In a brash clash of colors, languages and pop fashion, Moroccan artist Hassan Hajjaj’s upbeat portrait of musician Marques Toliver is among new art that is breaking from easy labels like “Arab” or “Middle Eastern.” Courtesy of the artist and Rose Issa Projects.

Using styles and media as diverse as the countries from which they come, artists of Middle Eastern origins, working in or outside the Middle East, are full of new energy that respects the past, is passionate about today and is helping to create tomorrow.

Doha’s New Modern
Written by Richard Covington

A collector and a professor quietly spent 25 years building the world’s largest collection of modern art by Arab artists. Finally, last December, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art opened its doors in Doha, Qatar.

On the Surest Path
Written by Gerald Zarr

In 19th-century Tunisia, he was a builder of the modern nation. In Istanbul, he tried to save an empire. To the rest of us, the story of Khayr al-Din shows how the rule of law is—in any nation—a key to prosperity and stability.
Blessed by Two Oceans

Written and illustrated by Norman MacDonald

Brightly painted houses help symbolize colorful blends of cultures from Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe in Bo-kaap ("Above the Cape"), the Cape Town neighborhood at the tip of South Africa, where the Indian and Atlantic Oceans join.

Portraits of Commitment

Photographed and written by students of Pathshala South Asian Media Academy

Faruk Hossain helps lead a youth group that brings doctors to a slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He’s the youngest of 11 people profiled by young photographers in Dhaka whose assignment was to tell a brief story of a dream that has made a better tomorrow a reality today.

The Multipolar Future

Interview by Tom Verde
Photographed by Robbie Bailey

“\text{I think we are just at the beginning of this phase that I call ‘the New Middle Ages,’}” says Parag Khanna, author of \textit{How to Run the World: Charting a Course to the Next Renaissance}. “\text{Multipolarity, in the literal sense of diverse powers and civilizations coexisting, with none dominating over the others but starting to interact—trade and commerce, but also tension and conflict—that’s a very medieval phenomenon.}”
Middle Eastern artists, whether they live in that culturally kaleidoscopic (and ill-defined) region or outside it, are at the center of one of the world’s most dynamic movements in contemporary art.

Their work is suffused by themes of identity, memory, grief, rage and a sense of belonging to (or alienation from) the place or culture in which they live. The traumatic ruptures of wars, exile and migration that have affected them all are partly responsible—but a different consciousness has emerged in the last few years. What’s new is a cultural confidence and optimism, stemming from the fact of survival and the rising expectations that go with global recognition of the quality of their art.

“Everybody thinks we’re crying all the time!” says Rose Issa, a curator of Iranian–Lebanese background whose London exhibitions have given visibility to Middle Eastern artists for 25 years. “But our art is not only about despair. It’s about beauty too—the beauty of ordinary people’s lives, enabling destruction to become hope. The artists who interest me now communicate, fun, color, joy, love.”

She points to the photographs of Hassan Hajjaj, a young Moroccan–British artist who captures upbeat rhythms of North African street life in an iconographic style that radiates both warmth and kitsch.
self-mockery, and who says, “I wanted to express so-called Arab work in a cool way.”

That sensibility, says Issa, is what the new “MidEast cool” is about: playfully questioning stereotypes and exploring the relationships between traditions and modernity, between “Easts” and “Wests.”

Increasing numbers of galleries in top art centers like London, Paris and New York are exhibiting contemporary Middle Eastern art. At Sotheby’s and Christie’s, the world’s top auction houses, sales of contemporary Middle Eastern art are now regular, hugely successful events that—even during the current recession—generate an upward spiral of record-breaking prices. What’s behind it?

To generalize broadly, although contemporary Middle Eastern art is often challenging and iconoclastic, it is nonetheless often esthetically beautiful, and rarely either nihilistic or self-indulgent. There’s fire, there’s passion, there’s confidence in its messages and its own self-worth. “It reflects the reality of what’s going on in the Middle East,” says Dalya Islam, deputy director of Sotheby’s Middle East department. “It’s thematically relevant, addressing the issues of today.”

Venetia Porter, curator of the British Museum’s Middle East department, adds, “Many artists of the region have kept alive an

avant-garde culture in the arts. In many cases, this has sadly required personal sacrifices, including emigration and persecution, but it is these artists’ perseverance that has allowed a greater level of understanding of the cultural achievements of the contemporary Middle East, at a time when such understanding is needed more than ever.

Nat Muller, first curator of Cairo’s Townhouse Gallery and author of *Contemporary Art in the Middle East* (2009), writes that, throughout the Middle Eastern region, “artists take on many roles: witness, archivist, architect, activist, critic, cartographer, storyteller, facilitator, trickster, dreamer.” And they often do so as citizens of two—or often more—cultural worlds. This gives artists a keen awareness of their own multiple layers of identity and experience.

Amid this diversity, four common characteristics of Middle Eastern contemporary art stand out: beauty, craftsmanship, meaning and spirituality. These go beyond time and place, and for viewers of Middle Eastern background as well as others, they help make the art extraordinarily satisfying and inspirational.

In every time and place, people hunger for beauty. Much contemporary Middle Eastern art offers a quiet, often minimalist elegance. Many of the same shapes that characterize classical art from the region—especially geometric and calligraphic ones—deeply inform contemporary works. Likewise, today’s contemporary artists have embraced the craftsmanship that is highly valued in classical Middle Eastern art. From painting and sculpture to photography, video, digital images, installations and performance art, technical excellence prevails.

Meaning comes from connections to concerns, hopes, experiences, questions and dreams shared by artist and viewer. Because contemporary Middle Eastern artists are asking questions and making statements about society, their works are rarely entirely abstract, and often tend toward the figurative and the narrative. “The notion of ‘art for art’s sake’ is inconceivable in the Arab world,” writes Nada M. Shabout, director of contemporary Arab and Muslim studies at the University of North Texas. “Works of art are texts both for art and society.”

Finally, artists are often aware that greatness in any of the arts is about transformation. In this regard, the contemporary development of calligraphic art is particularly inspiring: It can cause the spirit to soar, even if the viewer does not read Arabic. Elizeth Lalouschek, artistic director of London’s October Gallery, which exhibits top
contemporary calligraphers like Hassan Massoudy, Wijdan Ali and Rachid Kouraichi, says, “I like the fluidity, the breadth, the airiness, the elegance of calligraphy. It’s very spiritual.”

How have traditional Arab, Persian, Turkish, North African and Central Asian arts grown into the defiantly modern presence of a new Middle Eastern cool, with its emphasis on the upbeat and a style in which a nod to fashion can lighten underlying pain? How are these artists in dialogue with their pasts, both ancient and recent? Of Egyptians, Muller observes that “articulations of the contemporary ... are weighed down by an epic Pharaonic past and an equally epic dream of ... modernity and independence.” One leading explorer of this dialogue is Egyptian artist Chant Avedissian, who draws on Pharaonic design motifs, hieroglyphs, the craftsmanship of Islamic urban centers and popular Egyptian posters and magazines. He combines them all in highly crafted photographs, producing images that probe the visual languages of consumerism and political propaganda. His critically acclaimed series “Icons of the Nile” (1991–2004) features politicians, celebrities and even King Farouk, all as representatives of Egypt’s nationalist heyday of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Also from Egypt, photographer Youssef Nabil uses stills from movies of classic singer Umm Kulthum’s concerts to comment on celebrity culture, and his pastiche, hand-painted photographs of glamorous, languorous women evoke, and often exaggerate, classical Egyptian cinema styles of the 1940’s.

Iraqi-born Leila Kubba Kawash refers to ancient Sumerian culture as well as Greek and Islamic cultures to “piece together different time periods, ... to find a place where the past and present overlap.” More directly contemporary is Iraqi Himat Mohammed Ali’s moving memorial of 12 books of Arabic script overlaid with photographs and blotched with patches of black and red paint in commemoration of a car bombing on Al-Mutanabbi Street, which since the 10th century has been the center of Baghdad’s book trade.

The works are rarely entirely abstract. The notion of “art for art’s sake” is inconceivable in the Arab world. Works of art are texts both for art and society.
For Iranian artist Farhad Moshiri, the recent past includes eight years of the Iran–Iraq war, which helped inspire his installation of 1001 toy guns covered with gold leaf. This came as a new direction for an artist best known for his images of classical Iranian ceramics, many embellished with Farsi calligraphy, presented on huge white canvases that united the traditional with the contemporary. (In 2008, Moshiri became the first Iranian artist to sell a work for more than one million dollars: “Eshgh (Love),” a calligraphic work on canvas, was spattered with glitter and Swarovski crystals.)

In Iran’s not-so-distant past, the Qajar dynasty, which ruled from 1794 to 1925, often used portraiture for political propaganda, and yet there was always a yearning for prettiness, often evoked in flower paintings, as well as an abstract, spiritual dimension conjured up with mirror mosaics during that period. Childhood memories of the elaborately mirrored throne room in Tehran’s Golestan Palace are imprinted on artist Monir Farmanfarmaian’s mind, and these have inspired her 40 years of achingly poetic installations in mirrored mosaic, which also allude to the search for the spiritual inner self.

Near the end of the Qajar period, photography became the court’s medium of choice for portraiture. Contemporary Tehran photographer Shadi Ghadirian draws on these conventions in her “Qajar” series of sepia-toned photographs. Each shows one or more female models theatrically posed in vintage attire against period backgrounds, and to each Ghadirian added incongruously modern items, such as sunglasses, a vacuum cleaner or a can of Pepsi.

“The jarring contrast,” writes Marta Weiss, curator of photographs at London’s Victoria & Albert Museum, “is indicative of the tension between tradition and modernity, public personas and private desires, that many Iranian women navigate on a daily basis.” Ghadirian’s spirited debates with social issues that concern and inspire her inform her other series as well, which blur the distinctions between documentary and fiction, often wrapping needle-sharp points in dry humor. Probing the limits of her expressive freedom, she continues to live in Iran despite artistic residencies that have been offered to her from western institutions. In doing so, she mirrors her generation, the first since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, asserting its place despite doing so largely behind closed doors.

Most Middle Eastern diaspora artists live in the West, and their art benefits from both their home cultures and western ones.

Equally witty, winking at tradition and subversively questioning stereotypes, is photographer Hajjaj, who lives in both Marrakesh and London. He delights in street style and mash-ups of traditional culture and global branding. His models, dressed in veils and djellabas, seem to take pride in their heritage, but add their own generational stamps, such as the veil and headscarf sporting...
an imaginary Louis Vuitton logo and the babouches displaying a Nike swoosh. As Issa says, the street-smart figures “sometimes look menacing, but they are simply defending their world, their turf, their style and their right to have problems and aspirations. Like the artist, they have guts and attitude. They express Arab power, pride and joy.”

While far more politically engaged, Laila Shawa’s work exudes Middle Eastern cool. The invitation to her “Arabopop” exhibition looked like a miniature box of cornflakes—a play on branding and consumerism again. More provocatively, her “Fashionista/Terrorista” series creates discomfort by blending style with an implied threat based on stereotypes. “It’s a comment on how Palestinians are perceived,” she says. “We are judged on appearance.”

Shawa is one of the leading contemporary Arab artists living in the diaspora, outside the Middle East. In Reflections on Exile, the Palestinian writer Edward Said asks, “If true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?” The answer lies in art’s pursuit of transformation. Most Middle Eastern diaspora artists live in the West, and their practices benefit from both their home cultures and their Western ones, creating opportunities for endlessly hybridized styles. The artist whose painted photographs evoke Cairo’s cinematic past, Youssef Nabil, later embarked on a series of self-portraits: “I left my life in Cairo behind, and I found myself in a totally new place. I started asking myself questions about life, my life, my country and the idea of being away. In a way, I had closed a door behind me and I was no longer the person I used to be.”

Whether departure is voluntary or forced, exiles can use art to rebuild themselves—one of Nabil’s self-portraits depicts him sleeping among tree roots.

Arriving in Britain from Algeria in 1977, Houria Niati became one of the pioneers introducing contemporary Arab art to the West with her series “No to Torture.” She says, “In my heart, I am displaced culturally. When I return to Algeria, I feel sad, because I am not a part of it, though I feel alienated here too, which doesn’t mean I dislike it. Now I am rediscovering my mother’s Berber ancestry and my family roots. I go to my Mum’s place to paint, and I am connecting with young Algerian artists and art students.” Niati’s multimedia installation “Out of the Ashes” contains 100 engraved wooden portraits of Algerian women, showing the designs and patterns of their clothes. “They are the protectors of our culture,” she says. A series called “Curtains of Words” celebrates her own multiculturalism in photographs based on her childhood and family, overlaid with text in Arabic, French and English.
In addition to these common concerns, there is also gender. Far from stereotypical submission, women play central roles in contemporary Middle Eastern art.

In her widely exhibited series “Like Every Day,” photographer Ghadirian made studio shots of women in Day-Glo veils, over the faces of which they hold common domestic objects such as a teacup, an iron or a broom. Shirin Aliabadi and Farhad Moshiri, a married couple, poke at domestic life in their series “Operation Supermarket,” in which, for example, a box of detergent called “Shoot First” stands next to dishwasher liquid called “Make Friends Later.” In Aliabadi’s solo portrait series “Miss Hybrid,” a self-consciously glamorous young Iranian woman is photographed with bleached-blond hair, blue contact lenses and surgical tape on her nose (implying plastic surgery); she insouciantly blows a mauve bubblegum bubble that matches her denim jacket.

