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## Strategies for Engagement

A case study of the Detroit Institute of the Arts and its relationship to the Detroit Arab-American community 2001-2010

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Sarah Katherine Jorgensen

**FOR MY FATHER, JOSEPH GILBERT JORGENSEN (1934-2008), WHO INSPIRED ME TO  
FORMULATE QUESTIONS, TO LEAD AN ANALYTICAL LIFE AND TO ENGAGE IN  
COMMUNITY ISSUES.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Museums play a profound role in American society. In many ways, museums are the stitching in our social fabric, serving to bind America's diverse communities into a nation.

Statement made by Ford Bell, President, American Association of Museums, 20 May 2008<sup>i</sup>

If the role of museums is to bind America's diverse communities, how much should their collections and education programs reflect those communities and their values? Could visiting museums and participating in local cultural events facilitate the process of citizenship, i.e. identification with one's national identity? In this paper I discuss the Detroit Institute of Art (DIA) and its efforts from 2001 to 2010 to relate to one population, that of recent Arab American immigrants in the Detroit area. I focus on the Detroit Arab American population and look at strategies of the DIA and other cultural institutions to engage Arab American communities. This thesis's approach (museum studies, ethnographic and historical) can provide insight for those looking at cultural institutions' engagement of immigrant groups.

The Greater Detroit Area has one of the largest, oldest and most diverse Arab American communities in the United States. The Arab American population ranges from Lebanese and Palestinians who trace their roots to immigrants who came to the U.S. in the nineteenth century as well as refugees who have arrived recently. The continued growth of the Arab American population in the U.S. presents a potential broader audience for museums in the U.S..

Western visual art museums in the past have not been active in their outreach to Middle Eastern and Muslim immigrant populations. One reason is the lack of funds available to do so and another is a lack of familiarity with this immigrant group in

general.<sup>ii</sup> Not all Arab American immigrants have been/ are comfortable visiting visual arts museums.

Understanding the complex relationship of museums and immigrant groups such as the Arab American population in Detroit requires not only an overview of the DIA's history and that of the local Arab American population, but also an analysis of the role of museums and cultural institutions in creating a community. By examining an array of exhibits, cultural institutions and cultural programming at the DIA and other venues, this paper seeks to demonstrate how museums can act as meaningful spaces of civic engagement.

For over a century the DIA and other U.S. museums have more or less followed the European model of art museums as cultural “uplifters” of the general population. Nancy Einreinhoffer writes that the “pleasure the work of art provided, it was believed, was morally uplifting for the masses and therefore would create better citizens.”<sup>iii</sup> Even the neoclassical architecture of museums such as the DIA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMoA), the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the Art Institute of Chicago were meant to “delight, inspire, and transcend” and even inspire patriotism.<sup>iv</sup> The mid 19<sup>th</sup> century founders of museums envisioned them as institutions of public improvement and education. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. museum collections grew immensely as wealthy board members began buying art and artifacts from Europe.<sup>v</sup> By collecting valuable works of art that matched those in major collections of Europe, museum board members sought to show that the U.S. was a culturally sophisticated country.

In Exhibiting Contradiction, Alan Wallach describes older museums such as the Louvre as compendiums of knowledge that set limits on what counts as civilization, and creating an all-seeing arbiter that controls what belongs in the canon.<sup>vi</sup> The ultimate goal of these museums was the distinction and definition of quality.

The goal of American museums has been changing over the last century, new emphasis on exhibiting originals involved “not only the question of whether museums should pursue traditional forms of popular education but even the more basic question of what ultimately defined a work of art.”<sup>vii</sup> This was still the case in 1960 when Alfred Barr, the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, declared that what is primary to the art museum’s work is “the conscientious, continuous, resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity” articulating the assumption underlying the mission of most late nineteenth and twentieth century museums.

From the turn of the twentieth century to the present day, an aesthetic hierarchy amongst art objects has characterized the organization of museums.<sup>viii</sup> Western European paintings, from the High Renaissance to Abstract Expressionism, have traditionally occupied the most prestigious rooms at encyclopedic museums while ceramics, decorative arts and non-Western art were often literally and figuratively relegated to the flanks. Art has been judged not by its practical uses, by what it doesn’t do, that is, by how much its purpose is for purely aesthetic contemplation. In other words, the aesthetic and beautiful takes precedence over the commonplace and functional.<sup>ix</sup> Even after an extensive renovation of the DIA, for example, from 2001-2007, European and modern art dominate the main floor of the museum while decorative arts and non-western arts are



placed on the lower or top levels (see map in section three). This hierarchical system can impede a sense of “belonging” for some visitors to the museum.

Celine Taminan, former director of education at the Arab American National Museum, explained that immigrants from the Arab world are coming from cultures where art is “all around them,”<sup>x</sup> in the bowls they use for washing, the lamps that light their places of worship, in the tiles on their walls. It is not something they go to visit. When they go to a museum, they see examples of their cultural heritage placed in positions of lesser importance, because for a long time, non-Western art had not, in a sense, been considered “high art”.

Heather Ecker, who came to the DIA in 2005 from the Islamic Art Museum in Doha and was charged with evaluating the Middle Eastern collections has said that “interest in Islamic art has risen since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Before then, it was largely kept on the sidelines or in a supporting role to European and American art.”<sup>xi</sup> When the new Islamic gallery at the DIA was created and given an important space in the lower level, members of the Detroit Arab and Muslim population finally felt that they belonged in the museum. As Ali Moiin, a prominent physician and the chair of the DIA's Asian and Islamic Arts Forum, described it: “Many hadn't bothered visiting the museum before or hadn't spent much time there....They didn't feel connected....Now, they can say, 'I can relate to it.’”<sup>xii</sup>

Historically, the museum world and the aestheticism upon which the organization of museums has been based reflected the hierarchical social order that characterized European society. Stephan Weil argues against this sort of aestheticism in his book, Making Museums Matter (2002). He states that the focus on aestheticism is not eternal

but rooted in a time and place, and that if it ever served a purpose in “an increasingly democratic society” that purpose is over.<sup>xiii</sup> Curators can no longer assume that their visitors share the same aesthetic values that have been traditionally espoused in Western art museums. In the case of the display of Arabic artistic achievement, museums should demonstrate how intellectual and artistic ideas radiating from Arabia to Asia and to Western Europe have interacted throughout history.

An example of a museum that has re-installed its permanent collections to reflect such an exchange through history is the Brooklyn Museum. In its American galleries, entitled “American Identities”, many forms of artistic expression are displayed together. In the section that covers the Colonial Era particular emphasis is placed on social class differentiation, trade and colonization. Portraits show relative wealth of New Englanders; their possessions of such fineries as silk and pearls are evidence of trade. Small groupings within the gallery focus on the artistic traditions of the Anglo-Dutch colonists of New York. Comparisons of furniture show shared European stylistic sources. A Zuni water bottle stands as a reminder of the Native American artistic traditions of the period. The “American Identities” display is multi-dimensional, multi-media display presents opportunities for looking at objects through new lenses. The comparison of stylistic furniture in “American Identities” was particularly successful because it was grounded in the object but showed a real connection to artistic exchange, colonization and trade. Hypothetically, this also could be done in an exhibition about arts of the Arab world by comparing glass from Egypt (where glass originated) with later glass from Venice, Italy. This way, not only would Arab Americans be seeing art from the Arab world presented

as a precursor to a Western art practice (Venetian glass), the museum-goer would be seeing art in the museum presented in a novel way.

The fact that the large numbers of recent Arabic immigrants to the Detroit area are not traditional museum-goers poses a unique challenge for the DIA. There is a growing Arab American population in Detroit that could provide a valuable audience and membership for the museum. It appears, however, that the DIA's approaches to the Arab American population are at times oversimplified and counterproductive and have provoked both negative and positive responses. Using the greater Detroit area as a case study, this thesis will attempt to show why museums such as the DIA have difficulty forging relationships with Arab Americans, and particularly with recent Muslim Arab American immigrants. Indeed, this thesis argues that challenges faced by large encyclopedic museums such as the DIA include the low level of interest by recent Arab American immigrant in museum-going as well as the misperceptions and misunderstandings surrounding the beliefs held by Muslims about visual art. This thesis also explores the culture of the DIA as it has reshaped and redefined the ways in which it engages and interprets its collections for a changing city demographic. It suggests that looking at community organizations, exhibitions, festivals, as well as the approaches of other museums with a more sophisticated understanding of the diverse Arab American cultures, can provide possible models for making the museum more welcoming to and involved in the local Arab American population.

This thesis also suggests a model for cultural institutions seeking to incorporate immigrant cultures into the existing community by exploring recent successful outreach programs of the Japanese-American Museum in Los Angeles, the ACCESS (Arab

Community Center for Economic and Social Services) Group of Dearborn, Michigan, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC and those of the MMoA in New York. These are examples of responses to misunderstandings about immigrant groups.

As little extant published scholarship exists on the subject of Arab Americans and art museum attendance, this thesis relies heavily on in-depth interviews for its primary data. Because there was occasionally a strong reticence upon the part of museum administrators to discuss some of the more sensitive aspects of this topic, some people were not willing to be quoted by name and others did not return calls . Although I consulted the work of Oleg Grabar, the scholar of Arab and Islamic Art, I found MMoA curator Stefano Carboni's catalogue for exhibition "Venice and the Islamic World"(2007) and Eva Baer's The Human Figure in Islamic Art (2004), to be indispensable in considering both the historical production of art and the attitudes towards images in the Arab Islamic world.<sup>xiv</sup> Yvonne Haddad's Islamic Impact (1984) and comparative study of Islamic values in the United States (1987), and Rosina Hassoun's ethnography, Arab Americans in Michigan (2005) have been useful in determining the uniqueness of the Detroit Arab population and the commonalities it shares with other Arab American populations.<sup>xv</sup> And finally, Citizenship in Crisis, an analysis of the effect of 9/11 upon the Detroit Arab American community and civic engagement edited by Wayne Baker in 2009, proved to be a useful tool for placing Arab Detroit in the contemporary political context when the museum was revamping its mission and its collection.

## 1. THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ART

From 2003-2007, the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) undertook a remodeling of its building, exhibition spaces and curatorial regime. The remodeling represented a significant opportunity for the museum to reinterpret its collections and to expand its appeal to diverse audiences. This chapter explores the concurrent evolution of thought at the DIA as it went through both a renovation of its facilities and a redefining of its relationship with audiences that include a diverse and complex population of Arab Americans.

Detroit is home to the DIA, the fifth largest (in terms of space and holdings) museum in the United States and the possessor of a distinguished art collection. Its top-notch holdings include some of the best Native American and African art collections in the country,<sup>xvi</sup> an impressive classical antiquities collection and some of the most important Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works in the world including one of Van Gogh's famous self-portraits (1887) and the Portrait of the Postman Roulin (1888). The museum also has the Diego Rivera tribute to "Detroit Industry", a mural completed in 1932, The Wedding Dance (1566), considered one of the greatest works by Pieter Breugel the Elder; The Jewish Cemetery (1657), an eerie painting by Jacob van Ruisdael; a self-portrait by Whistler; and an elaborately carved palace door by a twentieth century Nigerian artist, Olowe of Ise.

Although it is one of the largest and oldest municipal museums in the country, as Jeffery Abt explains in Museum on the Verge, the museum has walked a "financial tightrope since it opened just over a century ago"<sup>xvii</sup> and the DIA was nearly closed after undergoing local and state government funding cuts in the 1970s and again in the 1990s.

Unlike comparable museums, such as Chicago's Art Institute and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, the DIA, located in a city of slightly more than 710,000, does not have a large enough urban population to support it.<sup>xviii</sup> The fact that Detroit has been a dying industrial city for decades means that resources in general for the museum and the people willing to pay for museum admission are limited. Private funding that it comes mostly from sources outside of Detroit proper. These include private foundations and wealthy patrons.<sup>xix</sup> Steven Gray observed in Time that patrons from outside Detroit reflect the majority of the DIA visitorship and that the "DIA, which ranks among the country's top 10 museums, has largely remained the province of Detroit's white suburban elites."<sup>xx</sup>

Although originally a city museum, the profile of the museum's audience has been changing to reflect a broad and diverse metropolitan area that includes Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties with a combined population of 3,962,783.<sup>xxi</sup> These counties grew with waves of immigrants, mainly from the Middle East, and with the exodus of people from Detroit due to industrial decline and urban flight in the later half of the twentieth century.<sup>xxii</sup> While the museum seeks to provide a broad introduction to world art history for the general population, it does not meet the cultural needs of the local Arab-speaking Detroit population. There are tours in Spanish for the public and interpreters for Spanish speaking school children. There are audio guides in Spanish and in Japanese (catering to the visitors in the auto mobile industry). At the time of writing this, there are however, no regular guided tours, audio tours, or labels in Arabic and there are no outreach programs to Arab Americans in local schools.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## CONTEXT FOR CONTROVERSY

The public-private funding issue has greatly affected the DIA's choices of how to approach its audience. In 1885, the DIA was founded as a privately funded art gallery.<sup>xxiv</sup> Gradually, in the years following its founding, the DIA began to receive city funds. In 1904, the museum trustees deeded "the museum building and land to Detroit to legally justify municipal funding for an addition and continued support."<sup>xxv</sup> In 1975, the city of Detroit's declining revenues forced major budget cuts and temporary closure of the DIA. The state of Michigan "[rescued] the DIA with a special allocation 'passed through' Detroit's city budget."<sup>xxvi</sup> In 2010, the museum reduced its budget from \$32 million to \$26 million, partly by reducing the staff by 20%.<sup>xxvii</sup> As of 2011, the museum was mainly privately and state funded, with little revenue coming from the city.<sup>xxviii</sup> Although cultural institutions around the United States are struggling during the economic crisis, "the challenge facing Detroit's institutions is especially severe; they can no longer rely on support from the region's ailing auto industry. Raising money... has been unbelievably challenging."<sup>xxix</sup>

Thus in the past neither the board nor the staff were able to conduct vigorous outreach into one of its fastest growing constituencies, the Arab American population. Perceived religious barriers also affected the way the DIA engaged with its public of Islamic and Arab descent.<sup>xxx</sup> Hiding and demoting classical or otherwise "controversial" art (nudes or displays of violence or sexuality, for example) took place in lieu of undertaking time-consuming and expensive efforts at outreach. According to a DIA public relations representative, schools with large populations of Arab American students

were discouraged from attending a major DIA exhibit of “*Camille Claudel and Rodin: Fateful Encounter*” (2005) because it included nude images and the fact that the exhibit highlighted the art of two artists who engaged in an adulterous relationship. As the public relations representative said, “we cautioned schools with large concentrations of Muslim students not to come to this exhibit.”<sup>xxxix</sup> In fact, the museum received letters of complaint about the exhibit from members of the local orthodox Muslim and Christian.

### **Approaching Nudity and the Public**

Few subjects are as sensitive in Muslim culture as that of nudity. In an important work on the classical nude, *The Nude: A Study in the Ideal Form*(1956), Kenneth Clark observes that “to be *naked* is to be deprived of our clothes, the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. *Nude*, however, conjures not only a real body that is unclothed but also a perfected, balanced, prosperous and confident body.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Although the definitions sometimes blur and vary depending on time period, *nakedness*, in Western culture, is most often associated with the vulnerability -- even shame -- and flaws of the specific individual, while the *nude* suggests an idealized human form “that was never meant to be covered.”<sup>xxxix</sup> In Islam, there is no such distinction between *nude* and *naked*. *Nudity* is defined in the *Encyclopedia of the Qu’ran* as “the state of being devoid of clothing.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Furthermore, “the Qur’an enjoins modesty and evokes nudity only negatively [Q24:30-1]and insists upon physical modesty for both men and women, while the narrative of Adam and his spouse.. associates nudity with the first human act of disobedience....The “nakedness” of Adam and his spouse is not merely a physical but a



moral denudation”<sup>xxxv</sup> The unclothed body is compared, in the Qu’ran, to states of “exposure, vulnerability and intimacy.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In deference to the perceived concerns of orthodox Muslim and Christian museumgoers the DIA considered putting the antiquities collection that contained nude statues (once near the building’s main level foyer) behind opaque, scrim-like screens.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In 2002, the education department also suggested that “adult content” warnings be placed at the entrance to exhibits that contained nudity. Some museum officials offered these suggestions in response to objections, such as those from an imam of the Arab American population in the Detroit area, who took offense at the western concept of nudity. During this period a solution was proposed to eliminate or avoid art with nudity. For example, Nancy Jones, the chief curator for education and whose main focus was the engagement of the potential museum-going community, said that she had made a pitch not to include nude statues at all in the re-installation and not to have classical nude statues in the front of the museum or at least to put up warning signs at the entrance to the antiquities exhibits. It was Jones’s belief that conservative populations should not have to confront nude sculptures in the museum.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Whereas Jones admitted that recent adult immigrants do not often come to the museum, school children do. In these situations, “the museum professionals must adjust for kids coming in-- so they avoid the nudes.”<sup>xxxix</sup> According to Jones, a “don’t go” sign can also be seen as a legitimately culturally sensitive compromise. After much debate, none of the strategies were enacted.

The proposal simply to screen the nude sculptures supports the view that the DIA was not, in the past, financially able to cover the educational costs of such things as developing special outreach classes for students from orthodox communities to explain

developments in classical art. It also raises the question of whether the DIA had enough resources for it to be curatorially capable of developing strategies to show comparisons and connections between the development of Western art and Islamic art or to reach out to the local Arab Muslim population through other forms of programming.

