National Arab Orchestra Hits the Right Notes
Written by Piree Keating
Photography and video by Ryan Garza

Backed by Arab-music virtuosos from around the country, the 20 world, the middle easterners stole the show—and the audience's hearts—at the National Arab Orchestra's recent performance. “Here is an authentic and meaningful portrait of Delta and its cultural music,” says видит kita van Dusen.

A decade and a half of national efforts in the region in contemporary arts, photography with the help of middle east and jockeying one of its biggest waves.

the multi-sectorive, a series of performances, film screenings, talks, workshops, publications, conferences and other special events at the Museum of all contemporary and other cultural institutions and organizations, so many artists give form to the question of what is a museum, the loca- tions in Montreal, Quebec, this annual festival is celebrated in the city to examine how contempo- rary art is manifested and public spaces throughout the world. Performers will be joined by artists, writers, directors, architects and designers in the scenic town of Provence, France, on the edge of the Cote d’Azur.

The world of the Middle East

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Amid a decade of unprecedented creativity in the region's contemporary arts, photographic artists and instrument playing.

The Middle East’s New Lenses
Written by Simon Bowcock

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This aerial view shows how newly born vertical access shafts, adjacent to old ones, can help keep centuries-old structures from collapsing, or again, in working order. Along a parallel main, access shafts have been protected against surface erosion by barriers created by a bulldozer. Photo by George Steimmetz.

Saudi-Arabia, the energy company from an international enterprise more than 80 years ago, distributes Saudi-Arab World to more than 100,000 households around the world. The magazine's goal is to broaden knowledge of the culture, history, geography, art, and music of the Arab and Muslim worlds, and their connections with the West. Saudi-Arab World does not publish, nor sell, nor in any manner distribute, nor provide access to material that, in the sole discretion of the editor, is obscene, or violative of any law, or which in the sole discretion of the editor, is offensive to any nation, religion, or group.

World of the Muslim (Muslim) Worlds
A new permanent exhibition at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar, introduces a great range of Islamic art. The exhibit opens October 22 through March 23.

Jerusalem Sheik Wajdi encompassing ex- hibitions, film screenings, performances, talks, and workshops will showcase an array of Palestinian and international art, presented in theSheik Wajdi in various indoor and outdoor venues. Jerusalem, October 23 through November 7.

Adobe Restoration Project, inspired by the renowned late Egyptian archi- tect Hassan Fathy and necessitated by damage from unusually heavy rains, Adobe Alliance offers work-and-stay seminars devoted to adding beauty and maintenance, with an emphasis on the restoration of historic buildings and sites as well as the ancient Egyptian pyramids themselves. Participants will be joined by artists, writers, directors, architects and designers in the scenic town of Provence, France, on the edge of the Cote d’Azur.

Lenses
The 34 residents of Bahrain. Photo

Shafts, adjacent to old ones, This aerial view shows how contempo- rary art is manifested and public spaces throughout the world. Performers will be joined by artists, writers, directors, architects and designers in the scenic town of Provence, France, on the edge of the Cote d’Azur.

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Amid a decade of unprecedented creativity in the region in contemporary arts, photographic artists and instrument playing.
The Quiet Muslim Heroes of World War II
Written by Omar Sacirbey

In 1943, Noor Inayat Khan gave her life as a British spy in Nazi-occupied Paris, and in Albania, Muslims hid some 2500 Jewish refugees. Each story glimpses Muslim heroism during World War II—stories little known to historians until recently—and each is the subject of a new film: Enemy of the Reich and Besa: The Promise.
SOMETIMES, A SONG CAN CHANGE A LIFE OR, IN THIS CASE, 20 LIVES. ON MAY 31, AT THE HISTORIC MUSIC HALL CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS IN DOWNTOWN DETROIT, MICHIGAN, BEFORE A FULL HOUSE AWAITING THE ANNUAL CONCERT OF THE NATIONAL ARAB ORCHESTRA (NAO), MUSIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL IBRAHIM STEPPED UP TO MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT. LAST FALL, HE EXPLAINED, THE ORCHESTRA WAS AWARDED A GRANT FROM THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION TO START AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM CALLED BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH MUSIC. THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM, HE ADDED, IS TO TEACH ARAB MUSIC IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT SERVE LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS.

WRITTEN BY PINEY KESTING | PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO BY RYAN GARZA

NATIONAL ARAB ORCHESTRA hits the
Tonight you will be hearing the product of this inaugural program with these fine young students from the Woodward Academy,” said Ibrahim as he turned to face his chorus: 20 fourth- to eighth-graders standing, self-consciously, on risers behind the musicians. Most had never performed on any stage, let alone sung with a professional orchestra. Ibrahim raised his baton, and the students burst into a spirited rendition of “Zuruni,” a classic ballad from Lebanon, which they sang entirely in Arabic. The audience erupted in applause and rose to give the students a standing ovation throughout their performance. For their second number, they sang Pharell Williams’s contemporary hit “Happy” using Ibrahim’s arrangement for Arab instruments as well as the students’ own hand and dance moves.

“I was about to cry when they sang,” recalls Sachi Yoshimoto, a Los Angeles-based violinist who has played with the nao since 2012. “Their performance was an inspiration and touched everyone in the audience as well as in the orchestra.” Noting her own Japanese heritage, she adds that “witnessing African-American school kids skillfully and joyfully sing ‘Zuruni’ made me proud of studying Arabic music and of keeping the heritage alive as a non-Arab musician. This type of cross-cultural exchange is precisely the reason why I joined the orchestra.”

Percussionist Sam Parsons believes that the dynamic performance “was one of those experiences that define people.” A jazz musician by trade, he has performed with the nao since 2011, when he was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. “When the Woodward Academy students walked on stage, it rekindled the exact same electrifying feeling I had the first few times I played with the orchestra,” he says. “They were amazing.”

The stories behind both Building Bridges through Music and the nao itself begin with Michael Ibrahim. A Syrian-American, born and raised in Sterling Heights, Michigan, Ibrahim, 30, began studying the ’ud, or Arab lute, at age 10, and he soon discovered a passion for classical Arab music. In 2009, while a student at Eastern Michigan University, he formed his first ensemble, a takht, or traditional Arab chamber group, of seven student musicians playing the ’ud, violin, qanun, riqq and nay (Arab zither, tambourine and reed flute, respectively). That same
year, he started the Michigan Arab Orchestra, which by 2011 comprised not only the takht, but also an Arab community choir he had founded. Victor Ghannam, a well-known Arab-American musician who often composes music for television, played with Ibrahim from day one. “It went straight to my heart,” says Ghannam. “What’s better than preserving our heritage?”

In January, the orchestra renamed itself the National Arab Orchestra to reflect both its focus on education and its national presence. On January 24, it held its premier performance under the new name in the Atlanta Symphony Hall in Georgia. Violinist Katie van Dusen regards the new name as “a better reflection of our current identity, because musicians come from all around the country and sometimes the world to join us.”

One of them, Austin, Texas-based composer and violinist Roberto Riggio, says the orchestra gives him the opportunity to grow as a practitioner of Arab music while at
the same time “it’s also great to see that the NAO is making an intentional effort to step forward and declare cultural exchange an explicit purpose.”

“When I first started this orchestra five years ago, it was my goal from the beginning to have a full-time professional orchestra and to also build a school for Arabic music,” explains Ibrahim. “We don’t have that, we need it and we can sustain it. If the Arab arts and our culture are going to be saved,” he adds, “it will be done here”—meaning in the US. “We need to preserve this music and bring it alive again.” As an accomplished musician himself, and with a rising reputation as an innovative musical director, it’s been easy for Ibrahim to attract skilled, diverse and passionate musicians; however, he admits it was harder to hit the right notes when it came to building and funding an educational program. “Musicians are usually not good business people,” he confesses.

Enter Moose Scheib, a young 34-year-old Lebanese-American entrepreneur based in nearby Dearborn. A graduate of Columbia University Law School, Scheib founded Mizna Entertainment, which in 2007 produced the first Arab-American comedy shows in Michigan. Aged seven when his family immigrated in the late 1980s, Scheib didn’t listen to much classical Arab music until he sat down at his first Michigan Arab Orchestra concert. Then, he says, he fell in love with it.

“I like connecting people. I’m a bridge-builder by nature,” says Scheib, who led the incorporation of the NAO. “Music is an important way to connect.”

According to Scheib, some 70 percent of Detroit’s urban-core schools lack music educators. “The fact that kids can’t be exposed to music in a city known as the home of Motown is just terrible!” he exclaims. “The arts are an integral part of being human and connecting with others, especially when you don’t speak their language.” Early last year, Ibrahim, Scheib and NAO board member James Cline began to brainstorm about starting an Arab music after-school program, and later in the year, based on a proposal led by violinist van Dusen, the NAO received a Knight Arts Challenge grant for $100,000. “The Building Bridges through Music program is where we start,” says Ibrahim. “It’s like laying that first cornerstone.”

When Woodward Academy’s after-school program director, Marsae Mitchell, heard about Building Bridges through Music, she was eager for her school to be its first host. Woodward, she explains, is a “Title I” school, meaning that all of its students come from families living at or below the official poverty level. Funding for after-school programs is scarce to non-existent.
“I love to see the children having an opportunity to experience another culture, especially knowing that a lot of them don’t even have a chance to leave their side of town in Detroit,” comments Mitchell, whose own degree is in the performing arts. “To see them learn a different language and learn about different music instruments is awesome.”

She notes that even in diverse Detroit, most of her students had never met anyone of Arab heritage. She chuckles when recalling that one of the first questions the kids asked Ibrahim was whether or not he ate at Burger King, and their surprise when he replied that yes, he did.

Starting in October with 20 students from fourth to eighth grade, selected from among Woodward’s student body of 700, the program met weekly in classes taught by Ibrahim using a curriculum designed by NAO double bassist Maggie Hasspacher. It was difficult at first, says Mitchell, who also assisted in the classes and supervised an additional weekly practice. “The students weren’t enthusiastic about singing in a language that they didn’t understand, or being exposed to a culture they weren’t used to,” she says. Some of the parents, too, were anxious, uncertain about the value of the program.

According to Hasspacher, Ibrahim, too, needed time to adjust. “He had never taught in an inner-city school, and he had no clue what he was getting into,” she notes with a laugh, adding that he had never taught children before. Ibrahim agrees. “They didn’t know how to sing, let alone speak another language, let alone know anyone outside their own circle,” he says. In January, Hasspacher began to lend support by co-teaching, and she and Ibrahim put together a curriculum that integrated Arab and western music for a two-
Every week, the students practiced the Arabic lyrics to “Zuruni,” learned a few basic Arabic words and were taught how to recognize some musical notes. Ibrahim introduced them to the ‘ud, the qanun and the nay; he exposed them to his own background and culture. By mid-May, the students knew all the words. They were ready.

Cheyenne Williams and Jaya Pullen, both in seventh grade, say they enjoyed the class and that they would do it again if they could. Cheyenne says she plans to major in music education in college, and she liked being able to sing every week. “It was really interesting to sing in a new language, and it makes me want to learn more about the Arab language and the culture,” she adds.

“There is something about music that breaks down barriers,” observes Woodward Academy superintendent William Jackson, who praises the program that “exceeded my expectations.” Arts, he says, “bring in the right-brain element. Instead of putting our kids to sleep, let’s expose them to things that liven them up, like music and dance.” Indeed, as the night of the performance came near, the school’s survey of test scores for the Building Bridges through Music students showed overall improvement in their math and reading grades.

On the night of the concert, Jackson, Mitchell and many other Woodward teachers, staff and parents attended. “The kids really made me proud,” exclaims Mitchell. “Not only was the concert excellent, but they sang beautifully, and they were wonderful representatives for Woodward Academy.” What pleases her as much as their performance is the shift in their attitudes. “At the beginning of the program, they were not at all interested in singing in Arabic,” she recalls, “and now they are talking about wanting to come back and sing again.”

“I loved the sense of accomplishment and joy I saw in the kids as they performed,” comments van Dusen. “I was sitting in my chair on stage wishing everyone could understand how cool it is that we have a choir full of African-American kids performing with an Arab orchestra for this audience in downtown Detroit. Here is an authentic and meaningful portrait of Detroit and its musical culture presented in a way that facilitates relationships across cultural boundaries.”

“The program was a huge success, and it opened up a fraction of the world to [the students],” says Ibrahim. “In the beginning, they started off kicking and screaming,” he recalls. They thought Arabic “was weird because it was a different culture and something they hadn’t experienced before. Once they performed in the concert, all of them wanted to do it again. They loved it, and they really felt good about themselves after being up onstage.”