Samira Alikhanzadeh discovered a box of old photographs, mainly of women and children, to which she applies grid patterns, veiling some of the women and using shards of mirror to conceal the eyes of others. The viewers catch reflections and are encouraged to ponder their own identities as well as their connections with the subjects. Yet another leading Iranian woman artist, working most often in film, video and photography, is Shirin Neshat, whose 1993 series “Women of Allah” pointedly addressed gender segregation.

But among some of the younger generation, it is the lighter approach, with humor, exaggeration and style, that characterizes Middle Eastern cool. In a still from Palestinian Larissa Sansour’s movie “Bethlehem Bandolero,” we see her in a red Mexican sombrero; a bandanna covers her lower face, outlaw-style—but behind her is the wall erected by Israel to fence off the West Bank.

“But we can’t always ask our artists to reflect political issues,” says Issa. “I’m fed up with sad things and ugliness. I’m looking for positive messages, good energy. My job is to filter the best art, to present beautiful art, as well as to question things.”

Reflecting a geographical region as hybrid and complex as its many cultures, contemporary Middle Eastern artists are merging heritage and modernity into something very cool indeed.
though London, New York and a few other cities remain dominant art centers, the explosive growth of digital communication has meant that art from countries not formerly known for local creativity, except in the heritage department, is now meaningful enough to global art buyers to be super-cool and worth a bundle. Whether the art produced the demand or the demand produced the art—or both—the result is our digital-era, post-9/11 “golden age” of spectacular artistic creativity, a cultural phoenix born from the fires of half a dozen exceedingly turbulent decades, strengthened by blossoming local cultural developments and burgeoning international interests, both intellectual and cannily capitalist.

Though the tragedy of 9/11 had the side effect of raising western interest in Middle Eastern cultures, art historians point beyond it to two other modern political events that caused profound introspection about the future directions of the Arab world, a re-evaluation in which the region’s artists and intellectuals participated. Both the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the June War of 1967 involved military defeats that were shattering psychic events for Arab countries. Writing on the theme of “Arabness,” poet and critic Buland al-Haidari describes artists after 1967 as “vying with each other in trying to blaze a new trail which would give concrete expression to the longing for Arab unity, and end by giving the Arab world an art of its own.”

As a consequence, curator Venetia Porter writes in Word Into Art, the catalogue of the landmark 2006 exhibition of contemporary Arab calligraphy, “Arab artists, many of whom had trained in the West, or had been exposed to western art traditions, began to seek inspiration from aspects of their indigenous culture. The increased use of script by some artists can certainly be seen in the light of this.”

Rose Issa points out that, for Iranian artists, the rise of Iranian cinema to world prominence over the past three decades “has encouraged a mix of documentary films and photography mixed with fiction. This has led to a new esthetic language.” After the Iran– Iraq war, she adds, “artists wanted to document their towns, their families, their histories. Photography was the easiest and cheapest way to do this. The strength of Iranian art still comes from the way it tells real-life stories—the poetry of life, modestly done, winning prizes and influencing western artists.”

Artists, however, have been only part of the picture. Collectors, galleries, museums, governments and private businesses also play essential roles. In many countries of the region, post-colonial governments established national museums, and some included contemporary collections. Prominent among them, opening in 1977—two years before the Islamic Revolution—Tehran’s Museum of Contemporary Art became “one of the region’s most important cultural institutions,” notes Saeb Eigner, author of Art of the Middle East, and “today the country can boast some of the region’s great artists.” Indeed, Tehran has a wealth of private galleries, and artists also run Internet galleries and stage performance art in abandoned buildings, fields and mosques.

Other national museums with strong
contemporary collections opened in Cairo, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Istanbul. In other places, local private and international donors often play leading roles. For example, although Lebanon is a vibrant art hub, the first Lebanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale, in 2007, was entirely supported by private Lebanese and Italian patrons.


In the region, pioneering galleries sprang up early on in Cairo: Mashrabiya opened in 1982, followed by the Karim Francis Gallery and the influential Townhouse. In 2000 the Nitaq Festival introduced a new generation of artists and media, including photography and video, followed in 2004 by the Contemporary Image Collective of Cairo and the Alexandria Contemporary Art Forum. Last year, Articulate Baboon Gallery was founded as “a harbourage for counter-culture in Egypt and the Middle East.”

It is Dubai, however, that has become the new hotbed. Down below the high-rises and construction cranes are some of the region’s most cutting-edge contemporary art galleries: Majlis, B21, Cuadro, XVA, MEEM, The Courtyard, The Flying House and The Third Line (which recently opened a satellite in Doha). Within Jordan’s National Gallery of Fine Arts is the first contemporary art gallery in the Middle East, kick-started in 1980 by Princess Wijdan’s collection of her own and other artists’ work. And in 1989 the first exhibition “Contemporary Art From The Islamic World” took place in London’s Barbican, organized by Jordan’s National Gallery.

In Kuwait, the Dar Al Funoon Gallery was founded in 1994, after the Gulf War. Then, says its owner, Lucy Topalian, “it took us 10 very difficult years to even awaken an interest and awareness for art in the Middle East.” The last few years, she adds, “have


gone well, thanks to the interest of the international auction houses, also the media, especially Canvas magazine, the art fairs and certain museum shows.”

Topalian mentions the Dubai-based, bimonthly Canvas magazine, founded in 2004, which—along with the quarterlies Bidoun (2005) and Contemporary Practices—have spread the word of Middle Eastern contemporary art.

Sotheby’s was the first auction house on the scene with an auction in London in 2001; Christie’s opened a Dubai office in 2005 and held its first auction there in 2008. Sotheby’s promptly followed and added a branch in Qatar; then came Bonhams and Phillips de Pury. Continuing auctions both locally and in London have exceeded sales expectations, and in 2008 Iranian sculptor Parviz Tanavoli set a record for Middle Eastern art prices when “The Wall (Oh, Persepolis)” sold in Dubai for $2.84 million. Michael Jeha, managing director of Christie’s Middle East, says that, in 2009, “75 percent of the Dubai art sale” went to buyers “from the region, up from an average of 50 percent in previous years.”

In 2008 Christie’s introduced contemporary Turkish art. In 2009 it added Saudi artists, who that same year exhibited at both the “Edge of Arabia” show at the Brunei Gallery in London and, for the first time, at the Venice Biennale. They plan more shows in Berlin and Istanbul.

The region has its own biennale in the emirate of Sharjah, where the event is an almost venerable 24 years old. Before the sixth biennale in 2003, it focused on the more traditional genres of painting, sculpture and graphic arts; since then, its efforts have been concentrated on more contemporary art practices, such as installation, video, photography, performance, digital and Web art, emphasizing the “discourse between aesthetics and politics.”

The newest art fairs, born as annuals, are Art Dubai (2007) and Abu Dhabi (2008), which together have contributed greatly to the authority of contemporary Middle Eastern art. John Martin, co-founder of Art Dubai and a London gallery director, explains, “In the first year, our priority was to establish the credibility of the event, particularly in terms of quality and intellectual content, with 40 galleries taking part.” Since then the fair has expanded with many more galleries and events, attracting over 5000 visitors who might not otherwise have been drawn to the region. The 2011 event attracted 82 participating galleries from 34 countries.

Yet the golden age is in some ways only gold plate. As Saeb Eigner points out, in addition to a dearth of art-education opportunities in the region, there is a lack of sufficient expertise, courses and research about modern art of the Arab world and Iran, reflecting the absence of this subject from the curricula of art history departments in many of the leading universities around the world.”

“We need more art history, more museums dedicated to modern art and more galleries,” says Issa. Houria Niati says that in Algeria, “in the past 20 years, art schools and galleries have opened, but media coverage of exhibitions is spasmodic, reflecting our political instability.” There is now, she adds, “a new generation of artists,” and Algeria, like the rest of the region, is ‘kicking’ in terms of art!”

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Writer, photographer and editor Juliet Highet is a specialist in the heritage and contemporary arts of Africa, the Middle East and India. She is the author of Frankincense: Oman’s Gift to the World (Prestel, 2006) and is working on a book series called “The Art of Travel.” She lives in England.

In the mid-1980s, when Shaykh Hassan Ali Al-Thani began studying art history at Qatar University, he was struck by the fact that no Arabs figured in the story of modern art. He decided to look deeper.

With the help of his professor, the painter Yousef Ahmad, the shaykh, a member of Qatar’s royal family, embarked on what became an enduring exploration into the lives and labors of contemporary Arab artists. In short order, he was deeply bitten by the urge to collect their artworks.

“I realized that modern Arab art was in a terrible state,” he explains. “There were very few galleries in the region, and neither the gallery owners nor the artists themselves had a true appreciation of the value of the work.”

Speaking in his 10th-floor office overlooking Doha harbor and the sand-colored, cubist blocks of the I.M. Pei–designed Museum of Islamic Art, the 50-year-old Hassan, now the vice chairman of his country’s museum authority, recalls that his passion for acquiring Arab modern art first met with bafflement. “People thought it was very strange that I would put so much time, energy and money into collecting pictures,” he says. “I realized that if I started to put some of these pieces on display, they would begin to understand how this art is a connection to our past and a vision for our future.” The idea for a museum devoted to modern and contemporary Arab artists was born.

By becoming a hands-on patron of the arts, Hassan, a former painter and still a photographer and videographer, is helping transform Qatar into a cultural hub in the Gulf region. His collection of some 6,300 artworks, acquired since 1986, is the most extensive modern Arab art collection in the world.

Opening last December, the collection’s new home, called Mathaf (Arabic for “museum”), is both a modest and a serious affair. Housed in a two-story converted school near Education City, the sprawling enclave of mostly American university campuses a half-hour’s drive from Doha’s skyscrapers, the fledgling...
institution eschews the glamorous aura surrounding such other museum projects in the Gulf as the satellites of the Louvre and the Guggenheim rising on Abu Dhabi’s Saadiyat Island. The low-key design by French architect Jean-François Bodin is, Hassan explains, a temporary home, as plans for something more permanent—and presumably larger—are still under discussion. In addition to Mathaf’s galleries, the building includes a café, a small bookshop, a library and a classroom, all intended to help fulfill the museum’s ambition to become a center for research and education.

Throughout the 20th century, Arab artists often pursued blends of European techniques and Middle Eastern subjects.

The name of Mathaf’s inaugural exhibition, “Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art,” was inspired by a poem by the Palestinian author Mahmoud Darwish: Sajjil is Arabic for “the act of recording.” In the show, some 236 works, arranged in a dozen airy, white-walled galleries, offer up a survey of Hassan’s collection, starting from its oldest work, a small oil canvas from 1847 by Ali Zara, depicting a covered alley in Cairo.

Critical reaction to “Sajjil” has ranged from praise of innovators like Gazbia Sirry, Ramsis Younan, Ibrahim el-Salahi, Hamid Nada and Mahmoud Said to questions about whether it all goes far enough. “Nothing was censored,” says Mathaf’s acting director and chief curator Wassan al-Khudairi, referring mostly to works of political commentary, as well as a smattering of nudes.

Alongside “Sajjil,” two complementary exhibitions opened in a cavernous annex of the city’s Museum of Islamic Art. “Interventions” presents early productions by five artists represented in the shaykh’s collection together with the same artists’ fresh creations produced for Mathaf’s opening. More daring is “Told/Untold/Retold,” which shows new commissions of visual narratives by 23 young Arab artists living across the region and in Europe and the United States.

In a region with little tradition of appreciating, collecting and exhibiting modern art, nearly everything about Mathaf is groundbreaking. Although there is a growing roster of regional art fairs, auctions and commercial galleries, what has been missing, al-Khudairi observes, are institutions. “If you see pictures in isolation at an auction or in a catalogue, they don’t mean anything,” she continues. “What we want to do is to establish a context, a history, so you can make connections among works.”

Compiling biographical information on the 118 artists represented in “Sajjil,” and then editing it into a 374-page Arabic and English-language catalogue, proved to be a task in itself. Al-Khudairi and other researchers relied on gallery owners, collectors, the artists themselves, their families and descendants to assemble the often elusive personal histories. “Now, from the bios, you can see who studied where and with whom, and you can start to make key connections,” the director explains as we sit over coffee in the museum’s sun-drenched café.

“One thing we are trying to demonstrate is how Arab artists were part of mainstream art,” she says. “Many studied in Paris, Rome and elsewhere and became engaged participants in the modern-art movement. They came home and started schools or just had their own studios, and their influence spread to other artists,” she continues.

Unlike western modernists, Arab artists were not rebels, al-Khudairi argues. Instead of rejecting European or Arab traditions, she says, they sought a blend that brought European points of view and techniques to Middle Eastern subjects.

Like many of the modern Arab artists she exhibits, the 28-year-old art historian herself has a background that mixes East with West. Growing up in Kuwait with Iraqi-born parents, she studied art history in Egypt, the US and the UK, and she worked at Atlanta’s High Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum of Art before signing on in September 2007 to direct Mathaf.

Petite and dynamic with wavy black hair,

al-Khudairi relishes her pioneer role. “There is certainly a buzz surrounding modern Arab art,” she declares. “People want to try to understand the mysterious Arab world through its art.

