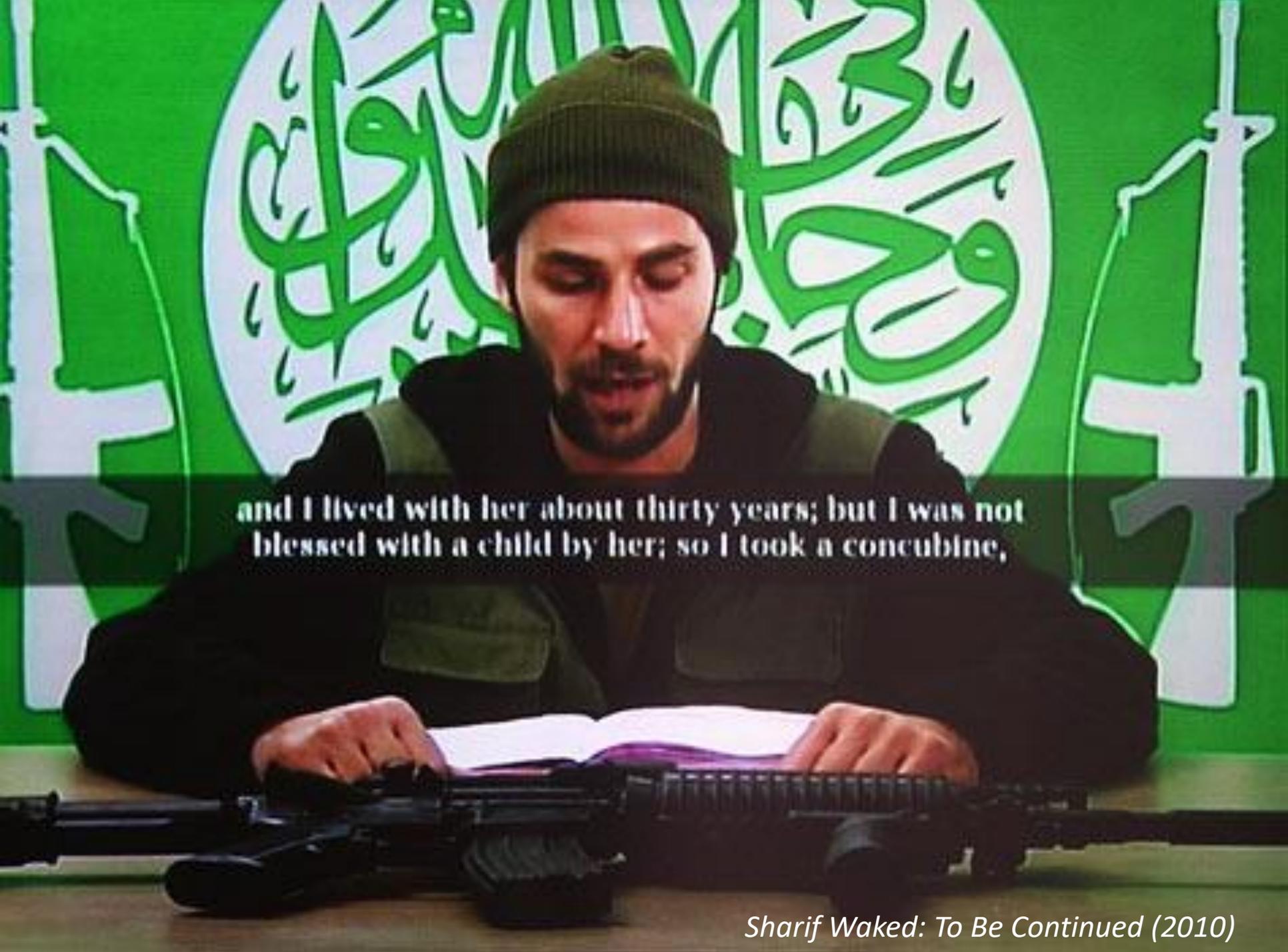
Abdulnasser Gharem: No More Tears (2009)

الموقف غير واضح

The Situation Is Fluid



Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Phantom Truck, Documenta 12

A man with a beard and a dark green beanie is sitting at a table, reading an open book. He is wearing a dark jacket with a green tactical vest. In front of him 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 (2010)

LIVE

**BBC
WORLD**

bbc.com/1/001

HEADLINES

MISSION TO LOOK FOR LIFE, SCIENTISTS SAY.

ZIMBABWE

BHOPAL LEGACY

JUDE FINISTERRA

Dow Chemical spokesman

Moussa Ag Assarid, EU representative of the MNLA



Why study art as part of international relations?