Again, much of this was due to lack of money. In 2003, there was talk of a joint partnership with the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn and of busing school children from the Arabic-speaking areas of Dearborn to the DIA, but the funds were never provided. The current Executive Director of Learning and Education at the DIA, Jennifer Czajkowski, wrote that the

museum has made individual efforts to reach out to Arab Americans in the Detroit area over the years, but we have not had a comprehensive or coordinated effort in that regard. Our head of interpretive programs met with staff at the Arab American National Museum to plan collaborative field trips for students. We hope to develop something with them in the future.<sup>xi</sup>

Jennifer Williams, a museum education staff member, said in 2007 that the DIA had also met with staff as early as 2005 to design a collaborative program, but that it did not come to fruition.<sup>xii</sup> According to Williams, some on the DIA educational department staff claimed that they were aware of the need to reach out to the Muslim population, but at least one key museum staff member did not see a particular need to do so.<sup>xiii</sup> In 2007, curatorial director, David Penney did not acknowledge any need for special consideration for the Muslim population, but it does seem that local concerns about nudity were nonetheless taken into consideration.<sup>xiiii</sup>

The long planned-for renovation of the museum's building and the reinstallation of its galleries, which lasted from 2001-2007, created a six-year window of opportunity to address some of the issues concerning the presentation of art to a culturally diverse

population. However much the museum personnel intended to appeal to the under-represented museum-going populations by changing exhibition displays, not all of the approaches under consideration involved directly engaging with “controversial” art.

In 2001, the director, Graham Beal, who came to the DIA in 1999 from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, initially scoffed at Jones’ notion of avoiding the exhibition of nudes. There were various departments that believed doing so would only reinforce artistic ignorance. Even though there were competing schools of thought within the DIA as to how to approach the matter of nudity in art for an increasingly culturally diverse and conservative visitorship, Jones noted that there had been a “smartening up” at the museum to become more learner-centered. According to Jones, this included an increased sensitivity to cultural values of the community on the part of both the curatorial and education staff. The idea of putting these exhibits off to the side was a part of an effort to make the museum more welcoming, so that those who might be uncomfortable with nudity would not immediately be confronted by it and thus feel alienated from the rest of the museum. The decision to put the classical nudes at a distance from the entrance was part of an effort on the DIA’s part to allow visitors to make decisions for themselves.

While cautioning DIA audiences regarding specific exhibitions was intended to avoid alienating segments of the museum audience, the manner in which this was accomplished was problematic. Museums, like libraries and other places of informal learning, play a critical role in education. On the one hand, to discourage visitors from looking at antiquities contradicts the very idea of education and the unlimited access to ideas that is fundamental to a museum’s mission. On the other hand, putting up a sign

that provides information and allows an informed and culturally sensitive choice shows a beginning, if imperfect, effort on the museum's part to be conscious of cultural differences and perceptions.

One common theme that the DIA staff extracted from interviews and consumer behavior studies that it conducted during the renovation is that people go to museums to get a sense of a shared history.<sup>xliv</sup> There is an association with museums, much as there is with (say) coffee, which conjures up a certain feeling. Museum-goers often describe their experience at a museum as “cathartic” or “biological,” or view museums as protectors of “cultural DNA.”<sup>xlv</sup> A priority for the museum, at least in theory, should be to remove barriers and emphasize the collection<sup>xlvi</sup>

## 2. RENOVATION

After his arrival in 1999, Director Graham Beal spearheaded a significant and comprehensive renovation of the museum and a reorganization of its exhibition and departmental structure, particularly between 2003-07. Some had originally hailed the selection of the new director of the DIA as a return to the academic values of research and the organization of challenging shows that would be at the heart of a world-class museum. According to museum historian Jeffery Abt and “The South End” columnist Nick Bashour, Beal fired or demoted those who had not been researching and organizing new exhibits, and hired people intent on generating exhibitions and making contributions to the study of art history.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Although Beal came on board with an academic background, according to Nancy Jones he began to shift his focus towards community outreach and education midway through the renovation process.<sup>xlvi</sup> He attended planning meetings with education department personnel and was convinced of the importance of addressing the museum collection in a new way. This differed from a traditional approach to the role of a museum based on the “privileging of art history.”<sup>xlvi</sup> According to Jones, Beal became less academically and more visitor/viewer focused.

The overhaul of the museum – its mission, emphasis, and installation of Galleries-- was intended to attract larger audiences and to provide greater accessibility to the collections. The mission statement before the renovation was “To serve the public through the collection, conservation, exhibition, and interpretation of the art of a broad range of cultures and to expand understanding of these diverse visual forms of creative expression for the enjoyment and appreciation of the widest possible array of audiences.”

It was changed in the present mission statement: “To help visitors find personal meaning in art.” The museum renovation, and the research conducted during the renovation process, brought attention to a new range of questions about museum outreach that demanded answers. What emerged as the most critical question was: How would the artwork be installed and interpreted to fulfill the new mission?

## **RETHINKING ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

Prior to the renovation, the museum was organized in a traditional format reminiscent of the “princely galleries of Europe,” with High Renaissance and Classical art as the central focus of the main floor; decorative arts, and non-Western material such as Islamic, Native American and African art placed on other floors and in more distant galleries.<sup>1</sup> As one entered the great hall of the museum, the 18th and 19th century European rooms could be entered on the right side of the hall and the American art galleries on the left, while antiquities were displayed in the central hall. Special period rooms such as the Chateau chapel were off to the sides and upstairs, while Romanesque and Early Christian art were placed in recreated grottoes in the lower floor (Figure 2).

During the renovation, the DIA moved away from the traditional encyclopedic organization format. The arrangement of galleries changed from one of specialty areas (such as “Baroque Painting” or “Decorative Arts”) to thematic presentations (such as “Arts of Daily Life”, “Arts of Silk Trade with China”, and the “Arts of the Ottoman Empire”) that mixed all forms of arts (similar to the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s American installation noted in the Introduction). The impetus for this change was in a large part due to a desire to further engage the visiting public while the museum was being renovated.

## VISITOR – FOCUSED APPROACH

A visitor focused approach in museum practices means that the primary concern of the museum is the visitor. The primary focus of exhibitions, education programs and activities of the museum is the visitor and the visitor's experience. The visitor-focused approach employed by the education department at the DIA and at many other museums, including the BMA, comes from the Visual Thinking Strategies Model developed between 1980-1995 by Abigail Hosen, a cognitive psychologist in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The "VTS" approach is based on the stage theories of Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget who identified stages of development in children. His experiments sought to discover how children learn and when they make significant breakthroughs. AVTS approach is not intended to privilege any one point of view but rather stresses a value-neutral approach.<sup>li</sup> As Nancy Jones noted "we are not here to teach art, we are here to help people engage and relate to the art... relate to their lives. If you correct them or direct them, you are crying 'I know better.' You inhibit their participation; you are undermining."<sup>lii</sup>

The adoption of the VTS approach by the DIA resulted in part from the contributions of two internal evaluators, Matt Sikora and Ken Morris in the education department, who established visitor focus groups during the renovation. As part of their formal visitor-centered research, the evaluators carefully observed people in the galleries and also questioned visitors to formulate a meta-analysis about the effectiveness the exhibitions.

In developing a meta-analysis, the evaluators created a diagram of the gallery, which showed how much time visitors spent on reading the signage and looking at

objects. The results were humbling and most revealing, as almost no time was spent reading the carefully constructed didactic panels that are a hallmark of most museum exhibits.<sup>liii</sup> The results of these studies helped the museum professionals to see that the artistic and educational messages behind the exhibitions, organized on long held assumptions, were not being effectively communicated to audiences. Understanding that the explanatory panels were not effective both freed and pushed the DIA to conceive of news ways of storytelling and organizing its collections.

### **“BIG IDEAS” AND FOCUS ON THE VISITOR**

The work produced by the evaluators informed the re-installation “teams” which Graham Beal began putting together during the renovation.<sup>liv</sup> These teams were comprised of members of the curatorial, education, design and other departments, such as marketing. They conceived of the reinstallation as a learner/participant centered overhauling of art history, a multi-themed, collection of “Big Ideas”.<sup>lv</sup>

“Big Idea” is a thematic, rather than object driven, way of presenting a collection. Teams looked around the collection and picked an idea/relationship that was object based, as in “what you could see, not what used to be explained to you.”<sup>lvi</sup> For example, instead of putting a collection of ceramics together, ceramics might be interspersed through an installation entitled “Daily Life.” Although the DIA staff made one bold curatorial choice by putting arts and cultural artifacts of Native Americans of the Michigan Area at the entrance of the museum, they unfortunately passed over many other objects and exhibits that would have acknowledged other local visitor populations. One presentation, of brief duration because it was deemed controversial, included artifacts



related to the Dutch slave trade which were placed in the Northern Renaissance period rooms.<sup>lvii</sup> After the reinstallation, “Big Ideas” ranging from themes historical periods and movements “Era of Revolution” (Figure 3) to themes of “Images of Spiritual Power” and “the Grand Tour” pervade many of the galleries.<sup>lviii</sup> The new organization was intended to invite discussion and comparison of the objects and ideas represented in the museum.

For example, “through an entry way reminiscent of arches at the Doge’s Palace in Venice” a series of galleries was organized around the theme of the “Grand Tour” of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Italy<sup>lix</sup>. The paintings, sculptures and furniture were culled from the museum’s collection to show what young European men traveling to Italy might have seen or bought at the time. In the Naples gallery, visitors could create postcards reflecting on their own “grand tour.” In other galleries there are hand-held computers and interactive displays to help interpret the exhibits. For example, in a gallery housing cases of the museum’s 18<sup>th</sup> century European serving pieces, a video projected onto a “virtual” dining table shows some of those objects being used. Other themes around the museum to engage visitors include: “Images of Spiritual Power,” featuring Native American objects; “Art and the Cycle of Life,” displaying objects from African cultures; and “the Dutch Golden Age,” reflecting on faith and commerce in 17th-century Dutch society.

Other museums such as the BMA, the Musee D’Orsay in Paris and the Tate Modern in London have explored aspects of the ideas on display in Detroit’s “Big Ideas” venture, but “observers say no institution the size and scope of the DIA has attempted such a full rethinking of its permanent collection.<sup>lx</sup>” Some critics, however, question the shedding of traditional language of art history. For example, Marlene Chambers, who retired from the Denver Art Museum after its reopening in 2006, offered a complexly

ambivalent response to the new thematic organization and interpretation in Curator: The Museum Journal (January 2009):

The art itself has been reinstalled in the expanded museum space almost entirely according to its former groupings into major collection areas defined by cultural or national origins and art historical periods or genres — a traditional and familiar scheme easily grasped by referring to the color coded gallery map. Yet, overlaid on this organizational plan are some 80 themes or Big Ideas, as the developers call them that occur in no particular order or clear organic connection.<sup>lxi</sup>

Chambers grew impatient with what she saw as gaps between progressive intention and “all-too-familiar execution,” such as “labels that present a puzzling array of unanchored facts and conclusions that seem to confer final meaning and preclude finding or trusting a personal response.”<sup>lxii</sup> She cites a specific Van Gogh label as being flawed because nothing in the text explains or points to its title “Creating Light From Within.” The conclusion on the label reads: “In all his paintings, Van Gogh captures a sense of the real and immediate. With heightened color, distorted form and brilliant colors applied in short, linear strokes, he gives direct expression to his own turbulent emotions.”<sup>lxiii</sup> She claims that the casual relationship to his biography and elements of his style do not serve visitors who are unfamiliar with the dramatic accounts of the artist’s life.

There are, however, promising labels in the DIA’s European collection that serve to show material, artistic and trade exchange among cultures. One example of such a label is in the Renaissance galleries, under the Big Idea entitled “Looking Back, Around and Elsewhere”:

**Looking Elsewhere — For Raw Materials for Color**

All three ceramic vessels were made in Italy. But the ingredients for the white and blue colors came from elsewhere. Tin in the white glaze was imported from England or Flanders. Cobalt from Persia’s Kashan province, now Iran, helped produced the blue. Italians admired, collected, and wanted to copy the fine, elusive white porcelain from China. Potters in the Middle East first developed the kind of thick, opaque glaze used on these objects to imitate porcelain. It’s called

Maiolica, possibly named after the island of Majorca between Italy and Spain, or after Málaga, Spain.

Some of the same critics who were wary about the departure from the traditional historical organization and interpretation of art, like James Steward, director of the University of Michigan's Museum of Art, note that the Detroit museum is making a choice about what is right for their visitors. "It's so wholehearted," Steward said to USA Today. "They haven't elected to test their focus on the so-called 'Big Idea' with one area of the collection, but have committed the whole of the institution to this approach."<sup>lxiv</sup> But Bruce Altshuler, director of the Museum Studies Department at New York University and quoted in the same article, noted that changes at the DIA are part of a movement to make museums more accessible that has been going on since the 1970's. The revamped DIA is not purely grounded in themes; it retains its organization by time period. "It's not really getting away from history, but presenting history in a different way around narratives" Altshuler said.<sup>lxv</sup> For Marian Chambers, the museum is still projecting it's own academically rooted ways of seeing and valuing art. She observes that the new galleries feel like an "encyclopedic display of current standard theories and practices which are employed in confusing profusion."<sup>lxvi</sup>

## **MIDDLE EASTERN GALLERIES AND THE CONCEPT OF "BIG IDEAS"**

After the structural renovation was completed in 2007 and the galleries were reinstalled under various themes, the head of the Middle Eastern Department, Heather Ecker pushed the "Big Idea" of illustrating the cultural and historical ties between the Muslim and non-Muslim world. Ms Ecker emphasized the relevance of exploring the various types of imagery from the Middle Eastern world as a response to the post-9/11

political climate. As a way of focusing attention on the cultural connections between the Arab Diaspora and the West and to attract the local population of Arabic speaking Christians, DIA curators and education personnel reinstalled the Middle Eastern galleries combining late antiquity Coptic (Levantine Christian) art and Mosarabic art from Spain. To connect the arts of the Middle East to the European collections, and to show the influence of the Middle East on western thought, Ecker grouped works around the theme of politics and trade between the Islamic world and Europe. One example of this approach was the exhibit she organized (the year before coming to the DIA) at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, “*Caliphs and Kings: The Art and Influence of Islamic Spain*” (2004), that focused on Western art during the Islamic period. It attempted to show that, from the eighth to eighteenth centuries, Al-Andulus as an Islamic ruled but culturally sophisticated region that included a varied Christian, Jewish, and Islamic population. Main themes included the Umayyid Caliphate of Cordoba, the Christian patronage of Muslim craftsmen in Spain, and exchange that produced a hybrid of Islamic and European styles that manifested in ceramics, textiles, woodworking and manuscripts.

One curatorial issue that must be considered in any gallery devoted to the arts of the Middle East and Arabic world is the prohibition on representational images that exists amongst more conservative Muslims. As is generally known, Islamic tradition does not permit the worship of representational images.<sup>lxvii</sup> Indeed, the visual representation of the prophet Mohammed is strictly prohibited. Not so well known is the fact that there is not a similar historical prohibition against non-religious representational visual arts in the Islamic world from Persia to Indonesia.<sup>lxviii</sup> Despite this tradition of permitting secular representational art in a large part of the Muslim world, there has been a gradual

conservative shift in attitudes in the Middle East against the viewing of any images. Experts in the field claim this is especially true among refugees from war-torn areas such as Iraq.<sup>lxi</sup> The emergence of Wahhabism, a fundamentalist form of Islam that is growing in influence in the Middle East has hardened opposition to the viewing of any representational art by more and more Muslim immigrants from Arabic speaking countries.

Speaking candidly about the challenges and misconceptions that surround the prohibitions against representative imagery and Islam, Ecker said that museum goers of many faiths are often more concerned with “cultural values” than with the intended “argument of the exhibition.”<sup>lxx</sup> She claims that these taboos against Western representational art are contextual and political and that the people in the U.S. who most reject representational art are often recent immigrants, and in the Detroit case are not representative of the Arab American population at large.

The fact remains that orthodox Muslims and Wahhabists “have controlled the climate of looking at images in the Arabic Muslim world”<sup>lxxi</sup> and the DIA will have to contend with this reality as refugees from the Arab peninsula continue to immigrate to Detroit. Now that the new Islamic Gallery has opened (March, 2010), Ecker plans to continue to design exhibits that highlight the history of visual arts in the Middle Eastern and Islamic world, including the history of secular representation.<sup>lxxii</sup>

### 3. MUSEUM EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SINCE REINSTALLATION

In 2008, museum educators Jennifer Williams and Madeleine Winslow confirmed that cutbacks in the state budget hampered the DIA's development of outreach projects for the Arab American population.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Despite the economic belt tightening, the DIA strove to make the museum a resource for the city. For example, audio guides are an important resource in accessing the museum's collection; however, they are costly to produce. In 2007, funding by Japanese car companies allowed for a Japanese language audio guide. There has also been government funding for museum audio guides in Spanish, but no money has been available for an Arabic guide.

Federal educational requirements and government funding play big parts in what a museum is able to do in terms of outreach to schools. The DIA has received grants for outreach programs to schools with a high percentage of Spanish speaking immigrants. Unfortunately, there is no talk of partnership with the Arab American community or ACCESS for similar outreach to the Arabic-speaking community. This is in large part due to budget cutbacks in area schools amidst an economic decline. The museum would like to hire translators for Arabic-speaking students who are brought to the museum, but this has not been possible in the current economic climate. Dearborn, the school district with the highest percentage of Arabic speaking students, is financially strapped and cannot afford to bring translators, let alone students, to the museum.