“The Gulf is misconceived as having no history, so when people hear about a collector who’s been gathering works for 25 years, and hear that we’ve built a modest-sized museum designed by a great architect who is not a ‘starchitect,’ we catch them off-guard.”

Although Mathaf has only been open a matter of months, the museum has already hosted two conferences for international art scholars; another is planned for December. Art from Mathaf has been lent to shows in the US, Germany and France. Emerging poets have written and recited compositions inspired by objects in the collection, films have been shown, and student volunteers from nearby universities have devised personalized tours of their favorite items. “The idea is that if these 19-year-old and 20-year-old college students speak to teenagers, they’re more likely to listen,” al-Khudairi explains.

To Yousef Ahmad, 55-year-old professor and painter, Mathaf is unique in its focus on Arab modern artists from the region as a whole. Other museums of modern art in the Arab world, he notes, tend to focus primarily on national artists.

Ahmad started his own career at the art academy in Cairo, a venerable institution that opened in 1908. Following in the footsteps of many aspiring Middle Eastern painters, he went west to continue his education, but not to Paris, Rome or London. He landed at the California Institute of Art in Oakland, where he earned a master of fine arts degree in 1982.

Back in Doha, he began teaching art history and drawing at Qatar University. Hassan was one of his star pupils and soon became a close friend and patron: Among the first canvases Hassan acquired was Ahmad’s own 1976 abstract work “Construction,” which now hangs in the museum.

Under his former professor’s tutelage, Hassan learned all he could about Arab artists, consulting reviews, conversing with other collectors and visiting the artists themselves. It was often frustrating, he recalls. Few books had been written about the artists or the region’s artistic movements. Newspaper and magazines, he says—including Aramco World and Saudi Aramco World—were about the only published sources available.

“I went to Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco,” Hassan recalls. “Sometimes I would stay with the artists and sometimes they came to Doha,” he adds.

One place Hassan was unable to visit was Iraq, but in 1990 Ahmad was able to arrange for some 400 works by Iraqi artists to be transported from Baghdad to Doha in 40 trucks. Among the works was an antic street scene by Jewad Selim entitled “Baghdadiat” that is in the current show. In 1994, after nearly eight years of collecting, Hassan opened a private museum in a pair of villas that he had converted into gallery spaces and artists’ studios. Ahmad became the director.

Around 1995, as Baghdad under sanctions became a difficult place for artists, Hassan invited Dia Azzawi, Ismail Fattah, Mahmoud al-Obaidi and other Iraqi painters to take up residence in the studios of the villa museum.

Mathaf is unique in its focus on Arab modern artists from the region as a whole.
“I gave them space, canvases, paint and other materials and turned them loose,” recollects Hassan, sketching with the artists and photographing them, he became more of a colleague than a patron. The loosely organized collective provided a productive refuge for a decade, until around 2005, when Hassan decided to close it. The artists moved to the US, Canada and Europe. Of the 500 or so works that were produced during these informal villa residencies, a dozen are currently on display at Mathaf.

Meanwhile, Hassan and Ahmad continued methodically scouring the region for finds. To some artists, the shaykh’s support meant the difference between obscurity and recognition. Mounir Canaan, for example, was a successful magazine illustrator in 1940’s Cairo. He sank into poverty in the 1950’s and 1960’s when he began producing abstract collages made with scraps of wood, cardboard, jute and glued sand. “His efforts were not only misunderstood, they were reviled,” the shaykh explains. Hassan began buying Canaan’s art, and he recommended it to the Arab World Institute in Paris, which also made several purchases.

“Canaan wrote to me that, for the first time in his life, he could afford to buy a studio,” Hassan reflects. On the artist’s death at age 80, in December 1999, the shaykh acquired the entire contents of that studio. Canaan is now regarded among the most important artists in the Arab world.

Frequently, too, artists and their families balked at parting with treasured pieces. But when they learned that Hassan planned on showing them in a public museum, they often agreed after all.

A pyramid 233 centimeters tall (7’6”), made of wood and crawling with images of creepily realistic ants, is a striking case in point. Constructed in the 1960’s by Cairo artist Taheya Halim, the installation sculpture generated confusion when it was first unveiled. “Back then, people didn’t know what to make of it,” jokes Hassan. “They thought it was some sort of decorative backdrop for a store window. But when I saw a photograph of it in the mid-1990’s, I said to myself, ‘I must have it for the museum!’”

Halim, who was then 85 years old and one of the established doyennes of Arab art, refused Hassan’s initial purchase offer, saying she had promised the piece to the Cairo museum. But when he assured her it would have pride of place in the larger institution he was planning, she changed her mind. The piece, which some critics have interpreted as a veiled attack on the controversial construction of the Aswan High Dam (with the ants representing exploited laborers), is now showcased in the Mathaf’s galleries of abstract and conceptual art.

Ultimately, Hassan’s ambitions outgrew his resources. In 2004, he persuaded Shaykha Mozah Al Missned, the second wife of the Qatari emir Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, to place his collection under the auspices of the Qatar Foundation.

Now, in addition to lending art for exhibitions abroad, Mathaf is conserving and restoring modern art works and building up a research center as a scholarly source of information on artists, art schools, galleries and commercial sales in the region, starting with Hassan’s own library of some 7000 books on art—including a growing number of publications and catalogues focusing on the Middle East. He hopes to produce an encyclopedia of Arab art that will be available over the Internet.

“We’re becoming an international player, not just an institution for Qatar,” he says.

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Museum of Islamic Art: N/D 07, J/F 09
American university campuses: MJ 10
Mahmoud Darwish: N/D 08

www.mathaf.org
On the Surest Path

Written by Gerald Zarr
In his 2003 memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, writer and Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk recreates his extended family’s apartment building in the enclave where once lived the viziers and pashas of the Ottoman Empire. But by the 1950’s, when Pamuk was growing up, their mansions of state had become “dilapidated brick shells with gaping windows and broken staircases darkened by bracken and untended fig trees,” soon to be razed to make way for apartment buildings like his own. One of the mansions Pamuk could see from his back window was that of the 19th-century Tunisian pasha Khayr al-Din, whom the sultan had brought to Istanbul in 1878 to help save the empire.

Known to history as the Tunisian Khayr al-Din (or, in Turkish, Tûnuslu Hayrettin Pasha), he was born in the western Caucasus around 1822. Then as now, this Circassian region was embroiled in conflict between the local populations and Russia. His father, a local chief, is believed to have died in battle against the Russians. “I definitely know that I am Circassian,” Khayr al-Din recalled, but “I do not remember anything about my native place or my parents. Either because of war or forced migration, I must have been separated from my family very early and forever lost track of them. My repeated attempts to find them came to naught,” he wrote in a memoir.

He was brought to Istanbul as a child—too young to later recall by whom, or even exactly when—and, as a mamluk, was indentured to the Ottoman military governor of Anatolia. Mamluk literally means “slave” in Arabic, but “ward” would be a better description of his situation: He was raised and educated with the governor’s son in a mansion on the Asian shore of the Bosporus. But after that boy’s untimely death, Khayr al-Din found himself, at age 17, on a boat bound for Tunisia, then an autonomous...
Ottoman province. One of the rituals that bound the bey, or governor, of Tunis to the Ottoman sultan was the provision of mamluks for the bey’s military and civil service.

At the bey’s palace, Khayr al-Din received further education appropriate for a future member of the ruling class. He learned the Qur’an by heart, perfected the Arabic he had first learned in Istanbul, and studied French and Italian. Around 1840, he entered the army, where he studied warfare under French officers in the bey’s service. With his strong intellect, athletic build and military bearing, he advanced rapidly. By 1853, near his 30th birthday, he was a brigadier general.

That same year, the bey sent him to Paris to represent Tunisia in a case against a corrupt Tunisian tax official who had absconded to France, obtained French nationality and sued to extort more money from the Tunisian state. Khayr al-Din denounced the defendant and countersued. The case attracted so much publicity that Emperor Louis Napoleon appointed an arbitration panel at the French foreign ministry, and as a result of Khayr al-Din’s efforts, the panel’s ruling was favorable to Tunisia.

That was the beginning of four eye-opening years in Paris, during which the young general perfected his French and carefully observed the French Republic’s customs, society and government. He was impressed particularly by the clarity of the rules governing citizens’ rights vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the state.

In 1860, he chaired the commission that produced the Arab world’s first constitution separating executive, legislative and judicial powers, along the lines of reforms in Europe and Istanbul.
In 1857, Khayr al-Din returned to Tunis, where he was appointed Minister of the Navy, a post he administered capably for five years. When the office of bey changed hands in 1859, Khayr al-Din was selected for the customary and prestigious diplomatic mission to Istanbul, where he presented the sultan and the pashas of the court with a cargo of gifts, and petitioned the sultan for the customary document for the bey’s investiture. In 1860, he chaired the commission that produced Tunisia’s—and the Arab world’s—first constitution that separated executive, legislative and judicial powers, along the lines of reforms in Europe and Istanbul. Later the bey tapped him to head the 60-member Grand Council the constitution created.

At the time, the most powerful and corrupt political figure in Tunisia was the bey’s prime minister—and Khayr al-Din’s superior—a mamluk of Greek origin born Georgios Kalkias Stravelakis and named Mustafa Khaznadar. He contracted for huge loans in Europe at extortionate rates of interest—paid in part to himself—and treated the state treasury as his private slush fund, even paying for the education of his two nephews in Paris out of state coffers.

Khayr al-Din found Khaznadar’s behavior repellant, but that didn’t stop him from marrying Khaznadar’s daughter Djenina in 1862. A few months later, however, he lost patience not only with Khaznadar, but with other officials, including the bey himself:

I realized that, under the guise of allowing reform measures to emanate from the Council, the Bey and Prime Minister were trying to legalize their own infractions. I tried ... to solicit their sincere interest in the country’s welfare. However, my efforts yielded no results. I did not wish, by participating in the affairs of state, to share in the deceit being practiced upon my country.

For the next seven years, Khayr al-Din refused all government posts. He and Djenina lived quietly near Tunis, raising a family. Besides gardening, reading was his passion. He ordered such French publications as Le Petit Marseillais and Le Semaphore, and for commentary on Tunisia he read Le Journal des Débats. He also read Al Akbar from Algiers and Al Djawib from Syria.

Nonetheless, he made a point of keeping on good terms with the bey and his father-in-law. He paid courtesy calls on the bey twice a month, and he headed
Khayr al-Din was no slavish admirer of the West, but Europe’s power, prosperity and progress, he felt, stemmed from stable political institutions and, in particular, the rule of law.

He also gave a straightforward argument in favor of Muslim states adopting European advances in mathematics and science. "There is no reason to reject or ignore something simply because it comes from others, especially if it had been ours before and taken from us," he wrote in *The Surest Path*, referring to the knowledge from Greece and elsewhere that Muslim scholars had translated and advanced during Europe’s Dark Ages.

Rather, there is an obligation to restore it and put it to use... The truth must be determined by a probing examination of the thing concerned. If it is true, it should be accepted and adopted whether its originator be from among the faithful or not.

And, he added, "It is not according to the person that truth is known. Rather, it is by truth that the person is known. Wisdom is the goal of the believer. One is to take it wherever one finds it."

Arabic and French versions of *The Surest Path* appeared in 1868, followed by English and Turkish translations. The book was eagerly read by the governing class in Istanbul and across the Muslim world. In Paris, the Persian ambassador had it translated into Farsi and shipped to Tehran.

In Tunisia, by 1870, Khaznadar’s corrupt ways had led to financial ruin—as Khayr al-Din had predicted. European creditors forced the bey to sack Khaznadar, and Khayr al-Din was offered the post of prime minister.
He accepted: Finally, he had a chance to put into action reforms he had thought long about. He commissioned a study that found that in his country of one million people, only 14,000 children were in primary school: He made education a government priority. In Tunis, he established Sadiki College, the first secular secondary school. He boosted the agrarian economy through tax holidays for new plantings of date palms and olive trees. He had a locked box placed in Tunis’s central square to which only he held the key and into which he encouraged people to drop comments and complaints, signed or not. Never had a Tunisian head of government tried to govern with such transparency, honesty and accountability.

Khaznadar, however, was not finished. Drawing on a fortune he had stashed in Europe, he financed a campaign to vilify Khayr al-Din in the French and Italian press, going so far as to drive down the value of Tunisian bonds on the Paris bourse just to discredit him. And the unhappy truth was that Khayr al-Din had no natural constituency to fight back on his behalf: He had contracted for no foreign loans, created no clique of yes-men, and offered no morsels of patronage to flatterers, relatives or cronies.

“The Bey appeared to be satisfied with my administration,” he wrote, “but in secret longed for the old times.... Also, supporters of my predecessor Mustafa Khaznadar, who stood to gain from his return to power, left no stone unturned to revive his fortunes.”

Khayr al-Din was forced from office on July 21, 1877. Khaznadar was back in power the next day, though he was himself quickly replaced. This reversal of Khayr al-Din’s reforms sparked a new political crisis for Tunisia, one that ended three years later in the complete loss of the country’s sovereignty when the French army marched in and established the protectorate that endured for the next 75 years.

When Khayr al-Din died in 1890, his funeral was observed here in the Eyüp Sultan mosque complex, the oldest in Istanbul and the most honored place of final rest for leaders of the Ottoman Empire.

