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Queering Islamic Modernities: Middle Eastern Political Art and its Diaspora

Abstract:

For the 12th Annual Duke-UNC Graduate Islamic Studies Conference, *Imagining the Beautiful: Theories and Practices of Meaning in Islamicate Aesthetics*, I will investigate Middle Eastern diasporic artists in North America who are creating political work surrounding Queer identity. This leading project will be one of the first to discuss Queer identity in relation to Contemporary political art being produced by the Middle Eastern diaspora in North America, and will nuance and contribute to the growing scholarship on Middle Eastern Contemporary Art and cultural studies. This investigation will nuance Middle Eastern Art research and cultural studies by studying the place of Queer and/or gay studies in terms of the art of the Middle East, and issues of masculinity and human rights; it is this focus of Middle Eastern Contemporary Art that I am on the cutting edge. More importantly, my timely research emphasizes themes of migration, and researching the political artwork that is associated with the diasporic community, an identity category not focused on in traditional investigations of Middle Eastern Contemporary Art.

Using Egyptian Artist, Youssef Nabil, as a case study for my analysis, I will explore the concept of Islamic/non-Western Modernities and their relationship to displacement, trauma, and Arab sexualities/masculinities within a post-colonial framework. This discussion will have us thinking about Arab homo-sexualities in terms of desire and alternative masculinities rather than Western notions of visibility and coming out; narratives which are not conducive to understanding how Queer Arabs living in the West experience their sexuality. The analysis of Youssef Nabil's photographs will help investigate the codification of Middle Eastern masculinity through a visual language, and destabilize homo-colonial discourses of Western Modernity in a discussion rooted in sociological ideas of gender, nationalism, and sexuality, and the triangulation of identity and oppression that could arise at their intersection. Through the analysis of Nabil's photographic art, my intent is to see if we can reach a Modernity narrative that works beyond sexual oppression versus acceptance, and instead examines a negotiation of diasporic sexuality by incorporating different sociological strategies to help self-identification categories be less dichotomous.

Bio:

Andrew Gayed is an Egyptian visual artist and art historian, born and raised in Toronto Canada. Completing his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts with a Minor in Women's and Gender studies, themes of race, displacement, and culture are foundational in his practice. Currently completing his Masters of Arts in Art History at Carleton University, his dissertation investigates Middle Eastern Contemporary Art, with a focus on photographic art being produced by the North American diaspora. This includes Middle Eastern artists (such as himself) working from Canada and the United States, creating artwork surrounding diasporic identity; his research emphasizes themes of migration, and the political artwork that is associated with the diasporic community. Gayed has been the recipient of notable awards including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Award, and chapters of his dissertation have been presented at conferences internationally, including Oxford University on two occasions, in addition to presentations before Canadian audiences.