The federal No Child Left Behind Education Act of 2001 has also been a stumbling block to funding for the museum. In order for schools to justify taking students to the museum, they must find ways that the museum trip complies with the requirements of the Act. Therefore, the DIA must adapt its educational and "Big Idea" approach to the

demands of the “No Child Left Behind” regime of strict testing in basic skills.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

Although the museum is trying to design tours around “Big Idea” themes, the education department is required to demonstrate how each tour can be applied to the learning of math or the English language.<sup>lxxv</sup>

DIA Floor Plan 2011



FIGURE 1 Main Floor



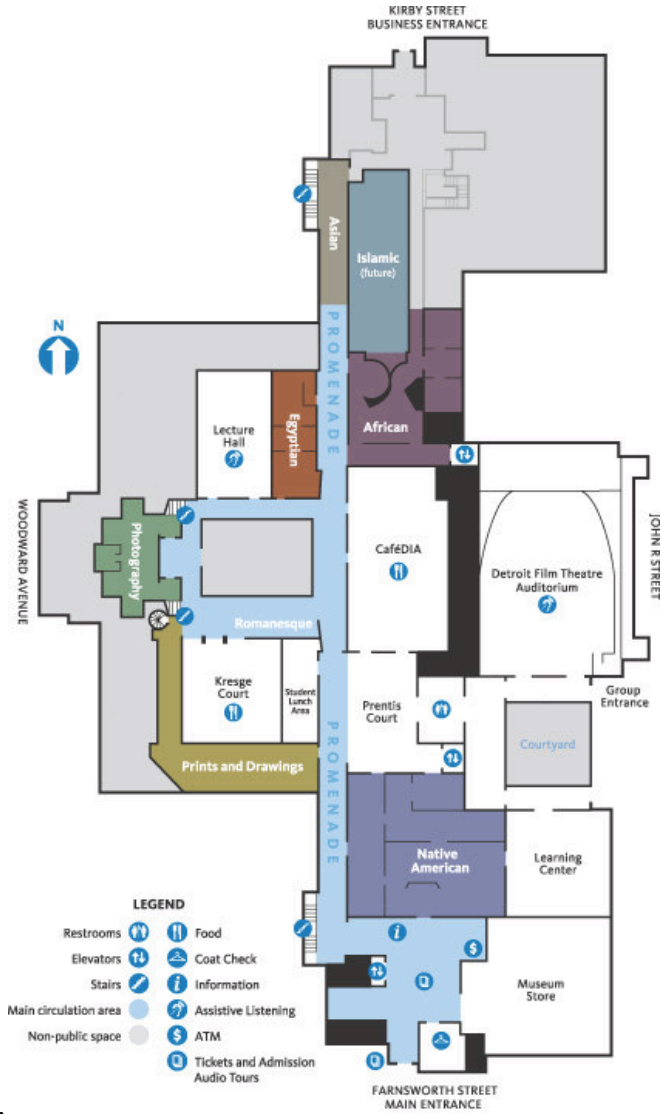


Figure 2 Lower Floor



Figure 3 Top Floor:

## **Reinstallation of Middle Eastern Galleries**

Despite the lack of money available for specific outreach to the Arabic speaking community, the DIA curatorial and education departments try to remain attentive to and interested in sharing their collections with the Arabic population in a culturally sensitive manner. Whereas in the past the arts of the Middle East and the Islamic World were at far reaches of the museum, the collection now is placed in a prominent area at the center of the museum's "downstairs."

The entrance to the museum's Middle Eastern collection showcases an introduction to the different arts of the Islamic world: books, glassware, textiles, and pottery. The collection of 170 works, though relatively small, contains diverse and important work from the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Spain, and India. It is 1,000 square feet and filled with what Adil James from the Muslim Observer referred to as "a smorgasbord of Islamic art rather than an exhaustive...look at the cultures and art of Islamic world."<sup>xxvi</sup>

Applying "Big Ideas" themes to the DIA's collection of Middle Eastern art involves linking the artistic developments, intellectual contributions and connections of the Middle East to the larger world. These are expressed in seven major themes: "The Silk Road;" "Masterpieces of Carpet Weaving;" "Art of the Great Empires: Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal;" "The Medieval Islamic World: Urban Settings and Goods;" "Art of the Mamluks;" "Mediterranean Trade and Spanish Lusterware 1250–1500;" and "Sacred Writings from the Islamic World." And, as noted in the Arab Detroit News, in keeping with the museum's visitor-centered approach, multi-layered labels and other interpretive devices are interspersed in the galleries to help visitors engage with the art.

Among these are an interactive “carpet-making” activity, a video of a master calligrapher at work, a large map of the areas represented in the galley and the popular 'Eye Spy' labels.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

The reinstallation of the overall Middle Eastern art collection at the DIA also incorporates “Big Ideas” themes. The theme of “The Medieval Islamic World: Urban Settings and Goods” centers on the arts in Islamic daily life. Islamic art is shown as it is used in daily rituals, from prayer carpets, to texts that are recited, to architecture that is lived in.<sup>lxxviii</sup> An underlying theme is that of cultural connection: “as much space is given to Christian and Jewish scripture” by Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians living under Muslim rule (included as example of themes of cultural interplay and tolerance) as “there is to Muslim scripture in the exhibit.”<sup>lxxix</sup> The narrative panels and interactive stations, created by teams made up of museum staff, outside evaluators (Daryl Fisher, Beverly Serrell and Deborah Perry) and members of the public, explain how the objects relate back to the “Big Idea” themes and critique such as “West” and “non-West.”<sup>lxxx</sup>

Art critics such as David Runk deemed the redesign of the Islamic galleries and overall reinstallation a “fresh way of looking at art” .<sup>lxxxi</sup> Others, such as Adil James of the Muslim Observer, pointed out that there is nothing on Qur’anic recitation, an important Islamic art, and that there are collections (of the Hadith) that do not have translations.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Other observations include that there is nothing from Africa, central Asia or East Asia, and nothing on poetry or on “any of the rich and different clothing traditions from around the Muslim world.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Criticisms aside, Adil James ultimately states that

The DIA has done something very gracious and important by devoting a substantial and expensive portion of its real estate to opening the world of Islamic art to museum visitors... The DIA also opened itself to Muslims from around Detroit, including TMO (The Muslim Observer), which is a very important

gesture- when we as Muslims still face tremendous pressure from prejudice and ignorance- it is an enlightened act to show an Islamic art exhibit in this time.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Although the new Islamic galleries, installed in March 2010 were fairly well received, achieving cultural sensitivity is an on-going process. The presentation and interpretation of the balance of the DIA's general collection for the Muslim immigrant audience has remained a concern.<sup>lxxxv</sup> There are no more classical nudes in the front or in the central areas of the museums. The galleries that house these nudes are now on the second floor and in the back of the museum. "Big Ideas" tours for schools with a high number of Islamic and Arabic students purposefully do not visit those galleries.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

### **Reviews of "The Big Ideas" Approach**

As innovative as the "Big Ideas" approach might be, some, such as Christina Hill and Marlene Chambers, have criticized this approach on the grounds that it "dumbs down" the art by over simplifying the information presented, or by presenting "unanchored facts," or by steering people away from objects all together.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> When the subject matter of a collection is oversimplified or specifically hidden by the museum, what does this action reveal about the institution's attitudes toward its audience? According to critic Christina Hill, "[rather] than being the beneficiaries of vanguard concepts, Detroiters have been judged [by the DIA] as dum-dums who can't engage with art, and must be lured into the DIA on some pretext unrelated to art."<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

According to the museum director Graham Beal, this criticism is a typical response from art world insiders who expect to have an unmediated experience with the artworks.<sup>lxxxix</sup> However, efforts to create a "friendly" or, -- in the case of orthodox Muslims-- a "non-offensive" environment have also won praise from the local press.<sup>xc</sup>

Beal's response to Hill was to point out that she was part of a museum-going audience that confidently enters the museum, and is familiar with the references to art history and cultural context. "But most art museum visitors are *not* trained in art history or in any of the alternative disciplines that permit works of art to "speak" to them with the ease they do to Hill, to me and to others like us."<sup>xcii</sup> He also noted that other museums, such as the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C which operate on the older, "quieter" model of museum going, do not depend on repeat visitors. They are flooded daily with visitors from out of town or overseas. Beal added that:

Different visitors have different degrees of expertise, but one thing they all have is a high degree of respect for culture and obvious intelligence.... I believe it is incumbent upon us to find ways to engage these visitors, most of whom, we *know* from our research, welcome the kinds of efforts Hill finds so egregiously wrong-headed.<sup>xciii</sup>

Despite the efforts that have been made to engage broad audiences, the issue remains of how to create a space that is both inviting and enriching to the large population of Arab Americans in the Detroit Area without pandering to preconceptions about their views of art. It remains to be seen how radical and how successful these changes will be. If the current methods like the "Big Ideas" are employed to entice new visitors do not consistently result in more Arab American visitors, it will be imperative to explore and experiment with other solutions such as outreach into the community via programming and collaborations with Arab American cultural institutions.

The DIA is dealing with issues of learning about and attracting a local audience to a stately museum in the downtown of a city that remains distinctly in the shadow of its manufacturing past. In moving from an academic approach to a visitor friendly approach, the museum itself has had to reorganize internally in order to respond to its audiences and

create exhibits that re-invigorate the museum and the notion of museum going. The following sections will discuss how, through an understanding of the demographics, history, and cultural ways of seeing of the Arab American Muslim American population in Michigan and by looking to other museums' practices for models of programming and exhibitions, the DIA can successfully include Arab Americans in the life of the museum and create a space for intercultural dialogue and exchange.

#### **4. DETROIT AND ARAB AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS**

To understand the complex context of Arab Americans in Detroit and what that means for museum visiting in Detroit, it is important to look at both the changes in Detroit's demographics and the varied demographic and cultural history of Arab immigrants in the United States.<sup>xciii</sup> After a brief discussion of the demographics, this section will focus on the demographic, cultural and religious background of Arab American immigrants.

Despite the fact that Michigan has the largest concentration of Arab American Muslims in the country, the DIA has not really offered programs that reach and penetrate into the Arab American population (as was discussed in the previous section). Along with the loss of population in Detroit, the museum has lost potential visitors. However, in the past few decades, a vibrant Arab immigrant population has grown in and around Detroit and these immigrants represent potential new museumgoers. It is important to understand the background of these people in order to more thoughtfully include them in museum life. However, in terms of civic engagement, museum professionals would benefit from ethnographic engagement and research into the cultural experiences of the Arab American population. The cultural values shared by Arab peoples are as profound as their religion, political views and languages are diverse.

#### **THE POPULATION OF DETROIT**

Due to the growth of the auto industry, Detroit was one of the largest and wealthiest cities, "the Paris of the Midwest," in the United States in 1920's.<sup>xciv</sup> Automobile wealth allowed the DIA to expand into its present downtown Beaux Arts



home in 1927 and markedly increase its collections with mostly European and American pieces.<sup>xcv</sup> Shifts in Detroit's population since the Second World War have dramatically changed the city's demographics and significantly affected the amount of funds and number of visitors coming into the museum.<sup>xcvi</sup>

Detroit has been particularly hard hit by the general decline in manufacturing in the United States. Auto production soared to an all time peak in 1955.<sup>xcvii</sup> Faced with growing foreign and domestic competitors, Detroit had already started to decline by 1958 when unemployment briefly reached 20%.<sup>xcviii</sup> Auto companies merged, folded or moved away. By 1960, Chrysler, for example, had dropped the number of its workers at Detroit plants from 130,000 to 50,000.<sup>xcix</sup>

In some ways present-day Detroit could be described as a shell of a city. Its broad avenues look barren. Once grand buildings in Detroit's downtown, such as the Book-Cadillac Hotel and the United Artists Building, are empty or crumbling from neglect and many houses in once prosperous neighborhoods have been burnt out or boarded up. Like its infrastructure, Detroit's urban population has shriveled and changed character. In 1940, Detroit boasted a population of 1,623,452 and was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest U.S. city<sup>c</sup> In 2010, its population registered just 713,777 and was the 18<sup>th</sup> largest U.S. city.<sup>ci</sup> The African American population of Detroit was 149,119 in 1940: in 2000 it numbered 679,000.<sup>cii</sup> The city lost most of its inhabitants to "white flight" beginning in the 1960's, a trend in most of the nation's industrial cities at that time.<sup>ciii</sup> Recently, however, blacks are moving out of Detroit towards outlying areas. According to William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, Detroit lost 185,393 black residents from 2000 to 2010. "This is the biggest loss of blacks the city has shown, and that's tied to the

foreclosures in the city's housing,' Mr. Frey said. Because of the Great Migration — when blacks flowed from the South to the North — and the loss of whites, he said, 'Detroit has been the most segregated city in the country and it is still pretty segregated, but not as much.' At one point, the city was 83 percent black.”<sup>civ</sup> An article in the Windsor (Ontario, Canada.) Star claims this is an indication that the middle class of both races has given up on the city: “To some extent it is the fear of crime, the lack of grocery stores; the higher cost of everything, including auto insurance. There are countless stories of people, [middle class] white and black, who struggled valiantly for years to stay in Detroit, before giving up in exhaustion.”<sup>cv</sup>

## **BACKGROUND OF THE DETROIT ARAB-AMERICAN POPULATION AND THE ARAB IMMIGRATION**

In contrast to the relative emptiness of urban Detroit, the surrounding suburbs are made up of varied and extremely vibrant immigrant communities. They include large populations of Asian, Greek, Polish and German immigrants. Since the turn of the twentieth century there has also been a surge in the immigrant population of Maronite Christians from Lebanon and Muslim peoples from Yemen (the later coming after Henry Ford began to build plants in the Detroit area).<sup>cvi</sup> While Detroit proper has shrunk in population, the ethnic Arab communities surrounding Detroit have continued to grow. Recent estimates of the number of Arab Americans living in the Detroit area range from 409,000 to 450,000 according to the U.S. Census and Zogby International .<sup>cvi</sup> However, these figures may be grossly underestimated, “due to intermarriage and mistrust of government surveys” among recent immigrants.<sup>cvi</sup>

Identifying the history of Arab immigration patterns is difficult, often due to the fluidity of terms and definitions used to describe ethnic groups by the U.S. Census Bureau. Arab peoples have immigrated to the United States since the 19th century. When Palestinian entrepreneurs attended the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and began to sell their products, they subsequently began to explore trade with the United States.<sup>cxix</sup> In the early 1900's Arab Americans were re-classified by the census bureau from "Turks in Asia" to "Syrians". In 1952, they were re-classified to "white". Current practice folds the count of Arab Americans "into those of white populations and prevents researchers from obtaining accurate modern and historical demographics."<sup>cx</sup>

After the Second World War, internal strife and civil war in the Middle East caused many Arabs to immigrate to the United States. Conflict-driven immigration into the United States occurred particularly after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the 1975 civil war in Lebanon, and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Muslim and Christian, these immigrants included professionals and students who remained in the United States after graduating from college.<sup>cxix</sup> In recent years turmoil in the Middle East has swelled the Arab immigrant population to include Iraqi Chaldean, Egyptian Coptic, Iraqi Muslims (mostly Shiite), Syrians, Yemenis, and Palestinians.<sup>cxii</sup>

Because of the confusion fueled by a lack of knowledge, the U.S. public equates "Arab" with "Muslim." This was evident in the public response to the Al Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11). However, Arabs who are Muslim make up less than one third of the Arab American population (estimated at 2.3 million).<sup>cxiii</sup> Early Arab immigrants to the United States were comprised mainly of Christians leaving the Ottoman Empire, and later Lebanon and Palestine.<sup>cxiv</sup> In fact, Arabs make up only 12

percent of the American Muslim population; 40 percent of American Muslims are African American, while 25 percent are from India's sub continent.<sup>cxv</sup> (These numbers are changing slightly, however, due to Chaldean and Muslim refugees coming from Iraq in recent years.<sup>cxvi</sup>)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Michigan Arab American population grew by 65% between 1990 and 2000, more than doubling since 1980. Sixty percent of the population claims either Lebanese or Iraqi/Chaldean heritage along with sizable numbers of Palestinian/Jordanian and Yemeni Americans. More than 80% of Arab Americans reside in the three counties, Wayne, Oakland and Macomb, surrounding Detroit. Over thirty percent of the city of Dearborn claims Arab heritage.<sup>cxvii</sup>

## **EXCEPTIONALISM OF THE DETROIT ARAB-AMERICAN POPULATION**

The Detroit Arab population is considered typical of the Arab American experience, but some question whether it is truly representative of the whole of the Arab American communities. Katherine Pratt Ewing points out two assertions about the Detroit/Dearborn Muslim Arab population: 1) that their "Post 9/11 experiences in Detroit are representative of Muslim communities in other parts of the US" and 2), that "they are exceptional with respect to national patterns because of the high visibility of Arabs and Muslims in this area and the public's resulting perception of their concentrated Otherness."<sup>cxviii</sup>

Although Arab Detroit is among the longest standing of US Arab American communities, most of its population has only arrived recently. This recent wave of immigrants is far more fluent in Arabic and other languages than in English.<sup>cxix</sup> Relative

to other Arab American communities that are largely Christian, the proportion of Muslims, particularly Shi'a Muslim, is greater in Detroit. In general, Detroit's Arab population is wealthy and educated, but there are a large number of poor and uneducated recent immigrants.<sup>cxx</sup> Dearborn itself (where a large number of Arab Muslims live in high concentration) is America's most highly visible and largest Arab American enclave.