Opposite: Famous for its blend of Ottoman and European neoclassical styles, the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul was both home and office for Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

A nearly worthless currency and some 400,000 war refugees were among the challenges Khayr al-Din faced in 1878, when Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II, above, appointed him grand vizier—a post comparable to that of prime minister.
worthless paper money had been issued, clogging the financial system. And Egypt’s Khedive Ismail—nominally subject to the Ottoman Sultan—had repudiated foreign loans and kicked out European advisors, precipitating an international crisis.

Khayr al-Din worked long hours, even on Fridays, and at night often invited ministers to continue working in his mansion—the same one Orhan Pamuk would look out toward as a young man some seven decades later.

Within the year, most of the refugees were resettled. Khayr al-Din defused the Egyptian crisis by persuading the sultan to depose Khedive Ismail, an action that also put the bey of Tunis on notice. As for the paper-money crisis, his solution was dramatic and effective: “Although no one considered it possible,” wrote Ali Ekrem Bolayır in a memoir published in 1991, “Khayr al-Din Pasha had cages of iron installed in Bayazit Square in which huge bundles of the paper money, which were worth less in value than wrapping paper, were burned in front of the eyes of the public, and he thus rid the nation of this pestilence.”

But success so often invites enmity, and opposition to the incorruptible grand vizier began to build. With time, fabricated stories began reaching the ears of an increasingly paranoid sultan, who in July 1879 asked for Khayr al-Din’s resignation.

Yet Khayr al-Din remained in Istanbul until his death on January 29, 1890. His funeral services were observed with royal pomp at the Eyüp Sultan mosque, on the west bank of the Golden Horn.

Today, Tunisians regard Khayr al-Din as the inspiration for their country’s blend of tradition, modernity and openness to the world. Almost every city or town has a street or public square named for him—usually spelled “Kheired-dine” in the French manner—and his palace in the old city of Tunis has been brilliantly restored as an art and culture venue. His academic creation, Sadiki College, is still a leading institution (and appeared on a Tunisian commemorative stamp). In 1968, to mark the centennial of his great book, his remains were moved from Istanbul and reinterred in Tunis.

As the author of The Surest Path, Khayr al-Din is often compared with another celebrated Tunisian statesman and scholar, Ibn Khaldun, whose Muqaddimah (Introduction to History) was a beacon of knowledge in the Middle Ages.

Historian L. Carl Brown of Princeton University says that Khayr al-Din “probably felt that the problems of government and administration were similar throughout the world.” And that, he adds, “is why the book appears so modern
today, in spite of a terminology and mode of argument which belong to an earlier age. In any case, this predisposition seems to have enabled Khayr al-Din to learn from Europe unburdened by inferiority complex or mental anguish."

To that should be added a comment by Julia Clancy-Smith of the University of Arizona, a specialist in 19th-century Mediterranean history: "Khayr al-Din’s thinking and life story—which cannot be separated from each other—hold critical importance for the 21st century. His openness to ‘foreign’ ideas, tolerance, courage in voicing criticism of Muslim religious and political elites, including the Ottoman sultan and Tunisian bey, and his cosmopolitanism—he moved with ease between Paris and Istanbul—breaks down the pernicious myth that cultural and religious identities are necessarily a source of conflict in the world."

Sadiki College was founded by Khayr al-Din in 1875, while he was Tunisian prime minister. Right: In 1975, a stamp commemorated the college’s centennial. Below: Tunisia’s 20-dinar banknote uses a design based on Mahmoud ben Mahmoud’s painting of Khayr al-Din.

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- Ibn Khaldun: S/O 06

BLESSED

Written and Illustrated by Norman MacDonald

Cape Town, at the bottom of Africa, is where the Indian and Atlantic oceans meet — where East meets West. You could say: fierce storms develop quickly here. Look out over Table Bay, where the freighter is docked. It could be the very spot where the Haarlem, a Dutch ship, foundered in a storm in 1697. The European history of South Africa begins right about then.

When you gaze out over Cape Town from Signal Hill, you see the colorful houses of the Bo-Kaap district in the foreground. In the distance is Table Bay. The majestic Table Mountain isn’t visible in this drawing, but it’s to the right. At times a cloud drapes itself over the top of the mountain that gives the impression of a tablecloth. Are there songs written about this city — like Chicago, New York — even Birmingham? None of those places have a mountain of brilliantly colored houses by a bay. From here, Cape Town seems to deserve an opera.

One morning I was sketching a pink house close to a grey-green mosque. A man came by and looked over my shoulder. “You know,” he said, “we are blessed.” He mentioned the beautiful harbor, the Bo-Kaap where we were standing, Table Mountain and “Doctor Wind,” which at times can blow at hurricane speeds.

The hill to the left, a Muslim burial ground, looks like what the rest of the harbor would have been if you think away the buildings. The glowing tales of the bay that the rescued sailors of the Haarlem told convinced the governors of the Dutch East India Company that, in spite of storms, this was an ideal halfway stop on the route to Batavia (Indonesia).

So Jan van Riebeeck arrived on April 6, 1652 with three ships (two were to follow) carrying 80 men and eight women, including his wife. They were, essentially, survivors of the five ships, 130 sailors had died on route from Amsterdam. It’s a comment on how important the new settlement was to become.

In the 19th and 18th centuries, the company sent slaves, convicts, political exiles and occasional intellectuals and even princes to the Cape. They came from India, Southeast Asia and especially Indonesia. Most were Muslims, and they were sent to build the town, though some were imprisoned on Robben Island out in Table Bay.

Recovering Dutch sailors and bored soldiers gave Cape Town the reputation in maritime circles as “the tavern of the two oceans.” However, the Muslim workers arriving from the East were different. Drinking was against their beliefs. They were also law-abiding, skilled and smart. Some eventually started moving to the slopes of Signal Hill.

Sammettime, by J.M. Coetzee, about his early years as a writer in Cape Town, “I felt blessed” is near the middle of it.
In Afrikaans it was called "Boven die Kaap." Now everyone just calls it Bo-Kaap.

Over the next 350 years, this area became home, at one time or another, to almost every clan and religion, including the Dutch. But it was always most closely associated with the Muslim community, as it was built largely by the descendants of the Malay slaves in the last half of the 19th century. Under the infamous apartheid Group Areas Act of 1950, the area was declared an exclusive residential area for Cape Muslims. Since the end of Apartheid in 1990, and especially today, the Bo-Kaap is hot real estate. People from everywhere are buying these red, green and yellow houses with a view over the bay where it all began.

In the 17th century, before Cape Town existed, sailors who spied these rocks at the Cape of Good Hope looked to the sky and whispered a prayer that good weather would see them safely past.
When Cape Town began as a resupply staging post, Protestant Holland was at war with Catholic Spain, and the Dutch Reformed Church was the only denomination allowed in Cape Town—at least visibly. But Lutheranism Christians built a “barn” that was only later remodeled into the church it had always been, and Muslims prayed in their homes. Their situation was more complicated because Muslim leaders and teachers wrote in Arabic, Muslim students therefore had to study Arabic, and people today say the Muslim slaves (who were often called “Malay” because they came from the East) studied hardest of all to prove their value to their masters, even though they were doing it in secret.

A scene back then, say in the early 1700s, could have looked something like this: Two slave boys of Malay origin are on their way to the madrasa, or school, but they can’t let on that’s where they are going. The boys are barefoot, for slaves were not allowed to wear shoes. Their clothes are one notch up from rags. They hold a piece of paper because slaves always had to have in their possession a written reason to be on the street. A Dutch soldier steps in front of the two and asks where they are going. He examines their paper, which is in Arabic. Although he can’t read it, he sends them on their way because Malay slaves are expensive, and he doesn’t want to anger their owner by making them late. When the boys enter the schoolhouse, the teacher tells one to sit over there next to Africa, and the other to sit next to January Batavia: Slaves were given names that reflected where they came from.
and in which month they arrived; slaves born at the Cape were often given Biblical names by their owner. The boys would study the alphabet, the Qur'an or arithmetic. But they did go to school, even as slaves. At least some did. That's how people here say it was.

"I'm not an imam. I only assist. Our imam is not well and the committee asked me to stand in. I have the time. I'm a plasterer by trade. I fell in Durban when a scaffold broke, and I was injured. The orthopedic surgeon said I had to have a hip operation, which has been done.

I was born in District 6. We moved here in 1945. We were given green ID cards from the government that identified us as 'Cape Malay', one of the colored groups. I never believed I was colored."

Mohammad Fahid Soeker

"The Auwal Mosque we are in became a reality in 1994 thanks to Prince Abdullah Kadi Abu Salaam, later called Tuan Guru. In Arabic, 'auwal' means 'first'. Tuan Guru is a person on a high spiritual level.

"There was a woman here yesterday. She asked if I had seen a film on TV about Abraham Lincoln, and she asked if I knew the poem about the death of the American president. I said, 'Yes, I know that poem,' and promptly began—

Oh Captain! My Captain!
our fearful trip is done;"

The ship has weather'd every rack,
the prize we sought is won;...
And I recited the rest for her.
She couldn't believe it, at my age. I thought she was going to faint. (laughs). I had memorized the poem in grammar school.

I love history and poetry. Tuan Guru wrote the whole Qur'an from memory while imprisoned on Robben Island. What a memory that was!"
Zanie Mischbach, Malay cook who had a cooking program on TV last year. "I grew up in the 60s at the top [of Bo-Kaap] near the Noon Gun. Whenever I walk up and down, I always stop and look out over the Bo-Kaap. I went this way to school and to town. This is my memory of the Bo-Kaap. From there you can see three minarets, the harbor and the mountains. The name of this street is called Stadszicht, which means 'city view' in Dutch."

"I opened my first restaurant in the Bo-Kaap. This community knows me as 'Sedel.' It was a tent in the garden with green chintz draped to the floor. People sat on the floor on cushions. It was a job serving the food, always bending over. I liked the idea of owning a restaurant. I sold it about 1994 and we started the Noon Gun Restaurant. It's my mom and dad's. My Sister was up in arms when I made my version of bobotie. Mama never made it like this," she said. "I taught her and her daughter to make other recipes. It's like that in families."

"The houses were all white before the bright colors. Thirty years ago, I was the first to paint my house pink. In the guides it says it was a protest against Apartheid. For me, it was a protest against white walls!"

"No, not really. My real protest was something else. Non-whites weren't allowed to own a business during the apartheid, and I always had a business. I made wedding and ball dresses. We had become part western. You can see it, at weddings, in our dress. We're half-way. I had a white manager who was a friend stand in front. I had to stand in the back of the shop."

"They are called the three sisters. We stared at them, thinking maybe they were Namibian for us. Then we drove on. The restaurant is seasonal and now starting to get busy..."

"Ali, "We have a big family. My cousins and I do everything together. We look after each other."

"A workman pauses by with a toolbox. "My uncle," he says."

"My sister Sheereen wrote a book about the Bo-Kaap. Zanie, my other sister, hosted cooking programs on TV."

"When we were in school, our parents would put us in the family car and we would travel somewhere for a short vacation. When we travelled east and into the mountains, at some point my dad would pull over to the side of the road and look ahead. "See those three peaks?" he would ask."

I came to the Noon Gun Restaurant for their famous bobotie. It arrived with a loud bang. The Noon Gun - there really is one - above the restaurant on Signal Hill, fired off a round at noon every day since 1806.

"My bobotie looked similar... Shepherd's pie with a yellow topping. Like a lot of oven dishes it's not its visual beauty but rather its smell and taste that make this dish so popular."
Born in District Six, Moosa sells vegetables on Pentz road in the Bo-Kaap. His grandchildren come by after school, give change to customers, and he smiles watching them.

"I come here every morning at six. Everyone in Bo-Kaap knows me. Selling vegetables is the only living I can make...I can’t write. I was very sick as a child and did not go to school. I could not walk. Doctors in Somerset Hospital put iron on my legs to get them straight. It is a nice place here. Some sell and go for away. Where I live is nice but not like here. The higher you go up the Bo-Kaap, the more money you pay. It is a better view and cooler in summer. But you can’t live forever. You can have a lot of money but the money can’t go with you down. I am satisfied. God let me live. He gave me another chance."

Emily Njengere  
Chef at the Gold Restaurant, next to the Gold Museum on the edge of Bo-Kaap.

"I was born in Cape Town. I watch my mother cook. I cook Indian, African and Malay recipes mostly. I like to cook stews and curry dishes. I always taste my food because it's important in a chef. I get a passion on cooking.

"Summer we have light meals, couscous is nice and cool. Not a lot of spices. We serve it with chicken. Tagine, chicken, cumin spice. Roast it a bit. Serve with couscous. I make nice mealie [corn porridge] soup. Portuguese introduced corn to Africa. We call it mealie. I also make Cape Malay puri crisps and chicken satay, from East Indies. I cook a nice 'boobie'. It's for winter time. It is a Cape Malay dish and the national dish of South Africa. It's also a historical dish, when the slaves from the East came to the Cape in the 17th century. The ingredients for the recipe were already growing in the gardens. All they needed were the spices like masala, turmeric, cumin, coriander, etcetera. It was one more blend of East and West."

"When you come here, Emily advises, 'you must come with an empty stomach.'"
During slavery, January 2 was the only day in the year slaves had a holiday. They danced in the streets. It is still celebrated on this date as the Carnival. After the end of slavery, about the 1860s, it was continued by the colonial working-class society. Today anybody can join a Kloofs (club) that competes each year. The first three winners in each category get a trophy to keep in their Kloofskamer (clubhouse). Categories include “best dressed,” “best march,” and so on.

