

Panel 42: **The Art Salon in the Middle East: Migration of Institutional Patronage and its Challenges**

Saturday 19, 9-11.15, Meeting Room (1<sup>st</sup> floor)

Convenors: **Nadia von Maltzahn** (Orient-Institut Beirut), **Monique Bellan** (Orient-Institut Beirut), **Nadia Radwan** (University of Bern)

Discussant: **Eva-Maria Troelenberg** (Max-Planck Institut Florence)

Salons, art academies' official exhibitions, started in France under Louis XIV. The academies of art in Paris and London and their annual salons soon became the most powerful institutions in the European art world of the time, patronizing art and directing public taste. Only in the 19th century did artists start to oppose the monopoly of the academy, resulting in the creation of new exhibition forums or independent salons. In the Middle East, a School of Fine Arts was established in Cairo in 1908 by Prince Youssuf Kamal, who believed that the fine arts could be a means for Egypt to engage with modernity. Several salons sprung up in the 20th century, such as the annual Cairo Salon of the "Society of Fine Art Lovers", the annual exhibition the "Friends of Art" started in Baghdad in the 1940s, and the Salon d'Automne of the Surssock Museum in Beirut that was launched in the 1960s. Institutional forms of art clearly migrated from Europe to the Middle East in the late colonial and early post-colonial context, while artists circulated between the two regions. This panel aims to explore the role of the art salon in the Middle East, examining to what extent it had an impact on the formation of public taste and debates on art in the Middle East, as well as to look at knowledge transfer and cultural interactions between Europe and the Middle East. Was the art salon considered just an import from Europe, a fringe phenomenon lacking the historical development of institutional patronage and competing with other more rooted exhibition forms? Who initiated salons in the region? Was the rejection of the salon a driving force for the historical avant-garde in the region? Were there any alternative or informal forums, which defied the aesthetic and political values of the salons? Finally, how are state, art market and salons related?

- 1) **Nadia Radwan** (University of Bern), *Cairo's Art Salons: Patronage, Taste and Cultural Practices in Egypt during the 1920s and 1930s*

The first Art Salons in Egypt were organized by the elite towards the end of the 19th century. Associations, such as the "Cercle Artistique" led by the doctor and scientist Onofrio Abbate Pacha, held annual exhibitions of orientalist painters as of the 1890s. In the 1920s, the "Society of Fine Art Lovers" headed by the politician and art collector Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil established the annual Cairo Salon that opened the path to art criticism and the emergence of a local art market. During that time, women invested these new spaces, both as artists and patrons, while Egyptian artists regularly exhibited in Cairo and Paris. By exploring the Cairene Art Salon as a vector of specific narratives regarding taste, identities as well as knowledge transfer, this paper aims at identifying the links between the politics of the Salon and the development of institutional patronage and cultural practices. In that perspective, it proposes to examine the role played by actors and intermediaries in creating

new spaces and networks, which challenged western artistic canons and geographical boundaries through the circulation of persons and objects between Egypt and Europe.

2) **Monique Bellan** (Orient-Institut Beirut), *The Egyptian Avant-garde Defying the Salon*

This paper looks at resistance to the art salon, concentrating on the historical avant-garde in Egypt and its reaction to the salon and academic art in general. The focus will be on the Art and Freedom group, which was close to surrealism and its leading figure Andre Breton, and the group's exhibition practices. Their alternative, independent exhibitions went against established tastes and models of perception, and provoked in many ways. The group wanted to challenge the prevalent bourgeois reception and production of art, the homogenization of public taste as well as the aesthetic reception of art. The museum and sacral aura of the dominant exhibition concepts were to be undermined and desacralized. The surrealists' aim was to erode the art institution that contributed to a consolidation of power, and return to a spiritual experience of art. This experience was to go beyond a simple observation of beauty, and bring the unfinished and raw aspects of a work of art to the foreground. Exhibiting in unfinished buildings or – as in contemporary art – industrial buildings was part of this experience. Taking the salon and the art academy as a starting point, this paper will sketch out the debates around taste, values and morals and the resistance against established norms by the Egyptian avant-garde.

3) **Morad Montazami** (Tate Modern), *Hamed Abdalla: From the 1938 Cairo Salon to exiled modernism*

Hamed Abdalla (1917-1985) is a key figure in Egyptian modernism and global art history. His experimental inventions not only reflected over thirty years of political and philosophical debate in the Arab world, but also gave shape to an exiled modernism: to the cities where he lived and worked (Cairo, Copenhagen, and Paris) and aesthetic movements he interacted with (CoBrA, lettrism, Islamic arts ...). Abdalla exhibited at the Cairo Salon in 1938, a part of his story which needs further unveiling. This paper focuses on Abdalla's participation at the salon in the context of how it was received by the Cairo art intelligentsia, confronted with Abdalla's peasant lineage and poor origins. It analyses what the Salon represented to Abdalla, and what Abdalla represented to the Salon, before he broke up from that context and artistic orthodoxy and turned to a more avant-garde approach and exile from Egypt.

4) **Nadia von Maltzahn** (Orient-Institut Beirut), *Guiding the Artist and the Public? Salon D'Automne at the Sursock Museum*

The Salon d'Automne saw the light of day at Beirut's newly opened Sursock Museum in 1961. It was launched at a time when new galleries were opening in Beirut and many exhibitions taking place, and became a symbol of the museum. The first president of the Museum's committee, Lady Sursock Cochrane, announced the third salon with the words that it was time to "stop encouraging and proceed to establish criteria guiding both the artists and the general public". The direction of both public taste and the artist was thus clearly a

mission of the salon. This paper will examine the role of the Sursock Museum's Salon d'Automne in terms of to what extent it patronized art and in fact impacted the debates on art in Lebanon in the thirty-one salons that took place between 1961 and 2012, also looking at why and by whom it was initiated, who participated and how works were selected, its relationship to the Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts and its interaction with other countries. Finally, its legacy and future prospects will be discussed.

5) **Catherine Cornet** (EHESS Paris and University of Rome II), *The "Academy of Egypt" in Rome: Egyptian soft power and the definition of a modern Egyptian art for foreign eyes*

In the midst of the green and Renaissance setting of the Villa Borghese park in Rome, stands a unique cultural institution: the "Academy of Egypt". Within the study of migration of institutional patronage from the Middle East to Europe, the Academy is a case in point: it is the most important Egyptian cultural centre abroad and it has been for nearly a century, a showcase for Egyptian art in Europe as well as a point of reference for Egyptian artists to travel to Europe and access the Egyptian pavilion of the Venice Biennial. With this paper, I intend to further dig into the Egyptian state soft power and the Egyptian art definition constructed by the State. Through semi-structured interviews to 'State artists', i.e., laureates of the Academy and the Venice Biennial as well as cultural actors of the Academy of Egypt; through the precise study of exhibitions leaflets and presentation of the Academy found in the archives and the study of the works themselves, I interrogate the ideas of authenticity, nationalism and modernity and their artistic translations in the Egyptian artistic state visual sphere.