Arab Americans have exerted political influence for several decades in Detroit. Detroit has a uniquely large number of Arab American elected public servants, including law enforcement officers and both appointed and elected government officials.<sup>cxxi</sup> This political activism has given Detroit Arabs a voice and influence that was not available to those organizing around Arab American concerns at the national level. One expert on Arab American populations, Helen Samhan, has written that:

“Arab Detroit was exceptional due to integrated and established positions in media, police enforcement, local institutions, business, of peoples of Muslim and Arab descent peoples. Arabs in Detroit have had political influence and voice at a local level, which allowed for protections that those at the national level did not have due to the national level phenomena such as the Patriot act.”<sup>cxxii</sup>

On the national level, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center, Muslim and Christian Arabs have suffered harassment at airports and immigration points, detention and deportation without legal counsel, and unprecedented surveillance. Certainly these reactions to 9/11 had a political and cultural impact locally despite the strong political presence of Arabs in the greater Detroit area. Nevertheless, like many immigrant groups, Arab Americans in Detroit are part of “a political and historical landscape that limits how, when, and to what extent [they are called, and call themselves,] American”.<sup>cxxiii</sup> The Detroit Arab American Study, which surveyed more than 1,000 Arab Americans, and is the focus of the book published in

August 2009 by the Russell Sage Foundation, analyzed this complex backdrop, making an emphatic argument to put to rest the cultural and political stereotypes of Arab Americans as somehow “other.”<sup>cxxiv</sup>

Despite the distinctiveness of Detroit’s Arab population compared to other Arab American communities, Detroit does provide a useful starting point from which to explore issues surrounding civic and community engagement in Arab American and immigrant communities. According to Sally Howell and Amaney Jamal, “Looking at Detroit is not just to look at a singular, exceptional demographic, but to see if there are important implications for nationwide Arab and Muslim communities in the proceeding years.”<sup>cxxv</sup>

### **ARAB-AMERICANS AND CULTURAL AND CITIZENSHIP ISSUES**

Mainstream perceptions of Arab Americans are often devoid of a nuanced understanding of important aspects of Arab culture and simply reduce Arab culture to “other” as defined by perceived religious taboos. This is apparent even in well-intentioned efforts at reaching out to Arab Americans, such as when museum professionals offer to put screens in front of classical nudes or send pamphlets advising schools with a high percentage of Muslim students not to send them to exhibitions.<sup>cxxvi</sup> Looking solely at perceived religious taboos of a small, but growing portion of the Arab American population without taking into account that there are means to include this population in the civic life of Detroit is to miss an important opportunity for civic engagement.

In order for museums and other cultural institutions to engage Arab American families, it is essential to understand the importance of the family in Arab American life. One key difference between American and Western European cultures and Arab cultures is the sense of the individual as it pertains to the larger unit.<sup>cxxvii</sup> Halim Barakat, in The Arab World: Society, Culture and State(1993), asserts that Arab culture, and in a sense many cultures of the Mediterranean world, link the concepts of loyalty, honor and shame directly to the family.<sup>cxxviii</sup> That is, accomplishment and failures of individuals reflect on their family far more than in Western cultures. Membership in a family, group, or tribe, is key to the individual's worth in the community.

Arabs do not define the individual as separate from the family network. This, however, is more relevant to the Arab world than to the rest of the Muslim world. Arabs, Muslim and Christian, are part of a Mediterranean cultural group that maintains the primacy of family in a person's identity.<sup>cxxix</sup> In American culture, by contrast, the privacy of the individual is paramount and it is the individual whose needs require a much more central focus. Also, integrity and shame belong to the individual, not to the family. In explaining this, McCloud states that:

Arabs, on the other hand, have always believed that fate and loyalty to one's family takes precedence over personal needs. The individual has duties and obligations, but only after the responsibility to God; all other obligations are to the family. Personal integrity or shame belongs also to the family. Thus, a person's dignity, honor and reputation are of paramount importance and no effort should be spared to protect them, especially one's honor. Arab Muslims (and South Asian Muslims) want to convey that sense of dignity and honor, to make a good impression on others. While personal status in the West is understood as what the individual has achieved (either divorced from or married to the family), Arab cultures see individual achievement as family achievement.<sup>cxxx</sup>

The identification of the self is not limited to family relationships. The identities of many Arab individuals are specifically related to units larger than themselves. The

concept of the individual that many conceive of as universal stands in contradistinction to that of many Arabs. Zogby International, an international market research, opinion polling and consulting firm, asked U.S. students and students from Arab countries to use three words to describe themselves. They found that the U.S. students offered individual personality traits such as “outgoing, cheerful, or sporty,” while the words Arab students used to describe themselves referred to larger groupings such as “Muslim, Maronite, Jordanian.”<sup>cxxxix</sup>

In the Arab culture, a person’s relationships are often the drive behind their accomplishments. There is the understanding that all relationships come with rights and duties. In fact, Arab families could be defined as a web of duties and the basic socioeconomic unit.<sup>cxxxix</sup> Accomplishment is directly linked to those relationships.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

The Detroit Arab American Study argues that “contemporary Arab American citizenship and identity have been shaped by the chronic tension between social inclusion and exclusion that has been central to this population's experience in United States.”<sup>cxxxix</sup> Given the understanding that family is paramount in Arab culture, all approaches to that group by museums and other cultural institutions must strive to incorporate a focus on the family and other relationships rather than on the individual when developing strategies of engagement. As will be discussed in the final chapters, the DIA could engage visitors from the Arab population by organizing activities specifically aimed at bringing in Arab speaking families into the museum.



## **5. STRATEGIC THINKING AND PLANNING ABOUT OUTREACH**

The DIA would benefit from studying the strategic thinking and planning of the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in Los Angeles, ACCESS and the Arab American National Museums, both in Dearborn Michigan. Both offer examples of institutional outreach into communities that have been marginalized. As discussed below, both institutions have confronted or addressed fear of specific cultures and religions through specific programming, partnerships and exhibitions.

### **JAPANESE AMERICAN PARALLELS**

The treatment of Arab Americans in the wake of 9/11 evoked some parallels to the Japanese American experience during World War II when 120,000 Japanese Americans -- both citizens and non citizens (first generation Japanese immigrants were prohibited from becoming citizens until 1952) -- were forced to leave homes, belongings, and businesses to live in American concentration camps.<sup>cxv</sup> Because of this experience, the leaders of the Japanese-American population in California were determined not to let the story of their treatment disappear from the American consciousness.

In the early 1980's a group of Japanese-American community members in Los Angeles, including World War II veterans and business people from Little Tokyo in downtown Los Angeles, joined forces to create what became the JANM.<sup>cxvi</sup> The "opening of the Japanese-American National Museum in May 1992 was significant not only for the 850,000 Japanese Americans in the United States, but for Americans of every ethnicity."<sup>cxvii</sup> The mission of the JANM was to carefully document the Japanese-

American experience within the context of broader American history and to improve awareness of ethnic and cultural diversity.<sup>cxviii</sup>

After 9/11, Japanese Americans saw clearly the parallels between the historical depictions of Japanese Americans during World War II and the predominantly negative imagery and media focus on Arab Americans. These suspicions based on race were reminiscent of the days following the outbreak of World War II, when Japanese-Americans were considered “the enemy” by their own government simply by virtue of their ancestry. A few days after 9/11 the JANM issued a public statement to the media reaffirming its mission “to interpret and link the lessons of history to the present and to reach out to Arab American and Muslim communities who could be unfairly targeted on the basis of their ancestry.”<sup>cxix</sup> Additionally, the JANM “brought together Japanese-Americans, Arab Americans, law enforcement officers and federal agencies to discuss the challenges of maintaining national security while also protecting the civil liberties of United States residents.”<sup>cxl</sup> The support of the Japanese-American community was crucial to the development of the National Arab American museum.

### **SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 AND ACCESS**

After September 11, 2001, there was an expectation on the part of Arab Americans that both Muslim and non-Muslim persons prominent in the government, community and business world would stand up and call for civil rights protections and ethnic and religious tolerance for American Muslims. One organization involved in advocating civil rights was the ACCESS based in Dearborn, Michigan.<sup>cxli</sup>

Despite this expectation, following the attacks of 9/11, threats on members of the Arab American community increased. The director of ACCESS, Ishmael Ahmed, began

to receive hate mail and threatening verbal communications. “In one incident a group of young white men followed him in a car shouting threats that they would kill him. Ahmed appeared on local and national media, including ‘60 Minutes’p, often to refute unfounded and inaccurate statements about the financial and moral support of terrorists by the Arab American population”<sup>cxlii</sup>

The attacks inspired ACCESS to begin additional political and cultural outreach, such as creating more programs to help immigrants, campaigning against laws that could have a detrimental effect on the Arab American community and addressing the pressing need to educate the public about Arab American culture and Arab American history. ACCESS organized support for Arab Americans by putting together teams of educators and counselors to visit area schools to help students, both Arab and non-Arab, deal with the aftermath of 9/11 and become more aware of Arab American history and culture. ACCESS also joined with other civic organizations to sponsor public programs, interfaith candlelight vigils, town hall meetings, and cultural events.<sup>cxliii</sup>

The cultural outreach department of ACCESS, which gave presentations about Arab culture to local school groups, eventually grew into the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in 2005. The museum is located in Dearborn, Michigan, the area with the second highest concentration of Arab-speaking peoples in world (after Paris) outside of the Middle East.<sup>cxliv</sup> The goals of this museum and cultural center were to preserve and collect history, culture art of Arab and Arab American people, to supply the community and scholars with a research center, and to "to enhance the knowledge and understanding about Arab Americans and their presence in the United States."<sup>cxlv</sup>

The AANM is the first museum in the U.S. devoted to Arab American history and culture. The timing of the museum's formation, however, was both inspired and impeded by political events. When the attacks of 9/11 occurred, the need for cultural outreach and information regarding Arab Americans was never more palpable, but racial tension and lack of resources created obstacles not only for ACCESS but also for the formation of the AANM. As hate crimes targeting Muslims and people who appeared to be of Middle Eastern ethnicity in Detroit increased from 22 in 2000 to 581 in 2001, administrators at ACCESS worried about both the funding and the timing of the museum.<sup>cxlvi</sup> Anan Ameri, the director of the AANM, stated in Museum News that

*In the spring of 2000 the AANM seemed an idea whose time had come at last. There was not a single Arab American museum anywhere in the United States. The founders saw the need for educating the American public and countering a growing misconception about Arab culture. There were serious obstacles, though: no funding yet in place, no collection, no building, and no consensus on programming. It looked to everyone involved like a daunting task. Then September 11 happened, and suddenly an Arab American museum looked almost impossible.*<sup>cxlvii</sup>

Ahdaf Soueif, Egyptian writer, novelist, and commentator claims that while the Arab world has embraced much of Western thought and products, the Arab and Middle Eastern contributions to world culture have been largely ignored or vilified. He points out that the "Western world was the first to deny the intellectual exchange and important contributions of the Arab world."<sup>cxlviii</sup> He goes on to state that the

U.S., Germany, and China are the three great exporting countries. [The Arab world] absorbs their goods, popular culture, history, and literature. Yet, as in terms of cultural exchange, the Arab world feels like a jilted lover: [who] loves the West, and wants the West to love it back.<sup>cxlix</sup>

*It looked to everyone involved that creating a museum was a daunting task. Then September 11 happened, and suddenly an Arab American museum looked almost*

*impossible.<sup>cl</sup> Making a museum possible in the wake of September 11 took concerted effort on the part of ACCESS, with help from the Japanese-American National Museum.*

***THE SPECIAL ROLE OF THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM in THE FORMATION OF THE ARAB-AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM***

*As noted above, the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) was created in 1992 in response to discrimination similar to that the Arab American population was facing. Soon after September 11, 2001, JANM took steps to bring attention to the civil liberties of Arab Americans. It also extended support to ACCESS and the AANM, convincing them of the timeliness of their plans for a museum and encouraging them to continue with its formation.<sup>cli</sup> The staff of the JAMN expressed “its willingness to assist ACCESS in whatever way possible to launch its new cultural center.”<sup>clii</sup>*

In meetings and public programs throughout 2002, organized by former U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Norman Mineta, JAMN and ACCESS, with the National Coalitions of Christians and Jews (an organization that has worked to build multicultural coalitions and programs), U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye and local members of the community, the JAMN helped ACCESS to create partnerships and support for an “ethnic institution dedicated to arts, culture and history.”<sup>cliii</sup>

The JAMN support for ACCESS encouraged the latter to continue with the building of their museum and cultural center while providing guidelines for the creation of a board. The JAMN was instrumental in showing AAMN how to build support from community and public leaders, and to create ways to partner with other cultural arts

programs to become a dynamic force for change and growth within the Arab American population.<sup>cliv</sup>

Since its opening in Dearborn, Michigan in 2005, the AAMN has become increasingly involved in the surrounding community and on the national stage as an institution dedicated to cultural exchange, education and research. By creating partnerships with local businesses and arts organizations through concert series such as “Concert of Colors” and an Arab American Hip Hop festival, film festivals, exhibitions, and a permanent collection culled from Arab American personal stories and collections, the AANM has successfully integrated into and augmented the Detroit cultural landscape.<sup>clv</sup> [These partnerships will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.]

According to museum staff, evidence of this success has been the growing popularity of the various AANM festivals drawing large crowds of Arab Americans and non Arab Americans from not only Dearborn but from all of Michigan.<sup>clvi</sup> As stated in the museum’s 2009 activity report: “attendance has increased from 50,000 in 2007 to 52,000 in 2008 and 56,000 in 2009. An estimated 325,000 people attended annual off-site events such as Concert of Colors, the Museum’s annual Gala, and educational workshops and seminars....and more than 25% of visitors come from outside Michigan.<sup>clvii</sup>

#### **AAMN AND CULTURAL VALUES REGARDING ART**

The AANM exhibition organizers carefully weigh how their exhibitions answer to and represent the communities they hope to reach.<sup>clviii</sup> The exhibition committee consists of AANM staff and members of the ACCESS community. Their programming concentrates on mediums such as crafts or films. While considering community attitudes and needs, AAMN curators admit that they are sensitive to concerns regarding the impact

of representational images on the recent, more conservative Arab immigrant population. One way they make sure that the exhibitions are appropriate is to obtain committee approval of all exhibition ideas.

When asked about the perceived prohibition against nudity, AAMN curators and educators claimed that they have created strategies to address this issue that arises only occasionally.<sup>clix</sup> For example, the small exhibition of drawings, "To Discover Beauty: The Art of *Kahlil Ghibran*" (2006), included the depiction of a naked torso. The museum installed a sign on the entrance to the exhibit warning that the exhibition included the portrayal of partial nudity. One might argue that small-scale drawings, might pose less of a sensitivity issue than exhibiting three dimensional life-sized nudes.<sup>clx</sup> What the curators maintained, however, is that the context of the art is paramount when understanding the sensitivity to figural depiction. According to Islamic tradition, the human form is not to be used in a religious context.<sup>clxi</sup> As was noted in the first section, however, some maintain that Wahhabists, Shi'a Muslims and more conservative recent immigrants take issue with any depictions of the human form, secular or otherwise.<sup>clxii</sup> Indeed, there may exist some irresolvable conflicts among segments of any diverse society, but a museum can be a safe place for individuals to discuss ideas that they might not elsewhere.

The AANM and the JANM both provide models of how a museum might reach out and include marginalized or misunderstood populations through programming and exhibits. The DIA could partner with institutions such as the AANM to offer programming on a bigger scale that targets both Muslim and non- Muslim audiences. A museum can create a place for intercultural dialogue, for sharing their arts and cultural developments. The next chapter will discuss Arab Islamic arts, Islamic attitudes towards

art, and Arab American cultural engagement that the DIA could potentially consider when creating exhibitions and programming.



**6. MUSEUMS AND ARAB AND ISLAMIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS ART:**  
**THE IMPERATIVE FOR CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATION OF ARABIC ISLAMIC**  
**ARTS**

The history of art is often assumed to be a reflection of the history of society and culture. The rich cultures of Islamic populations have created art that reveals a complexity of iconography and imagery. As a result, the display and study of Islamic art can serve as a reference for understanding Islam's social structure, cultural achievements and history.

Scholars have traditionally described Islamic art as either “social documentation, a record of dynasties and economic interests” or as a record of stylistic developments that were shaped by historical and geographic spread of ideas and techniques.<sup>clxiii</sup> Scholar Walter Denny warns, however, that it is important to be cognizant that there is a tendency to compartmentalize Islamic art and attitudes towards art of the Middle East:

Under such circumstances, the individual who sets out to characterize and define Islamic art in broad terms must tread somewhat warily--he or she is, after all, working in a field where a commonly accepted textbook has not even appeared, and where many general works on the subject sidestep important matters of definition by resorting to watertight compartmentalization of art by medium, by dynasty, or by geographical area; this same compartmentalization is frequently reflected in the organization of museums of Islamic art.<sup>clxiv</sup>

**CONSIDERING ISLAMIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS ART**

The display of nudity is specifically disapproved of in the Koran, but what else is truly known about the reaction to images of Western art within the very diverse Muslim world? Because there are different understandings about Islamic attitudes towards art in general., it is important to consider the milieu in which Islamic attitudes towards figurative art evolved. Although curators from the Arab American Museum (AAM) in

Dearborn, Michigan claim that given the proper context figurative art is permissible, scholarly texts claim that, according to tradition and non-Koranic texts, a deep mistrust of naturalistic images has evolved in Islam.<sup>clxv</sup> Although the Koran does state that God alone gives value to visual representation (Koran 3.43), the Hadith (a body of traditions describing the life of the Prophet which has acquired a quasi-canonical character), historic developments and Semitic culture played a larger role in the development of Muslim attitudes towards imagery.<sup>clxvi</sup> Part of this is because the formation of Islamic imagery had to do not only with religion, culture and politics, but also with a perceived need to reject medieval and Byzantine Christian images<sup>clxvii</sup>. The result of this was art rich in calligraphic, biomorphic and geometric forms.