The students weren’t the only ones feeling good. Reflecting on his own youth, Ibrahim says he “had a lot of people telling me ‘you can’t, you won’t, you shouldn’t.’ The philosophy that helped me get out of my rut is what I tried to teach the kids every week. I told them, I started off just like you, and I’m the proof that you can do anything you want as long as you are willing to work hard for it.” And that, he believes, would be the best note any of them could hit.

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nationalarborchestra.org

Video:
Amid more than a decade of rapid growth of Middle Eastern contemporary art, photographic art has led the way.

THE MIDDLE EAST’S NEW LENSES

WRITTEN BY SIMON BOWCOCK
To many, the phrase “photography from the Middle East” has generally meant little more than news images from conflict zones. This limiting perception has changed markedly over the last decade, as photographic art from the Middle East and North Africa has become one of the brightest new stars in the contemporary art constellation.

Although its roots go back much farther—arguably to the very beginning of photography itself—the entry of Middle East contemporary photo-art onto the world stage can be dated to 2004, when the prestigious annual Noorderlicht photography festival in the Netherlands devoted itself to the Arab world with an exhibition called “Nazar” (“Look”). While at the time it may have appeared as a one-off, boutique-theme show, it planted the seeds for a flowering of interest in photographic art both inside and outside the Middle East that matured alongside other media in contemporary art.

In 2012, London’s Victoria & Albert Museum mounted “Light from the Middle East,” a survey of more than 30 photographers from the region. The following year, Liverpool’s Look Festival put on “I Exist in Some Way,” a significant exhibition of Middle East photography, while in the US, Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts exhibited “She Who Tells a Story,” the first major show of women photographers from the Middle East.

Most recently, in March, the biennial FotoFest in Houston showcased photographic art by 49 artists from the Arab world, one of the largest exhibitions of Arab art of any kind. It was especially notable for showing 12 artists from Saudi Arabia, now one of the fastest-growing photo-art scenes in the region.

In addition to these high-profile shows, group and solo exhibitions of Middle Eastern photo-artists have become almost commonplace in public and private galleries around the world. But why is contemporary photographic art from this part of the world commanding such attention? To find out, I sought insights from six of the region’s most prominent photographic artists as well as art-world experts. 

LALLA ESSAYDI was one of the stand-out exhibitors at the 2004 “Nazar” show, and today she is one of the most successful artists working in any medium from the Arab world. Her photographs are held in dozens of major public and private collections. In common with many photo-artists from the Middle East and North Africa, Essaydi has an in-depth, lived experience of the broader world beyond the region.
“My work has involved a long and ever-deepening exploration into what constitutes my own identity as an artist, a woman, a Moroccan and someone living in the 21st century, where a certain degree of cultural nomadism—I now live in the West—has become in a sense the norm,” she says.

Essaydi also has extensive knowledge of global art history, and as well as being about her own cultural identity, her images respond—at time subtly and at other times pointedly—to centuries of western Orientalists who frequently eroticized their depictions of Middle Eastern women.

“My work reaches beyond Islamic culture to invoke the western fascination with the veil and, of course, the harem, as expressed in Orientalist painting,” she says, adding that many of her photographs are the products of elaborate scene-staging that can take months to construct.

The rise of Middle Eastern photo-art, she offers, is a product of “global nomadism and global modernization, technology and social media,” and “perhaps it is because of the recent unrest in the Middle East that its art is becoming more popular, driven by artists’ desire to show a global audience their interpretation of what is really happening there, as well
as a reflection of audiences who are increasingly keen to understand the region from a new angle.”

Youssef Nabil, born in Egypt but, like Essaydi, living in the US, was also one of the “Nazar” show’s leading lights who has since earned world renown. He has mounted on four continents numerous solo exhibitions of his traditional black-and-white photography that he colors by hand using antique methods. At the beginning of his career in the early 1990s, while still living in Egypt, Nabil was heavily influenced by his homeland’s cinematic tradition, which is the most prolific in the Arab world. By contrast, his more recent subjects have tended to come from farther afield, though they often retain a connection to cinema, such as his recent portraits of French actresses wearing a *hijab* (headscarf).

Nabil points to the Gulf countries as major drivers of the new global visibility of contemporary Middle Eastern art, including photographic art. “Suddenly, with Dubai’s economic boom around 10 years ago, they just helped create this channel, putting Middle Eastern artists on the map, attracting viewers at art fairs, at auctions. It was through Dubai first, then afterwards Abu Dhabi and Qatar with the museums and collections. They are giving artists from the rest of the region a window to show their work.”

Aside from this boost, Nabil also feels that the region’s time, artistically speaking, had simply come. “It was about time that the world knew about art from the Middle East,


Photography and Photographic Art

Photography, a word associated with an image produced by a camera, has struggled with recognition as an artistic medium since its invention in the 19th century. Now more than ever, artists use photography as only one of what may be several media components in an artwork. These multimedia practices make “photographic art” and “photographic artists” useful new terms.
the same way they knew about Chinese art, Indian art, Latin American art,” he says. “It just made sense. It seemed to be time to acknowledge the artists of this region.”

Given their global popularity, it is perhaps no surprise that both Nabil and Essaydi featured in the Victoria & Albert’s 2012 show, which also included non-Arab photographic artists from the region, such as the widely exhibited MITRA TABRIZIAN, currently a professor of photography at the University of Westminster.

“Having been born in Iran and educated in England, going back and forth has given me the advantage of observing both cultures from an outsider’s point of view,” she explains. “Belonging neither here nor there provides a sense of detachment, as well as engagement, and thus perhaps a different understanding.”

Made in both England and Iran, Tabrizian’s work contains a good deal of social commentary, and she cites intellectual as well as artistic influences, from the noted British writer, artist and photography-theorist Victor Burgin, under whom she studied, to the French philosopher and critical theorist Jean Baudrillard and the German polymath Berthold Brecht. If viewers cannot always tell where her images were made—“East” or “West”—that is fine with her, even to her point. Of her series titled “Another Country,” which focuses on a Muslim community in London, she says, “It was received very well, and the audience was confused whether this is East or West.”

Tabrizian believes that the rising profile of Middle Eastern photographic arts has complex causes, including the confusion, or “the inability to understand the political situation,” that results in “interest in the artists from that region and how they may interpret or view life.” She also has a more pragmatic hypothesis: “Since in the current atmosphere the market seems to be dictating contemporary art, the East is a new area of exploration and exploitation,” she says.

Her point on economics is readily echoed by Francis Hodgson, the photography critic for the Financial Times in London and a former head of the photographs department at Sotheby’s, one of the world’s leading auction houses. “Every sector has seen a lot more of the Middle East in recent years, from horse racing to banking to travel to a variety of other art activities,” he says. “The obvious reason is the money. In spite of its caricatured reputation as stuck-in-the-mud with colonialist values and pre-revolutionary class structures, the rich West is remarkably adaptable and flexible—you’d be astonished at how well tweed-clad persons from [western institutions] adapt to the Middle East when they’re after the money. Part of the payback is ‘taking an interest’ in local expressions of culture. The same is true of China, India, even Russia. Where there’s emerging money, there’s a lot more interest.”

Consequently, he says, some Middle Eastern photo-artists are all too mindful of this. “It may be that the center of gravity

of the art world is moving, as it periodically does. But I take that with a certain caution. The fact is that while a great deal of very interesting and high-quality photographic activity is now being generated in the Middle East or North Africa, it is still being generated for consumption mainly in New York and London and Paris. A great proportion of the ‘value’ of Middle Eastern contemporary art is only in fact validated by success in those older capitals,” he says.

“We have to see that there is such a thing as export art, art made to be appreciated in countries other than the countries of its origination.”

It is this very complexity that helped draw FotoFest co-founder Wendy Watriss to the region’s photo-art. “I find the work intensely intelligent,” she says. “I don’t think of it as mono-structural as ‘photography.’ Most of the artists in the...
[FotoFest] exhibition cross back and forth between many media—moving and still, two-dimensional and multi-dimensional. Like the work, these are artists of the world. Their work is multi-layered and informed by many different aspects of political, cultural and geographic history. It is sophisticated work.”

Saudi photo-artist ABDULNASSER GHAREM, whose complex works often involve photography as just one element, is exemplary of this sophistication. Now 41, Gharem taught himself global art history during his formative years. “The Internet appeared in the late ’90s,” he explains. “I started to educate myself from the beginning. In that time, a lot of wars happened in the region. And war affects artists. After the First World War, there was Dadaism, Constructivism; after the Second, the Fluxus movement. I found myself with an opinion, and I wanted to express it.”

These global movements have inspired Gharem to produce art that often speaks primarily to Arab viewers more than it does to western ones. This shows in his elaborate rubber-stamp paintings that often incorporate photographs. “In the Middle East, people suffer from bureaucracy,” he explains. “Nothing happens without the stamps.”

Gharem, who has exhibited at world-leading art fairs including the Venice Biennale and the Sharjah Biennial, has his own ideas about the current interest in photo-art from the Middle East. “After 9/11, the West and East are more curious to know each other,” he says. “You know why people like art? Usually people get their information about us through the media. But when people see artworks, they can get information from nation to nation. There is nothing in the middle. It’s a pure thing. No one is controlling the artist or his message.” In this regard, Gharem has invested in his beliefs, helping co-found in 2003 the artists’ organization Edge of Arabia, which has since become a leading voice for Saudi contemporary art.

Sophisticated, complex use of multiple media is evident also in the photographic art of Bahrain-based CAMILLE ZAKHARIA, who incorporates elements and materials such as layering, collage and calligraphy. Like Gharem, Zakharia appeared in both the Victoria & Albert and FotoFest shows, and he has mounted dozens of his own exhibitions in North America, Europe and the Middle East. His work, he says, “is introspective in nature. Having left my birthplace Lebanon about 30 years ago, the subjects of home, identity, belonging, sense of self and place remain dear topics.” For example, “Stories from the Alley” is a series he created in 1998 while he was living in Canada. “I had immense nostalgia for the Middle East, and Bahrain in particular. As I listen constantly to [classical Egyptian singer] Umm Kulthum, who is a source of inspiration, I incorporated several of her songs in the backgrounds.”
Photographically, Zakharia cites documentary photographers from outside the Middle East as his leading inspirations, including Eugène Atget, August Sander, Diane Arbus and Alec Soth. “As for my favorite movement,” he adds, “it is Dada, and Hannah Höch in particular.”

Much like Nabil, Zakharia thinks that the Zeitgeist and art infrastructure are propelling Middle Eastern photo-artists. “As the world is opening up to itself, I believe it is also time to discover lesser-known territories,” he muses. “Of course there are other more obvious reasons, including the opening of many galleries and museums in the Middle East and the Gulf states in particular in the last decade, nurturing the creativity of many artists.”

Like Zakharia and Gharem, Morocco-UK artist Hassan Hajjaj appeared in both the London and Houston shows, and he says he has “always been a big fan of all kinds of photography, historic and contemporary, but the photographers who have inspired me the most are Henri Cartier-Bresson, Malick Sidibé, Samuel Fosso, Robert Capa, David LaChapelle and Shirin Neshat”—a list that ticks off four continents of origin.

As with fellow Moroccan Essaâdi, the interplay of “eastern” and “western” elements is fundamental to Hajjaj, fueled by his sensitivity to the exotic “otherness” with which the outside world has tended to view his homeland.

“I first turned to photography more than 20 years ago after assisting on [European] photo shoots in Morocco,” he explains. “It felt strange to me that the landscape, cityscape and residents were, perhaps unintentionally, used as an exotic backdrop or props while all the models, clothes, magazine staff and readers were western. No one at the time was really focusing on us.”

His work has won wide popularity in part because his responses to this concern often indulge humor and a sense of play along with what might be more dryly called “social commentary.” In each series, he says, “I’ve wanted to show my Morocco—yes, old traditions still exist, but look at how modern and spirited and feisty the characters are!”

Living in the UK and represented by leading galleries there as well as in New York and Dubai, he sees the global interest in Middle Eastern photo-art backed by new regional art infrastructure and aided by the Internet and regional economic prosperity. “The talent was always there; it’s just that there wasn’t the infrastructure to showcase it,” he says. “You need museums, galleries, art schools, good shippers, good framers, good materials, good publications, magazines, newspapers, reviews, people with disposable income to buy art to support the artists. We take all this for granted in the West.”

This new regional art infrastructure, for a decade one of the most rapidly growing in the world, has seen new art galleries, museums, auction houses and art fairs, most visibly in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, but also in Saudi Arabia, where further showcases for contemporary art are in the works.
In the older western art centers, the greatest concentration of Middle Eastern photo-art is in London; in the Middle East, the top hub is Dubai, which recently has opened galleries devoted largely and even exclusively to photographic art. The newest is East Wing, whose director, Elie Domit, sees a growth in the general perception of photography from the region. “This awareness and curiosity is part of a shift in attention to a geographic area that has been somewhat shrouded in mystery,” he says.

