

Islam/Media, Project 2

Response to Islamic art

Our second unit in this course focuses on visual and aural culture in Islam, including writing, visual arts, architecture, poetry, cityscapes and soundscapes, as well as many of the “original media” of our first weeks (the Qur’an, recitation, prayers, the adhan, etc.). For project #2, choose a piece of Islamic art or other audiovisual object and create a response to it. As usual, what constitutes “Islamic art” will be left up to you—and indeed, your choice of an object may necessitate your explaining why you consider it Islamic, art, or audiovisual. (That being said, creative interpretations of the terms are encouraged!) Some objects/collections/resources you might consider would include:

- the Islamic Art gallery of the Museum of Fine Arts or another museum
- architecture, or some object within an architectural space (ideally something you’ve seen in person)
- an object from the bookstore of the Boston mosque
- a copy of the Qur’an (possibly drawing on the MFA’s online database)
- a sound recording, video, or other piece of media you encounter online (note: if you pick something something of this sort, be sure that you carefully check sources/citations)
- a piece of poetry, traditional or contemporary (Sufi, hip-hop, nasheed, etc.)
- a particular reciter/recitation (of the Qur’an, of poetry, etc.)
- images from MIT’s Aga Khan collection (archive of architectural images; new collection of materials from contemporary Iraq)
- books depicting (sometimes imaginary) speculative technologies (e.g., al-Jazari’s *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices*)
- a website or other piece of computer-generated art
- films depicting Islam (including those screened in class)
- or some other sensory object/practice you find intriguing!

The starting point to consider here is that of audiovisual (or other sensory!) experience: What kind of sensory engagement does your object entail? How does its material qualities (e.g., what it’s made of, how it’s preserved) interact with and shape its meanings? How/when (if at all) does it circulate? How does the object balance aesthetics with information?

As with the first project, responses may take the form of a 5-6 pp. paper or alternative/media formats—or something in between. (Note: musicology and art history papers often incorporate media examples *within* the papers themselves.) Written work may be more speculative or imaginative, but it should critically engage with the themes of the course. Once again, projects in alternative formats are especially encouraged, including those that use aural or visual means to engage with your audiovisual objects. To further foster creative thinking along those lines, alternative format projects will start with a bonus 10% in grading. Possible formats might include:

- a written paper
- a short video piece (fiction or non-fiction)
- an audio piece (sound composition, podcast, experimental radio piece)
- a set of images (photographs, drawing, calligraphy)
- memorizing some part of the Qur'an and documenting (in writing, video, or sound) your experience with that process
- a computer program (database, standalone program, simple website, app)
- computer-based art/design (visualized/sonified data, etc.)

If you choose to create a media piece in a non-written format, you are encouraged to include captioning, other textual supplements to clarify your materials, and a brief piece of writing to clarify your aims with the project. If you program something, please include your code.

As you are brainstorming ideas, please don't hesitate to be in touch by email, before/after class, or in office hours. If you have materials in-progress for class on Monday, April 6th, we will work through a quick group-critique of them. All materials should be submitted by 11:59 pm on Friday, April 10th.

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