In considering Islamic art and Muslim Arab attitudes towards art, it is important to be aware of the developmental differences between Islamic and Western art. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the “question of the prohibition of the figural image in Islamic art, and the attitudes of Islamic theologians toward this question over time.”<sup>clxviii</sup> Indeed, the matter continues to be debated in theological circles in modern Islam. Other art forms such as photography, comics, television and cinema also continue to raise questions and provoke controversy in the Islamic world.<sup>clxix</sup>

According to Walter Denny, the tenuous position of figural art in Islam is “but one aspect of a much wider ambiguity composed of a set of contradictory needs in Islamic civilization, needs that have profoundly affected the role of the Islamic artist and the product of his work.”<sup>clxx</sup> Some scholars argue that Islamic art arose as much from trade and artistic exchange as from political developments and theological questions.<sup>clxxi</sup> Also according to Denny, in addition to the structural conflict of a puritanical and anti-

sensual nature of visual art, the enormous difference across the Islamic world in ethnicity and theological orthodoxy, and the embracing matrix of inherited non-Islamic or even anti-Islamic cultures, have created doubt in the minds of some scholars about the existence of an entity called 'Islamic art', at least to the extent that such an entity can be defined in traditional art-historical terms. The debate over this definition is frequently as lively as that surrounding the meaning of the terms 'Arab' or 'Muslim.'<sup>clxxii</sup>

The study of the historical relationship between attitudes and art in the Islamic world is a burgeoning field, but there is yet to be a scholarly consideration of contemporary attitudes within Islamic cultures to Western art in particular. Islam remains firmly against the use of representational images in a religious context. But in some areas of the Muslim world, such as Saudi Arabia for example, religious, social, political and artistic worlds converge under the control of the state.<sup>clxxiii</sup> In other areas of the Muslim world, however, as in the more secular society of Turkey, religious imagery is increasingly separated from any social and political context.<sup>clxxiv</sup>

Despite the trend towards secularism in Turkey, general cultural mores related to religion still dictate taste and comfort when confronting images in the Arab world.<sup>clxxv</sup> Even though in the twentieth century there are examples of secular leaders in Muslim nations, such as Iraq, who used representational imagery for political purposes, there remains great opposition to the uses of figural representation that touch on cultural taboos as mentioned earlier (thus the discomfort with the Camille Claudel/August Rodin exhibit at the DIA, which highlighted an "adulterous" affair).<sup>clxxvi</sup> It also is not clear to what extent Arabs who are not Muslim share these attitudes. The process employed by the museum staff at the Arab American Museum to determine what is going to be exhibited

reveals an evolution of attitudes towards images among Arabic peoples in the Detroit area that will be explored below.

Just as there has not been a great deal of scholarship about contemporary attitudes within Islamic cultures to Western art in particular, neither is there any major scholarly focus on the attitudes towards art held by Muslim Arab Americans, especially recent Arab immigrants. Looking at the differences in taboos and cultural mores among recent Arab immigrants and other Arab Americans, however, may provide insights into the attitudes towards art that do exist. As previously noted, recent immigrants tend to be conservative, and they may come from countries where extreme fundamentalist attitudes towards imagery hold sway.<sup>clxxvii</sup> Examining changing attitudes towards Islam and Muslim life within the contemporary Arab American experience may also offer some clues about attitudes towards involvement in broader cultural institutions, such as art museums, among Muslim Arab American immigrants.

Clearly there is interest and support for and production of contemporary secular performing, musical and visual arts by Muslim and non Muslim Arab Americans in the United States (ranging from hip hop, comedy and dance to film, painting and sculpture as shown in the Arab American National Museum's 2007 DIWAN festival). While recent refugees from Arab countries have been wary about cultural involvement that is not religiously sanctioned, there has emerged a diverse cadre of Arab American artists who are engaging in mainstream arts from performance to visual arts.<sup>clxxviii</sup> While there are prohibitions on types of images made and viewed, there is still a diversity of types of images being created and appreciated by and for Muslims.

## **MOSQUES, CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE SHIFT TOWARDS CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDES IN DETROIT**

The cultural life of Muslim Arab Americans in Detroit often center on the mosques, as mosques in the United States serve both as a place of worship as well as a cultural hub.<sup>clxxix</sup> Interestingly, Arab American mosques allow women to share leadership responsibilities and worship alongside men. The mosques in the Detroit/Dearborn area also held bingo games, art classes, weddings, showers and events for youth such as dances and Halloween parties. But in the 1980's the Detroit Arab-Muslim population became increasingly shaped by the more conservative mores resulting from the influx of immigrants coming from war torn countries. These immigrants brought their own customs and interpretations of Islamic values into the mosques. As less conservative founding members of the mosques stepped down, social activities gradually ceased, and women were expected to wear traditional dress and to pray in a room separate from men.<sup>clxxx</sup>

In Yvonne Haddad's study of two mosques, a member of the older Arab American community describes the shift amongst the mosques: "A lot of these customs didn't really have much to do with Islam, but people have practiced them for many years in Arab [tribal societies]. They thought this was they way it should be done. And they started forcing it on the people who were members of the mosques. Because of that you could see the younger generation leaving the mosques."<sup>clxxxi</sup>

Sometimes the differences created by the shifting population and the challenges of integrating various groups of Muslims (American-born and new immigrants) into one community are theological, other times they are simply due to language or culture.

For uneducated Muslims from rural areas of the Arab world, the mosque is needed to provide identity and comfort in a new and alien world. According to Yvonne Haddad,

What may appear to more established groups who are more at home in the [American] culture as ultra-conservatism or as an arbitrary return to outdated customs, to a [recent] immigrant, [mosques which promote a conservative understanding of Islam represents] a much needed stability and a means of preserving that which is most deeply cherished.<sup>clxxxii</sup>

For museum professionals in Detroit it is essential to understand immigration patterns and their impact on varied attitudes towards imagery among Arab populations. Applying cultural sensitivity and outreach to these mosque communities would likely produce an increase in visitorship from local Arab American immigrant populations.

## 7. OPPORTUNITIES TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

### **EXHIBITIONS AS INSPIRATION**

Mounting an exhibition around the theme of trade brings to the fore the exchange of art, language, religion, politics and ideas that has occurred for millennia without regard to territorial boundaries. Organizing an exhibit around such an exchange -- the “Big Idea” approach -- reflects the ideas presented by noted anthropologist Eric Wolf in his book Europe and the People without History (2 edition 1997)

Wolf, examining the European expansion through the modern era, asserts that non-European peoples were active participants in the progress of history, rather than static, unchanging cultures.<sup>clxxxiii</sup> European expansion affected an interactive exchange – though not equal – between both European societies and the societies upon which they encroached. Exhibits organized around exchanges of trade and culture can easily highlight often overlooked contributions of the Islamic world to Western culture, such as the architecture, baroque music, rosaries and the French novel without making forced connections.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> Wolf states that

the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality. Concepts like “nation,” “society,” and “culture” name bits and threaten to turn names into things. Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships, and by placing them back and into the file from which they were abstracted, can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding.<sup>clxxxv</sup>

Thus, one possible curatorial track for exhibiting ancient art would be to show objects along trade routes, such as the silk roads, connecting the ancient worlds of Greece, Sumeria, the Sassanian empire, India and China.<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

Developing a plan to bring in Islamic Arab Americans into museums should include the creation of exhibits that concern their history, art and culture. Often exhibits that present Islamic culture and art have been conceived in terms of a geographical region, such as The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery's collaborative exhibition with the Textile Museum, "Mamluk Rugs from Egypt" (2003), curated by Carol Bier. This is a common approach in museology, which reflects the traditional art history trajectory, wherein non-Western art is presented regionally and Western art is presented as if on a linear, progressive timeline such as "art of the Impressionists" or "Renaissance sculpture".

A few museum curators, however, are introducing a radically different approach to museum art history. Stefano Carboni, for example, the head of Islamic and Near Eastern Art at the MMoA, focuses on highlighting the exchange and interaction among cultures that has occurred for thousands of years. Carboni has mounted important exhibitions that incorporate Islamic art in the general context of world art and intellectual history. He has created exhibits that connect the Islamic world of the Middle East to the Far East, in "The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Art and Culture in Western Asia" (2002-2003), and to the West, with "Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797" (2007).

Created in collaboration with the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, "Venice and the Islamic World" showed the intellectual and artistic exchange that flourished between those two areas. The chronologically and thematically arranged exhibition included maps and early Islamic objects that had arrived in Venice through trade. The variety of uses of Islamic glass, rock crystal, carpets, textiles, and metalwork in Venetian churches and estates was explored and detailed in the exhibition. Scientific instruments and manuscripts from Islamic lands were valued in Venice, as they were more sophisticated



than anything available in medieval Europe. By displaying texts, translated from Arabic into Latin, and medical and scientific instruments, the exhibition showed how intellectual developments from the Islamic world spawned advancements in Venetian science and philosophy.

The exhibition devoted considerable space to the visual representation of the economic and diplomatic exchanges between Venice and the Islamic world in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. The rugs brought to Venice by Arabs and displayed as items of luxury are evident in Venetian art. Paintings by Bellini, Carpaccio and Mansueti depicting Ottoman leaders and Venetian ambassadors to Egypt and Turkey dressed in “Oriental” attire established the Oriental trend in European art.<sup>clxxxvii</sup> At the same time, idealized naturalistic portraits created by Western artists specifically for Islamic customers influenced the future of Islamic painting.<sup>clxxxviii</sup>

This important exhibition provided evidence of the complexity of Venice’s relationship with the Islamic world. Fifteenth century depictions of people from the Islamic world in Venetian paintings portray them as sages and people of distinction. As the sixteenth century progressed, trade continued but Venetians felt threatened by the strength of the Ottoman military.<sup>clxxxix</sup> Ottomans were then shown, as evidenced by Venetian prints, drawings and ship carvings, in less sympathetic ways. Continually underscoring the way in which trade played a central role in the cultural exchange between Islam and Venice, the exhibit documented a gradual negative shift in attitudes as that trade was threatened and began to decline.<sup>cx</sup> Ultimately, the exhibition demonstrated that by the time long and well-established commercial ties ended, Venetian art and decoration had become inextricably intertwined with Islamic aesthetics.

The exhibit focused on the intellectual and cultural connections between these two societies as trade between the two waned. The exhibit was designed to have a broad reach. The design of the exhibit considered many types of learning styles such as visual, auditory, and experiential and many types of interest. Audio tours, visual displays and written documents all worked to explain the very complex and intellectual thesis of the exhibition. Maps outlined the major trade routes, paintings and glass showed the course of artistic development, and manuscripts and scientific instruments underscored intellectual exchange. The comparison of various Venetian images of Islamic thinkers showed a change in attitude from reverence to reticence.<sup>cxci</sup> By focusing on the exchange of art and thought that also happened in the exchange of trade between Venice and the Islamic world, Carboni encouraged a view of art history that is colored by cultural exchange. The exhibition made a plea for a re-consideration not only of the Islamic contribution to western culture, but also the way in which art history is represented in museums.

The catalogue accompanying this thoughtful exhibition contains essays by scholars in the fields of decorative arts, cultural history and art history. The book ventures beyond the museum realm to call attention to anti-Islamic sentiments in the Academy. In the chapter on Arab philosopher Averroes, the distinguished historian John Huizinga, details the history of inclusion and ultimate rejection of Averroes in the Western scholarly canon. The study of Averroes in European universities went from being essential reading for his critique of Aristotle to being rejected by Petrarch and Aquinas who wanted “to purge Christian society” of Arabic influence.<sup>cxcii</sup> Whereas current discussion of medieval Islamic literature and philosophy is relegated to “exotic

superfluous niches of academia,” Huizinga makes clear that “Islamic thinking [until its 17<sup>th</sup> century expulsion from mainstream European culture] played a central role in European civilization”<sup>cxiii</sup>

The exhibition and the accompanying catalogue brought forth the vibrant history of intellectual and artistic communication between the Islamic world and Venice. In doing so, according to critic Holland Cotter, it forced visitors to reconsider the relationship of the West to the Islamic world:

Critically acclaimed as successful in its attempt to show the historic cultural, intellectual and artistic ties of the Islamic world to Western thought, the exhibit could be a model for other exhibits (or museums) that would like to initiate and foster cultural exchange between the West and Islam<sup>cxiv</sup>.

The exhibit and the accompanying catalogue show that for the past three hundred years, the impact of Islamic craft and classical Islamic thought has been left out of the Western scholarly canon. Curator Stefano Carboni, a scholar of depth and breadth, hopes that exhibits like this will “spark reconsideration in academia as well as in the museum world.”<sup>cxv</sup>

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH MUSLIM AUDIENCES**

Dr. Carboni claims that there were favorable responses to the exhibit from the New York Muslim communities. Although he did not cite visitor surveys, Carboni personally observed that in this exhibit, as well as in earlier large-scale exhibits, visitors would often look for items from their country or culture. They might have focused on Egyptian glass or Persian rugs but they were also exposed to other objects and themes in the exhibition. The exhibit was not only well attended, but was visited by a diverse audience which included many Muslims. Carboni did not find that the New York

Muslim communities took offense to anything in particular in the museum. He did say, however, that when organizing an exhibit or giving a talk, each community needed to be addressed differently depending on whether they were Iranian, Mongolian, or some other nationality. He emphasized the significance of maintaining his good relationships with important members of the Islamic communities in New York, such as religious and cultural leaders in the city. Although there are no specific attendance figures for Arab Americans, Carboni believed that these relationships aid in “bringing the community into the museum and contribute to the development of exhibits that are culturally sensitive.”

cxevi

When asked if there were specific instances where members of the New York Muslim community avoided particular works of art on display in the MMoA, he said he knew of no such instance.<sup>cxevii</sup> Although he scoffed at the idea of putting a sign up in front of nude statues (as had been suggested in Detroit), he conceded that there are always extreme cases when someone might be offended. Such incidents are not limited to Islamic fundamentalists. For example, the Queens Museum had to take down classical nude statues before Orthodox Jews would attend a service for Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.<sup>cxeviii</sup>

The MMoA serves many more one-time visitors than the DIA, as has been noted earlier. This is an important distinction because the DIA depends on recurring visitation and needs to forge relationships with the Muslim population for the future success of the museum. Also, the Muslim population in New York is smaller than that in Dearborn and is only one of a hundreds of ethnic and religious communities that the Perhaps a

hypothetical “Arab Identities” could look trace various art traditional forms of the Arab world: calligraphy, textiles, ceramics, and glasswork serves.<sup>cxix</sup>

A major problem the DIA education and public relations staff have to contend with is the confusion over the relationship of Islam to figural representation. No one interviewed on the education staff acknowledged the history of figural representation in Islamic secular art. In museum education, this would be useful knowledge when giving tours to an audience. When, for example, touring the Classical galleries with a largely Muslim audience, an educator might cite the influence of classical Greek and Roman figural art on early Sassanian art and coinage.<sup>cc</sup>

In discussing the importance of context when considering Islamic art, Carboni was quick to reiterate that the depiction of the human form is specifically not permissible in religious contexts. Therefore, he did not see a problem with the inclusion of Muslim students on tours of Classical sculptures or nude photographs. Furthermore, exposure to Muslim portraits reconfirms that the objection to depiction of the human form in Islam is dependant on context. As was evident in his exhibition, “Venice and the Islamic World,” portraiture was as important a method of propaganda in the Ottoman Empire as it was in Europe.



Figure 4. Gentile Bellini, Portrait of the Sultan Mehmet II, 1480; oil on canvas. National Gallery, London.

When drawing out evidence of figural representation in Islamic art it is essential to recognize that the form and content of these images are linked to the societies for which they were created (and not necessarily a faithful record of what has been seen and experienced). As art historian Eva Baer emphasizes, different periods of Islamic history did not have the same standards or ideas about the representation of the human image.<sup>cci</sup> Despite the “predilection of Muslim artists for abstract designs and their tendency to

stress decorative elements of the picture, ... literary texts and visual sources quite early on reveal a concern with figural art.<sup>»ccii</sup>

It is essential for museum education programs to place visual themes of Arabic art in context while attempting to make connections with Western art. While it is important to avoid the danger of explaining art and culture in terms of their similarities and not to engage in oversimplified relativism, museums such as the DIA could increase dialogue and community inclusion by bringing to light shared influences in the arts of the Islamic world and the rest of the collection.

### **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR MUSEUMS**

As Islamic cultures and immigrants are not historically “museum goers,” U.S. museums need to venture directly into Muslim communities in order to promote museumgoership.<sup>cciii</sup> Partnerships with community organizations that are trusted by the Islamic population would be beneficial to the DIA. The other institution that housed the “Venice and the Islamic World” exhibition, the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, is more of a community center than a museum *per se*. Carboni called the exhibition’s opening at the Institut a Pan-Arab/French community event.<sup>cciv</sup> Like the Arab American Museum, the Institut du Monde Arabe serves a sizable Arabic and Islamic population. It contains a cinema, a restaurant, a library, a language center and an exhibition space. It also sponsors conferences and youth programs and publishes a journal. Exhibitions in such environments are welcoming the Muslim visitor who might not typically frequent a museum, or perhaps have reservations about doing so. Furthermore, as author, lecturer analyst and founder of the Arab American Institute, James Zogby, points out, when “Arabs see [museum audiences that include Arabs and non-Arabs] respecting them and

wanting to learn about them, it sends an important message. It changes the sense of what you and your relationships can be.”<sup>ccv</sup>

The next section will discuss how museums, like the Detroit Institute of Arts, can look to museums such as the Institut du Monde Arabe and the Arab American National Museum to develop strategies for community partnerships that effect greater familiarity with their museum in the Islamic population.<sup>ccvi</sup>



## **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

The question of how museums can play a larger role in the social fabric of the community begs the question of what social issues might museums be able to help address. In the case of Detroit, the DIA might be able to help instill in the local Arab-American immigrant population a general sense of inclusion, not only by presenting the role of the Arab world in the history of art through exhibitions and reinstallations of the permanent collection, but also by fostering connections within local Arab culture through partnerships with local Arab organizations and businesses and cultural festivals.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Although museums are not in the business of social work, they are indeed social agencies. Museums are particularly expert in areas such as education and the promotion of community pride. Museums could play a constructive role in addressing issues such as racial and ethnic divisions. Just as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was the belief that museums somehow created better citizens (discussed in Section One), there is today a vague concept that “culture,” including museums and arts institutions, can unite peoples. Without citing evidence, an unnamed participant at the 1995 Philadelphia conference on “Museums and the Life of a City” proclaimed that “culture [the arts] is at the center of the healing of the country.”<sup>ccvii</sup>

Many large urban areas in the U.S. -- Chicago, New York, Detroit and Philadelphia, for example -- are famous for multi-cultural and multi-racial patchworks of discrete communities.<sup>ccviii</sup> Although they have made significant strides, museums, such as the DIA, can redouble their efforts to reflect this cultural pluralism.<sup>ccix</sup> For example,

museums can promote the active participation of people from a broad spectrum of the population and encourage commitment to serving the population by the museum staff and boards. Ways to do this include forging partnerships between peers (communities and museums), such as with the ACCESS and the AANM, whereby community leaders and museum professionals share decision-making responsibility and each other's existing resources.<sup>ccx</sup> Current partnerships with ACCESS and AANM for family-oriented classes in Arabic are intended to promote comparative cultural art history, cross-cultural understanding and internship opportunities for Arabic speaking immigrants.