Rose Issa, a pioneering London gallerist specializing in Middle Eastern contemporary art and editor of the 2011 book Arab Photography Now, holds similar views. “I’ve found there is a thirst for images from or about the region as few people today can very easily go to Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Tunisia, Egypt, Iran or Saudi Arabia, and, therefore, representation by artists from the area can bridge the gap,” she says. “Also, once a region is in the news, it is natural for the public to want to learn more about it, and the artist-photographers from the Middle East and North Africa all have a lot of unique and interesting things to say.”

Yet there are other, far more practical reasons, she explains: “In the last 20 years, photography in general—not just from the Middle East—has been popular with art galleries. The reasons for this are not only artistic, but also logistic: Photography is a medium that can easily avoid transportation costs. Photographers can send images by email or on a disc, so it is less costly to organize a show once you subtract shipping costs, and the size of the image can be adapted to suit your budget, therefore saving on framing costs.”

So it appears that the flowering of photographic art from the Middle East has had multiple seeds. Its time is here, fueled by new money and venues for showing and disseminating work, from museums and galleries and art fairs to online.

But perhaps the greatest factor is the increasingly global outlook of the Middle Eastern photo-artists themselves. By absorbing life, culture and art history beyond their regions of origin and through the lenses of both their cameras and of their own experience, they are putting their original stamp on the global art scene.

Simon Bowcock is a UK-based photographic artist who writes regularly about art for magazines such as Harper’s Bazaar Art and Eikon.

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Two and a half millennia ago, during his long, arduous journey home, the Greek commander Xenophon crested a mountain pass overlooking present-day Trabzon on the coast of the Turkish Black Sea. In one of the most dramatic moments of his epic narrative, he recorded how he was moved by the hurrahs of his 10,000 weary soldiers as they shouted, “Thalassa! Thalassa!” (“The sea! The sea!”), which would give them safe passage. Had they been considerably less homesick, they might have instead looked at the trees covering the hills and hurrahed, “Fındık! Fındık!” (Fuhn-duk)—and sat down for a picnic, fındık being the Turkish word for hazelnut or, as it’s often known in English, filbert.
or this is hazelnut country, a part of northeastern Turkey extending from Trabzon to Samsun, and especially covering the middle provinces of Giresun and Ordu. Altogether, this region grows 99 percent of the hazelnut yield in Turkey, which is 75 percent of the world harvest, amounting to some 750,000 tons annually with an export value of almost $2 billion. A large chunk of this volume ends up in everything from Nutella spread to Italian gelato, from Planters’ nut mixes to Godiva chocolates (the chocolatier was recently bought by a Turkish company with promises of making its bonbons even hazelnuttier).

Here one cannot escape the Corylus avellana tree, a member of the birch family that is said to have originated in China. During the spring, its feathery, newly burst leaves cover some 700,000 hectares (1.7 million ac) of hilly slopes, seemingly blanketing these Pontic Mountains with soft green velvet. In the fall, their leaves turn a uniform shade of yellow, a colorful harbinger of the snow that winters often bring right down to the edge of the sea. And it has been this way for hundreds of years—17th-century Ottoman tax records describe hazelnut orchards as dominating the landscape.

The local bus line is named Findik Kale (Hazelnut Castle). Nut-shaped kiosks sell nuts bagged and loose. Roadside vendors advertise taze findık (fresh hazelnuts), even out of season. Candy and ice cream bars both resound with the nut’s familiar roasted crunch—equally so whether sliced, chopped, ground or even kept whole as miniature nuts called pikola—which are under nine millimeters (3/8”) in diameter, about half the usual size.

Xenophon’s book, the Anabasis, is the first written record of these nutritious kernels, which he described as “the broad kind with a continuous surface.” He found the local Mossynoecians churlish for using them “in large quantities for eating, boiling them and then baking loaves of them,” which fattened the local boys, making “their flesh soft and very pale.” His battle-hardened Greeks, he noted tersely, soundly defeated this enemy tribe, “had their meal here and then marched on.”

Each August through September, hazelnuts are hand-harvested by both seasonal workers and local villagers along Turkey’s Black Sea coast. In Geçitköy, near Giresun, below, women pull nuts from low branches; men often climb into the trees to shake the limbs to drop nuts to the ground. Opposite: The steep hills of the Akbash hazelnut orchard, also near Giresun, make mechanical harvesting impossible. Moisture-laden winds off the Black Sea produce humid conditions that make the region ideal for the Corylus avellana tree, which produces hazelnuts.
Modern Turks still make bread from hazelnuts, but most often they grind them into flour for baking cakes, and of course there are the phyllo-dough pastries stuffed, in this region, with hazelnuts—not the pistachios nor almonds common elsewhere in Turkey. Those delicacies include everything from basic baklava to its myriad sub-specialties such as şöbiyet (cream-filled), bülbül yuvası (nightingale’s nest) and kocaman gerdani (giant’s nape), so named because the dough is bunched and wrinkled like the fleshy rolls on the back of a fat man’s neck.

Like all nuts, hazelnuts are rich in protein and key micronutrients, but with relatively higher levels of beneficial oleic acid than others. Because they are the fruit of trees rather than subsoil legumes like peanuts, hazelnuts do not contain the earth-dwelling toxins and irrigation-water-borne salmonella bacteria that frequently threaten other nut foods favored by children, who today increasingly suffer from groundnut allergies.

Scientists have long recognized this nut’s curative power. A contemporary of Xenophon, Greek physician Ctesias of Cnidos, mentioned hazelnuts in the Hippocratic Corpus, a collection of early medical texts. In the first century CE, Dioscorides prescribed its oil and milk mixed as a cough syrup in his pharmacopoeia De Materia Medica. The legendary pre-Islamic sage Luqman al-Hakim recommended taking hazelnuts with marzipan (sweetened almond paste) to fight anemia. Later, in the 11th century, the polymath Ibn Sina suggested its paste be applied to dog bites and scorpion stings. The Missouri Botanical Garden of St. Louis, which researches modern ethno-botanical medicine, suggests, however, that the nuts simply be “left for the squirrels.”

Trabzon factory owner Sinan Cirav is a third-generation hazelnut processor who also sells sweets and packaged nuts from a downtown storefront. His grandfather Ibrahim opened the city’s first mechanized hazelnut processing plant, and he sent its first exports to Germany. As Cirav explains, the family’s success has depended upon keeping in close touch with suppliers. This has allowed his business to keep pace within an industry where larger and larger players continuously enter. “I visit my suppliers in June, right in their fields,” he says, “to anticipate the size of their harvest and to reconfirm our contracts. A guaranteed supply in August is essential, when everyone is scrambling for the best product.”

Ahmet Keskinoğlu tends his family’s gaily decorated store on Trabzon’s main square, and its outdoor sign advertises Çifte Kavrulmuş (Double-Roasted). His son Lokman stands ready to take over the business, just as Ahmet took over from his own father 30 years ago. At night, the neon light flashes the word “findik” over and over, for all to see.

To further understand the place of hazelnuts in local food culture, visit the sweet shop Mëşbur.
After harvesting, hazelnuts are dried in the sun until the husks turn a crisp brown, at which point a vacuum-fed threshing machine separates the husks—which will be sold as animal bedding—from the nuts.

*Dila Ev Tatlıları* (Famous Dila’s Homemade Sweets), where six pastry makers crowd around a marble-topped table. Using up four 50-kilogram (110-lb) bags of ground nuts a week, they turn out 50 large trays a day of all manner of local delights—what they call *Trabzon burmalisi* (Trabzon roll). Thirty-seven-year-old Nurten Özcan is on her feet 10 hours a day, six days a week, rolling out the dough, five layers at a time, and generously sprinkling in the nuts as if she were sowing seeds. (And what does she do on her day off? “I don’t even own a rolling pin,” she says with a smile. “I only bake cakes.”)

Down the coast, just outside the town of Giresun where Xenophon may have tasted his first nut, Mustafa Şahin sits

Husked, the hazelnuts are bagged and transported. Some will be sun-dried for some 15 to 20 days, and others will be taken for immediate factory processing. Officially, 24 countries produce hazelnuts, a number that has nearly doubled since the 1970s, but Turkey far outproduces the others: In the early 2000s, it produced nearly 90 percent of the world crop; today it produces about 75 percent.
at his desk at the Keşap hazelnut cooperative. From here he oversees the fields of 120 orchard-men whose average holding is 300 trees. “Four hundred thousand Turkish families make their living directly from hazelnut farming,” he says, “so I feel a great responsibility to keep my members happy.” To maintain the European standards that allow for a brisk export trade, he keeps meticulous records of each farmer’s pesticide treatments, and he receives routine visits from inspectors.

One of Mustafa’s member farmers is 53-year-old Musa Sabırlı, who along with his mother, Binnaz, tends an orchard up the Harşid Valley in the village of Kiliçli. At 200 meters (655’) high, the steep, down-slope view takes in the near-shore island that Jason and the Argonauts are said to have landed upon in search of the Golden Fleece. In May, Sabırlı’s crop is just forming its tiny fruit cups as he wanders through his property, past the gravestone of his grandfather Hassan, with a sharp eye and an even sharper pruning hook.

In Turkey, hazelnuts do not grow on a single-trunked tree as they do in Italy, Spain and the state of Oregon in the US, but rather on a five- or six-branched shrub called an ocak (o-jak). Each shrub produces between one and a half and three kilograms (3.3-6.6 lb) of nuts, alternating years of high and low yields. The mature fruit forms in a three- to five-nut cluster that grows from a red female flower pollinated in January. The catkin, or male flower, grows six months later, at the time of harvest, which is why hazelnut trees here are said to be “always working.”

Giresun province, with about 61 million ocaks, is famous for the best-tasting and most useful nut variety, called tombul, or yağlı findık (oily hazelnut), because, in addition to the high oil content that gives it its flavor, it easily sheds its brown, papery skin during processing, resulting in a stark-white nutmeat prized by confectioners, especially those who use it to make white chocolate. Other varieties include the çakıldak, or gök findık (sky hazelnut), because it is hardy at 1000-meter (3200’) elevations, and it survives the worst winter conditions; kuş (bird); sıvri (pointed); uzunmusa (tall Musa); and a still-unregistered cultivar called Allahverdi (God-given), which is a naturally wind-pollinated hybrid.
Every part of the hazelnut is used. Its oil is good for high-temperature frying. Dried husks protecting the nut cluster are sold as animal bedding. The shells can be burned for fuel or pressed and glued to make artificial wood laminate. The branches themselves are used as garden stakes, or they can be split lengthwise and woven to make the pickers’ own traditional conical harvest baskets. A folk belief has it that its branches also can be used as divining rods to find water or even treasure.

Plant physiologist Gökhan Kızılcı is director of Giresun’s Hazelnut Research Station, established in 1936. He oversees hybridization studies among 400 varieties of Corylus avellana and a few specimens of the wild, single-trunked and thick-shelled Corylus colurna. Kızılcı’s main preoccupation is to understand why the older trees give alternating harvests of high and low yields: If the annual down-cycle could be stopped, harvests could almost double.

His scientists also pursue genetic improvements and pest-control studies, and his economists examine price subsidies and farm extension services. Student entomologist Ebru Gümüş does daily battle against gall gnats, green shield bugs, white butterflies, offshoot moths, oystershell scale and filbert aphids—each a sworn enemy of the hazelnut. Among its latest developments, the station is proudest of a new cultivar called Okay 28, which combines hardiness with high yield and is named not for a thumbs-up sign but rather for the station’s top breeder, Ali Nail Okay.

A visit to a modern hazelnut-processing facility is something like entering a high-security scientific testing site. At the Noor Company factory in Giresun, fingerprint readers open the bolted doors, and sterilizing misters decontaminate dirty hands after wristwatches are removed and before surgical-style caps and booties are donned. Everyone wears a white coat, even outside the laboratory where levels of moisture, fat, toxicity and acid in each batch of pre-roasted hazelnuts are machine-measured.
Lasers sort the nuts by size before they are run through the six-tons-per-hour roasting ovens with computer-controlled temperatures—170° Celsius (338 °F) for nuts bound for pastemaking, 130° Celsius (266 °F) for those for confectionery and lower settings for blanching those to be fully de-skinned. Then they are sent to milling and pureeing machines. Not all customers want skinless nuts, for the skin deepens the taste. Inspectors cast a final critical eye on the nuts as they move along the conveyor belt toward the packaging unit. All told, 14 million kilograms (31 million lbs) of nuts pass through here each year.

Plant manager Aydın Öztürk is responsible for quality control for the bulk of the Turkish crop destined for Europe. The Ottoman army may have been pushed back from the gates of Vienna 330 years ago, but the soldiers left behind their hazelnuts to give Linzer torte its unmistakable taste, and they since then have spread into all things sweet and even savory.