“Carnival came from the slave trade, the dregs of the community. The whole thing wastagged with so many negative aspects. The middleclass ‘coloreds’ went to the mosque and church and were taught the right things and kept their kids away from the Carnival. It’s different now. The majority of parents and kids of the technological age have their own opinions. They are much more advanced. Carnival is respectable now.

“Once the fever hits you, you can’t help but be part of the whole thing. Mac’s father, Mr. Mac, was a leading figure in the Carnival. He played the sax and the banjo.

“Mac wrote music for all the instruments in the Goema Symphony. Number 1, violin, flute, cello, and sax. The first time I heard it I thought he was pushing the bar so high he’s leaving some of us in the dark. He’s not just talented, he’s gifted. The Zulus and Khoi have tribal dancing, and we have the goema. That is our musical culture. That is who we are. I’m blessed.”
I wanted to find out about goema music. There is a lot of jazz in Cape Town, and goema is related. Everyone said Mac McKenzie was the best goema musician. Staff in a music store told me where to find him.

His 87-year-old mother answered the door, wiping her hands on a dishcloth. “He is in his studio in the backyard,” she whispered. I waited until he finished up with Wesley Valentine, a bass-guitar student.

Then he put the kettle on for a cup of tea. “What we are doing here is a Cape Town composers’ workshop. We have six concerts of the Cape Town Goema Orchestra coming up. We are always challenged by not having a music education. It’s expensive. Going to University of Cape Town costs 31,000 rand. Where is one going to get 31,000 rand? We don’t charge money.”

“People here are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and we are trying to put music in the schools, open their minds—from asking a student to play a C and they don’t know where it is on the guitar, to where they can write and hear orchestration. I learned to play by ear and taught myself to write music so I could get royalties for my work and put bread on the table, which is what we all want to do in life. It is a slow journey. We don’t use computers. It is a pencil, an eraser and music paper. We are Creole, mixed people. Colored. Our ancestry has disappeared. We come from the first people of the world, if you knew your business. Our brains have been stripped bare of knowledge of where we come from. They danced to the goema drum. The Carnival is goema. We call our music goema.”

Mac plucks the beat on his guitar. “I march out each year with the Carnival group. The sound has the mixture of all the world. You can hear Indian, Khoe, San, Malaysian, Indonesian, Jewish, European. Cape Town was the one port that everyone had to come to. I compose it with quieter tones, a sophisticated version of what one hears in the street. I can now play goema with classical musicians.”

Want to listen to Mac and the Goema Captains of Cape Town? Surf: Goema—Mac McKenzie. There are lots of YouTube videos to select from.
This portrait of Andries Bicker, a governor of the Dutch East India Company who sent Jan van Riebeeck to the Cape, hangs in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. From the early days of Cape Town, artists sketched its life and times. In the 19th century, it was the famous artist-explorer Thomas Baines, with his long black beard, wide-brimmed hat and colorful scarfs. 25 of his pictures hang in the Castle of Good Hope museum in the city. I counted them.

Bruce Speirs - Rose Lodge.

"I came here on vacation. Thought it was a beautiful country. A great place to open a B&B. I lived in Germany for 35 years. I began as a ballet dancer in Canada then went to Germany where there was more work. I was a salesman and an English teacher. I could open a B&B. No problem there. Six months later I moved here and found out how to do it. The first year was difficult. It always is in the beginning until your place is mentioned in travel books. Bo-kaap is a residential area of colorful buildings like this one, the most interesting part of Cape Town. You can wander around the streets and admire the Cape Dutch architecture. But the city is only five minutes away. It gives me a great kick to help people enjoy a short stay."

"I remember most of the people I sketched. The streets, the buildings, the Malay girls, Indian women in bright palandrin dresses. And then there was Coss. Coss was a wonderful model. He had gorgeous expensive costumes which were lovely to paint. He was a dancer and very religious. He had made the Hajj many times. Each time he returned from Makkah, he asked me to paint him in his new Arab Kit.

"When I paint a portrait I feel a oneness, an energy flowing between the sitter and the painter." She painted to a portrait of Coss on a book cover and sighed. "I wish I hadn't sold that one."
Shereen: “I was born in the Noon Gun Restaurant at the top of the hill. It wasn’t a restaurant then. It was my mother’s bedroom. (laughs)

“When we went to school, we spoke Afrikaans and the language of the oppressed. My parents didn’t want us to go to an Afrikaans school, so I went to St. Paul’s High School, where I was taught in English and also where we attended church. My grandmother was given a letter asking if she wanted to attend church. She didn’t mind if we went to church. She said it would be good for me to learn what the Bible says.”

“There was a lot of trauma at the time, people leaving or getting shot. Police would have excuses to shoot, calling it self-defense. All this happened with my kids around. Between 1985 and 1990 were the saddest years of my life because friends left the country, some tortured to give names. I lived in the heart of it and experienced the struggle.

“He said, ‘It’s not my business to go to the army and be sent to the bush and shot anything that moves. He left.

“1991 Mandela came to Tana Baru Cemetery in recognition of those who were buried at Robben Island and those buried there. My mother, my daughter, Zanab and I were there. I had photos of the four of us. A picture of Mr. Mandela and I was in the newspaper. Mr. Mandela came in 1999 when we celebrated the bicentennial of the Auwal Masjid Mosque. He mandated me to put this area on the international map. We celebrated the first elections that same year.

“In 1999 I stood for the ANC (the African National Congress party) in the Bo-Kaap, and I won. It was exciting. It was nothing about money. Everyone had to put their hands in their pocket. We were here when the real issues were at hand. I enjoyed it. Since then our infrastructure is very good. Education is better. We worked hard to have computers in every classroom.

“After the real problems were solved, it was just play. Politics is not taken too seriously these days. Today I speak a lot with young people and they seem very clique-y and group-y. They won’t have anyone else in their crowd. They stick together with their own kind. We saw that in apartheid and we broke it — and now it’s back again.

“I believe in the power of praying. I say to people, ‘Pray! Throw it out into the universe, and something positive will come back.’ That is why I am a tour guide. Often tourists want to know the down side. They say, ‘We’ve been on the bus and hear that every thing is rosy and so good. Please tell us what is wrong. There is so much wrong, but it is going to get better. We are working on it.”

Norman MacDonald
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with my avid interest in drawing and history, Cape Town and the Bo-Kaap were perfect subjects. Lovely people in the midst of a turbulent history, I’m blessed.

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For a week in January, 10 young photojournalists took part in “Portraits of Commitment,” a workshop held during the sixth biennial Chobi Mela Festival of Asian Photography in Dhaka, Bangladesh. All were students or recent graduates of the Pathshala South Asian Media Academy in Dhaka. Their assignment: A portrait-and-caption profile of someone who is contributing to the common dream of a better community, country or world.

Of course, it was not as easy as it might seem. We met not only in Pathshala’s classrooms, but also at exhibits and events, and there was a daily buzz of mobile phone calls, texts and e-mails. Some students returned to their subjects twice or more in pursuit of the elusive qualities that distinguish portraits from snapshots. Being visual storytellers, most of the photographers supported their portrait with narrative images in addition to words.

The results varied as much as the students and the subjects. But one message came through clearly: All our dreams have a story.

—DICK DOUGHTY, MANAGING EDITOR

**Portraits of Commitment**

**BY K. M. ASAD**

Shahida Kanam, 20, lives in the small village of Purbodhola in northern Bangladesh. She counts herself lucky to have gone to school, and luckier still to have taken a computer class in ninth grade. The following year, Arban, a non-profit development organization based in the region, sponsored a more advanced class. She stayed in touch with Arban, and last year she became one of 12 “info-ladies.” Each travels by bicycle from village to village, carrying wireless-enabled laptop computers that allow residents of these rural communities to talk with relatives working overseas using Internet-based voice communications, such as Skype, and webcam chats. In these villages, residents often migrate to work abroad, and the webcam, Shahida says, is a particular delight to those who remain at home and see their loved ones perhaps only once a year. It has also reduced crime: False passports, visas and promises issued by unscrupulous recruiters can now be detected more easily through Internet research and direct communication with relatives overseas. “I’ll continue rendering my service to all as long as I can so that no one can be exploited for lack of education,” she says.

**Shahida Kanam**

“If we come forward one by one, our country shall certainly be developed one day.”
Sayeeda Khanam

“I have tried to document time, space, society and history. It has not been so silky-smooth.”

In the 1950’s, it was rare to see a woman carrying a camera in East Pakistan (as Bangladesh was then called). But Sayeeda Khanam had been photographing since 1940, when at age 13 she received from her sister the gift of a Rolleicord twin-lens reflex camera—which she still owns. “The different colors of the skies, the beauty of the Padma River, different birds” inspired her, she says, but later she turned to journalism. In 1956 she participated in an international exhibition in Dhaka, becoming the country’s first female professional photographer. In 1971, during Bangladesh’s War of Liberation, she took a photo of two rows of young women dressed in white saris with rifles on their shoulders. The image became one of the most famous photographs of the war. For many years she worked for Begum women’s magazine and various other press outlets. Now 73, she also recalls the celebrities she photographed—among them Queen Elizabeth II of Britain, the empress of Japan and Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon.

BY TASLIMA AKHTER

In August 2006, 12 high school students in Dhaka founded the One Degree Initiative (1°) to get youth in Bangladesh engaged in community service. Now, 1° has more than 1500 members, and international branches in Nepal and Canada. In Bangladesh, it has run some 50 projects, each designed to be a life-changing experience for both volunteers and recipients. Mushfiqur Rahman, 20, sits on the group’s executive committee while also studying business at the American International University of Bangladesh. In December, Rahman helped organize a medical camp at Alok Shishu Shikkhaloy, a primary school in Dhaka’s Agargaon slum. More than 100 families received free medical services from doctors organized by 1°, and students of the school themselves acted as volunteers: One of the student leaders from the school was 13-year-old Faruk Hossain, who has continued to act as a liaison between his classmates and 1°.

BY ASHRAFUL AWAL MISHUK

Mushfiqur Rahman

“The smallest change has the power to trigger substantial, lasting improvements. One should not hesitate to be the first one to take such a step.”

Faruk Hossain
By A. M. Ahad

Born in 1940, an accountant by profession, Shudhir Chandra Bardhain resigned his government job in 1969 and sold family property to found the Bhulakut K. B. Higher School. It opened its doors in 1972, a year after Bangladesh’s independence, and it offered the new nation’s first free education for rural girls. Bardhain remembers going door to door, family to family, in his village of Bhulakut, some 170 kilometers (105 mi) east of Dhaka, persuading villagers that education could improve their lives and that “an educated mother makes an educated nation.” The school also enrolled boys, but charged tuition for them; it was free for girls in order to encourage families to send their daughters as well as their sons. Today, the school is still open, and every morning starts with a chorus of alphabets and numbers for some 550 girls and 330 boys. In 2008, Bardhain was one of 10 recipients of the Shada Moner Manush (“people of generous heart”) Award sponsored by Unilever Bangladesh.

Shudhir Chandra Bardhain

“An educated nation will not remain a poor one.”

By Hasan Raza

Since 2005, Munir Hasan has led Bangladesh’s students in the International Mathematics Olympiad, but—perhaps more important—he is the leading creative force revitalizing the nation’s approach to math education. Using a network of community-building math festivals, daily newspaper columns, teacher training and new textbooks that emphasize exploration and questioning rather than rote memorization, he is “making math a joyful priority,” according to the Ashoka Foundation, which elected him a fellow in 2008.

Munir Hasan

“I have always dreamed of turning my country into a nation of world-class, advanced mathematicians and scientists.”
**BY M. R. K. PALASH**

Recipient of 28 national and international awards, Shykh Seraj is the pioneer of agricultural journalism in Bangladesh. In this mostly rural nation, that makes him a star. He has produced more than 1000 episodes of five different television programs, starting with “Mati o Manush” (“Soil and Men”) back in 1982, the year he graduated from Dhaka University with a master’s degree in geography. He has covered every imaginable facet of agriculture, from rice-farming techniques, shrimp and fish farming, fertilizer choices, beekeeping and dragon-fruit production to urban and schoolyard gardening, soil health, land-use disputes, conflicts between small and large growers, technology impacts and rising sea levels. His use of television to reach often illiterate or semi-literate farming families is widely credited with hunger relief and improved prosperity nationwide. Most recently he has launched a series of Web sites and podcasts under the banner of “e-agriculture.”

**Shykh Seraj**

“Farmers are the real architects of Bangladesh.”

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**BY N. HAIDER CHOWHURY**

Born into the Chakma, the most prosperous of 13 major tribal communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of southeastern Bangladesh, 31-year-old Tenjing identifies himself among a new breed of fashion designers. In the 1990’s, he studied design in New Delhi and Calcutta. In 2000, he returned to Bangladesh, but the emerging fashion houses of Dhaka did not interest him, and the rapid assimilation of international styles—and the abandonment of traditional ones—among his own Chakma people drew him back to the Hill Tracts. Now, working in the small city of Rangamati with four employees and contracts with a handful of Chakma weaving families, he produces fusion designs that bring together traditional and contemporary. Most popular are his wedding dresses, which show now in Dhaka, in Chittagong in eastern India and elsewhere.