- a) Many arts are not bound by language (visual, music...) - they can thus communicate across borders;
 - b) By the same token, art can avoid or even undermine the ideological assumptions inherent in language;
 - c) the artist enjoys a degree of freedom (to think and act 'out of the box') which seems unrivalled in other domains, such as the academia or the media;
- art allows a radical critique, expressed in universal terms, and innovative approaches to existing political issues.



Is contemporary art not a specific phenomenon of *Western* culture?

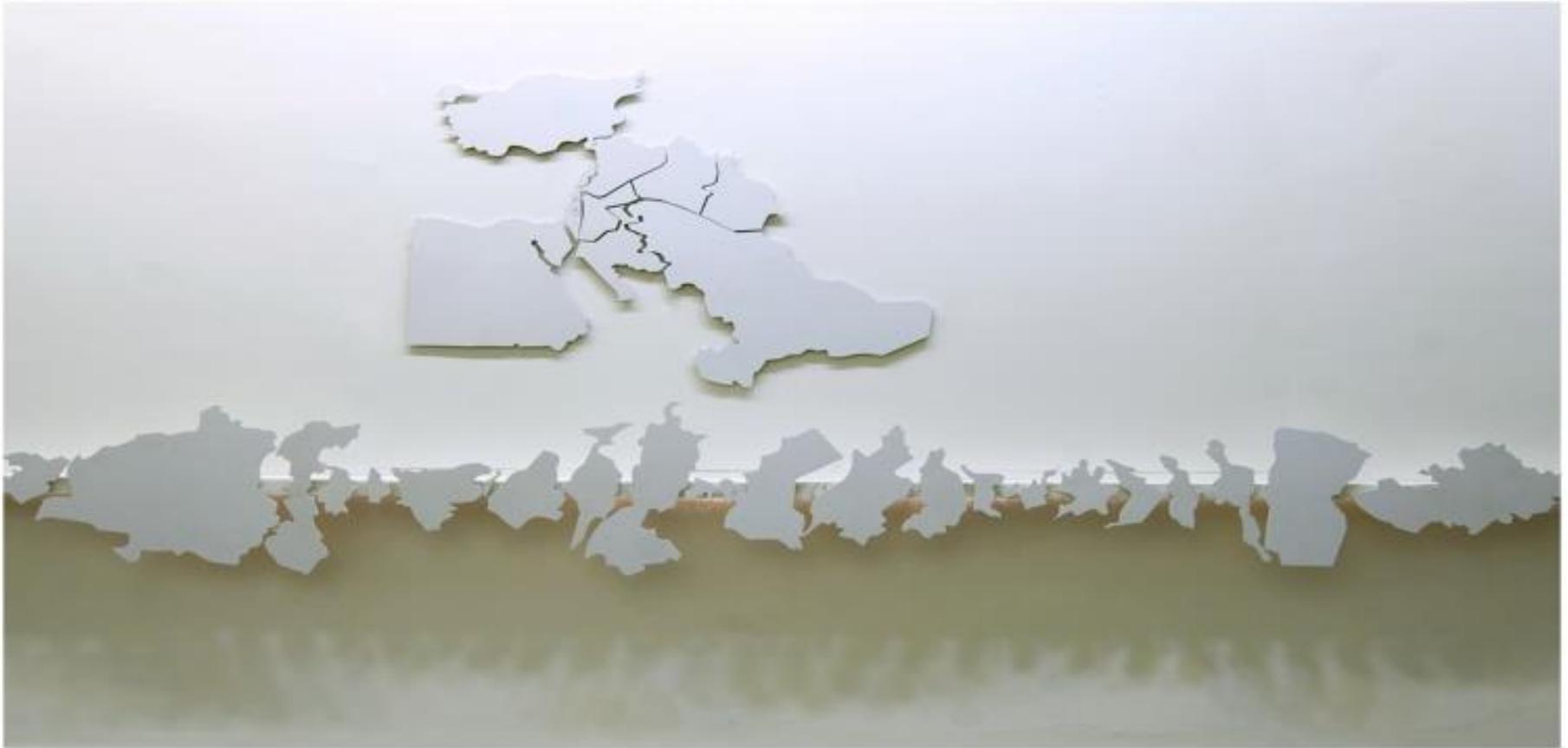
How does art produced in the Arab world fit into the narrative of Art History?

How does art produced in the Arab world relate to Islamic Art?

Does contemporary Arab art belong to Arab culture, or to Western (or global) culture?



What is the Arab world? The Middle East? The Islamic world?