Hazelnut meal is often mixed with ground meat to give köfte balls a more complex, less cholesterol-fueled taste. Hazelnut flour is used for breading fried eggplant. A popular spreadable hors d’oeuvre here is a tangy mixture of hot red pepper and hazelnut butter.

The US market itself is set soon for a boost. According to studies recently carried out by the United States Department of Agriculture, US consumers eat, on average, only 226 grams (8 oz) of hazelnuts a year, whereas the Swiss, for example, eat more than 1.8 kilograms (4 lb) in the same period. But that disparity may not endure given the growing popularity of hazelnut-chocolate spread among American teenagers: New York’s Columbia University made headlines this year when it discovered that students were taking up to 100 pounds a week out of its dining halls, costing the university some $5,000 each week. The students might fairly claim hazelnuts as a study aid, as it is rich in vitamin B6, which promotes neurotransmitter synthesis, a process critical to the development of memory and brain functioning.

The Hazelnut Promotion Group, a trade organization representing the Black Sea and Istanbul Exporters Unions, recently published a cookbook originating from a series of international kitchen competitions. It included such standbys as baklava and hazelnut pudding, whose award-winning recipe comes from Giresun housewife Nuran Karaban.

Not all dishes, however, call for such quintessential Turkish ingredients as salep, ground orchid root, and güllaç, a Ramadán specialty of ready-made sheets of starch, flour and milk. Foods of foreign lands, from Italian gnocchi to Japanese sushi and Mexican tacos, stand out beside a recipe for this region’s
second most famous delicacy, called hamsi—fried anchovies dredged in hazelnut flour.

The great 17th-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi praised Trabzon’s hamsi and baklava to the hilt but never once mentioned findık, presumably because he visited in late winter, when the anchovies were running and well past the hazelnut harvest. Yet his description of men crazed for a taste of hamsi, to the point of jumping out of warm beds in the dark to go fishing in the cold, is echoed in enigmatic local sayings about findık such as: “I wouldn’t feed my dark-haired girl anything but nuts” and “I am the hazelnut worm for whom many a life is thrown away.”

New York-based Austrian chef Tomas Slivovsky supplies cakes to the Cafe Sabarsky at the Neue Galerie art museum, whose dessert menu wins high praise from countrymen who know their way around their Kirschtorte, Topfentorte and Zitronenschnitte. He explains why hazelnuts, and only hazelnuts, are essential: “When it comes to Austrian pastry-making, I am one to follow rules. My Sachertorte uses hazelnut flour because that is how the Hotel Sacher in Vienna makes it, and always has. And Linzer torte? Those who instead garnish it with almonds are breaking with tradition, to their loss.”

Dursun Gürsoy, chairman of the Promotion Group and president of the Gürsoy family factory in Ordu, thinks of himself as his country’s hazelnut ambassador to the world. His job is to increase the US market, which currently buys only 10 percent of Turkey’s export crop. He sees no problem that Oregon is also expanding its harvest. “Our nuts are better,” he says without hesitation and then cites another, no less obtuse Black Sea adage: “What doesn’t fit in a castle fits in the shell of a Turkish hazelnut.”

Hazelnut production in Ordu province alone amounts to almost half of the area’s total, so it is no surprise that Ordu University enrolls more than 100 students of nut science. Turan Karadeniz (whose surname means “Black Sea”) is dean of the School of Agriculture, whose focus is on trying to double the harvest of the region’s older trees.
A spring cold snap in 2010 reduced the hazelnut yield all over Turkey but especially at the higher elevations above Ordu, so Karadeniz’s team is now cross-breeding the cold-resistant çakildak with other varieties. Because hazelnut orchards in this part of the coast are planted on steep mountainsides, there are also problems with excessive rain runoff. The university is now testing whether the ash of burnt hazelnut branches, which butterflies tend to avoid, might be both a cheaper and more effective pesticide on steep terrain than chemicals.

Ripe hazelnuts fall from the branches over a 20-day period beginning in early August. The declivitous slopes of the Pontic Mountains allow little to no motorized equipment. Picking and collecting, therefore, is by the hands of Georgian and Kurdish day laborers who follow the

Pastry chefs in shops like Dila’s in Trabzon, above, use hundreds of kilograms of hazelnuts each week, which they scatter handful by handful, roll in thin dough, slice, sweeten and bake to make local dessert favorites.

In this shop in Trabzon and all along the Black Sea coast, hazelnuts appear in almost every conceivable form: shelled and unshelled; ground, roasted and minced; plain and candied, and more.
Sun-drying unshelled hazelnuts helps them develop the rich flavor that keeps worldwide buyers coming back to the Turkish varieties. Much like the Black Sea itself, hazelnuts sustain the life of the entire coastal region.

harvest from lower elevations to higher. One treat for the pickers is that other fruit trees in the nut orchards ripen at the same time, so pears, mulberries, medlars and cherries are part of the workers’ midday picnic.

Once gathered, the nuts are dumped onto concrete floors where vacuum machines separate out the husks. They are then rotated back and forth with long-handled, wood-toothed rakes (tirmik) to dry in the sun before being sent to de-shelling plants. From here the nuts are taken to processing factories like Noor, where they pour down huge, grated spillways, just as wheat and corn are unloaded at grain elevators in the North American farm belt.

At the other end of the factory floor, vacuum-sealed bags await shipment to 106 countries in lots large and small. An Egyptian company imports 37 tons a month. A 15-ton order from Germany, for blanched and skinned nuts used in ice cream, will likely be repeated several times before summer’s end, and it is ready for loading.

Such quantities can boggle the mind when one remembers how a hazelnut begins life as a dainty female flower, fertilized in midwinter by a nearly microscopic grain of pollen dusted off a drooping male catkin.

German artist Wolfgang Laib takes his inspiration from precisely this moment in time. He recently completed a site-specific, 5.4 x 6.4-meter (18’ x 21’) painting in the atrium of New York’s Museum of Modern Art using pigment of yellow hazelnut pollen precisely because it turns out to be eerily luminous. He first collected the pollen, flower by flower, from trees near his studio, and then he sifted it onto a horizontal canvas, much like a Tibetan sand painting—or a Trabzon pastry maker scattering her chopped hazelnuts onto a sheet of finely rolled phyllo dough.

Hazelnut pollen, Laib says, “is as simple, as beautiful and as complex as [the potential beginning of life].” After a bite or two of fresh baklava straight from the oven, the same might be said of the nut itself. 😊

A statue in a park pays homage to the hazelnut heritage of the city of Giresun, which, although it is smaller than Trabzon, proclaims itself the “hazelnut capital of the world.”

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This is unfortunate, because both tell stories that are fascinating, suspenseful and moving, and at the same time, they do public service by documenting virtually unknown histories with unexpected, unforgettable heroes.

*Enemy of the Reich: The Noor Inayat Khan Story* is a docudrama exploring the life of an Indian-American Muslim woman who became one of Britain’s least likely but most effective spies in Nazi-occupied Paris. *Besa: The Promise* is a documentary that tells the story of how countless Albanians, adhering to an ancient code of honor that bound them to shelter strangers in need, gave sanctuary to at least 2500 Jews.

While the characters in these films come from very different backgrounds, and the films are told in different styles, together they break new ground by portraying the stories of Muslim heroes during World War II.

Because the Holocaust was overwhelmingly carried out in Christian-dominated Europe, it is easy to forget that the Nazis and their allies extended their reach into North Africa and heavily Muslim Balkan regions of Europe, and that the people in those lands, too, were resisters and rescuers.

“At every stage of the Nazi, Vichy, and Fascist persecution of Jews in Arab lands, and in every place that it occurred, Arabs helped Jews,” wrote Robert Satloff, historian and executive director of the Washington Institute on Near East Policy in his 2007 book, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands*, one of the few historical examinations of the subject. Satloff found that although Arabs in Nazi-occupied Arab lands collaborated or stood by in roughly the same proportions as Europeans under Nazi occupation, many Arabs and Muslims spoke out against the persecution, and took public stands of unity with Jews, while others withheld the support that would aid the persecution efforts. “Some Arabs shared the fate of Jews and, through that experience, forged a unique bond of comradeship. And there were occasions when certain Arabs chose

It’s ironic that two recent films about secrecy are in some ways themselves secrets.

Albanian Muslims helped some 2500 Jews avoid Nazi deportation, and US-based photographer Norman Gershman’s portraits of the Albanians involved, and their descendants, led to *The Promise*. “This little country, doing what they did, they have something to teach the world,” says Gershman.
to do more than just offer moral support to Jews. They bravely saved Jewish lives, at time risking their own in the process.”

The roots of *Enemy of the Reich* go back to Alex Kronemer and Michael Wolfe, founders and producers at Unity Productions Foundation (UPF), who each, in almost the same week in 2010, was approached by different Holocaust survivors from France, each with stories about how they had been aided by Muslims. The stories were revelatory for both producers, neither of whom had ever heard of Muslim heroism during the war.

“Having both these conversations in such a short time, we felt the universe was speaking to us, and we decided to look into this further,” says Kronemer.

Soon, they found more stories. For example, Indian and Algerian Muslim soldiers both also fought in Europe, for the British and French respectively, while doctors at the Franco-Muslim Avicenna Hospital in Bobigny, France, treated American and other Allied soldiers. The French cabaret singer Simon Halali was one of a number of Jews given refuge in Paris’s Grand Mosque, where Muslims provided him with forged documents that changed his first name to Salim and identified him as a Muslim, a story recalled in the 2012 film *Les Hommes Libres (The Free Men)*, which remains available only in French.

While the filmmakers found several stories that could have made for strong documentaries, they pursued the story of Noor Inayat Khan because of her deep spirituality and her position as a woman.

“What made her compelling was that she had this inclusive humanity,” says Kronemer. “The Nazi ideology was opposed to everything she believed in, and she couldn’t sit on the sidelines.”

Filmed mostly in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., using actors from the local stage scene, *Enemy of the Reich* tells Khan’s story, interspersing segments from scholars and relatives. Academy Award-winning actress Helen Mirren narrates.

“I wanted to portray her because she was such a strong woman who showed such bravery and nerve, but she was also a young woman from unusual circumstances,” says Grace Srinivasan, the actress who played Khan. “She was half Indian and half American, like me, and I don’t often get to read or hear stories about people who look like me. Her story deserved to be told, and I was just excited to be a part of it.”

Khan’s father, Hazrat Inayat Khan, was a Sufi Muslim preacher and musician from India who in the years before World War I traveled to America to preach and teach. There, he met Albuquerque-born Ora Baker. They married and moved on to Moscow, where Noor was born in 1914. Shortly afterward, the family moved to London, and then to Paris, where a wealthy patron bought a villa for them on the outskirts of the city, a home that became known as Fazal Manzil, or House of Blessings. Visitors would come to hear her father, and young Noor soaked it all in during what she described as the most idyllic time and place of her life. But it ended tragically when her father unexpectedly died. Noor’s mother became paralyzed with grief, and Noor took over care for her younger siblings.

She went on to study at the Sorbonne, and she became a successful children’s writer, publishing both in children’s magazines and in a collection of short stories. In 1940, ahead of the
Nazi invasion of France, Khan and her family fled to England.

There, she joined the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force as a wireless radio operator. After the occupation of France, she was recruited by the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a covert unit created by Winston Churchill and tasked to get behind enemy lines to help local Resistance fighters.

British training records described Khan as idealistic, which her superiors saw as a liability. For example, she told them she refused to lie. The documentary also suggests that the negative reports may have been the result of prejudice against her dark skin and Islamic faith. But her radio skills were excellent, and SOE radio operators were desperately needed in France, where Nazi tracking trucks discovered them with ruthless ease. The average survival time on the job was six weeks.

In 1943, Khan was airlifted to a remote rural airstrip and smuggled into Paris carrying a radio in a case that looked much like a secretary’s typewriter. Her assignment was to support an underground Resistance network called Prosper with communications between London and local spies. But Prosper was soon betrayed, and most of its agents were arrested. Khan narrowly eluded capture for about 16 weeks, constantly changing locations, still sending messages to London even as the Gestapo trailed her with radio detectors. She was captured in October 1943, imprisoned and ultimately sent to Dachau concentration camp in Germany, where in September 1944, she was executed.

“I found the challenge to be balancing the light and dark of Noor’s story,” says Srinivasan. “She loved fantasy and make-believe, poetry and art, and almost lived in this imaginary world during her childhood. That side of her is so different from the tough person she must have been to go into France knowing she would probably die there and never giving up despite horrific circumstances. Finding a way to show her layered soul was interesting for me, and the documentary discusses both her fantastic and pragmatic sides.”

