Killing the Image?

The Debate on Islamic Contemporary Visual Culture

The last decade’s scenes of “killed” images coming from the Islamic world most notably during the Danish cartoons demonstrations and Taliban’s destruction of Bamiyan’s Little Budha are only the most publicized examples of the public debates shaping Islamic visual culture. Instead of a simplistic media focus on an Islam that forbids and annihilates images another more complicated visual context needs to be re-emphasized. With the wide and fast spread of modern media in the Islamic world beginning from photography in the 19th century to the information revolution by the end of the 20th century visual culture has been constantly changing in this part of the world. With all the publicized displays of “killed” images visual representations remain an integral part of contemporary Islam political and cultural discourses. Yet the same issues seem to be debated. The conflict over cultural identity and reaction to modernity are the main themes of artistic production. In this seminar we will examine such characteristic features focusing on the contemporary histories of the visual culture including architecture, painting, sculpture, photography, and cinema in the Islamic world with a focus on the Arabic, Turkic, and Persian spheres. We will see how visual culture is becoming increasingly present and reflective of the major debates defining the contemporary Islamic world.

Requirements will include oral reports on specified readings and the topic of the student’s research, as well as a written research paper.

Readings (R-book are on reserve in the Art Library. Other readings will cover other parts of the course and will be available online through “sakai”)

Introductory readings.


19th century architecture.


19th century photography.

19th century and early 20th century history of painting/sculpture (Arabic speaking world and Iran)


19th century and early 20th century history of painting/sculpture (Turkey and Central Asia)


Architecture in the first half of the 20th century


Early cinematographic experiences


Postcolonial painting/sculpture

Postcolonial architecture


Postcolonial cinematographic experience


Islamism and the visual representation


**Movies Screenings** (Art Library)

Iran: A Cinematographic Revolution (2007)

Bab el-Hadid (1958)

The Runner (1985)

The Apple (1997)