Oraib Toukan. *The New(er) Middle East*, 2007. Plastic, magnet, and iron, panel 600 cm long, magnetic board 300 x 200 cm, magnets dimensions variable; interactive installation. Private Collection.



The vexed question of 'national identities' and the artist's role in expressing it.



Diaspora, hybrid identities, globalization...

Emily Jacir: Sexy Semite

tion & working out. Skg to meet and
Int: tall SWM 30-45. ☎ 9564

VIRILE PALESTINIAN SEMITE

Exotic looks & curly hair. Seeks Jewish lady (any race) 4 LTR in Israel. I love history, Arabic cuisine & skinny dipping in lake Tiberias. ☎ 9804

VOLEPTUOUS LATINA

Pretty 28 yr old, earthy, funny, sweet, seeks successful financially secure gentleman 30-45 who knows how to treat & pamper a lady. Drug/disease free. No psychos. ☎ 9530

YOU claimed our PALAFEL

olives, oranges, music, houses as yours. ME: the REAL SEMITE fun, sexy, Palestinian gal. I need you to get me home. WANTED: loving Jewish M ☎ 9796

YOU STOLE THE LAND, MAY AS WELL TAKE THE WOMEN!

Redhead Palestinian ready to be colonized by your army.
You: Jewish, Hot, Strong, U take me home + I'll let you win. ☎ 9553

YOUNG FUN PETITE ENGLISH GIRL 25, SEEKS SUGAR DADDY. ☎ 9914

Young Palestinian Semite, M,
35, educ., successful career, seeking Jewish female (any race) for long intimate relation to live in Israel. Only serious people. ☎ 9705

MEN SEEKING WOMEN

long drives, converses
outdoors. ☎ 9601

BI F WANT

Bi MWM, 6' handsome b
for sensual ritnshp & will
Will make you v. happy

BIG IS BEAU

Wanted: Large, lovely,
full figured F. I'm WM
handsome business exel
discreet relationship.

BISEXUAL OR BICUR

18-38, attractive, slim,
from 212 or 718 soug
handsome, tall, slim, int
ic gentleman. No men.

BLACK FEMALE PRE

Blue eyed male (39) sor
sks friend, sharp-mi
hearted to match wits, c
Serious & sensual fun.

BLACK PRINCE

Italian toned, muscular
(40, 5'9 175) into boxi
sician. ISO very attracti
true beauty (25-30) for
friendship, possibly mor

Busy lawyer se

German speaking frau,
30's, intellectual type to
and each other. Skler, I
mer, artist a plus. ☎ 98

BUXOM BEA

PALESTINIAN FLAMENCO DANCER

semetic sex pot SKG: Jewish M (any
race) for LTR and to share our lives in
Israel. I love Palestinian falafel, Akka,
and the Gaza beach. ☎ 2072

Palestinian Semite in search of
Jewish soul mate.

Do you love milk & honey? I'm ready
to start a big family in Israel. Still
have house keys. Waiting for you.

☎ 2025

Palestinian Woman Seeking sexy
Jewish man for romance and
marriage. My dream is to move to
Israel and raise a family. Prefer
non-smoker
☎ 2020

Drathtz with SIME 27 ♂, full figure,

WOMEN SEEKING MEN

100% Semite & Palestinian

Total knockout. Seeking Jewish Male,
any race, to tour my homeland. Yel-
low license plate an absolute must.
You know what I mean! ☎ 9690