Besa—a word that literally translates as “promise” but whose meaning is deeper—began with us photographer Norman Gershman’s desire to document the legacy of Albanians who sheltered Jews during World War II. In 2002, on his first trip to Albania, which is today roughly 70 percent Muslim and 30 percent Christian, he was astonished at what he found: not just a few people who were exceptions in a sea of bystanders, but rather an entire country that worked to save Jews in accordance with the traditional code of honor known as Besa, which requires that the stranger in distress who seeks shelter must receive it.

When Gershman showed his photos to his friend and film producer Jason Williams, founder of JWM Productions and a specialist in cultural programming, the pair agreed that there was a movie that could be made.

“This film provides the testament of Muslims that the Holocaust happened, and just as significantly, it tells the story of Muslims who took right action in relation to the threat at a time when most Christians didn’t,” says Williams.

“This little country, doing what they did, they have something to teach the world,” says Gershman in the film. Indeed, Albania is the only country that came out of World War II with more Jews than before the war.

The documentary, however, is more than a look back. It inter-twines a suspenseful mystery and quest that unfolds in the present. Rexhep Hoxha was 17 when his father, Rifat, a pastry baker who was “born poor and died poor,” first told him how the Jewish
family of Nissim and Sarah Aladjem, with their 12-year-old son Aron, arrived at his store seeking help on one of the ‘ids (holidays) in 1943. The family had fled Axis-allied Bulgaria, which had enacted numerous anti-Jewish laws; Albania at the time was occupied by the Italians who, although allied with Nazi Germany, allowed Jews relative freedom. Rifat immediately closed the store and led the Aladjems to his home, where he gave them a room.

A few months later, the Nazis moved into Albania, and life became perilous for the Aladjems. They fled in 1944, and Nissim entrusted Rifat, by then a close friend, with three heirloom prayer books, which he intended to return for when Albania was liberated.

But after the war, Albania fell under the staunchest communist regime in the world, and it became one of the world’s most closed countries. Only after the communists fell in 1990 did Rexhep see an opportunity to fulfill his father’s wish that the books be returned at last to their rightful owners, which brought the two families together again after more than 70 years.

The Albanians providing refuge to Jews extended from the poorest peasants to the country’s king, Zog I, Europe’s only Muslim monarch, who in 1939 opened Albania’s borders to any Jews who wanted to come in and granted at least 400 passports and countless visas. Among those who came was the family of Johanna Neumann, from Hamburg.

They first stayed with a peasant family outside the Adriatic coastal town of Durres, but after the Nazis arrived, they moved in with the family of Njazi Pilku, an Albanian engineer who had studied in Germany, spoke German and had a German wife, Liza. Whenever the Nazis came to the door to inquire about who the Neumanns were, the Pilkus passed them off as cousins from Germany.

“The hospitality, the warmth, it was a wonderful thing,” says Neumann, who now works as an endowment associate at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

“That family put themselves at great risk. If the Nazis had found out that they were hiding us, we’d all have been killed on the spot.”

To honor their courage further, Neumann in 1992 nominated Njazi Pilku for inclusion at the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, where a dedicated hall honors “The Righteous Among the Nations,” non-Jews who rescued Jews during the Holocaust: Pilku is one of 69 Albanians commemorated there.

The Albanians also protected Italians who had been their occupiers yet who themselves became Nazi targets after Italy surrendered to the Allies. Neumann says that Roma (gypsies) also lived in Albania, and that they, too, were protected. “To the best of my knowledge, they weren’t deported,” she says.

“Our timing was fortuitous,” Williams says, noting that at least 18 of the 24 rescuers and rescued interviewed in the documentary have since died. “That’s why this work is so important. If we had not made this film, this record would not exist. There would be no history. This truth will have never been known,” he adds.

Hoxha, too, worries about the many stories that will be and already have been lost.

Many of the rescuers are not alive today. Certainly many stories will forever remain unlit,” he wrote in an email. “I myself learned much more from the filmmakers, rather than my own father. Also because of the modesty that characterized that generation.”

Released in 2012, Besa continues to be popular at film festivals, winning the Grand Jury Award at the 2014 Nashville Film Festival and best documentary at four film festivals in 2013. Commercial success, however, continues to elude it, and the filmmakers, and some of those who appear in it, worry that the film’s message is not getting out to enough people.

“This is my goal in life, to show the world that these people did this, and to show that the phobia that exists against Muslims is the result of people not knowing and not thinking,” Neumann says.

Enemy of the Reich has screened in about 25 cities to date, mainly at art house theaters, universities, music halls and museums, but it will premiere on PBS Tuesday, September 9.

The filmmakers behind both documentaries also want to see their work distributed to schools for use as educational materials.

“We believe in dialogue and in using film to bring people together,” says Enemy of the Reich co-producer Kronemer.

“And we believe this film can really make a contribution to the education of future generations of students, as well as a contribution to improving Muslim-Jewish relations.”

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besatthepromise.com enemyofthereich.com
From a distance, they might be lines of holes dug by giant gophers. Up close, usually beneath a sand-covered capstone at its center, each mound looks more like a well, its shaft just about large enough to scamper down into if you find the indentations on the walls for toe- and hand-holds. But most are so deep you can’t see the bottom. If you lean down and listen carefully, you might hear the water, far below, flowing.
THE WATER BELOW
From North Africa, Iberia and across the Middle East to Central Asia and northwestern China, these are qanats—subterranean aqueducts. Known by different names in different places, they all do the same thing: channel precious water from springs, lakes, streams and aquifers to low-lying fields in arid plains. Hand-dug and requiring routine, hands-on maintenance, they date back 3000 years, and many are still supplying farms and drinking water.

Growing food in arid regions has always been hard, risky work. Ever since humans first figured out how to cultivate crops more than 10,000 years ago, one of the biggest problems farmers have faced in lands with limited rainfall has been how to get enough water to their furrows.

In some lands, distant seasonal rains and mountain snowmelts flood rivers, and the runoff covers croplands. Such flooding happened along the Nile in Egypt for millennia, until that river was domesticated in modern times by the Aswan High Dam. Riverine flooding similarly fed Mesopotamian farmlands along the Tigris and Euphrates. In both regions, early engineers built elaborate systems of canals, channels and basins to regulate and conserve water.

Yet in these and other hot, dry lands, canals, channels and basins all face a common, elemental problem: evaporation. The blazing sun depletes surface water with merciless speed. So scarce and precious is the water that engineers devised a clever—if laborious—solution: shade the water in an underground tunnel sloped to allow gravity to move the water from source to thirsty farmland.

Just who dug the first qanats is uncertain. Although some researchers think they may have originated in the highlands of today’s Armenia, or perhaps in the mountains of Oman, the most widely accepted hypothesis points to the area commonly referred to today as Kurdistan—northwestern Iran as well as adjacent parts of Turkey and Iraq—in the early first millennium BCE, where subterranean water systems have been found in the mountains. Ancient miners worked these mountains, too, and they would have known much about building tunnels. Geographer and early water systems researcher Dale Lightfoot of Oklahoma State University asserts that it was from here that the know-how for these irrigation systems spread both east and west to lands that today are parts of some 35 countries.

In Iran and throughout Central Asia today, this water-management system is often called by its original Persian name, karez (or kariz), which technically is an architectural word applied to the small feeder tunnels that flow into a larger subterranean aqueduct. The Arab countries, including Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, call them qanat (channel), and this Arabic word has become the most common generic term for this type of irrigation tunnel network. In Oman and the United Arab Emirates, the word is falaj, which means “division” or “arrangement.” In North African countries such as Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, foggara is the common name; in Morocco it is khettara. And at the eastern extremity of their diffusion, in northwest China, among Turkic Uighurs the name is again back to karez, a reflection of its Persian roots as an import via the Silk Roads.

In Iran, most karez stretch five to 10 kilometers (3-6 mi), but some go on for more than 70 kilometers (44 mi). Perhaps
as many as 20,000 remain in use, totaling some 275,000 kilometers (171,000 mi). Many of them are in the vast Iranian Plateau, a geological feature extending some 2000 kilometers (1250 mi) from the Zagros Mountains in the west to the Indus River valley in the east with an average rainfall of only about 15 to 25 centimeters (6-10") each year. As late as the mid-20th century, the karez delivered up to three-quarters of Iran’s entire water supply.

In all places, the cross-section of a qanat tunnel is usually about one-and-one-half meters (5') tall and one meter wide—just enough to be dug and maintained by hand. The vertical shafts usually are spaced some 50 to 100 meters (164'-330') apart, and they connect to the water-bearing tunnel at depths of 10 to as much as 100 meters (32'-330').

Modern qanats are still constructed much like those of antiquity: Specialized diggers, in Arabic called muqannis (channelers), excavate first the vertical shafts, hauling dirt and rock up to the surface in buckets. If luck is with them, they will reach moisture at about 15 meters (50'), but they may have to dig much deeper. Eventually they begin work on the horizontal shafts, whose slope is determined by a surveyor.
Sometimes, when the soil quality is unstable, the muqannis may reinforce the shaft, tunnel or both with baked clay or stone. It is dangerous work. It is traditional for a muqanni to say a prayer before entering a shaft, and some will refuse to go underground on a day that is for any reason viewed as unlucky.

One of the earliest written records of qanat-building dates back to the eighth century BCE, and it was found in Assyria. It recorded that Assyrian king Sargon II, while on a military campaign in Persia, reported finding there an underground water system near Lake Urmia, in the northwest. Sargon’s son Sennacherib, ruling in the seventh century BCE, adopted Persian techniques to build karez near his capital Nineveh and also at the city of Arbela.

In 525 BCE, the Persian Achaemenids conquered Pharaonic Egypt. Not many years later, the Persian king, Darius I, asked the Carian Greek explorer Scylax of Caryanda to build a karez system 160 kilometers (100 mi) west from the Nile Valley through the Libyan Desert to Kharga Oasis, which was one of the major stops on the lucrative caravan trade route known as darb al-arba’in (Forty Days Road). The late scholar H.E. Wulff noted in 1968 in Scientific American that “remnants of the qanat are still in operation” and, he speculated, this technology “may well have been partly responsible for the Egyptians’ friendliness to their conqueror and their bestowal of the title of Pharaoh on Darius.”

Later, trade and conquest served as a catalyst for the further expansion of qanat technology both east and west. Roman civil engineers employed qanats in conquered lands where their signature aqueduct technology proved unsuitable. For example, in Jordan, the so-called Gadara Aqueduct, which is a Roman structure unearthed about a decade
ago, is not a true aqueduct, but rather a subterranean water tunnel—a qanat—and at 170 kilometers (105 mi), it is the longest such tunnel of antiquity. The Gadara system, also known as qanat firaun or “Pharaoh’s Qanat,” was constructed after a visit by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in about 130 CE, and it partly follows the course of an earlier Hellenistic tunnel. The Roman version appears to have been unfinished, although it was put into service in sections.

In North Africa, the earliest qanats date from the second half of the first millennium BCE. There, archeologists and other experts trace the migration of the technology from Egypt to the Fezzan region of southwest Libya, which was inhabited by the Garamantes, and from there, it spread eastward across the Sahara to present-day Algeria and Morocco.

In the oases of Algeria, qanats—which became known as foggaras—enabled the development of new north-south caravan routes that built trade relations with sub-Saharan Africa. Archeologist Andrew Wilson of Oxford University, who has studied the foggaras of the west-central Sahara, says the oases “are today the zones of most highly developed foggara use anywhere outside Iran.” Wilson notes that while traditional scholarship dates the establishment of the foggara as late as the 11th century CE, there may be “grounds for thinking it may go back to the seventh century if not earlier” based on “strong similarities, in construction and nomenclature,” between Algerian foggaras and those of the Garamantes in Libya.

Timimoun is a small oasis town in Algeria’s Gourara desert region, and it is known for its red ochre buildings as well as its substantial, still-operating foggara system that irrigates date palms and other crops. At the last formal count in 2001, the foggara here numbered about 250, but as local farmers increasingly turn to electrically pumped wells, the foggara are slowly going dry. The wells deplete the aquifer, and unlike foggara, wells can be drilled ever-deeper. This story is playing out all over Algeria, where United Nations water resource surveys have noted a decline from some 1400 active foggara in the recent past to some 900 now. While there have been recent efforts to rehabilitate some foggara that may date back to before Islam in the seventh century, the pressures on farmers to switch to more modern water-supply methods is unrelenting.

Baza Mohammed of the village of Oulad Said in Timimoun, Algeria, checks and cleans finger holes in barrier stones that regulate flow in water channels. Although the village is supplied by five major lines of qanat, which comprise some 250 branches totaling 80 kilometers (50 mi) in length, some are going dry as more farmers in the area install electric pumps that overdraw the water table.
The western expansion of Islam and Arab civilization in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, throughout North Africa and north across the Mediterranean into the Iberian Peninsula, resulted in the second major spread of qanat technology after the Garamantian era. Qanat construction was carried out in the eastern Mediterranean in Cyprus and westward in the Canary Islands. Geographer Paul Ward English of the University of Texas at Austin notes that qanats also spread to the New World, where they were built following Spanish conquests in Mexico at Parrás, Canyon Huasteca, Tecamenchálco and Tehuacán.