**Tenjing Chakma**

“For my native people, I’ve felt something instinctive inside myself.”
Abdullah Abu Sayeed

“People do not become enlightened. That is the name of a dream. They try and become enlightened. That attempt is the enlightenment... To me, what is important is the start.”

BY D. M. SHIBLY

Yasmin was still in her teens when Iffat Ara Sarker Eva met her at Safe Home, a halfway house in Dhaka for destitute youth separated from their families. Yasmin said she didn’t know where her family was. She recalled being sent at age 13 to live with her grandmother, a beggar in the town of Dinajpur. That was after her parents’ divorce, she said. Police had brought her—rescued her, says Eva—to Safe Home, where Eva has worked as a coordinator since 2008. There, her job is to reunite troubled, runaway and abandoned youth with their families—if the families can be found. Finding Yasmin’s family, Eva says, was particularly difficult. Yasmin recalled little, partly out of shame; since she had run away, her grandparents would not take her back. Eva learned that Yasmin’s father was a rickshaw driver in a slum in Dinajpur. She finally found him, sitting on a footpath on a bridge. They shared tea. He agreed to take her back. Four months later, the father arranged a marriage, with Yasmin’s consent. Yasmin asked Eva to attend the wedding, and to remain her legal guardian. Now the couple has a son, and Eva, age 52, has since then accumulated more than 20 such success stories.

BY SYED ASHRAFUL ALOM

Writer, television presenter, cultural activist and professor of Bengali language at Dhaka College, Abdullah Abu Sayeed is perhaps best known as the founder in 1975 of Dhaka’s World Literature Center (Bishwa Sahitya Kendra), known popularly as “Kendro.” Now counting more than 125,000 members and housing one of the nation’s best libraries, Kendro also offers classes on world literature at more than 500 schools—and provides the books to the students. In 2004, Abu Sayeed’s commitment was recognized with the Ramon Magsaysay Award, often called “the Asian Nobel,” for his contributions to “cultivating in the youth of Bangladesh a love for literature and its humanizing values through exposure to great books of Bangladesh and the world.”

Finalists in the nationwide annual student reading contest sponsored by Kendro celebrate in Dhaka in January.

Iffat Ara Sarker Eva

“I will work for people until I am physically unable to do the job.”
BY M. N. I. CHOWDHURY

Beginning with her first tiny salon, called Persona, in 1990, Kaniz Almas Khan has now become the owner of Persona Group, a chain of women’s beauty salons and spas, as well as the lifestyle magazine Canvas. In 2009, she was named most outstanding businesswoman in Bangladesh. What sets her apart from other entrepreneurs are her employees, who now number more than 1,400; 99 percent of them are women, and many come from underprivileged, even dire, backgrounds. They include members of rural minority tribes and nearly two dozen survivors of acid attacks. All have been trained by Khan and her associates. “The women of our country have a lot of potential,” she says. “If they want, they can step in along with men and build a better future.”

Related articles from past issues can be found on our Web site, www.saudiaramcoworld.com. Click on “indexes,” then on the cover of the issue indicated below.
Bangladesh: J/F 94, M/J 99, J/A 02, M/J 09

“Portraits of Commitment” was led by Dick Doughty, managing editor of Saudi Aramco World, and D. M. Shibly, an instructor at Pathshala South Asian Media Academy and a staff photographer at ICE Today magazine. Bottom row, from left: Students M. N. I. Chowdhury and M. R. K. Palash, Pathshala Vice Principal Abir Abdullah, Dick Doughty and D. M. Shibly. Top row: Students K. M. Asad, Ashraful Ayal Mishuk, Syed Ashraful Alom, Taslima Akhter and Hasan Raza. Not shown: Students N. Haider Chowdhury and A. M. Ahad. Special thanks to Pathshala Principal Shahidul Alam, workshop coordinator Snigdha Zaman and tutor Munem Wasif for the support and encouragement that made this article possible.
THE MULTIPOLAR FUTURE

INTERVIEW BY TOM VERDE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROBBIE BAILEY

Parag Khanna is a senior research fellow in the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation and author of How to Run the World: Charting a Course to the Next Renaissance, published in January by Random House. He earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service and a doctorate from the London School of Economics. Born in India, he grew up in the United Arab Emirates, New York and Germany. The World Economic Forum has named him a “young global leader,” and Esquire magazine has included him among the “75 Most Influential People of the 21st Century.”

For this interview for Saudi Aramco World, writer and radio producer Tom Verde met Parag near his home in Manhattan.

Tom Verde: In your new book, you discuss “neo-medievalism,” which seems to be an oxymoron. How does that work?
Parag Khanna: Well, the Middle Ages was a very long period of history, from the fall of Rome to the fall of Constantinople. A thousand years are captured by this phrase, “the Middle Ages.” Of course it was a different kind of history for every part of the world. In Europe, it’s often thought of as the Dark Ages. But as we know, for the Arab–Islamic world, it was a golden age. For Song Dynasty China, it was a golden age. For the Chola Dynasty of India, it was the apogee of their power. We are again, in the 21st century, entering a multipolar landscape—one in which China, India, the Arab–Islamic countries, Europe, the United States, Brazil and others are all able to call their own shots, to determine what they want and the policies they want to pursue, without any one power dominating over the others—and that is exactly what the world was like during the Middle Ages. Too often we hear the term, and we think [of it] from a Eurocentric point of view. But the multipolarity, in the literal sense of diverse powers and civilizations coexisting, with none dominating over the others but starting to interact—trade and commerce, but also tension and conflict—that’s a very medieval phenomenon. And we are back in that world today.

What’s made that happen?
Globalization is probably the number-one thing. Globalization 1.0 began in the Middle Ages, the first time we had sustained, intercontinental contact between Western Europe and China and all of the various civilizations and empires in between. The Silk Roads and the Crusades, for good and bad reasons, helped create this constant connectivity across geography. Today, I would say that we are at Globalization 5.0. I think we are just at the beginning of this phase that I call “the New Middle Ages,” in which we have to reckon, in the West and in the East, with coexisting. People like to say that China is rising and that means the decline of the West, or of America. But in fact, the East is not replacing the West. China is not replacing America. The Pacific world is not replacing the Atlantic world. All of these are going to coexist in a much more complicated network. I think that is a very telltale sign of a new medievalism.

During these thousand years and those golden ages that you refer to, there was, besides commercial exchange, a lot of exchange of ideas. Is that happening today? Is the Internet the new way of transmitting ideas?
Old and new ways of transmitting ideas coexist. If you think about ideas as technologies, for example, they are going in many directions. If you think about the latest high-tech innovations in clean technology or biotechnology, much of that has been invented in the West, but it’s currently be-
People like to say that China is rising and that means the decline of the West or of America. But in fact, the East is not replacing the West. China is not replacing America. The Pacific world is not replacing the Atlantic world. All of these are going to coexist in a much more complicated network.”
In that passage I give a lot of examples of things in the Middle Ages that resemble some of our news headlines today. One is, of course, the great London food riot. We know that a lot of the sparks that have flown up now in the Middle East and other parts of the world have been triggered by food prices spiking. I give the example of the great tragedy of Iraq and the extent to which a society that was quite modern and developed was so quickly brought to chaos and violence and civil war. I think that there are some unfortunate parallels between what we think of when we hear the word medievalism and what we see happening in the world today: the fact that we can slip so quickly from a pristine model of modern nation-states into something that looks far more fragmented, dangerous and unpredictable.

Some of what you've said reminds me of that scene from the movie “Network” where the chairman of the board is chewing out the TV anchor and says to him, “There are no more nations! There is only AT&T, and Dow Chemical, and Shell Oil. These are the nations of the world today!” Are we moving in that direction?

People have predicted for a long time the decline of the nation-state. This goes back to the period of that film, to the 1970s, because that's when globalization really picked up, after the end of World War II, the Marshall Plan, the rise of multinational corporations, western liberalization [and the] deregulation of economies. Susan Strange, at the London School of Economics, wrote about “triangular diplomacy,” in which firms were equal participants in diplomacy with states. Alvin Toffler wrote The Third Wave and talked about the denationalization of economies and the rise of mega-corporations. This was really a trend in thinking at the time. Now fast-forward 40 years and of course we still have many strong, modern nation-states, but we also have a lot of weak, fragmenting, collapsing states. In this book, I call it “post-colonial entropy”—the gradual dissipation of centralized power in many post-colonial societies. So it isn't one or the other, just like it isn't China or the United States. It isn't companies or states. It's a mix of the two.

One can look at how large and powerful western economies still are—the United States and Great Britain and Germany and so forth—but if you look at the proportion of their GDP that is made up by very powerful corporations, it's a stunningly large percentage. In Britain after 2008, people realized just what a staggering percentage of their GDP—close to 50 percent—depended on the London City, meaning the banking sector. It's quite remarkable how powerful firms are, but that's different from saying that they are truly autonomous actors. Yet quite a few multinational corporations have become that way: They can relocate; they can move their headquarters around for financial or other purposes. I think that's important to recognize as well, because I think it is an almost irreversible component of globalization.

In the wake of the Middle Ages, there was the Renaissance, of course. What kind of Renaissance do you see coming?

Well, this is the question, really. When I was writing my Ph.D about the evolution of diplomatic systems, the literature on medieval diplomacy and on Renaissance diplomacy conceded that it was hard to tell when the Renaissance actually began. We think of the Renaissance as being this great flourishing and flowering and rediscovery of ancient wisdom and culture, and of course Arab and Muslim scholars were an important conduit for that having taken place at all, given what was happening in medieval Europe. But the fact is it took centuries to actually crystallize the Renaissance, and even when it did, it was highly uneven. So to me, the transition is a very long one. What I am trying to explore in this book is what we can learn from the way different power centers—companies or NGOs or governments or international organizations or humanitarians or philanthropists—are engaging today a set of rules about how to steer resources in the right direction to stabilize the world. Then maybe we'll be able to see the dawn of this new Renaissance. And my hope is that we will follow some of the prescriptions that are evident in the best practices that are out there today, so that we could get to this new Renaissance in the next 20 to 30 years.

Did the Renaissance have any worldwide impact at all, or was it simply a European phenomenon?
The Renaissance actually spread very slowly from Italy northward. People speak of the Italian Renaissance and then the Northern European Renaissance, which had a very different set of characteristics. There was a gradual modernization of institutions, but Talleyrand didn’t invent the modern French foreign ministry until the 17th century, and that was a long way after what we think of as the Renaissance. This is a very long period of unfolding, and the global consequences were such that, as Europe came out of the Middle Ages and the commercial revolution helped to spur the period of great exploration, early manifestations of intensifying East–West trade began, and colonialism ultimately arose. That was another major phase of globalization, whether it was positive or negative, but it did unite the world geographically and allow for the acceleration of East–West exchange. It also marked the period in which the western ascendancy began again, and that lasted for centuries, until the modern day.

**During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, it seems that Muslim or Christian, Arab or Asian didn’t really matter when it came down to trade, did it?**

No, it didn’t, and that was the amazing thing about the Silk Road. Whether it was Marco Polo or Ibn Battutah, whether it was the bazaars of Samarkand or Jerusalem or France, it’s really remarkable how multiethnic and multicultural these were, how trade managed to transcend all of those divisions. And that continued for such a long period of time. This is why I believe that we are not only building new Silk Roads through modern infrastructure—roads and railways and pipelines and so forth—but there’s a new maritime Silk Road as well. So much medieval commerce was conducted by land and by sea, and today most of the world’s trade is handled by shipping-container traffic. The new maritime Silk Road that links the Middle East, with its vast energy resources and other exports, to China, India, Japan, Korea and other powers is thriving again today.

**During the late Ottoman Empire, the Hijaz Railway was a conduit for moving goods and soldiers and military materiel from one part of the Ottoman world to the other. What future do you see for that particular conduit?**

I think of the Hijaz Railway, or the need to resurrect the Hijaz Railway, as a great metaphor for how the Arab world is beginning this process of reuniting again. Unfortunately, the last time the Arab world was united was under the Ottoman Empire. But the lesson still stands that infrastructure is a pathway to unity. In the turbulence around the Arab region today is this opportunity to revisit very fundamental questions of political and geographic identity, because, we know, quite a few of the borders in the region are artificial. The pathway to broader progress and unity across the Arab world is to break down those straight lines on the map and start using infrastructure to transcend them—everything from water canals to railways to pipelines. I can envision a new Hijaz Railway, not only from Turkey all the way to Saudi Arabia, but with offshoots to Syria, to Iran, to Iraq. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries have planned a high-speed railway that will link all of them together. I can imagine a Hijaz offshoot to Cairo. Think about how resources and migrants and trade can take place across North Africa as well. I think infrastructure is going to be a vital part of the next map of the Middle East, especially coming out of the current situation.