23 yo BF
seeking

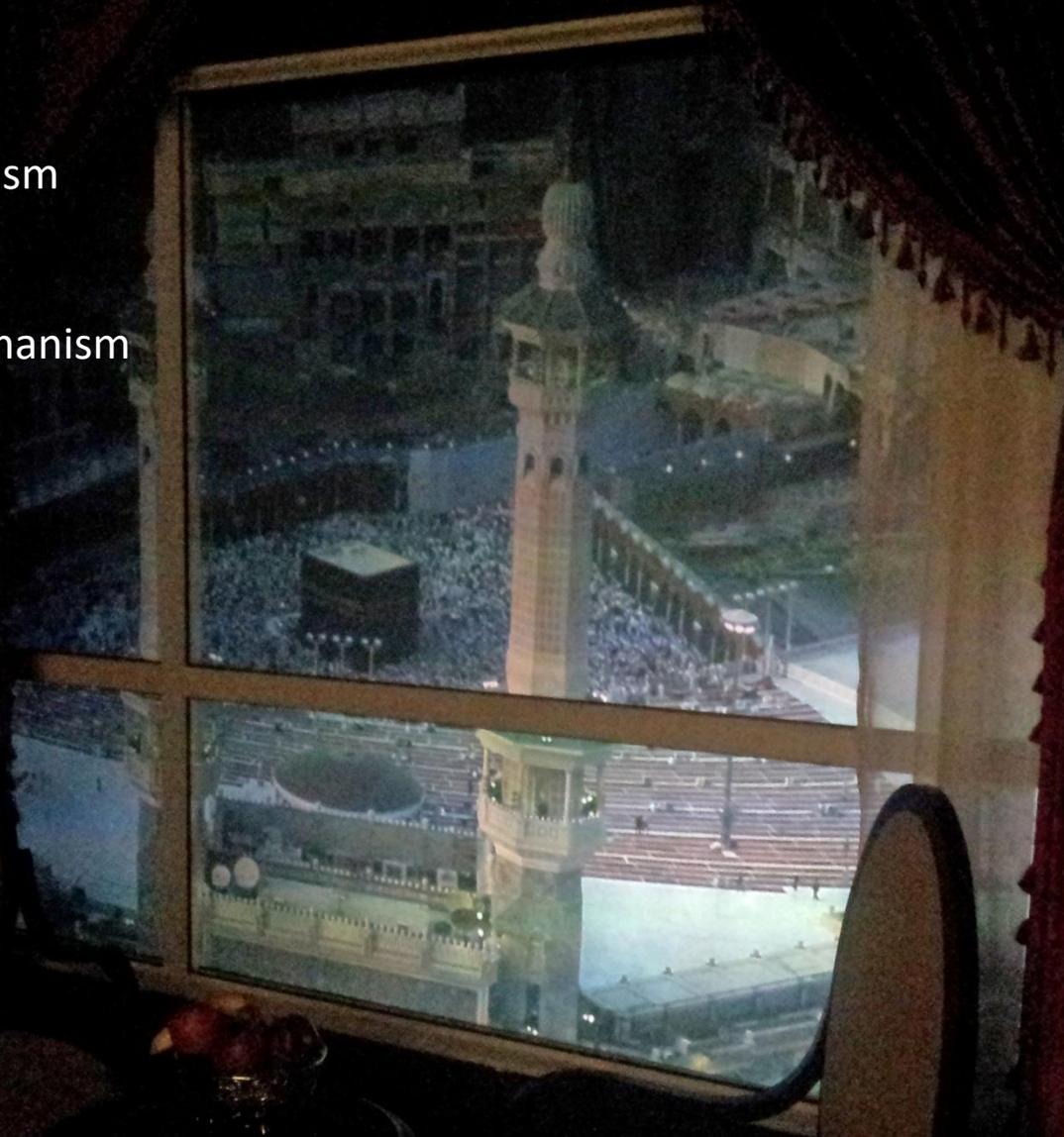
Which, if any, are the local audiences for contemporary Arab art?



Slavs & Tatars: Mollah Nasruddin, as installed in the Gwangju Biennale, 2012

Dealing with the viewer's bias

- (Neo-)Orientalism
- Fashionable meta-narratives
- Charitable Humanism
- "Expert views"





Ahmed Mater: Room With A View installation shot. Sharjah Biennial, 2013



The bias of Western audiences has become a fertile subject matter for Arab artists



Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades



The problem of the art market

Catering to the patron's expectations...



The Middle East as a vast new source of art goodies for the market's limitless voracity

Catering to the market's expectations:
Iranian art from New York





Kader Attia: The Repair, from Occidental to Extra-Occidental Cultures (installation at Documenta 13)

POSSIBLE REPLIES TO ONTOLOGICAL ISSUES OF CONTEMPORARY ARAB ART

a. Is contemporary art not a specifically Western phenomenon?

Maybe it was, but it is not anymore. It has been appropriated by artists all over the world

b. What is the Arab world? The Middle East? The world of Islam?

The Arab world = the region where people speak Arabic, plus its diaspora. Pan-Arabism may be discredited, but the existence of some sort of Arab identity is still accepted by most Arabs.

c. The vexed question of 'national identities' and the artist's role in expressing it. Diaspora, hybrid identities, globalization...

The individual artist cannot be taken as a representative of his/her 'nation' – but taken collectively, artists from a country or region and their diaspora do express issues facing their society/culture. Accept vague boundaries and drop taxonomical efforts.

d. The issue of the bias of the Westernized person seeing art from the Arab world: orientalism, 'universal' (= Western) values, influence of the media...