In the other direction, at the eastern extremity of their diffusion, English observes, the karez of Iran spread to Afghanistan, Silk Road oasis settlements of Central Asia and into western China, “although whether this diffusion occurred under the Achaemenids or some later Persian dynasty is uncertain.”

In Xinjiang, the oasis city of Turpan (or Turfan) has a venerable history as a major stop on the trade routes from the West. Surrounded by mountains yet lying below sea level, the city is built in one of the world’s deepest inland depressions—the Turpan Depression. This, it turns out, is an ideal setting for gravity-powered, underground water tunnels, fed from watershed runoff.

Summers in Turpan are scorching, and dry winds carry sand from the nearby Taklamakan Desert. Karez have provided water for residents and passing caravans alike here since the Western Han Dynasty more than 2000 years ago. Almost uniquely among all the world’s qanat-using areas, Turpan has actually experienced growth in these water systems since the 19th century.

In 1845, the famed Chinese official and scholar Lin Zexu, considered a role model for moral governance in China, was made a scapegoat for two successful British military incursions along the Chinese coast, and he was banished to distant Xinjiang. While living in the northwest, Lin became familiar with karez technology, and he promoted its spread beyond Turpan, in time winning support from the central government.

By 1944, the Turpan area was home to some 379 karez, and by 1952, there were 800 underground water systems in the depression. Their total combined length of 2500 kilometers (1555 mi) equaled that of the Grand Canal from Beijing to Hangzhou, the longest artificial waterway in the world. Today that total distance has doubled, and there are well over 1000 karez in the Turpan Depression.

From Iberia to China, qanats have made possible farming—and, indeed, civilization—in many arid lands. As Wulff
concluded in 1968, “The qanat works of Iran were built on a scale that rivaled the great aqueducts of the Roman Empire. Whereas the Roman aqueducts now are only a historical curiosity,” qanat technology “is still in use after 3000 years and has continually been expanded.”

Although qanats in Iran and North Africa are declining, they still play significant roles there, as they do in northwest China, where they grow in length and number, which all says much about the timeless value of keeping precious water safely below ground, out of the sun.

In Turpan, which lies below sea level, numerous qanats, such as these above, convey water from the foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains to cash crops such as grapes, which are dried into raisins in buildings such as these, left.

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CLASS ACTIVITIES

Theme: Art Fills in the Blanks
We all carry around a sense of places in the world, even if we’re not conscious of it most of the time. If you quickly think about California, for example, you might think of movie stars. If you think about Argentina, you might think of cattle. At best, what we think of is partly accurate: Part of California has movie stars, and yes, there are a lot of cattle in Argentina. At worst, however, we attach familiar stereotypes to places we don’t know much about, places that are more or less blank spots in our mental maps.

We often think about what we know about the world, but we don’t so often think about what we don’t know. In other words, how detailed are the mental maps you carry around with you? To explore this idea, print out any basic world map. Look at the different places, and write on the map what you know about them. If you don’t know anything about a given place, leave it blank. (We’ll get to that shortly.) Then compare your map with another student’s. Do you know the same places? Do you know the same things about them? Do you know about places your peer doesn’t know about, and vice versa? Talk about where you learned about those places.

Now let’s look to those blank spaces. Articles in this issue consider how the arts can help fill in some of them. Read “The Quiet Muslim Heroes of World War II.” As a class, discuss what these two films highlighted in the article add to your knowledge of that war. Why do you think the stories of Muslim heroes have not been included in many World War II histories?

FOR STUDENTS

We hope this guide will help sharpen your reading skills and deepen your understanding of this issue’s articles.

FOR TEACHERS

We encourage reproduction and adaptation of these ideas, freely and without further permission from Saudi Aramco World, by teachers at any level, whether working in a classroom or through home study.

—THE EDITORS

Curriculum Alignments
To see alignments with us national standards for all articles in this issue, click “Curriculum Alignments” at www.saudiaramco world.com.

Julie Weiss is an education consultant based in Eliot, Maine. She holds a Ph.D. in American studies. Her company, Unlimited Horizons, develops social studies, media literacy, and English as a Second Language curricula, and it produces textbook materials.

Some photographs are considered primarily to be art; others are considered to be mostly informative. (Most do both, to some extent.) “The Middle East’s New Lenses” focuses on photographic art, and Saudi Aramco World itself regularly publishes photographs that, although they are quite beautiful, they are not specifically identified as art. So what’s the difference—if there is any—between these two types of photographs? To explore the answer, compare and contrast the two photographs shown below. One comes from “The Middle East’s New Lenses,” while the other comes from “The Water Below.” Start with the “art” photo. What do you notice about it? What do you see and where is it located in the frame? What do you notice about color? Light and shadow? Foreground and background? What do you learn from the article and the caption that add to your understanding of the photo? Then ask the same questions about the photo from “The Water Below.” Would you call one of the photos art, but not the other? If so, why? If not, why not? What generalizations, if any, can you make about different types and uses of photographs? (Note: You may work with a partner on this, or not, depending on your own preference.)
Now that you’ve read both articles, reflect on what you’ve learned. Write an essay that answers these questions: How can the arts fill in the blanks? Equally important, what do you think is the value of filling in those blanks? Support your ideas with evidence from the articles, as well as from your own experiences.

**Theme: Art and Stereotypes**

As noted earlier, when there’s an absence of firsthand knowledge of people or places, it’s common for everyone to sometimes fill in the blanks with stereotypes, which can be good or bad. The six artists in “The Middle East’s New Lenses” know all too well the stereotypes about their region—mostly negative ones—that have played a big role in the West and in relationships mostly among Middle Eastern countries, Europe and the United States.

Read “The Middle East’s New Lenses.” A few of the photographers profiled there talk about the history of how people in the West have thought of the Middle East and those who live there. Find and highlight the parts of the article that explain what those ideas about the Middle East were and are. When stereotypes are well-known, as these are, many people become likely to approach a place with those stereotypes in mind. Think of the stereotypes as the background—like the scenery on a stage—behind the photographs you’re reading about. These artists create their work on a stage that has this “scenery,” so their work—in this case photographs—interacts with that scenery in some way.

For example, photo artist Mitra Tabrizian deals with stereotypes by blurring the distinctions between East and West. Find the place in the article where she speaks about her strategy. Then find the photograph that is an example of it. (If you can, look her up on the Internet, too, to see more.) Think of Tabrizian’s photos on your imagined stage with the stereotypes in the background. How does making art that leaves readers uncertain about whether they’re seeing East or West relate to the stereotypes in the background? Does knowing the stereotypes affect your understanding of Tabrizian’s photographs? If so, how? How does knowing Tabrizian’s thoughts and motivations affect how you react to her art?

Hassan Hajjaj deals with the stereotypes in a different way. Find the part of the article where he explains his approach. If you think of his photographs on the imaginary stage, as you did Tabrizian’s, how do they relate to the stereotypes behind them? Again, how does seeing his photos with knowledge of the stereotypes affect how you feel when you see the photo and how you think about it?

Still other artists acknowledge stereotypes by tinkering with them in some way. Consider the two photos of women on pages 10 and 11. What stereotypes about Middle Eastern women do these photos respond to? How does each photo respond to the stereotype? What do you think the artists are trying to convey? What do you perceive in the photos? (Hint: Give yourself some time to look at them and think about them. Discuss them.)

Now that you’ve analyzed other people’s photographs in light of the stereotypes about them, it’s time to try it yourself. Think about a stereotype that may have been applied to you. For example, many people have stereotypes about teenagers, boys, girls or people from a certain part of town, or—certainly—ethnicities, backgrounds and ways of dressing. You might choose one of them. Start by writing about the stereotype briefly for two minutes—what it is, how you feel about it and so on. The writing doesn’t need to be polished, as long as you’re writing about the stereotype. It’s just a chance for you to do some uncensored, unedited writing to get your thoughts together and to clear your mind. Then use a camera (the camera in a phone will do) and take some photos that “respond” to the stereotype you identified. Use as your guide the different responses to stereotypes that you’ve learned about in the article. Write a caption for each of your photos explaining it in terms of the stereotype. Display photos around the classroom and view each other’s work.

Finally, try one more kind of photo. Recall that Hajjaj said, “I’ve wanted to show my Morocco,” rather than having Moroccans be background for photographs of westerners. Take a photo that shows the “real” you in the foreground, with something representing the stereotype in the background. Then try it the other way around: put the real you in the background. How do the two photos differ? How do they make you feel? Which do you prefer? Why?

As a bonus, use the idea of foreground and background to analyze the photograph on page 10. Write a paragraph in which you examine the photograph in terms of what you have learned about stereotypes and how artists respond to them.
Readers of Saudi Aramco World who want to range more widely or delve more deeply than a bimonthly magazine can do will find interesting material, most of it recently published, in this list. Without endorsing the views of any of the authors, the editors encourage varied and omnivorous reading as a path to greater understanding. The books listed here are available online, in libraries, from bookstores—we urge our readers to patronize independent bookstores—or from their respective publishers; International Standard Book Numbers (issn) are given to facilitate ordering. Please do not order books from Saudi Aramco World. The full-text electronic archive of “Suggestions for Reading” from 1993 to the present can be found at www.saudiaramcoworld.com.

The Art and Architecture of Ottoman Istanbul. Richard Yeomans. 2012, Garnet, 978-1-85964-224-5, £50.00 hb. Unlike guidebooks that proceed geographically from site to site, this book describes Istanbul as one might a living organism, tracing its architecture century after century, sultan after sultan. It reads like a biography, beginning with Istanbul’s birth in the ruins of Constantinople in 1453 and ending when the modern state emerged in the 1920s and it ceased being the capital. The cityscape first takes shape with Persian and Central Asian styles, develops Ottoman hallmarks, then adds baroque and beaux-arts elements. Topkapı Palace, too, reappears in the story as successive sultans make changes to suit new policies (e.g., adding a suite to imprison princes instead of assassinating them) or new enthusiasms (e.g., constructing pavilions the better to admire tulips). Intercutting the narrative are three chapters that focus on ceramics, textiles, and calligraphy and painting, respectively. If architecture constitutes the body of the city, these are its precious adornments. —Lee Lawrence

Arish: Palm-Leaf Architecture. Sandra Pesik. 2012, Thames and Hudson, 978-0-50094-280-0, £29.95 hb. It is hard to imagine that 50 years ago Dubai was a town consisting almost entirely of palm-leaf structures, as were many of the now-great cities of the Gulf. This book, with its wonderful historic photographs, serves as a much-needed reminder. It is filled with information on the history and techniques of building, and records modern efforts to chronicle and maintain knowledge of a vanishing craft that has been so much part of the Gulf culture for millennia. Japan is often praised for its use of inexpensive and basic materials to obtain sophisticated and elegant effects, but images in this book show that with arish the Gulf also had great mastery. Palm-leaf houses were generally built by families working together, so that the techniques were passed on automatically, but now those who have the skills tend to be over 60, and a conscious effort has to be made if the craft is to survive. Anyone interested in the Gulf, the ethnography of the region, sustainability or architecture-without-architects will be fascinated by this book. —Caroline Stone

“The Art and Architecture of Ottoman Istanbul”

“After many visits to Istanbul I have now learned to appreciate more the manifold complexities and subtleties of Ottoman art. The experience has been like peeling an onion and constantly discovering new layers.”


Lebanese writer Jurji Zaidan died a week before the outbreak of World War I, that historical turning point that brought about the same extremes of geopolitical change and cultural conflict that he examined in plots set a thousand years or farther back in time. The Battle of Poitiers stands in the western imagination as the place where Charles Martel’s army made its successful last stand against the Arabs, 20 years after they had invaded Spain in 711 and during which they suffered no slackening en route north. The Kurdish general Saladin, who defeated the Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin in 1187, hastening the end of their rule in Jerusalem, is also famed for wresting Egypt from the Shi’ite Fatimid dynasty. At both of these turning points, ancillary figures lived, loved and died in the shadow of their heroes. The medieval French epic poem Chanson de Roland, about Martel’s grandson Charlemagne’s conflict with Muslims, recounts this human back-story from a European point of view. In The Battle of Poitiers, Zaidan does it for the Arab camp, if not with similar literary talent. Saladin and the Assassins takes an equal number of love-interest liberties with the historical record, seeing Saladin’s rivalry with the Fatimids through the lens of a multi-angled romance between a princess and three suitors, including Saladin himself. “Throw in the dealings of the Assassins, a cult whose fearsome reputation in the West owes more to its etymological origin—hashish—than it does to the known facts, and Zaidan delivers exactly that for which he is known best: page-turning prose and minor characters so plentiful they can be difficult to keep straight.”