**When I first saw the title of your book, How to Run the World, I thought it was written by the cartoon character on “Family Guy” who’s always coming up with a plan to run the world. That’s funny. But this title is very serious. It could be thought of either as a joke or a way to compete with Tom Friedman. But actually this book is an homage to diplomacy, and diplomacy is to me the profession, the art, the craft of attempting to make rules for the world. And “run” is the operative part of it. It doesn’t just mean a one-off solution, a silver bullet. It doesn’t mean crisis management. It means a process. What is the management process for keeping the world stable? The answer to that—the one-word answer to that—is diplomacy, better diplomacy. This book is meant to be a very serious treatment of that, because we need more and better diplomacy.**

**There is an exploding population under 25 in many of the countries that we’ve been talking about. What is the future for them?**

You know, people talk about a “youth bulge” across the Middle East, but also in other parts of the world that have very young demographic profiles. That certainly includes the emerging markets as well. For many people, that’s very dangerous, because it can mean instability, political unrest and so forth. To me it’s an opportunity, because I think there’s a policy road map for how to create jobs for and integrate young people into society and make them productive assets to help lift economies. I firmly believe that events right now can be seen as putting the region on a more positive trajectory. The ways in which young people today are motivated and connected and networked and willing to move—and have the freedom to move—across borders to pursue their goals is going to be a factor that all governments, East and West, are going to have to take into account.

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**Freelance journalist and author Tom Verde (writhah@gmail.com) is a frequent contributor who holds a master’s degree in Islamic studies and Christian–Muslim relations from Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. He has lived and traveled widely in the Middle East.**

**Robbie Bailey (www.baileyphoto.com) is a free-lance photographer, based in New York City, who specializes in environmental portraits. Her work has appeared in The New York Times and Time Out New York and been seen on “The Today Show” and “NBC Nightly News.”**

**How to Run the World: Charting a Course to the Next Renaissance.** Parag Khanna. 2011, Random House, 978-1400068272, $26, hb.

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Several articles in this edition of Saudi Aramco World focus on art. Two of them explore art that is being created and shown by artists in and from the Middle East. A third displays portraits made by photojournalism students in Bangladesh. The three articles provide opportunities to think about creativity—how and why people create, and where and why people view their creations. The activities in the Classroom Guide aim to help you explore these issues. It is divided into two themes: Making Art and Showing and Viewing Art. As you’ll see, the distinction isn’t always hard and fast, but breaking the material down into these two themes will give you a way to access it.

Theme: Making Art

Why do people create art? What is art’s purpose?

Before you read any of the articles, consider this question: What is the purpose of art? Take a few minutes to think about it. Then make a few notes, or write a few sentences with some answers to the question. Don’t worry: There are no right or wrong answers! You’ll be reading some articles that will address the question. But the reason for this activity is to see what you think now, before you read what others think. Once you’ve finished answering the question, have volunteers share their answers with the class, and have the teacher or another student write them on the board.

When you’ve got a good list, step back and think about the whole group of answers. What generalizations can you make about your class’s thoughts on the purpose of art?

Now turn to Saudi Aramco World to see how others address the question of why people create art. Read “Mideast Cool.”

As you read, highlight the sections of the article that answer the question “What is the purpose of art?” Divide the class into groups. Each group should have a piece of chart paper. Turn it sideways (landscape) and draw lines dividing it in thirds. In the left third, write the phrase “art for art’s sake.” In the middle third, write the phrase “art for art’s sake.” Now, what do you think “art for art’s sake” means? If you don’t know, do some Internet research to find out. Write your group’s definition of the phrase on the left side of your chart. In the middle section, write down the purposes of art that you highlighted in “Mideast Cool.” Discuss each of them with your group to be sure you understand them. With your group, role-play a conversation between someone who believes in art for art’s sake and others who believe in art for the purposes listed in your middle column. (Each person should take just one “purpose for art,” even though you may support several different purposes. By focusing on only one purpose, you can get clear on why someone would think that that purpose was the most important one.) After the conversation, make a few notes that identify which ideas about art’s purpose you agree with (if you agree with any of them) and why. Hold on to the notes. You’re going to have a chance to use them, but first you’re going to think even more deeply about why artists create art.

You’re going to do that by looking at art itself and then working backward. Consider the artwork on page 6, “Mother and I,” by Houria Niati. With your group, talk about your first impressions of the work: At first glance, do you like it? Why or why not? Then look more closely at it. Notice that it contains two layers. Who do you think the people are in the base layer photo? What makes you think so? What does the top layer consist of? In what ways are the two layers different? What effect do the two layers have on you as a viewer? How do you feel when you look at them? Getting back to the artist’s purpose, why do you think Niati made a two-layer piece? Why these two particular layers? Use your list of purposes to help you think about it. Then find the part on pages 7 and 8 where Niati is quoted speaking about her art. How does her explanation affect your thinking about the purpose of her art? Make any necessary additions to your list.

What is art anyway?

As you know, both “Mideast Cool” and “Doha’s New Modern” look at artists and the art they create. “Mideast Cool” identifies four characteristics of art by Middle Eastern artists. What are they? Read about each one. Then turn your attention to “Portraits of Commitment,” which has a somewhat different focus. Read Dick Doughty’s introduction. Who created the photographs and narratives (stories) that appear in “Portraits of Commitment”? In the introduction, circle the words or phrases that describe the creators of the portraits. Do you think that the work of photojournalist-storytellers is art? To get another perspective on that question, read “Setting the Scene,” which follows “Mideast Cool” on page 9. Looking back at your chart, the purpose of art might be “for art’s sake,” or it might be any number of other purposes named by the people you’ve read about. Let’s put the initial question “What is art anyway?” in a more specific way: Do you think there is a clear distinction between art and photojournalism? Why or why not?
Who makes art?
Now that you’ve thought about why people create art, think more about those creators: artists. Who are they? What characteristics do they share? What characterizes their vocation? “Midest Cool” quotes author Nat Muller’s description of the roles that Arab artists take on. Find the list and write it in the third column of your chart. Compare it to the list of reasons that people create art. Draw lines to match up the roles with the purposes. For example, artist-as-activist could match up with the purpose of art as “making statements about society.” If you can’t find a match, see if it makes sense to add (or subtract) from either list.

In what circumstances is art created?
Artists are people who live lives. In addition to creating art, they have to take care of such mundane matters as food and shelter. Some also have to deal with such difficult matters as living in exile or struggling with limitations in their homelands. Since you’re exploring the making of art, it’s worth thinking about whether such circumstances affect artists’ creations. For example, “Doha’s New Modern” says that “Baghdad under [the United Nations economic] sanctions [in the 1990’s] became a difficult place for artists.” In what ways do you suppose it was difficult? What very practical assistance helped the artists?

How might material support change the art that someone creates? Take big Hollywood filmmakers as an example. They have seemingly unlimited funds (relatively speaking) to do their work. Independent filmmakers, on the other hand, often have relatively little money. Bring in clips from different movies to share with your classmates. Make sure you have samples from both high-budget and low-budget films. Discuss: How can you tell which is which? Do you think these very different creative products can be compared to each other? Why or why not?

Take some time to pull together the work you’ve done on this theme. Write an essay that answers the question: What is the purpose of art? Use material from the three articles to support your answer. You may also want to use one or more of the artworks reproduced in the magazine, too.

Theme: Showing and Viewing Art
So far you’ve explored in some depth why artists create, what they create and the circumstances in which they create it. Now it’s time to look at how they display the art, and how and where we view it.

Why does it matter to people to have their art shown?
All three articles that you’ve read address, in one way or another, how artists feel about having their work displayed. In some cases, they know even before they begin creating that their work will be shown in a specific place, and often to specific kinds of people. Divide the class into groups of three, and assign each person one of the three articles. Reread your article, find parts that talk about showing art, and summarize them. (Probably the easiest way to summarize is to write a few sentences, but if you can summarize without writing anything down, that’s fine, too.) Share your summary with the members of your group, and listen as they share theirs. With the other members of your group, discuss this question: Do you think that knowing that their art will be shown affects artists while they are creating? To help you bring the question closer to home, think about doodling. When you doodle (say, during a class while the teacher is talking), do you think that anyone will see what you draw? If you think or thought your drawing would have an audience, would it affect what you do? How?

How important is the situation in which you look at art?
Find the part of “Doha’s New Modern” that describes Mathaf’s building. In addition, find the parts where people express their thoughts about that setting. Have you viewed art in a big, fancy museum? Write a journal entry that addresses these questions: How did you feel when you were there? Did the setting in some way enhance your experience of viewing the art? Did it in some way detract from your experience? On the other hand, have you ever viewed art in a small gallery? Or in an artist’s studio or house? How did you feel in those settings? Which kind of setting do you prefer? Why?

Another factor that affects the viewing of art is whether a viewer has a guide. Mathaf has tour guides who are local university students. “The idea is that if these 19-year-old and 20-year-old college students speak to teenagers, they’re more likely to listen," says Wassan al-Khudairi, Mathaf’s acting director. What do you think? Would you like art more if a person took you around? If so, why? If not, why not?

How do you look at art?
Now that you’ve explored the making and viewing of art, try your hand at actually looking at a work of art. Choose a work of art from one of the three articles. What do you like about the piece? What drew you to it (so to speak)? What, if anything, does it mean to you? Connect the piece to what you’ve read about the artist who created it. Does that affect your appreciation of it?
Current May
Jean-Léon Gérôme, the first major retrospective in 30 years to focus on the work of the 19th-century French painter and sculptor, displays a carefully selected group of some 70 works that cast new light on Gérôme’s oeuvre on the basis of research undertaken in recent decades. The exhibition will convey Gérôme’s theatrical concept of historical and mythological painting (his preferred genres), his use of a realistic idiom and the interest in detail evident in his orientalist works (based on highly detailed sketches made during his numerous trips, as well as on photographs), and his use of polychrome in his sculptures. The exhibition will also look at the artist’s use of illusionism and trompe l’œil, revealing the links between his paintings and new media of that time such as photography. It will also be shown at the Musée d’Orsay, Paris, and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, through May 22.

Told/ Untold/ Retold: 23 Stories of Journeys Through Time and Space presents new commissioned works from 23 contemporary artists with roots in the Arab world, including painting, sculpture, photography, video, multimedia installations and interactive digital art. Some works’ stories are “told,” evoking autobiographical accounts and nostalgia for the things that were. Other stories are “untold,” anticipating imagined futures that could be. And there are those that are “retold,” proposing an alternative narrative to the things that happened. The exhibition will also be shown at the Musée d’Orsay, Paris, and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, through May 22.

Events

Interventions honors and celebrates the lives and careers of five pivotal modernist Arab artists: Dia Azzawi, Farid Belkahia, Ahmed Nawar, Ibrahim el-Salahi and Hassan Sharif. As well as highlighting key moments in their experiments and oeuvres, the exhibition introduces five new works commissioned by Mathaf from the artists for this exhibition. These new works are presented alongside pertinent pieces from the museum’s permanent collection, providing a context which emphasizes the artist’s and the endurance of their discourse and cultural roles. Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar, through May 28.

West by East. Iranian artist Shadi Ghadirian explores in her photography the relationship between her homeland’s people and the social and cultural issues that have swept the nation. Queen Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, through May 30.

Mummies of the World presents 150 human and animal mummies and related artifacts from South America, Europe, Asia, China and Egypt, showing how science can shed light on the historical and cultural record and demonstrating that mummification—both intentional and by natural processes—has taken place all over the world. The exhibition includes interactive multimedia exhibits that illustrate how such scientific tools as computer tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, radiocarbon dating allow researchers to deduce facts about the lives, history and cultures of the mummies. Milwaukee [Wisconsin] Public Museum, through May 30, Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, June 18 through October 23.

Current June

Egypt in Stone, Egypt in Paper displays part of the rich collection of manuscript notes, graphic works recording the appearance of monuments, tracings of carved decorations and inscriptions, watercolors, prints, photographs and annotated clippings amassed by the great archeologist, Egyptologist and explorer Gaston Paris d’Avennes, who explored the shores of the Nile over 19 years in the first half of the 19th century. Unlike collectors of antiquities, he brought few objects home from Egypt, but those he did have are of the greatest historical importance. Musée du Louvre, Paris, through June 2.

New Cartographies: Algeria–France–Us brings together recent works by 10 emerging and established contemporary artists to explore Africa’s largest country and its complex relationship with Europe as Algeria heads its 50th year of independence. The show examines issues of diaspora, migration, memory and identity by investigating cultural and personal aspects of journeying across politically connected countries. Cornerhouse, Manchester [U.K.], through June 5.

Elizabeth Taylor in Iran features images of the late actress’s 1976 visit to Iran taken by Firouz Zahedi, today a successful Hollywood photographer but then a recent art-school graduate just learning his craft. Iran provided an exotic and engaging locale for Taylor to launch her global wanderlust and solidify her reputation at the height of her fame. For Zahedi, who had left Iran as a child, this was a reintroduction to his own country, which he experienced not only through the lens but through Taylor’s eyes. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, through June 12.

Motawi Tileworks showcases tile as both art and architectural decor, sheds light on the tile-making process and draws connections between the firm’s contemporary production and the Arab world’s tile-making tradition. Motawi Tileworks products are handmade in a studio in Ann Arbor, Mich., and, though Egyptian-American siblings Nawal and Karim Motawi have been producing them for less than 20 years, they are widely admired for their rich glazes and their Arts-and-Crafts-inspired designs. Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Mich., through June 12.

Cairo Dreams 2011. German–Egyptian artist Susan Hefuna exhibits aluminum sculptures and ink drawings dealing with fragility and vulnerability. Her work reflects her experience between cultures, dealing with cross-cultural codes and constantly playing with what images mean and how they travel the mind. Third Line, Dubai, UAE, through June 16.

