

The Representation of Muslim Masculinity and Femininity in Contemporary Art

Introduction and Objectives

Gender-related research in the Middle Eastern context has mainly addressed the female body and the plight of Muslim women in Islamic societies. Muslim masculinity has had little attention paid to, in comparison with Muslim femininity. This research attempts to further the analytical research on contemporary Middle Eastern art and gender by considering the impact of globalisation on local gender relations, and assess the interactions between the stereotypical representation of Muslim men's and women's gender practices.

This work intends to challenge the essentialised depictions of Muslim men and women and create more diversity in general perceptions of those cultural practices that represent them.

Research Questions

This thesis attempts to address these questions:

- how Western curatorial policies have strengthened traditional monolithic gender identity within the other culture.
- how individuals (here, the artists/art critics who are associated with the Islamic world) respond to their fixed given identity.

Methodology

The research is conducted in two steps:

- focusing on the exhibitionary practices of art galleries and museums in the UK in relation to the representation of Muslim femininity and masculinity.
- drawing attention to those art practices which take an intersectional approach towards history, religion and gender.

With reference to:

- Sara Ahmed's reflection on the institutional policy of diversity
- Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space
- The continental philosophy of ethics to investigate the notion of responsibility in the relationship between self and other

Conclusion

The legacy of the colonial gaze within Western curatorial acts of selection of contemporary Middle Eastern art can evoke and reinforce the oppositions of the East/West and Femininity/Masculinity.

Through their intersectional and postcolonial perspectives, artists such as Mahtab Hussain, Mitra Tabrizian, Akram Zaatari and Shirin Neshat depict the complexity of their subjects' social positions, offering the possibility of resistance to dominant representational regimes .

List of Illustrations

Figures 1, 2, 4, 6, 7. Akram Zaatari, 2007, from the series *Objects of study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices*.
Figure 3. Shirin Neshat, Untitled, 1996, from the series *Women of Allah*. Gelatin silver print & ink.
Figure 5. Rokni Haerizadeh, Typical Iranian Wedding (left panel & right panel), 2008. Oil on canvas.
Figure 8. Shirin Neshat, 1998, *Turbulent* (still frames)



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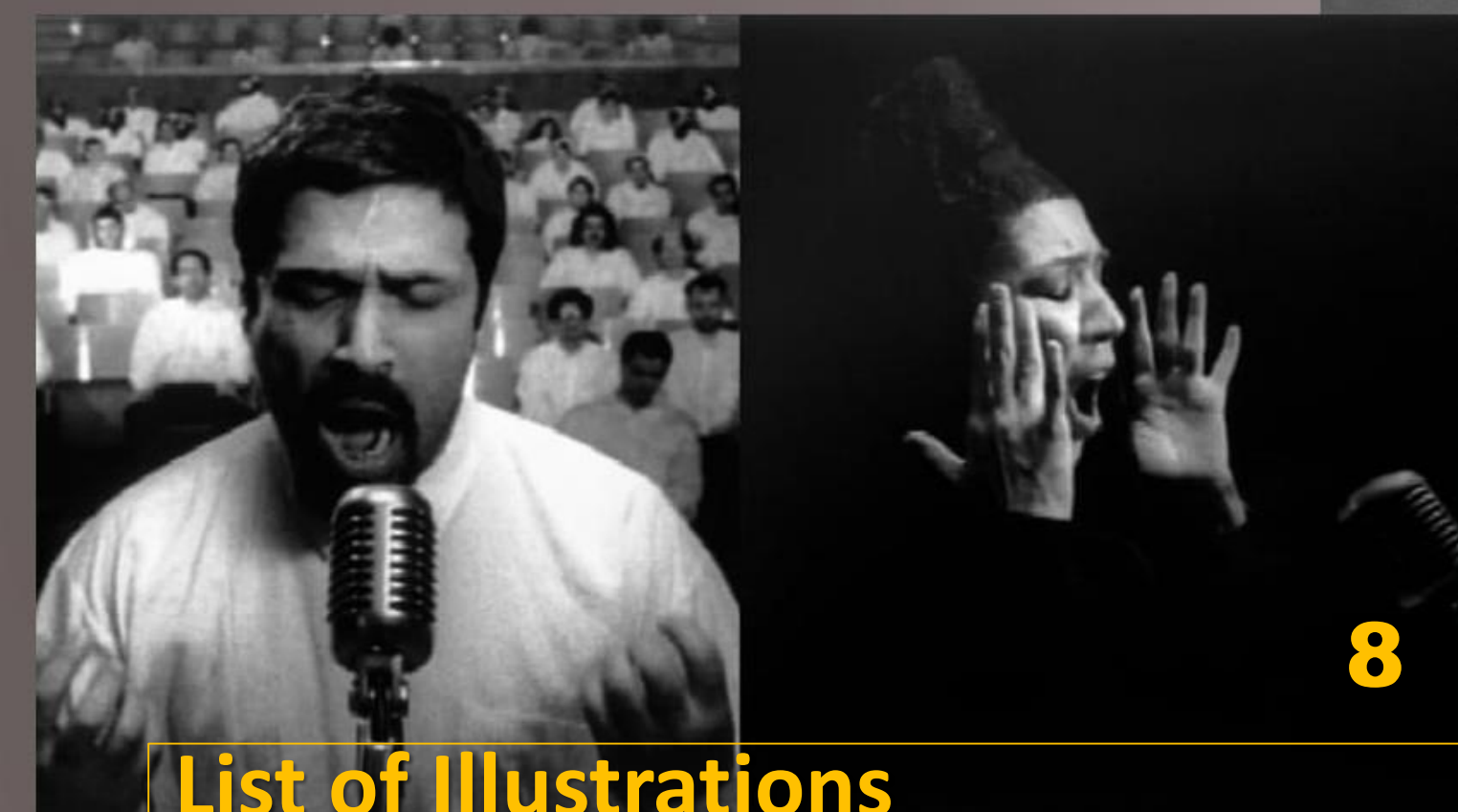
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