—Louis Werner

because of the camels. Brenda Blair. 2012, Siwa Publishing, 978-0-98504-700-9, $16.95 pb. In 1856, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis authorized a US Camel Corps. He wanted to see if dromedaries from the Middle East could supply forts scattered throughout the West, where harsh conditions prevailed. Though slightly altering the incidents of what became known as “the great camel experiment,” novelist Brenda Blair more than makes up for any discrepancies through her carefully researched settings—from Cairo to the Alamo—and her delightful fictional characters. They include the wealthy Sylvia McDermott, her lovely daughter Elizabeth and, thoroughly entranced by Elizabeth, the young cameleers: Hassan, an Egyptian, and Americans Alex and Nate. There are also the McDermott slaves, Esther, Antoine and Agnes. And there is steadfast Jeremy, grandfather to Nate, peacemaker and, ultimately, lover. The group journeys from Indiana to San Antonio with 34 newly arrived and sometimes obstreperous camels. Combining romance, adventure and tragedy, because of the camels takes a close look at
southern society in the days preceding the Civil War while recreating one of the most colorful episodes in the history of the American West.

—JANE WALDRON GRUTZ


Gary Nabhan has long pondered the circuitous routes taken by seasonings and incense gums both commonplace and exotic—but all connected somehow to the Middle East—across and between continents, from one national custom or cuisine to another. Here, he looks closely at the people who brought them, like the Makkah traders at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the 14th-century Chinese admiral Zheng He of the maritime Silk Road. He writes mostly as an ethnographer, as when he visits Bedouin in the desert or the Finns of the Baltic Sea. 

But Nabhan is also a historian of the intellectual tradition with a mind that takes in all the elements of a complex topic at once—literature, art history, religion, and science. His book is rich with such details as the story of the Makkan traders at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the 14th-century Chinese admiral Zheng He of the maritime Silk Road. He writes mostly as an ethnographer, as when he visits Bedouin in the desert or the Finns of the Baltic Sea. But Nabhan is also a historian of the intellectual tradition with a mind that takes in all the elements of a complex topic at once—literature, art history, religion, and science. His book is rich with such details as the story of the Makkan traders at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the 14th-century Chinese admiral Zheng He of the maritime Silk Road.


The author, a historian of Greco-Roman times, shows how edges of empires help us understand the inner workings of the empires themselves. His book Roman Arabia covered Rome’s encounters with the Arabian Peninsula up to the beginning of the Byzantine age. This book, which takes the story to the birth of Islam in the seventh century, was developed from lectures in which Bowersock presented “a new vision of the momentous collision of the Byzantine and Persian empires at the same time as the rise of Islam.” The first part focuses on how an “imperialist” conflict between two smaller powers, the Ethiopian empire of East Africa and the Himyarites of southern Yemen, spurred a collision between Byzantium and Sassanian Persia. Part two covers a highpoint of that collision, the conquest of Byzantine Jerusalem in 614 by the Persians. The final section examines Byzantine emperor Heraclius’s so-called “gift to Islam.” He scored a major victory over the Sassanians in Mesopotamia, bringing down the Perisan Empire in 628, ending Persia’s occupation of Syria and Palestine and opening the door for the Arab armies of the Prophet Muhammad. In the end, Heraclius’s army was exhausted by war and could not resist the Arab-Islamic expansion.

—ROBERT W. LEBLING


In this hefty, heavily annotated volume, the British economist-historian notes parallels between Britain’s occupation of Mesopotamia after the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The story is compelling, rich with such colorful personalities as Winston Churchill, Gertrude Bell and T. E. Lawrence. It details family and career histories of numerous British military and political officers and their antagonists and allies among Shi’a and Sunni Arab tribal leaders during the years of continuing conflict. Rutledge points out how British leaders on the ground coped with conflicting instructions from colonial policymakers and often had to rely on untrained Indian troops. In the end, Britain’s superiority of arms allowed it to prevail. Its dependency on armored cars, motorized riverboats and aircraft, as well as railways, drove home the fact that oil was critical for maintaining power in the industrial age, fueling a determination to control the region’s petroleum wealth. Readers interested in England’s subsequent relations with Iraq could turn to the slim Britain’s Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941 by Daniel Silverfarb (1986), which covers the years between the two world wars.


Mishra chronicles the story of the anti-colonialist revolutions in Asia and its periphery a century ago in which the desires for self-governance and independence were fomented not just in the streets, but also in print. From Egypt to Afghanistan to China to Southeast Asia and Japan, literate, well-educated revolutionaries challenged western hegemony using words as weapons. Mishra focuses on the careers of men such as Alighani journalist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Chinese philosopher Ling Qichao and Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. While the business of nation-building proved to be more difficult in practice than on paper, the “ideas and imagination” of thinkers like al-Afghani and his ilk, Mishra concludes, continue to be a resource “for societies faced with the crisis of modernity.”

—TOM VERDE


This lavishly illustrated book is the second compiled by Khatib from his vast collection of artworks of Palestine and the wider region, following Palestine and Egypt Under the Ottomans: Paintings, Books, Photographs, Maps and Manuscripts (2003). This volume features a
rich selection of artwork and similar published materials—the majority by European visitors during the 19th and 20th centuries. Each chapter provides a brief overview of relevant developments in fields such as photography or mapping, for example. While most of the featured paintings are 19th-century watercolors, reflecting the popularity of this medium in the Victorian period, what is striking is the sheer volume and variety of works produced by Europeans, as well as immigrants who forged creative alliances with local businessmen. In her foreword, Middle East historian Sarah Scarlighth provides a useful overview of the featured collection and the development of tourism in the Levant. This book will be appreciated by anyone with an interest in the history of the region and its place in the western imagination, or a wider interest in 19th-century European travel and exploration.

—ANNE LINEEN

Margo Veillon, Drawing Egypt. Bruno Ronfard, ed. 2013, AUC Press, 978-9-77416-575-7, $39.95 hb. Born in Cairo in 1907 to Swiss and Austrian parents, Margo Veillon began drawing at the age of nine and never stopped. Described as “the tireless chronicler of everyday life in Egyptian villages” by editor Bruno Ronfard, she had created more than 12,000 drawings by the time of her death in 2003. Two hundred of her works in pen and ink, pencil and watercolors, arranged by decades, in the western imagination, or a wider interest in 19th-century European travel and exploration. —ANNE LINEEN

The Mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon. Stephanie Dalley. 2013, Oxford UP, 978-0-19966-226-5, $34.95 hb. The Hanging Garden of Babylon, probably the best-known and most romantic of the Seven Wonders of the World, is paradoxically the most elusive. Legend has King Nebuchadnezzar building it in Babylon, but there was never conclusive evidence that it even existed. In this breakthrough book, Oxford University cuneiform expert Stephanie Dalley describes her decades-long sleuthing to make a compelling case for the Garden’s actual location and builder. Starting by deciphering text from a prism at the British Museum and matching it with classical descriptions of the Garden, she painstakingly examines all textual and physical evidence from irrigation technology to geopolitics and history. Her conclusion? The fabled Garden wasn’t in Babylon after all, but 550 kilometers (340 mi) north at Nineveh, near today’s Mosul, and built not by Nebuchadnezzar but by Assyrian king Sennacherib. As much as this scholarly work intrigues and convinces, it is bound to provoke debate.

—GRAHAM CHANDLER

Palestinian Music and Song: Expression and Resistance since 1900. Heather Burshes, Moslih Kanaaneh, David A. McDonald and Stig-Magnus Thorsen, eds. 2013, Indiana UP, 978-0-25301-106-0, $26 pb. For more than a century, the music of Palestine has been a touchstone of identity and artistic expression. This anthology of essays and interviews by 11 scholars explores its myriad facets, including influences and the intertwining of music with politics over the decades. Covering hip-hop, folk and protest songs, as well as the urban classical styles of Arab ensemble music, the essays survey experiments conducted aboard the Jewel of Muscat on its crossing from Oman to Singapore in 2010. Each chapter contains a helpful selection of informative, well-presented diagrams, maps and photographs. The result is a detailed—but not overly technical—presentation of the navigational techniques that enabled Indian Ocean mariners to create and sustain some of history’s longest maritime trading routes.

—ROBERT B. JACKSON

Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home. Penny Johnson and Raja Shehadeh, eds. 2012, Olive Branch Press, 987-1-66656-906-4, $16 pb. This collection of essays by 15 contemporary Palestinian writers, artists, poets and activists reflects on what it means to be a Palestinian 65 years after the Nakba, or “catastrophe,” in which many lost their homes. Rana Barakat, an assistant professor at Birzeit University, comments that as someone “born in exile, living in exile or returning to exile—I was not sure where to place myself.” As Jerusalem-native Jean Said Malkidi explains: “One views the whole world and everything in it through alienated Palestinian eyes, always aware of being in a state of incompleteness.” From poet Sharif El Musa, who writes about taking his American-born children to see the ruins of the refugee camp in Jericho where he grew up, to lawyer Raja Shehadeh, who describes himself as an “internal exile” for remaining in Palestine, each essay is a key to what writer Susan AbuHawa calls the “basic truth about what it means to be Palestinian—dispossessed, disinherited and exiled.”

—FIN PESTING

Shahnameh: The Epic of the Persian Kings. Ferdowsi. Hamid Rahmanian, ill.; Ahmad Sadri, tr. 2013, Quantuck Lane Press, 978-1-59372-051-3, $79 hb. The Shahnameh, or The Book of Kings, is Iran’s national epic. It chronicles Persia’s founding and establishment as a world power, weaving mythical stories of the past with more reliable, fact-laden accounts of its Sassanian period on the eve of the Arab invasions of the seventh century. Compiled by the Persian poet Ferdowsi in the late 10th/early 11th centuries, it celebrates an enduring culture that resisted, and even transformed, that of its conquerors. Invoking that same sense of pride, not to mention ambition, illustrator Hamid Rahmanian has produced a modern masterpiece that honors the distinctly Persian art form of the illuminated manuscript. Barely a leaf of this glorious, 572-page edition lacks colorful, meticulously rendered images. This outstanding volume would be a treasured addition to the library of any devotee of classical Persian art or literature.

—TOM VERDE
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—CAROLINE STONE


This memoir of Jerusalem civil servant and musician Wasif Jawhariyyeh (1897-1972) brings early 20th-century Jerusalem to life. Born to a prominent Eastern Orthodox family, Jawhariyyeh was encouraged to study music. After World War 1, his accounting talent, musical prowess and outsized personality propelled him into a financial career with the British during the Mandate period (1920-1948).

Both insider and outsider, he wrote about politics and civil affairs, as well as music and culture. Jawhariyyeh's writings are spiced with humor, wit and more than a little irony. He recalls the ups and downs of political events, and anecdotes about leading British political figures and prominent Arab musicians. Every page offers up a delightful surprise. This book was culled from the two-volume Arabic original and ends in 1948, as the Jawhariyyeh family made the decision to leave Jerusalem, eventually settling in Beirut. Two introductions put his life into perspective, and a foreword by Rachel Beckles Willson mines the memoir’s rich music material.

—KAY HARDY CAMPBELL


It is refreshing to discover a scholar who upsets Middle Eastern history's conventional typologies—center vs. periphery, colonized vs. colonizers, etc.—but Warwick Ball has done this subversion one better, by upsetting conventional geography. Who would say that the Ottomans were as much European as Asian, that their conquest of Byzantium began in the West and then moved East? Yet this is all true, or, at the very least, a good case for it can be made! The Ottoman Empire, like its many Turkish predecessors, was an amalgamation of ethnicities, languages and religions. Such complexity is not easy to contain in a single volume, especially as Ball takes pains to give all the Turkish peoples—Seljuk, Turgesh and Uighurs included—their due. But he succeeds admirably, choosing maps—for instance, the routes of Turkish Airlines to Eastern Europe and Central Asia—and photos—such as the Seljuk-style 11th-century Church of the Holy Apostles in the Armenian capital of Ani—to show as much as tell how the Turkish expansion all adds up.

—LOUIS WEBER

Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an: Islam and the Founders. Denise A. Spellberg. 2013, Alfred A. Knopf, 978-0-307-26822-8, $27.95 hb. The U.S. Constitution, as novel as it was, hardly emerged from thin air. The country's founders—learned men, all—drew upon their collective knowledge of Roman and English common law and Greek philosophy when composing the document. What may come as a surprise, however, was their consideration of Islam in the process, and that Muslims, as Spellberg writes, "were deeply embedded in the concept of citizenship in the United States since the country's inception." This appreciation stemmed from the commitment to religious tolerance of Thomas Jefferson and his compatriots Jefferson, in particular, was "unique ... in his desire to understand Islam on its own terms, looking directly to its most sacred source" (a 7164 English translation of the Qur'an) for guidance. His ownership of the book provides the backdrop for this timely examination of just how much the founders asked, and continue to ask, of a nation rooted in religious freedom for all.