Shahnamah: Heroic Times: A Thousand Years of the Persian “Book of Kings.” This exhibition tells the stories of three men whose lives intertwined during the Middle East. Over a decade, the excavation team unearthed around 450 textile fragments from late antiquity, as well as complete items of clothing and head-dresses, blanket and cushions. While it was customary for other excavators at the time to cut out the ornamental features of textiles and discard the rest, thus destroying the ‘objects’ cultural-historical context, Schweinfurth preserved the items as completely as he could. Some 30 archeological textiles are on display, spanning the entire spectrum of clothing and uséd fabrics from late antiquity. In addition, the exhibition uses several of Schweinfurth’s ancient Egyptian finds as well as manuscripts, drawings and illustrated books to trace the explorer’s biography and examine the full range of his diverse researches. Bode-Museum, Berlin, through June 19.


Archaeologists and Travelers in Ottoman Lands. In the late 1800s, the University of Pennsylvania began excavating the ancient city of Nippur, located in present-day Iraq. This marked the first American expedition in the Middle East. Over a decade, the excavation team unearthed a remarkable collection of nearly 30,000 cuneiform tablets. This exhibition tells the stories of three men whose lives intersected during the Nippur excavation, as well as the story of the excavation. Osman Hamdi Bey, director of the Imperial Museum in Istanbul (now the Istanbul Archaeological Museum), was the gatekeeper for all excavations in the Ottoman Empire. Also an accomplished painter, Hamdi Bey created a painting of the excavations at Nippur. This painting, along with another Hamdi Bey painting in the Penn Museum’s collection, is featured in the exhibit. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, through June 26.

Current July

“No Equal in All the World”: Artistic Legacies of Herat from Herat: An exhibition at the National Museum of Iran celebrates the visual culture of Herat and Afghanistan. The artistic traditions developed in this region from the 1100s to the present day extend far beyond the modern boundaries of Afghanistan. Herat enjoyed acclaim as one of the great cultural centers of the Islamic world. In the medieval

Events & Exhibitions
period, it was renowned for its production of inlaid metalwork. In the 1400's, however, the city was lauded for the sophistication achieved in the visual vocabulary. European art developed not only the fantasies embodied in orientalist painting, but also looked eastward for a new aesthetic that might transcend western representation. In the 1500's, the region of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East witnessed the revival of classical styles, as well as the rise of the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt. The art of the Mamluk period is characterized by a return to the principles of medieval Islamic art, but with a greater emphasis on realism and naturalism. The exhibition includes over 150 objects used in a range of ritual and domestic contexts, with genres as varied and complex as the region itself—figurative wood sculptures, masks, figurative ceramic vessels, and elaborate bronze and iron weaponry—and how the historical and cultural connections of Nigeria can be “unmasked” through the dynamic relationships of its peoples and their arts. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, through July 24.

Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley showcases the Benue River Valley, one of the most significant and evocative regions in contemporary African art. The Benue River Valley is a region of Nigeria that has been a crossroads of cultural and religious interactions for centuries, and it has been a major international exhibition to present a comprehensive view of the art produced in the Benue River Valley, from some of the most agrarian, among the Yoruba and the Igbos, to more urbanized cultures—among the Hausa. Yet contrasting is the fact that the majority of the world’s people live in the countryside, and this fact has led to a reconsideration of the dynamic relationships of its peoples and their arts in the context of the African continent. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, through July 24.

Tents, Camels, Textiles of Saudi Ara- bia and More: An Exhibit of Bedouin Weaving shows pieces acquired by Joy Totah Hilden and Robert Hilden between 1982 and 1994 in Saudi Arabia and nearby countries. Initially, Joy Hilden says, “I simply loved the textiles I saw and wanted them. Then I began to realize that they were being sold because the owner had abandoned the nomadic life. It became clear not only that there are no maps, but that the techniques of spinning, dyeing and weaving were falling by the wayside as we saw the opportunity to create a collection representing aspects of Bedouins’ textile culture in order to pass on my love of the craft and what I learned from it to others.” Q 415-399-0355, 15444 Sepulveda Blvd., Mont- gomery Street, San Francisco, through July 29.

Dis(Locating) Culture: Contemporary Islamic Art in America showcases cases American Islamic artists, broadly defined, and aims to problematize stereotypes and challenge notions of cultural and religious homogeneity. A symposium to explore the issues suggested by the exhibition, keynote speaker Reza Aslan, will be held April 16 at the Warhol Museum. Michael Berger Gallery, Pitts- burgh, Pennsylvania, through July 30.

Contemporary Views: The Spirit of the East.

Captured Hearts: and Tillya Tepe (“Hill of Gold”), the location of the Oxus River and on the modern bor- der between Tajikistan; Bragman, a capital of the local Kushan dynasty, whose rule extended from the Oxus River to Iran; and Tillya Tepe (“Hill of Gold”), the location of Iran and Central Asia at the same time. The exhibition, the Amsterdam collection is presented more than 170 works of art ranging from opulent ceramic vessels from medieval Spain and miniatures from Iran and India. Many of these items entered the Amsterdam collection by chance, as trade goods or souvenirs, and reflect the historical ties between the Neth- erlands and the Islamic world. In the exhibition, the Amsterdam collection is presented more than 170 works of art ranging from opulent ceramic vessels from medieval Spain and miniatures from Iran and India. Many of these items entered the Amsterdam collection by chance, as trade goods or souvenirs, and reflect the historical ties between the Neth- 47
Zaha Hadid: An Architecture examines over three decades of the groundbreaking Iraqi–British architect’s work through a selection of projects both completed and in progress, with photographs, prototype drawings, sculptures, paintings, objects, and film, allowing visitors to fully enter the universe of Hadid. A graduate of the prestigious Architectural Association School in London, where she later taught, Hadid’s style is characterized by sharp corners and overlapping planes. Touted as the result of trade with Europe and Asia, bead, button, and fabric repurposing with seamless and joyful integration is a significant aspect of the exhibition. The house’s oldest parts date back to the 15th century, although in 1949 it was built on the ruins of the house of museum founder Charles Lang Freer in 1908. It includes more than 250 ceramics from China, Japan, Syria and Egypt and is defined to “points of contact” between Asian and American art: subtly toned pots in indescribable and monochromatic shades of green, gold, and brown. Freer Arabia, London, New York, intensifying their quests for what the Bombay Progressives termed “aesthetic order, plastic coordination and color-coordinated composition.” At the same time, they looked deeply into their own artistic heritage, learning from the first exhibition of Indian art in 1948 at Raj Bhawan and later from a position from ancient sites like the old city in Benaras and the temples at Kajuraho. Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, through June 1, 2012.

The Peacock Room Comes to America. A lavish dining room designed by James McNeill Whistler is reinstalled for the first time as it was in the home of museum founder Charles Lang Freer in 1908. It includes more than 250 ceramics from China, Japan, Syria and Egypt and is defined to “points of contact” between Asian and American art: subtly toned pots in indescribable and monochromatic shades of green, gold, and brown. Freer Arabia, London, New York, intensifying their quests for what the Bombay Progressives termed “aesthetic order, plastic coordination and color-coordinated composition.” At the same time, they looked deeply into their own artistic heritage, learning from the first exhibition of Indian art in 1948 at Raj Bhawan and later from a position from ancient sites like the old city in Benaras and the temples at Kajuraho. Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, through June 1, 2012.

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unprecedented quality and appeal, viewed through the universal lens of gift giving—a practice that permeates at the great Islamic courts not only for diplomatic and political purposes but also as expressions of piety, often associated with the construction or enhancement of religious monuments. Gift-giving was part of the social fabric of the medieval and late-medieval Islamic world as a signifier of power and an expression of political aspirations. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, June 5 through September 5.

Out of Place features four artists—Hair Sarkissian, Ahsam Shibli, Ion Grigorescu and Cevdet Erek—who explore the relationship between dominant political forces and personal and collective histories. The exhibition centers on urban spaces, architectural structures and the condition of displacement. Darat Al-Funun, Amman, Jordan, June 7 through September 29.

Paper at Work focuses on European artists’ use of paper from the 16th century to the present day. Known as “1000 Years of Paper” it was first manufactured north of the Alps—to the present day, considering colored papers; cut, glazed or layered papers; papers selected for effect such as recycled or crumpled paper; and transparent or lithographic paper. Musée du Louvre, Paris, June 9 through September 5.

To Live Forever: Egyptian Treasures From the Brooklyn Museum uses some 100 pieces of jewelry, statues, coffins and vessels dating from 3800 BCE to 400 CE to illustrate the range of strategies and preparations that the ancient Egyptians developed to defeat death and to achieve success in the afterlife. The exhibition explores the belief that death was an enemy that could be vanquished, a primary cultural tenet of ancient Egyptian civilization, and explains the process of mummmification, the economics and rituals of memorial services, the contents of the tomb, the funeral accessories—usually differentiated by the class of the deceased—and the idealized afterlife. Exhibits include the vividly painted coffin of a mayor of Thebes, mummies, stone statues, gold jewelry, vases and canopic jars. Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, June 11 through September 4.

‘Abbas: 45 Years in Photography features 133 black and white photographs and four audio-visual clips by acclaimed Iranian photographer Abbas Kiarostami. As a member of the Magnum agency since 1981, he has covered important political and social events. Through his photographs, which also depict the Iranian Revolution, he aims to show his dedication to the struggles within different societies of the world. National Museum of Singapore, June 18 through September 18.

Eight Artists in Yemen. At the invitation of the Yemeni Tourism Ministry, eight European artists—Philip Bramham and Charlotte Foster-Hall from the UK; Stéphanie Ledoux, Philippe Bichon, Charlotte Jaunee and Aurélië Pedrjas from France; and Eduardo Laborde and Daniel Alazar from Spain—spent three weeks in Sana’a painting and exhibiting. The resulting works reflect a rich trove of subject matter. www.rgs.org Royal Geographical Society, London, June 20 through July 8.

Coming July
The Art of the Writing Instrument From Paris to Persia. Every culture that cultivated the art of writing has found ways to reflect the prestige and pleasure of the craft through beautiful tools. Writing implements such as pens, knives and scissors, as well as storage chests, pen-cases and writing desks, are often fashioned from precious materials: mother-of-pearl, gems, imported woods, gold and silver. Often owned by statesmen, calligraphers, wealthy merchants and women of fashion, these objects highlight the ingenuity of the artists who created them and underline the centrality of the written word in the diverse cultures that produced them. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, July 2 through September 25.

The Use of the Astrolabe: A Masterpiece of 16th Century Illumination displays a scientific manuscript created between 1555 and 1559 by an unknown artist in Flanders. It explains the functions of this ancient instrument according to the teachings of the German astronomer Johannes Stöffler, presenting a geometrical and visual delight. Musée du Louvre, Paris, July 6 through October 3.

Inside the Toshakhana: Treasures of the Sikh Courts brings together some of the finest examples of Sikh art and heritage in public and private collections as a tribute to Punjab’s rich artistic traditions. The Toshakhana (treasury) in question belonged to the one-eyed ruler of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839). The “Lion of Lahore” amassed a magnificent collection of beautiful objects and works of art—jewelry, paintings, textiles, arms and armor—to form his unrivalled toshakhana. The exhibition focuses on objects connected with the Sikh court of Lahore generally and Ranjit Singh’s toshakhana specifically, which was dispersed a decade after his death. Brunei Gallery, Soas, London, July 14 through September 24.

Coming October
In the Kingdom of the Alexander the Great: Ancient Macedonia retracts the history of Alexander’s homeland from the 15th century BCE to the Roman period, presenting more than 1000 artifacts from museums in northern Greece and from northern archaeological digs, particularly the Portal of the Enchanted Ones, a masterpiece of Greco-Roman sculpture. “People know that Alexander was Greek, but they don’t know that he was also Macedonian, or that Macedonia is in Greece,” says the Louvre’s director of Greek antiquities. “The exhibition presents an opportunity for visitors to rediscover Alexander in the light of his origins.” Musée du Louvre, Paris, October 3 through January 2.

Lost and Found: The Secrets of Archimedes. In Jerusalem in 1229 CE, the greatest works of the Greek mathematician Archimedes were erased and overpainted. In the year 2000, a team of museum experts began a project to read these erased texts. By the time they had finished, the team had recovered Archimedes’s secrets, rewritten the history of mathematics and discovered entirely new texts from the ancient world. This exhibition tells the story. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, October 16 through January 1.

God Is Beautiful; He Loves Beauty: The Object in Islamic Art and Culture is a three-day symposium whose keynote speaker will be Paul Goldberger, the Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic and writer for The New Yorker, who will discuss the Museum building, designed by I. M. Pei, as a work of Islamic art in its own right. Other speakers, each presenting a paper on a work of art in the Museum’s collection, include curators, art historians, academics, researchers, archeologists, independent scholars and calligrapher Mohamed Zakariya. This fourth biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art is free and open to the public. www.islamicartdoha.org, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar, October 29–31.

PERMANENT/ INDEFINITE
The Saudi Aramco Exhibit relates the heritage of Arab-Islamic scientists and scholars of the past to the technology of today’s petroleum exploration, production and transportation, set against the background of the natural history of Saudi Arabia. Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Information is correct at press time, but please reconfirm dates and times before traveling. Most institutions listed have further information available at their Web sites. Readers are welcome to submit information eight weeks in advance for possible inclusion in this listing. Some listings have been kindly provided to us by Canvas, the art and culture magazine for the Middle East and the Arab world.