### **PARTNERSHIPS WITH CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Eduardo Diaz, the Director of Arts and Cultural Affairs for the city of San Antonio Texas has described the importance of “cultural democracy” through museum partnership with ethnic and cultural institutions in the community<sup>ccxi</sup>. Another arts coordinator, Gerald Yoshitomi, the executive director of the Japanese-American Cultural Center in Los Angeles, explains, “The democratization of culture requires only that we understand the common support system. Cultural democracy requires each of us to try to understand one another's systems of cultural support. It also requires developing enough trust to believe that cultural groups which develop their own culture under the protection of a separate subsystem will choose to share their culture with others.”<sup>ccxii</sup>

The staff and volunteers of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles developed and implemented four initiatives for the JANM in the following areas: education, arts, international programs and the preservation of the legacy of the generations of Japanese American immigrants through oral histories and moving image

archives. Museum programs include field trips, hands-on programs such as art workshops, school outreach and partnering with ethnic community centers and business groups from diverse groups such as the African-American, Japanese-American, Chicano (Mexican-American), Korean-American and Jewish-American communities. The museum also partners with multiple museums including the Bishop Museum in Hawaii, the Smithsonian in Washington D.C, the Ellis Island museum in New York and several museums in Japan. Traveling exhibits seek to continue and strengthen relationships between the museum and the east coast Japanese American community. The museum also has a reciprocal ticket program with the nearby Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art.<sup>ccxiii</sup>

## **ORGANIZATIONS AND LOCAL BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS**

Community organizations and foundations such as the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, the Henry Ford Museum, and the Arts League build social capital by

leveraging human and financial resources from many sectors and targeting them toward activities that bring together dissimilar groups and individuals to effectively build and sustain community. They also recognize that arts and culture organizations [can] make an enormous contribution to the community, more than they are doing now....[Many foundations have identified arts and culture as a] “key area for funding.”<sup>ccxiv</sup>

In partnering with local Arab American institutions, such as the AANM, the DIA could become eligible to receive such funds.

In the early 1990’s, ten years before the opening of AANM, ACCESS found that the leaders of major cultural institutions and non-profits were slow to seek advice from minority groups, and in turn the leadership in ethnic and racial communities had not ‘always felt welcome at ‘mainstream’ arts and cultural events, which would help make those cultural activities more familiar and less intimidating to people of color.’<sup>ccxv</sup>

In 1994, ACCESS applied for the grant from CFSEM in order to enhance the “social capital” of Detroit. ACCESS planned to demonstrate through the grant that it would bring ethnic and cultural groups together to celebrate cultural and ethnic differences among its residents.

Although ACCESS had already launched a yearly festival celebrating Arab culture in Detroit, ACCESS used the grant money from CFSEM toward a new multi-year project to promote the music of varied cultures in Detroit. Following the lead of the World of Music, Arts and Dance (WOMAD) festival begun in England in the 1980’s, The Concert of Colors is a free one-day event that brings world-class performers from Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa to Detroit.<sup>ccxvi</sup> In conjunction with this event, other cultural groups brought in performers; the local Chinese cultural group brought in the Peking Opera in 2000. These festivals are also opportunities for local and ethnic businesses to sell their wares, share foods and show their support for local arts.<sup>ccxvii</sup>

In terms of recent immigrants, these partnerships with local ethnic groups are particularly useful. Presently, the DIA can look to the Institut du Arabe and the AANM to develop strategies for community partnerships that promote greater familiarity with their museum in the Islamic Arab American population. Studies on the impact of Arab American participation in ethnic associations, have shown that ethnic organizations such as the AANM, ACCESS, the Yemeni Benevolent Association, and the Chaldean Federation “bring increased opportunity to engage, sometimes productively,” with mainstream political and cultural institutions.<sup>ccxviii</sup> These institutions, which have gained the trust of the local population, act as “gateways to the larger political world, linking local residents to mainstream institutions at the local, regional and national levels.”<sup>ccxix</sup>

The success of ACCESS and AANM's Concert of Colors and DIWAN festivals demonstrate that performance festivals can serve as potent forms of cultural diplomacy. According to arts journalist Tyler Green, this means "creating dialogues around cultural interests and points of history as opposed to commerce, military or other geopolitical constructs."<sup>ccxx</sup> Museums and cultural institutions have begun to put on exhibits and performance festivals geared toward highlighting the arts of Arab and Arab American populations. Examples of this are the June 2009 "First Saturday" programs at the Brooklyn Museum that included films and performances by Arab- American artists and the Tarjama/Translation exhibition and performance series at the Queens museum from May 2009 through September 2009. The Tarjama/Translation exhibition included works of art and performances by artists from the Middle East and Central Asia and their diasporas and attracted a large number of Arab Americans and non-Arab American visitors from the surrounding Jackson Heights community.<sup>ccxxi</sup>

### **THE KENNEDY CENTER FESTIVAL**

Another ambitious exhibition and festival called "Arabesque: Arts of the Arab World", put on by Kennedy Center from February 23-March 15, 2009, is an example of cultural diplomacy put on by a non-governmental institution.<sup>ccxxii</sup> Through exhibitions, concert programs, spoken word performances and film series, the festival sought to show historical and intellectual links between the Arab world and the West and "hoped to change the all too familiar perception of the Arab world as a place of terror, religious extremism and constant struggle by offering a glimpse into the region's rich artistic heritage in a fusion that defies cultural stereotypes."<sup>ccxxiii</sup>

Known for its wide-ranging festivals of international arts, the Kennedy Center had not tackled the Arab world before then. Political dynamics between the U.S. and the Arab world in the wake of the Iraq war, the "war on terror" and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, posed a challenge for the organizers who wanted to focus on Arab arts rather than politics.<sup>ccxxiv</sup> "We wanted to do this festival for quite a while and have waited for the political situation to get better so that it would be easier for us to get Arab performers to come to the country," said Alicia Adams, Kennedy Center Vice President for International Programming and dance.<sup>ccxxv</sup>

For three weeks, the Kennedy center was transformed for the festival, which had 10 million dollars in funding.<sup>ccxxvi</sup> The festival was the most complex the center has ever presented, from constructing installations for art displays on each floor to creating culturally sensitive menus in the cafes. Films from Arab and Arab American artists showed daily. Five theaters featured performances in music, dance and theater, from the traditional to a rapper from Somalia named K'naan. Two tons of cargo arrived from Arab countries. Massive arches and a mashrabiya, a window of carved wood lattice work constructed in Egypt, were part of an exhibition called "Breaking the Veils," featuring works by Arab women artists. The Kennedy Center gift shop was made over into a souk, or marketplace.

Performances were the heart of the festival: Every day and evening there were theater pieces by Arab and Arab American artists (monologues, spoken word, short plays). Music and dance performances included the Al-Farah Choir, or the "Choir of Joy" comprised of more than 100 Muslim and Christian young people from Damascus,

performing a mass at the Washington DC Cathedral and choreographer Debbie Allen's collaboration with dancers from New York and Oman.

Exhibitions included jewelry makers, displays (with explanations) of various and intricate forms of calligraphy, traditional fashions from the various regions, art, photography, and an life size kaleidoscope which visitors were encouraged to enter. One of the most subtle and poignant pieces was an installation that recreated the sounds and light of mornings in the oldest neighborhoods in Cairo. The largest installation was the "Exploratorium." Visitors could sit on couches and look up as images depicting ancient texts that highlighted Arab contributions to western and middle eastern society between the 8th and 15th centuries -- advances in math, medicine, astronomy, and chemistry -- were projected across a globe above them.<sup>ccxxvii</sup>

### **POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS: CULTURE HUMANIZES**

At the time the Kennedy Center was preparing for the festival, the United States was not popular in the Arab world and that was a worry to Amy Adams. "Would they come [to the festival]? And I was just so pleased to learn on these trips [to meet and invite talent to the festival], as I met artist after artist after artist, that they were very interested in coming here. They very much wanted to tell their stories, to be able to be seen in a different light, to be able to show the beauty and humanity that exists within them as a people and as a culture. I think they want people to know that they're not terrorists. And [that] they share artistic and cultural connections."<sup>ccxxviii</sup> The festival was specifically organized to create a space that might offer a change of perceptions. At the Arabesque panel, Walter Isaacson questioned whether culture and arts could change

understanding?”<sup>ccxxix</sup> To that, Anan Ameri has posited that “issues that are co-opted by extremist groups can be opened up by culture.”<sup>ccxxx</sup>

As Queen Noor of Jordan phrased it after the festival, for three weeks they “subverted the dominant paradigm.” She pointed out that no amount of Arabesque is going to ameliorate the suffering, injustice, and indignity that has damaged relations with the U.S. in the Arab region, yet [exhibitions, festivals] and Arabesque...can help tremendously to create a human face, which will affect policy.... You won’t support policies to degrade and humiliate another people whose traditions, contributions and humanity you recognize.<sup>ccxxxi</sup>

Michael Kaiser, the President of the Kennedy Center, spoke of the respect for unfamiliar cultures and the political ramifications that cultural programming foster.

I believe that peace comes from understanding. And so if we know more about other people and have a rounder view of them and a more educated view of other people, then we can start to make peace. [Furthermore,] this festival is going to help people to understand Arab people, to understand their aesthetic tastes, to understand their hospitality and their generosity and their passion, and we'll start to understand them not just as political beings, but also as human beings.<sup>ccxxxii</sup>

Amy Adams aptly summed up the impact of the festival: “[Creating a dialogue] is probably the best thing that we will do in this festival, in terms of creating cultural exchange between the young people. And for me, more than the end product, it's the process.”<sup>ccxxxiii</sup>

The DIA certainly cannot mount such a costly festival on its own, but the DIA could unpack elements of the festival and use them in creating their own outreach programs on a smaller scale or in more affordable increments. The DIA could partner with the AANM and the Arab American business community in Detroit to create activities at the DIA such as talks and joint exhibitions and cross- cultural performances



with Arab, Arab American and American artists. This sort of programming would serve to incorporate the DIA into Arab American cultural activities in the Detroit area, creating not only a larger audience for the museum, but also opportunities for dialogue and artistic exchange.

## CONCLUSION

Hannah Arendt describes public space as a communal space where citizens are able to meet and confront one another, examine an issue from multiple perspectives, modify their views, and enlarge their position to incorporate that of others.<sup>ccxxxiv</sup>

Museums, such as the DIA, are also public spaces. As such they are important places for dialogue and for the expression of ideas. But as noted earlier in this thesis, American art museums have not had a fixed mission: the idea of what makes a museum beneficial (connoisseurship, education, etc) has evolved over time. Education techniques, curatorial emphasis and even staff organization have changed at American museums due to politics, funding and shifts in academic approaches. As Nilufer Gole writes in Cultural Politics, the public museum space is "not fixed once and for all but is always being recreated anew and inhabited through performativity, conflict and confrontation."<sup>ccxxxv</sup>

The very comprehensive effort by the DIA to rethink and redisplay its collections has not resolved all questions but has shown there are more challenges for the museum to confront. Differences in what is acceptable in terms of nudity in art have forced museums like the DIA to confront sharp cultural divisions between the West and orthodox Islamic culture. The domain of the visual arts has become "one of the battlegrounds of intercultural...conflict as well as borrowing and mixings."<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>

Despite significant hurdles to attracting recent and more orthodox Muslim Arab American immigrants, museum-going presents a possible avenue of outreach to and inclusion of Arab Americans in American culture. As I have shown, due to culture and tradition, not all recent Arab American immigrants have been comfortable visiting art

museums. In turn, visual arts museums have not been active in their outreach to Middle Eastern and Muslim immigrant populations. This thesis presents a case study that seeks to inform and help other groups working with Arab immigrant populations and to contribute to an ongoing conversation about inclusiveness of immigrant groups into museum life.

The renovation of the DIA brought about more than a remodeling of the museum. It brought about new modes of showing its collection through "Big Idea" themes and the opening of new galleries, such as the one devoted to the "Arts of the Middle East". It created an opportunity for the museum to interact more deeply with the Arab American population of Detroit through exhibitions that show connections between the Arab and Western worlds, but also through programming such as talks and performances and collaboration with local Arab American businesses and the AANM.

Fundamentally, however, engagement of the Arab American community with the Detroit Institute of Art will take an ongoing reassessment of what the museum is and how museum educators are prepared. A priority for the DIA, at least in theory, should be to remove barriers and emphasize the collection. But there is a continual debate on how this is done best and most inclusively. A key question is how the museum or exhibition serves others without denigrating itself or pandering. In order to implement partnerships, interact with Arab families and communities and other recent and future immigrant populations and understand in a nuanced way their attitudes towards art involves reassessing museum practices and training staff in new ways. The success is not in each outcome but in the active engagement of the process itself.



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- iStatement made by Ford W. Bell, President, American Association of Museums at the Congressional Education and Labor Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities Hearing on “Examining Role of Museums and Libraries in Strengthening Communities.” Washington, DC. 20 May 2008.
- ii Jennifer Williams and Madeleine Winslow, Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts. 17 December 2007 and, via phone, 23 January 2008. There are, however, some exceptions to this, such as the MMoA where the head of Islamic art regularly meets with imams and notables from the New York Arab and Muslim communities. They discuss topics ranging from donating museum objects to creating outreach programs aimed at Arab communities.
- iii Einreinhoffer, Nancy The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy. (London: Leicester University Press, 1997) 17.
- iv “Patriotism could be demonstrated in the art and in the architecture of the public building. The triumphal arches outfitted with statues representing civic virtues would in turn inspire patriotism.” McClellan, Andrew. The Art Museum from Bouleee to Bilbao. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008 and Einreinhoffer, Nancy,1997) 17.
- v Duncan, Carol. Civilizing Rituals Inside Public Art Museums. (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).
- vi Wallach, Allan "The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional Definition of Art" in Wallach, Allan. Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States. (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998) 50.
- vii Ibid. 55.
- viii Pratcher, Andrew in Stephen Weil. Making Museums Matter. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002). Introduction I-X.
- ix Duncan, Carol. (1996) 14
- x Celine Taminan. Personal Interview\_ Education Department. National Arab American Museum, Michigan. 2 March 2005
- xi Karoub, Jeff . “Islamic Gallery Opens At Detroit Museum,” USA TODAY 2 March 2010

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- xii Gray, Steven. "A Struggling Detroit Art Museum Tries to Reach Out", Time. 8 March 2010.
- xiii Weil, XI.
- xiv Grabar, Oleg. The Formation of Islamic Art. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987). Carboni, Stefano, et all. Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797. Exhibition and Catalogue. MMoA and Institut du Monde Arabe, 2007. Baer, Eva. The Human Figure in Islamic Art. (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004).
- xv Haddad, Yvonne and Lummis, A. Islamic Values in the United States: a comparative study. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 And Denny, Walter "Contradiction and Consistency in Islamic Art" in Yvonne Haddad. The Islamic Impact. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984). 137- 171. and Rosina Hassoun, Arab Americans in Michigan (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press. 2005).
- xvi David Penney, Curatorial Director, Personal Interview. 2 March 2007. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.
- xvii Abt, Jeffrey. A Museum on The Verge: a Socioeconomic History of the Detroit Institute of the Arts, 1882-2000. (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001). Introduction.
- xviii Seelye, Katharine Q. "Detroit Census Confirms a Desertion Like No Other." New York Times. 23 March 2011.
- xix Abt, Jeffrey. Personal Interview. (28 February 2007). Royal Oak, Michigan.
- xx Gray, Steven. "A Struggling Detroit Art Museum Tries to Reach Out", Time. 8 March 2010.
- xxi U.S. Census estimate 2009.
- xxii Gavrilovich, Peter and Bill McGraw, eds. The Detroit Almanac. (Detroit, MI: Detroit Free Press, 2000) also, "It's a major city in free-fall...Detroit's tax base is eroding, its citizens are fleeing and its school system is in the hands of a financial manager." Seelye, Katharine Q. "Detroit Census Confirms a Desertion Like No Other." New York Times. 23 March 2011.
- xxiii Williams, Jennifer ( 2008).
- xxiv Abt, Jeffrey, 2001. The DIA was originally named the Detroit Museum of Art. The name was changed to Detroit Institute of Art in 1960. Chapter 1.