—TOM VERDE


This exciting novel, originally published in 1914, is Zaidan's last in the genre of historical fiction, aimed at informing Arabic readers of the glories of their past. It recounts the legendary ascendance and fall of Shajar al-Durr, a medieval sultan's widow who rose to power from the harem to become the only woman to rule Egypt during Muslim times. War, love, jealousy, palace intrigue, murder—it's all here in a fluid translation by Rutgers University scholar Samah Selim.

—TOM VERDE

“My hope is that this study will contribute to an appreciation of the economic and social importance of silver in Yemeni society before 1970 and create increased demand for these exquisite pieces of tradition silver jewelry before the craft disappears entirely. I also want to share with a wider world my impressions of an extraordinarily humorous, hard-working, and deserving people.”


Silver-working in Yemen was largely, although far from entirely, in the hands of the Jewish community members. Their departure in the 1940s and 50s, the custom of melting down old jewelry to produce new, and the change of fashion from silver to gold have all meant that both silversmiths and antique jewelry have become increasingly rare. In this volume, Marjorie Ransom, who became fascinated with silver while posted to the US embassy in Sana'a, surveys the wide variety of styles from across Yemen by interviewing generally elderly owners and craftsmen. This is a study that could not have been delayed another decade. The book has more than 300 beautiful illustrations, some drawn from the author's extensive collection, and much interesting sociological information on the roles of the different pieces. A companion volume on silveryork for men and on the silversmiths still—or until recently—working is forthcoming.

—CAROLINE STONE

An Unnecessary Woman. Rabih Alameddine. 2014, Grove Press, 978-0-80212-214-8, $25, cl. Beirut, writes Rabih Alameddine, is “the Elizabeth Taylor of cities: insane, beautiful, falling apart, aging and forever drama laden.” His protagonist, Aaliya Saleh, isn't a starlet, but she might be a metaphor for Beirut. The shy, 72-year-old divorcee lives alone, estranged from her family, an “unnecessary appendage”. An outsider in her own neighborhood, the retired bookseller leads a rich life through the volumes she's collected, a few acquaintances and experiences she recalls from her past. She's a survivor: At one point, armed with an AK-47 and clad in a pink track suit, she chases looters from her home. Though opinionated, she's somewhat sympathetic. Every year for nearly four decades she's translated into Arabic one book a year by authors such as W.G. Sebald and Roberto Bolaño. They’re now in her spare room, guests helping her endure, even thrive. Ironically, their near destruction reconnects her with her neighbors, with whom she’s lived side by side most of her life.

—BRIAN E. CLARK


Travelanthologist Deborah Manley has compiled excerpts of the writing of 38 women who visited Egypt beginning in 1779. That year, Eliza Fay passed through with her husband en route to India. On their first day in the country they rode donkeys, led by an Ottoman Janissary, his sword drawn, to see Pompeii’s Pillar—now in Alexandria, but then “three miles [distant] over a sandy desert.” In 2006, Rosemary Mahoney rowed a fishing skiff down the Nile, alone. Between those accounts, Manley chose fascinating excerpts of travelers’ adventures, grouped by place. The travelers, many of whom became residents of Egypt, documented their experiences and physical challenges, and wrote about Egypt’s people. Several excerpts describe encounters with Egyptian women. The book’s index is arranged by traveler (and there are also short biographies of each traveler, shedding light on each woman’s unique perspective), but a full index would have been helpful for researching a particular topic.

—KAY CAMPBELL
The Language of Human Consciousness
delivers an art exhibit inspired by the study of geometry. Since time immemorial, humans have sought to master the use, definition and control of space, orienting mathematical postulations towards spatial relationships and concepts of life and cosmology. Possessing a universality that has been systemized, elaborated, utilized and combined, geometry and its abstractions are deeply rooted in human conception, making it a focal point for various civilizations that have viewed it as a unifying concept and perfect expression of sacredness. Humans have instinctively wrestled to find order within a world of havoc by attempting to understanding its clarity and equilibrium; translating it to a language that is visual and universal is a common field of discovery for scientists and artists alike. More than 20 leading galleries and over 40 artists from around world present this groundbreaking exhibition of geometric exploration. On display are works of sacred geometry and forms of conventionally utilized geometry, such as “A Hidden Order,” a culmination of several years of collaboration between composer Lee Westwood and artist Sama Marah that builds on an interpretation of music into visual geometric patterns. The Athr Gallery, Jiddah, through October 10.

Current September
A Thousand Years of the Persian Book explores Persia’s rich literary tradition with materials ranging from illuminated manuscripts to contemporary publications. The 75 items in the exhibition, selected primarily from the outstanding Persian collection in the library’s African and Middle Eastern Division, brings attention to the literary achievements of Iran and the Persian-speaking regions of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Central and South Asia and the Caucasus. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., through September 20.

Babak Golkar: Time to Let Go. Vancouver-based artist Babak Golkar, born in the US and raised in Tehran, presents an installation of large terra-cotta pots that negotiate between dichotomies of art and craft as well as modern reasoning and traditional mysticism. Emerging from the artist’s interest in spatial analysis and its relationship to communal areas and public territory, the project, rather than presenting static objects, encourages viewers to interact with the artist’s sculptures and blend into them, transforming everyday anxieties into play. These vessels are designed to soften sound, thus providing a unique location for viewers to voice their unexpressed emotions and release everyday pressures. Vancouver Art Gallery, through September 28.

Empire, Faith and War: The Sikhs and World War One tells the story of the disproportionately large role played by Britain’s Sikh community in “The Great War.” Though Sikhs were only two percent of the population of British India at the time, they made up more than 20 percent of the British Indian Army in 1914, gaining commendations and a reputation as fearless and fearless soldiers. Brunel Gallery, SoAS, London, through September 28.

Another Day features documentation of Palestine by photographer Sara Russell laid out as a narrative, unfolding just as did the photographer’s experience. HRC Bookshop and Gallery, Wembley, UK, through September 30.

Current October
Nairy Bagramian: French Curve/Slip of the Tongue draws on the legacy of post-minimal art to investigate the conventions and expectations that commonly surround public sculpture. The formal abstract-work of the Iranian-born, Berlin-based sculptor is represented by two site-specific pieces, created for the Bluhm Family Terrace in 2014. Art Institute of Chicago, through October 5.

Pride and Passion: Male Portraits and Images from the Mogul Era (1526-1858) devotes itself to one of the main themes in Indian painting in the 17th and 18th centuries. In large group-pictures, Mogul rulers are depicted on thrones receiving vanquished Rajput princes, or on ritualistic marches with elephants, further demonstrating their power. The passionate side of men’s nature is also revealed. The miniatures come exclusively from the museum’s own holdings; some are shown for the first time. Staattiche Museen zu Berlin, through October 5.

Abstraction into the World is a pairing of exhibitions that interrogates architecture, the urban environment and the natural world, placing abstraction in dialogue with these contexts. Tracing the careers of Piet Mondrian and Nasreen Mohamedi—artists working in different eras and continents—the exhibit explores how each arrived at similar non-figurative styles, suggesting correspondences between their practices and a parallel interest in bringing abstraction into reality. Exhibiting Mondrian and Mohamedi together creates an unprecedented dialogue between Indian and European modernism through the lens of abstraction in relation to urban and natural environments. Tate Liverpool, through October 5.

Princeely Traditions and Colonial Pursuits in India. South Asian artistic traditions were dramatically transformed by the political, social and economic changes that accompanied India’s transition from local to colonial rule in the 19th century. Artists formerly patronized by Indian princes came to work for English officials and merchant elites, adjusting their practices to suit their new patrons’ tastes. English artists and expatriates introduced new genres and pictorial styles to India, while foreign demand for Indian luxury items brought about aesthetic transformations in textiles, silver and other goods. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, through October 12.

Saturated: Dye-Decorated Cloths from North and West Africa celebrates the dyer’s art from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and Cameroon. The exhibition presents 11 dye-decoration cloths produced by traditional techniques and worn as garments or accessories. Before the introduction of European-made printed textiles to Africa in the 19th century, textile designs were made with natural dyes on plain homespun cotton, wool, raffia or other materials. Women were most often the dyers, and dye-decorated cloth was a major form of feminine artistic expression. Dallas Museum of Art, through October 12.

The Moving Museum. With a three-month residency program for 40 international artists, the museum marks the largest coordinated influx of international resident artists in Istanbul’s recent memory. Founded in 2012 by Aya Mousawi and Simon Sakhai as an independent, nonprofit organization, The Moving Museum is a traveling program that aims to strengthen relationships among local art scenes and the global community of contemporary art. The word “moving” not only is attributed to the museum’s
Sliver From the Malay World explores the rich silver heritage of the region, but is also described as a source of political, meta-
physical and even sexual emancipation, using its trademark mix of high and low culture to address the thorny issues of “alphabet politics”: the attempts by nations, cultures and ideologies to ascribe a specific set of letters to a given worldview. The exhibition includes original works in Persian, Russian, Turkish, Georgian and English presented in a series of sculptures, installations, textiles and printed matter. Dallas Museum of Art, through December 14.

Current November
Discovering Tutankhamun examines how currency was used by the ancient Egyptians as a means woven), these works all invite the viewers to bring a reader’s close reading of the written word into an art form on its own. The narrative thread emphasizes the achievements of four of the greatest master calligraphers, whose manuscripts and individual folios were still and are appreciated not only for their content, but also for their technical virtuosity and visual quality. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., through March 22.

National University Model Arab League and National High School Model Arab League are academic and leadership development experiences comprising some 20 local and regional conferences, each one a debate-based simulation of the League of Arab States. Students develop skills while gaining practical, immediate knowledge about a critical world region. Information: Josh Hilbrand (josh@ncusar.org). Georgetown Hotel and Conference Center, Washington, D.C., April.

India: Jewels That Enchanted the World explores the legacy of 500 years of West Indian life in the 17th century to the present. More than 300 pieces of jewelry and jeweled objects are brought together for the first time to showcase the beauty of Indian craftsmanship, the magnificence of gemstone setting and the refinement of Indian taste. Assembled from more than 30 museums, institutions and private collections, the exhibition provides a comprehensive overview ever staged on the subject. Its first section focuses on the jewelry traditions of South India: monumental pieces crafted from gold, in relief and decorated with gemstone flowers and birds. The second is devoted to the jeweled splendor of the courts of the Mughals, who came as conquerors, ruled as emperors and, as connoisseurs, patronized artists, architects, enamelers and jewellers. A further section is devoted to the symbiosis between India and European jewelers, who brought the cross-cultural influences that resulted in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It concludes with the work of two of India’s leading contemporary jewelers, The Gem Palace and Bhagat. State Museums of Moscow, Kremlin, through July 27, 2015.

Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation explores the history and contemporary experiences of Indian Americans as they have grown to be one of the more well-recognized communities in the US. Photographs, artifacts, videos and interactive exhibits trace arrival and labor participation in the early 1900s; achievements within various economic industries; and many contributions in building the
Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. An eye-opening look at the largely unknown ancient past of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this exhibition draws on recently discovered archeological material never before seen in the us. “Roads of Arabia” features objects excavated from several sites throughout the Arabian Peninsula, tracing the impact of ancient trade routes and pilgrimage roads stretching from Yemen in the south to Iraq, Syria and Mediterranean cultures in the north. Elegant alabaster bowls and fragile glassware, heavy gold earrings and Hellenistic bronze statues testify to a lively mercantile and cultural interchange among distant civilizations. The study of archeological remains only really began in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s, yet brought—and is still bringing—a wealth of unsuspected treasures to light: temples, palaces adorned with frescoes, monumental sculpture, silver dishes and precious jewelry left in tombs. The exhibition, organized as a series of points along trade and pilgrimage routes, focuses on the region’s rich history as a major center of commercial and cultural exchange, provides both chronological and geographical information about the discoveries made during recent excavations and emphasizes the important role played by this region as a trading center during the past 6000 years. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, October 24 through January 18.

This life-size head of a man in cast bronze, showing distinct Hellenistic-Roman connections, is among a number of discoveries at the former oasis trading center of Qaryat al-Faw in southwestern Saudi Arabia. The original treatment of the curled hair reveals its production in a local workshop influenced by Graeco-Roman models.
National Arab Orchestra Hits the Right Notes
Written by Piney Kesting
Photography and video by Ryan Garza

Backed by art music virtuosos from around the country, the world 20 local, middle-schoolers stole the show—and the audience's hearts—at the National Arab Orchestra’s recent Detroit performance. “Here is an authentic and meaningful portrait of Detroit and its musical schoolers stole the show—and the audience's hearts—at the National Arab Orchestra's recent Detroit performance. “Here is an authentic and meaningful portrait of Detroit and its musical

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