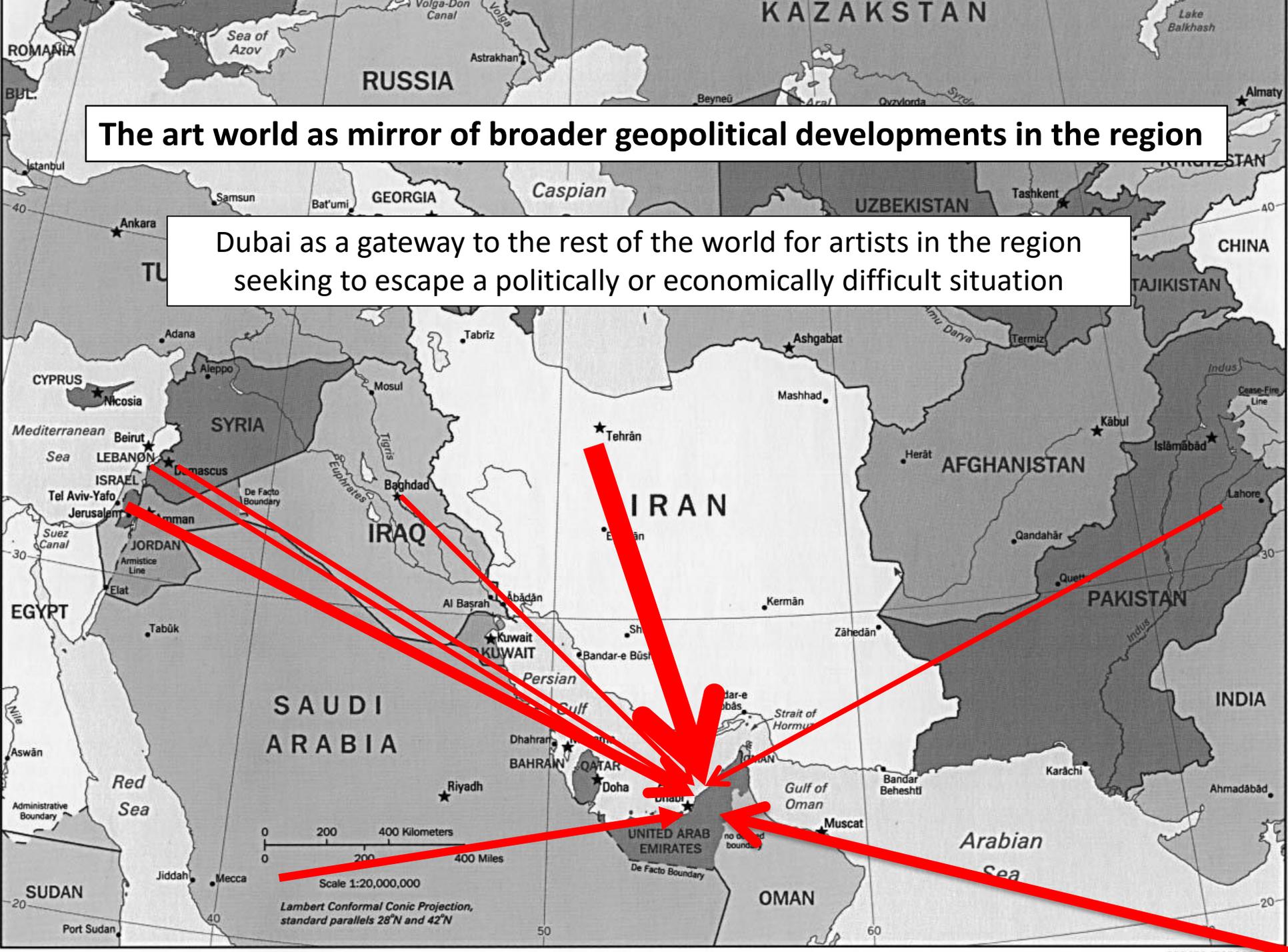
This is a problem that must be resolved by the viewer. First hand experience (rather than that mediated by intellectual discourse, assumptions or the media) is becoming increasingly common. Artists in the region often deal with this issue in their work, thus raising awareness.

e. The problem of the art market: catering to the patron's expectations. Also in the non-commercial art world.

Focus on the good artists. The work of artists pandering to their (desired) patron's taste does not withstand the test of time. Good artists often also do well on the market (collectors, private or institutional, are not stupid). There is no fundamental opposition between market and quality.

The art world as mirror of broader geopolitical developments in the region

Dubai as a gateway to the rest of the world for artists in the region seeking to escape a politically or economically difficult situation



The Artist as Seismograph



Ahmed Mater: 3000 USD / night hotel room