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xxv Ibid.

xxvi Ibid. 153.

xxvii Gray, Steven. "A Struggling Detroit Art Museum Tries to Reach Out", Time. 8 March 2010

xxviii Combined state of Michigan, regional funding, city revenue funding and endowment data Ibid.255.

xxix Ibid.

xxx Anonymous education department source, Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 2 March 2007.

xxxi Anonymous marketing and public relations source, Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 17 December 2005.

xxxii Clark, Kenneth. The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form New York: Pantheon Books, 1956. 23.

xxxiii Roberts, Helene E. "Naked/Nude" in Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press.1998). 641.

xxxiv Katz, Marion. "Nudity" in McAuliffe, Jane Dammen Ed. The Encyclopedia of the Qu'ran (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2003). 548-549.

xxxv Ibid. 548

xxxvi Ibid.

xxxvii Anonymous education department source, Personal Interview Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 2 March 2007.

xxxviii . Nancy Jones, Chief of Education, Detroit Institute of Arts. Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Michigan. 1 March 2007.

xxxix Ibid.

xl Czajkowski, Jennifer. Email, 23 March, 2011.

xli Jennifer Williams and Madeleine Winslow, Personal Interview, 17 December 2007 at Detroit Institute of Arts, via phone, 23 January 2008

xlii Ibid.

xliii David Penney, Curatorial Director, Detroit Institute of Arts. Personal Interview. Detroit, Michigan. 2 March 2007.

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xliv Ibid.

xlv Ibid.

xlvi “As in: Are the labels hard to read? Is there a story that I, the viewer, can relate to? Do I feel comfortable here?” – Jones (2007).

xlvii Abt, Jeffrey. Personal Interview. Royal Oak, Michigan. 28 February 2007. and Bashour, Nick “Detroit arts renovation to be completed by November 2007”. The South End. 14 February 2007.

xlviii Nancy Jones (2007).

xlix Ibid.

l Duncan, Carol. “Chapter 2: From Princely Galleries to the Art Museum” in *Civilizing Rituals Inside Public Art Museums*. (New York and London: Rutledge, 1996) 21-47.

li Abigail Housen, Eye of the Beholder: Theory and Practice. Lisbon, Portugal: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. 2001.

lii Nancy Jones, Chief of Education. Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 1 March 2007.

liii. The visitor panel, comprised of people from various income, ethnic and age groups met in three sessions to discuss the exhibitions. The transcripts of the video taped sessions were saved for future analysis. David Penney, Curatorial Director, Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 2 March 2007.

liv Abt, Jeffrey. Personal Interview. Royal Oak, Michigan. 28 February 2007.

lv Penney (2007) and Jones (2007).

lvi Penney (2007).

lvii Jones (2007).

lviii To David Penney, the DIA curatorial director and Native American Art specialist, “the Big Idea” concept is an opportunity to not be historically bounded. His exhibits, he hopes, will “find and acknowledge” a living tradition while including archeology. When asked if aspects of culture as a whole were determining where the museum is going, Dr. Penny answered that it is more that the earlier art historical paradigm in museums did not include “non Western” engagement, and that for twenty five years, African, Oceanic, Native American arts were lumped together with Ancient Middle East and Asian. The new director,



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he said, had disassembled the notion of antiquities, now you can see the collection as separates, not teleological, but regional: Africa now includes Egypt. Pre Columbian art is no longer included in antiquities. Penney stated that “Greek art is included in the European suite and Sumerian is included in the Asian suite. But what about art like Arabic Coptic art? Greek style portraits can be seen in the Coptic graves of North Africa dating from the second century BC. What about Glass techniques of Egyptians adopted in Venice during the Renaissance? -Some areas of art do not fit in easily into groups, -- American art is an offshoot.” According to Penney, the new design that incorporates the “Big Idea” themes is “not as neat as one would like, but it recognizes indigenous intellectual and artistic development and the contemporary indigenous community that is engaged in that tradition (such as the recent acquisition of a large piece by Ojibwa artist George Morison). The purpose”, he claims is “not showing an art history. We are looking for a way of showing the collection.” lviii That said, the museum is not avoiding the traditional museum/ art historical paradigm all together. By choosing what to put in and what to leave out, it is still presenting a narrative of value and of what is worth paying attention to. Also, According to Penney, a “Big Idea” at the DIA needs to be guided by a clear definition, design (architecturally bounded space) and exhibition (the exegesis of an idea). David Penney, Curatorial Director. Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 2 March 2007

lix Runk, David. “Museum Rethinks Art After 6 Year Expansion” USA Today. 6 December 2007.

lx Ibid.

lxi Chambers, Marlene “Sometimes More is too much” Curator: The Museum Journal. 52. 1(2009). 3-4.

lxii Linett, Peter. “Reinstallation Rorschach” Curator: The Museum Journal. 52. 1 (2009): 8

lxiii Chambers (2009).69.

lxiv James Christensen Steward, quoted in Runk (2007).

lxv Bruce Altshuler quoted in Runk (2007).

lxvi According to Marlene Chambers, the museum is still projecting its “own academically rooted ways of seeing and valuing onto its visitors instead of creating a space for dialogue in which the meaning of art works is questioned rather than answered. [She questions] what

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wasn't addressed in the course of re-installations, despite, or perhaps because of [the DIA's] attention to best practices. She asks what the reinstalled collection might have looked like if the museum had seized the opportunity to reconsider not just its strategies and means of interpretation but its purposes in the first place- "the work of the museum" in today's culture." in Linett. (2009) 8-9.

lxvii This is a common theme in Abrahamic religions ("You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth", Exodus 20:4) that is taken seriously by the Islamic faith.

lxviii For example, there are myriad portraits of rulers from early Arabic and Ottoman empires.

lxix. Salamey, Jamima and Celine Taminan. Personal Interview, Education Department. National Arab American Museum, Michigan. 2 March 2005. Personal Interview with Steven Williams and Curatorial Staff. Arab American National Museum. Dearborn, Michigan. 19 December 2007 and Heather Ecker, Personal Interview, Detroit Institute of Arts. 17 December 2007.

lxx Heather Ecker (2007).

lxxi "Yet, the Wahhabists justify calligraphy- that is a highly detailed, visual and developed art form- as permissible as it serves to instruct and illustrate the sacred word." – Heather Ecker, 2007.

lxxii Heather Ecker, via email. 11 February 2011. Also, in 2008, Ecker served as in house curator for the exhibit "The Private World of the Mughal Emperors of India. Albums of Paintings and Calligraphy from the Chester Beatty Library," (Detroit Institute of the Arts, August 2008 to November 2008).

lxxiii Williams and Winslow(2007).

lxxiv Ibid.

lxxv "Reauthorization of moneys is a major concern these days. Schools are more stressed all over the nation and the Government simply doesn't provide the funds for cultural field trips as they did in the past" The museum, however has been successful in creating specific programs for home schoolers (of which there are many in the Midwest) who have flexible hours and charter schools. Ibid.

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- lxxvi James, Adil. "DIA Opens Islamic Art Section" The Muslim Observer. 28 February 2010.
- lxxvii "New Gallery of Islamic Art Opens at the DIA-Detroit Institute of Arts" Arab Detroit News. 28 February 2010.
- lxxviii Gray, Steven. "A Struggling Detroit Art Museum Tries to Reach Out", Time. 8 March 2010.
- lxxix Adil (2010).
- lxxx Ibid. and Ecker (2007).
- lxxxi Runk, David "Detroit Rethinks Art During Renovations." Branford Expositor. 2008.
- lxxxii Adil (2010).
- lxxxiii Ibid.
- lxxxiv Ibid.
- lxxxv Williams (2007).
- lxxxvi Ibid.
- lxxxvii Marlene Chambers in Linett (2009). 8. Christina Hill particularly took offense to oversized script on the Claudel/Rodin exhibit that proclaimed "Their passion was overwhelming! Their love was too hot to last!" Hill, Christina "Lowering the Barre: Does the DIA think Detroiters are dumb-dumbs?" Metro Times, 10 January 2007.
- lxxxviii Hill, Christina (2007).
- lxxxix Beal, Graham M. "We can dance if we want to". Metro Times, 31 January 2007.
- xc Colby, Joy "Detroit leads other museums in creating friendly environments for their visitors". The Detroit News. 29 March 2006.
- xci Beal (2007).
- xcii Ibid.
- xciii For more information on the history of Islam and the Arab world as it relates to American Islam and Arabic culture, see McCloud, Aminah Beverly. Transnational Muslims in American Society (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006). See also, Nydell, Margaret K. Understanding Arabs Yarmouth, (Maine: Intercultural Press, 1999).
- xciv Gray (2010)
- xcv Ibid.

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xcvi Attendance to the museum fell sharply in the last decade (2000-2010). The museum “struggled” and Beale reduced the budget from 32 million to 26 million dollars, partly by laying off 20% of the museum staff. Ibid.

xcvii “Michigan: Decline in Detroit” Time. Friday, 27 October 1961.

xcviii Ibid.

xcix Wright, Richard. “Once teaming with auto plants, now Detroit is home to only a few name plates.” Detroit News. 16 January 2000.

c Abt (2001). Appendix C. 291

ci “Detroit’s population fell to 713,777 in 2010, the lowest since 1910, when it was 466,000. In a shift that was unthinkable 20 years ago, Detroit is now smaller than Austin, Tex., Charlotte, N.C., and Jacksonville, Fla.” Seelye, Katharine Q. “Detroit Census Confirms a Desertion Like No Other.” New York Times. 23 March 2011

cii Abt, Jeffrey (2001). Appendix C. Page 291.

ciii According to Jeffrey Abt, who wrote an economic history of the Detroit Institute of Arts, the suburbanization of Detroit reflects not so much a population change, but rather a “re-balancing of the black population” from minority to majority. Abt, Jeffrey. Personal Interview. 28 February 2007. Royal Oak, Michigan.

civ Frey, William quoted in Seelye, Katharine Q. “Detroit Census Confirms a Desertion Like No Other.” New York Times. 23 March 2011.

cv Lessenberry, Jack “Detroit’s Census Report Worse than Expected” Windsor Star. 29 March 2011.

cvi Freij, Janice. Personal Interview, via phone, 30 November 2010 .

cvii The term “Arab” used in here refers to three different ancestry groups as determined by the 2000 Census: Egypt Libya, Morocco, Tunisia or the western Asian countries of Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The second group is the Assyrian/Chaldean/Syrian. The third groups are those from the Sub-Saharan category: the Somalian and Sudanese.

<http://www.arabdetroit.com/arabamericans.php>

cviii “Reasons for the undercount of ancestry groups from the Arab world include the effect of the sample methodology on small, unevenly distributed ethnic groups, high levels of out-

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marriage among the third and fourth generations, and distrust/misunderstanding of government surveys among recent immigrants. While the 2000 census accounted for close to 1.3 million persons who trace their heritage to the Arab world, AAIF estimates the [Arab American] population at closer to 3.9 million. “Population Estimates of Americans of Palestinian Ancestry”, (Washington DC: The Arab American Institute, 2006).

cix Ibid.

cx Hassoun (2005).6.

cxi (However the largest number of Palestinians immigrated after 1965, mostly from the West Bank and Jerusalem) Ibid.

cxii Gavrilovich, Peter and Bill McGraw, Eds. The Detroit Almanac. (Detroit, MI. Detroit Free Press, 2000). 94-10.

cxiii Howel and Jamal. (2006) 9. 35 percent Catholic, 10% Protestant, 18% Orthodox, 13% Jewish, other or no affiliation. Zogby International Institute Survey (2009)

cxiv Ewing (2008). 4.

cxv “American Muslims have been categorized according to religious adherence, political ideology, class, ethnicity and place of birth, yet there remains great difficulty in asserting how many Muslims live in the United States.” Roughly 6 million, 4,000,000 of which were born citizens. One study claims that African Americans comprise 42 percent of the Muslim population, while other researchers say the largest single ethnic group is of Arab origin at 32 percent. Ba -Annus and Kobe, “Muslims Place in the American Public Square”. P 314.

cxvi Ewing. However, it is hard to get an estimate due to “degree of suspicion of questionnaires among recent immigrants and lack of understanding of polling methods are barriers to obtaining accurate counts of these recent immigrants” Ewing(2008) 20.

cxvii 2000 U.S. census.

cxviii Katherine Pratt Ewing, 6.

cxix Howell and Jamal (2008)50-53.

cxx Ibid. 53.

cxxi Suleiman (2006)

cxxii Samhan (2006)

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cxxiii Editor's note. In Wayne Baker , Ann Chih Lin, Andrew Shryock ET all. Citizenship in Crisis: Arab Detroit after 9/11. Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2009.

cxxiv Baker, Wayne, et all. Citizenship in Crisis: Arab Detroit after 9/11. Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2009.

cxxv Howel, Sally and Amaney Jamal. "Detroit Exceptionalism and the Limits of Political Incorporation" in Ewing, Katherine Pratt, Ed. Being and Belonging: Muslims in the United States since 9/11 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, (2008).

p. 49

cxxvi See section 1 on the DIA.

cxxvii The use of individual here is in contradistinction to the evaluation of the individual sui generis apart from class, family.

cxxviii "Mediterranean culture of family, loyalty, honor and shame that Muslims share with the Greeks, Italians, Portuguese and others- forming a Mediterranean family, so to speak" McCloud (2006) 74. See also Barakat, Halim. The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State. Los Angeles: University of California, California Press, 1993.

cxxix McCloud (2006) 74

cxxx McCloud (2006) 74

cxixi James Zogby referring to Zogby International Study (2005).

cxixii McCloud (2006) 85

cxixiii In general, the media and general public's lack of information regarding Arab family relationships, structure, culture, history and politics has contributed not only to the stereotyping of Arab Americans but also to the isolation and exclusion of Arab- Americans from the social-political fabric in the U.S. Ibid.

cxixiv Wayne Baker, Ann Chih Lin, Andrew Shryock ET all. Citizenship in Crisis: Arab Detroit after 9/11. Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2009. Editor's note.

cxixv "The mistakes of the U.S. government's actions in 1942 are essential to remember in the aftermath of 2001 to prevent a similar "miscarriage of justice." Hirano (2008) 167.

cxixvi Kikumura-Yano, Akemi, Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, and James A. Hirabayashi, editors. *Common Ground : the Japanese American National Museum and the Culture of Collaborations*. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005.)

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cxxxvii Ibid.1.

cxxxviii Ibid.

cxxxix “George W. Bush’s secretary of transportation, Norman Mineta, was in charge of instilling massive security measures in airports throughout the country was also one of the first to call for caution and restraint in security measures. Mr. Mineta was incarcerated with his family a concentration camp in Heart Mountain, WY when he was 10 years old- and is also a board member of the JANM.”Hirano in Kikumura-Yano, Akemi, Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, and James A. Hirabayashi, editors. *Common Ground : the Japanese American National Museum and the Culture of Collaborations*. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005).168-9.

cxl Hirano (2005). 168.

cxli Established in 1987, ACCESS is a human services organization committed to the development of the economic, social and cultural life of the Arab American community. In addition, ACCESS tries to address the needs of low-income families (both Arab and non Arab) and helps newly arrived immigrants adapt to life in United States by providing a range of social, mental health, medical, educational, employment and legal support.

[www.accesscommunity.org](http://www.accesscommunity.org)

cxlii Hirano (2005).170.

cxliii Samhan, Helen. “Loosing the Battle: How Political Activism Guarantees Ethnic Integration (in Spite of Defeats Along the Way)” in American Arabs and Political Participation edited by Philip Strum. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center. 2006).

cxliv The Dearborn area and outlying areas are home to over 403,445 Arab Americans. Arab American Population Highlights Arab American Institute Foundation:

[http://aai.3cdn.net/9298c231f3a79e30c6\\_g7m6bx9hs.pdf](http://aai.3cdn.net/9298c231f3a79e30c6_g7m6bx9hs.pdf). In addition to Polish Americans and Italian Americans, Dearborn proper has a large Arab American community- 40,000 Arab Americans out of a general population of 100,000. “Every Arab nationality and religious sect is found in Dearborn, from Yemeni traditionalists to secular modernists”.City-data.com

cxlv Mission of the AANM, Ameri, Anan. An American Story: The Arab American National Museum. Museum News. November/December 2006, and Hirano (2005).171.

cxlvi Hirano (2005). 171

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cxlvii Ameri, Anan. An American Story: The Arab American National Museum. Museum News. November/December 2006. At a forum held by the Aspen Institute on cultural diplomacy and Arab and American relations, Anan Ameri spoke about the urgency of creating the museum. She noted that the “image of the Arab as a negative image has [permeated] American culture [and to say that] the clash of the Arab world and western world is a clash of civilization is away to justify war, civil rights abuses and discrimination.”

cxlvii Ameri claims she had to “dig” to create a cultural means of ameliorating pejorative views about Arab Americans caused by the attacks of 9/11.cxlvii These larger issues contributed to why AACCESS and Anan Ameri felt that a museum that provided a safe place to talk was needed.

cxlviii Ahdaf Soueif, Egyptian writer, novelist, and commentator at the Aspen Institute, Global Initiative on Culture and Society. FIRST SESSION: Arab Arts and Culture Forum: Vision, Inspiration, and Big Ideas. Washington, DC: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, March 12, 2009

cxlix Ibid.

cl Ameri, Anan. “An American Story: The Arab American National Museum”. Museum News. November/December 2006. At a forum held by the Aspen Institute on cultural diplomacy and Arab and American relations, Anan Ameri spoke about the urgency of creating the museum. She noted that the “image of the Arab as a negative image has [permeated] American culture [and to say that] the clash of the Arab world and western world is a clash of civilization is away to justify war, civil rights abuses and discrimination.”

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cli Salamey and Taminan (2007).

clii Hirano (2005). 173

cliii Hirano (2005).175.

cliv Salamey and Taminan (2007). And Hirano (2005). 171-175.

clv Ibid.



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clvi Ibid.

clvii Arab American National Museum. Activity Report 2008-2009. Dearborn, Michigan: Arab American National Museum, 2010

clviii Williams, Stevens and Curatorial Staff AANM. Personal Interview. 19 December 2007

clix Salamey, Jamima and Celine Taminan, Personal Interview. 2 MArch, 2007. Arab American Museum, Dearborn. Michigan and Williams Curatorial Staff AANM (2007).

clx Ibid.

clxi Baer, Eva. The Human Figure in Islamic Art. (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004).

clxii Ecker (2007).

clxiii Denny, Walter. (1984). 137- 171 This influence can be seen in stylistic exchanges that happened through trade and political developments. (Louvre Museum, Coptic collection, and Carboni, Stefano, et al "Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797", Exhibition and Catalogue. (New York and Paris:MMoA and Institut du Monde Arabe, 2007.)

clxiv Denny (1984). 138.

clxv Islam, according to noted historian of Islamic art Oleg Grabar (1987), is not conducive to the fine arts (a feature he claims the prophetic religions share). Grabar (1987), Oleg "Arts of the Islamic Peoples" The New Encyclopedia Britannica. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica. 1987). 9:952-1011. "Representation of living beings was prohibited in the tradition as a result of which the graphic arts placed their emphasis on calligraphy and on the arabesque, that is on the abstract. Some figurative art did make an appearance in early palaces" If there is representation, it is for "private settings", but certainly it is NEVER in religious context. Oleg Grabar (1987), paraphrased in Goody, Jack. Representations and Contradictions: Ambivalence Towards Images, Theatre, Fiction, Relics and Sexuality. (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1997). Today figurative art is widely rejected in Islam and depictions of Muhammad are considered especially offensive. The Koran does not prohibit making images, only worshipping them. The Hadith clearly and consistently prohibits all images of any living being, with special mention of punishment for painters. "Those who paint pictures would be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it would be said to them: Breathe soul into what you have created." (Hadith, Sahih Muslim vol.3, no. 5268). Neither

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the Koran nor the Hadith state that viewing an image accidentally is a sin, but in the Hadith the Prophet teaches Muslims to avoid them. The uproar over the comic cartoons depicting Mohammed), “Dyb angst for kritic af Islam”, that ran in the Danish newspaper Politik on 17 February 2005 is an indication of the extent to which the representation of religious figures are deemed offensive. See “Protesters killed as furor over cartoons escalates” Middle East Times 6 February 2006. Also see the furor and eventual wrenching of the life size bronze female figure (naked except for a head scarf) entitled Turkish Delight outside the Kunsthalle Museum in Vienna 2007. Nilufer, Gole “Turkish Delight in Vienna: Art Islam and European Public Culture” in Cultural Politics (November 2009) 5. 3. 283

clxvi. Solely God creates and gives value to representations; representations which are omens/signs sent to man. “God creates what He will... And he will teach Him and the Children of Israel saying ‘I have come to you with a sign from your lord. I will create for you out of clay as the likeness of a bird; then I will breathe life into it, and it will be a bird, by the leave of God.’” Koran 3.43.

He alone is the “fashioner, a musawwir” the very term used for painter. Grabar (1987), Oleg, The Formation of Islamic Art. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987. Page 81.

clxvii The suspicion of images arose when Islam confronted the complexity, beauty – and power of visual art in Christianity. Grabar (1987). 85-86. Although awe and admiration led first to imitation (and the use of Christian artists to build and decorate early Islamic monuments), eventually historical circumstances led Muslims to reject the use of visual symbols that were so prevalent in the Christian empires. Grabar (1987). 94). Nevertheless, much of Islamic iconoclasm and fear of “the deceptive threats and the considerable uncertainty about the value of visual symbols together.” (Grabar (1987), 95) expressed in the Hadith and early stories involving Arabs and the arts of conquered people originate from the conquered territories rather than the homeland of Islam. Yet they appear to be important in that they reflect views “of the Muslim world after Islam embarked on its conquest.” Grabar (1987). 82. There is also a biblical injunction against images, and Byzantine Iconoclasts were active just after the time of Mohammed (730-780 AD).

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clxviii Walter Denny referencing Oleg Grabar in Denny (1987). 75-96 and Arnold, Thomas W. Painting in Islam: A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture (London: Dover Books, 1958).

clxix Denny (1987). 137, referencing Ahmad Muhammad Isa, "Muslims and Taswir", in ed. Muhammad Beg. Fine Arts in Islamic Civilization, (Kuala Lumpur: National University of Malaysia, 1981).

clxx Denny (1987). 137. And clxx: "Culture Clash: Bonfire of the Pieties." Wall Street Journal, 8 February 2006. Also see: <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/things/depictions-of-muhammad-in-islamic-art.html> Ibid.

clxx Paul Richard, "In Art Museums, Portraits Illuminate A Religious Taboo." Washington Post, 14 February 2006.

The law of Islam also banned sculpture, "which did not penetrate into the Arab world until the nineteenth century, and is still viewed with strong disapproval by purists." Lewis, Bernard The Muslim Discovery of Europe (New York: Norton, 1982, reissue 2001). 242. Also, see Paul Richard, "In Art Museums, and Portraits Illuminate A Religious Taboo." Washington Post. 14 February 2006.

clxx "We suggested that schools with a large Muslim population should not attend this particular exhibit". Anonymous marketing and public relations source, Personal Interview. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 17 December 2005.

clxxi As mentioned in endnote 214, the Koran does not prohibit making images, only worshipping them "Solely God creates and gives value to representations; representations which are omens/signs sent to man. "God creates what He will... And he will teach Him the Children of Israel saying 'I have come to you with a sign from your lord. I will create for you out of clay as the likeness of a bird; then I will breathe life into it, and it will be a bird, by the leave of God.'" Koran, 3.43. He alone is the "fashioner, a musawwir" the very term used for painter. Grabar (1987). 81.

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clxxii Denny (1987). 138.

clxxiii “Culture Clash: Bonfire of the Pieties.” Wall Street Journal, 8 February 2006. Also see: <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/things/depictions-of-muhammad-in-islamic-art.html>

clxxiv Ibid.

clxxv Paul Richard, " In Art Museums, Portraits Illuminate A Religious Taboo." Washington Post, 14 February 2006.

clxxvi The law of Islam also banned sculpture, “which did not penetrate into the Arab world until the nineteenth century, and is still viewed with strong disapproval by purists.” Lewis, Bernard, The Muslim Discovery of Europe. (New York: Norton, 1982, reissue 2001). Page 242. Also, see Paul Richard, "In Art Museums, and Portraits Illuminate A Religious Taboo." Washington Post, 14 February 2006. Furthermore, “We suggested that schools with a large Muslim population should not attend this particular exhibit”. Anonymous marketing and public relations source In regards to Claudel/Rodin sculpture exhibit which was deemed controversial not only because of the nudity but also because of the adulterous relationship depicted. Anonymous marketing staff member. Personal Interview Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 17 December 2005.

clxxvii Ecker (2007).

clxxviii Arab Americans artists cover the spectrum of artistic fields. There are also flourishing contemporary performance and art scenes extant among various regional Arab American communities. Examples of these are Comedy Festival, November 2008, Los Angeles California, The Hijabi Monologues plays (2007-2009), DIWAN, Ameri, Anan and Holly Arida. Eds. Etching our Own Image: Voices from within the Arab American Art Movement (Newcastle, UK : Cambridge Scholars, 2007). “Translation/Tarjama”, Queens

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Museum of Art, New York City, May 10th - September 27, 2009. See also: papers from DIWAN: Forum for the Arts, held at Dearborn Michigan, Arab American National Museum, 30 March – 2 April 2006. Arab American artists have begun to actively take on political subject matter. Holy Arida has shown that there are ways in which Arab American artists actively, within institutions of power, speak out. Arida, Holy. Voices from Within the Arab American Art Movement in America (Newcastle UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2007).

clxxix Haddad (2005)“Internal mosque conflict can arise within the addition of new members results in grouping around certain issues such as how Islam should be interpreted in the American context, what that mosque should do or be, or particular theological positions.” In two mosques studied by Haddad’s survey, serious conflicts arose when “new groups with different national identities from those already established came with strong opinions about the interpretations of Islam.” 39

clxxx Ibid.

clxxxi Haddad. (2005). 39-40.

clxxxii Haddad (2005). 41.

clxxxiii Wolf, Eric. Europe and the People without History. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

clxxxiv James Zogby. The Aspen Institute, Global Initiative on Culture and Society.

SECOND SESSION: Arab Arts and Culture Forum: Vision, Inspiration, and Big Ideas.

Walter Isaacson, President and CEO of the Aspen Institute, Her Majesty Queen Noor, and James Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute. Washington, DC: The John F.

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. 12 March 2009

clxxxv Wolf (1997). 3. Wolf, however, also states that “we can no longer think of societies as isolated and self-maintaining systems. Nor can we imagine cultures as integrated totalities in which each part contributes to the maintenance of an organized, autonomous, and enduring whole. There are only cultural sets of practices and ideas, put into play by determinate human actors under determinate circumstances. In the course of sections these culture sets are forever assembled, dismantled and reassembled, conveying in variable accents the divergent paths of groups and classes.... in these terms the peoples who have asserted a privileged

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relation with history and the peoples to whom history has been denied encounter a common destiny.” Wolf (1997).390-391.

clxxxvi There are many examples of recent exhibits centered on trade along the silk roads. These include “The Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World” (2010) at the American Museum of Natural History and “Secrets of the Silk Road” (2011) at the Penn Museum

clxxxvii These depictions also are evidence of the willingness of Venetians to reach out to their economic partners culturally.

clxxxviii “One of the most celebrated is a 1480 oil portrait of the Ottoman emperor Mehmet II possibly by Gentile Bellini. Thought to be commissioned during Bellini’s two years in Constantinople, it turns an easily sensationalized subject into an empathetic likeness, idealizing but naturalistic, an approach that would have its effect on Islamic painting to come.” Cotter, Holland “the Republic of Beauty, Melding West and East.” New York Times 20 March 2007

clxxxix Barry, Michael “Renaissance Venice and Her Moors” in Carboni, Stefano et all. Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797. (New Haven: Yale, 2007). The Ottomans besieged Vienna in 1529 and again in 1683.

cxc One of the final pieces in the exhibition is a carved figurehead of a seventeenth century Venetian battleship depicting a humiliated, chained half naked Muslim. The exhibition emphasizes that Venice’s partnership with the Islamic world was based on trade. When Venetian trade began to decline (with Portugal and Spain being linked to India and the New World, respectively), it left little to sustain Venice’s relationship with the Ottoman court. By the seventeenth century, Europe’s relationship with Islam had “irrevocably soured.” Cotter (2007).

cxci Giorgione da Castelfranco’s images of Ptolemy, Avicenna, Moses, Aristotle, and Solomon were particularly reverential of Islamic influence in Venetian, and perhaps all of Western, thought. Hugh Honour posits that in “The Three Philosophers” (1508) Giorgione depicts 3 magi: a young man, a man in turban, and a bearded man, possible astronomers or philosophers, as allegories for the main trends in Venetian thought. To Honour, the bearded man represents Aristotileanism, the man in “Oriental” attire represents Islamic Averroism,

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and the youth is associated with the new natural philosophy. Hugh Honour A World History of Art. (New York: Lawrence King Publishing, 2005). The exhibition contains later works of art that depict a change of attitude toward Islamic rulers, foreshadowing the conflict of Venice with Suleyman's army in 1530. In "The Stoning of Saint Steven"(1520) Vittore Carpaccio made all the executioners Ottoman Turks.

xcii Barry.(2007). 156

xciii Ibid. 154

xciv Ibid.

xcv Carboni, Stefano. Personal Interview at MMoA, 16 November 2007

xcvi Ibid.

xcvii Ibid.

xcviii Vatsky, Sharon "Museum Education", Course at the CCNY Museum Studies Program, Fall, 2005. And Vatsky, Sharon. *Personal Interview*, via email, 16 January 2008.

xcix Anonymous marketing and public relations source, Conversation. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. 17 December 2005.

cc Baer, Eva. The Human Figure in Islamic Art: Inheritances and Islamic Transformations. Costa Mesa, Ca. Mazda Publishers, 2004, page 5.

cci For example, Umayyad and Abbasid images (often allegorical) which drew on a wide spectrum of pre-Islamic imagery adopted from Roman-Hellenistic, Coptic and general Mediterranean and local traditions, showed a quest for a visual vocabulary that suited the requirements of Islamic society. Introduction. Baer, 2004.

ccii Introduction. Baer, 2004.

cciii Salamey, Jamima and Celine Taminan, Personal Interview. National Arab American Museum, Michigan. 2 March 2007.

cciv Carboni interview, 2007.

ccv James Zogby. The Aspen Institute, Global Initiative on Culture and Society. SECOND SESSION:March 12, 2009

ccvi Since writing this chapter, there have been many exhibitions that attend to these concerns of connecting Arab and Islamic intellectual and artistic history with the rest of the

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world through historical trade routes and cultural exchange etc. Some of these exhibits include the :“Art and Trade along the Silk Road”, Freer/Sackler galleries, Washington DC, 2007-2008, “Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City”, Getty Research Institute, LA, May 19 to October 18, 2009. “Translation/Tarjama”, Queens Museum of Art, New York City, May 10th - September 27, 2009., A Tale of Two Persian Carpets: The Ardabil and Coronation Carpets LACMA, November 14, 2009 – January 18, 2010. “Two Qalams: Islamic Arts of Brush and Pen”. Philadelphia Museum “Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas,” a summer festival of Islamic Culture in New York City, 2 June- 1 September 2009., “The Tsars and the East: Gifts from Turkey and Iran in The Moscow Kremlin,” Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 9 May – 13 September 2009. “Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul”. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 22 February – 17 May 2010 and at The MMoA, New York, 23 June – 20 September 2010. “Muraqqa: Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.” Honolulu Academy of the Arts 1 October 2009- 1 March 2010. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, 21 March – 14 June 2010. Denver Museum, Colorado.

ccvii Mintz, Ann “Exploring Possibilities” in American Association of Museums. Museums in the Life of a City: Strategies for Community Partnerships. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1995.10.

ccviii Ibid.10

ccix In terms of the DIA, significant outreach has been accomplished among the Native American, Hispanic and African American communities.

ccx Ibid. 12.

ccxi The distinction between the democratization of culture and cultural democracy is that the democratization of cultural involves integrating cultural institutions through affirmative action, while cultural democracy involves enabling culturally specific center and projects (including museum-based projects) to develop and thrive while addressing a range of artistic, historical, social and economic issues. Conference Summary, “Cultural institutions and Multiculturalism” American Association of Museums. Museums in the Social and Economic Life of a City: Summary of a Conference. (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1996). 25



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ccxii Ibid. 25.

ccxiii Kikumura-Yano. "Commitment to Community" in Kikumura-Yano, Akemi, Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, and James A. Hirabayashi, editors. Common Ground : the Japanese American National Museum and the Culture of Collaborations. Boulder : University Press of Colorado, 2005.

ccxiv Ibid. 52.

ccxv Ibid.

ccxvi Salamey, Jamima and Celine Taminan, Personal Interview. National Arab American Museum, Michigan. 2 March 2007.

ccxvii Arab American National Museum. Telling our story: the Arab American National Museum. Dearborn, Michigan: Arab American National Museum, 2007.

ccxviii Jamal (2008) 59

ccxix Ibid. 58.

ccxx Tyler Green, Modern Art Notes Journalist. Personal Interview. Washington, DC. June 2009.

ccxxi Tarjama/Translation. <http://www.arteeast.org/pages/visualarts>

ccxxii Ibid

ccxxiii Awad, Marwad "Arabesque festival challenges U.S. perceptions" in Alarabiya. 14 March 2009.

ccxxiv Ibid.

ccxxv Ibid.

ccxxvi Five years in the making, the cultural festival had the cooperation of all 22 Arab countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain and Sudan. Eight hundred performers and artists participated, from the a region stretching from North Africa to the Levant to the Persian Gulf, a region, the organizers want to make clear, of great diversity. Alicia Adams, who was in charge of finding performers throughout the Arab world, spent two and a half years securing hundreds of visas, transporting sets, art and costumes, and locating talent. Adams traveled to the many countries searching for art forms that reflected the various national and Arab artistic tastes across the region. Arabesque Festival. Washington DC. John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. March 2009

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ccxxvii Arabesque Festival.(2009).

ccxxviii Ibid.

ccxxix The Aspen Institute, Global Initiative on Culture and Society. SECOND SESSION: Arab Arts and Culture Forum: Vision, Inspiration, and Big Ideas. Walter Isaacson, President and CEO of the Aspen Institute, Her Majesty Queen Noor, and James Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute. Washington, DC: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. 12 March 2009.

ccxxx Ameri, Anan. “An American Story: The Arab American National Museum”. Museum News. November/December 2006.

ccxxxi The Aspen Institute, Global Initiative on Culture and Society. SECOND SESSION: Arab Arts and Culture Forum: Vision, Inspiration, and Big Ideas. Walter Isaacson, President and CEO of the Aspen Institute, Her Majesty Queen Noor, and James Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute. Washington, DC: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. 12 March 2009.

ccxxxii Michael Kaiser quoted in Awad, Marwad “Arabesque festival challenges U.S. perceptions” in Alarabiya. 14 March 2009.

ccxxxiii Amy Adams quoted in Marwad (2009).

ccxxxiv Arendt, Hannah. The Human Condition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). 178.

ccxxxv Nilufer, Gole “Turkish Delight in Vienna: Art Islam and European Public Culture” in Cultural Politics (November 2009) 5.3. 278.

ccxxxvi Ibid.

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