



Visual Narratives from Arabia

ONLINE MASTER MODULE ON ART, DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY



Collected papers presented by Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès and Tarek Atrissi

with contributions from Teemu Leinonen and Ricardo Mbarkho

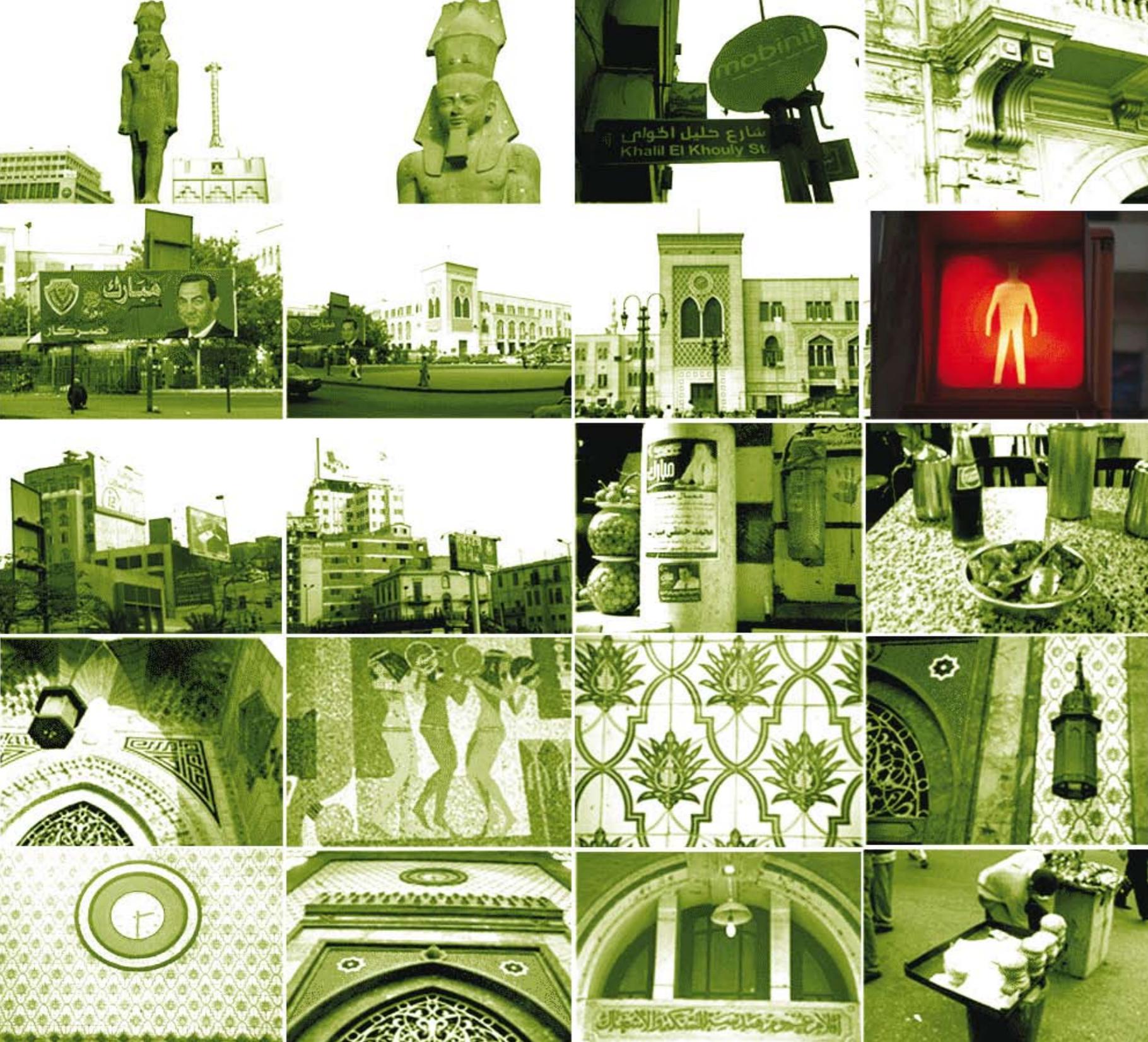
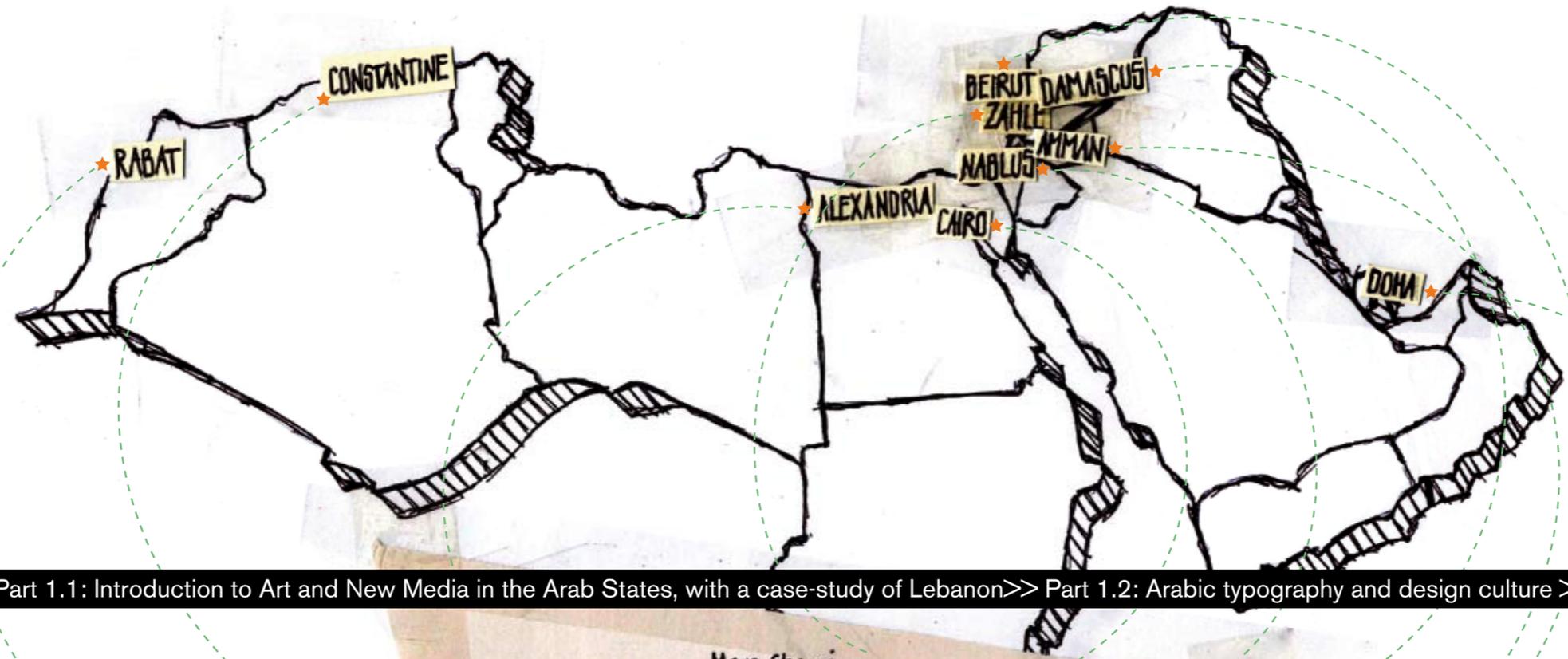


Table of Contents

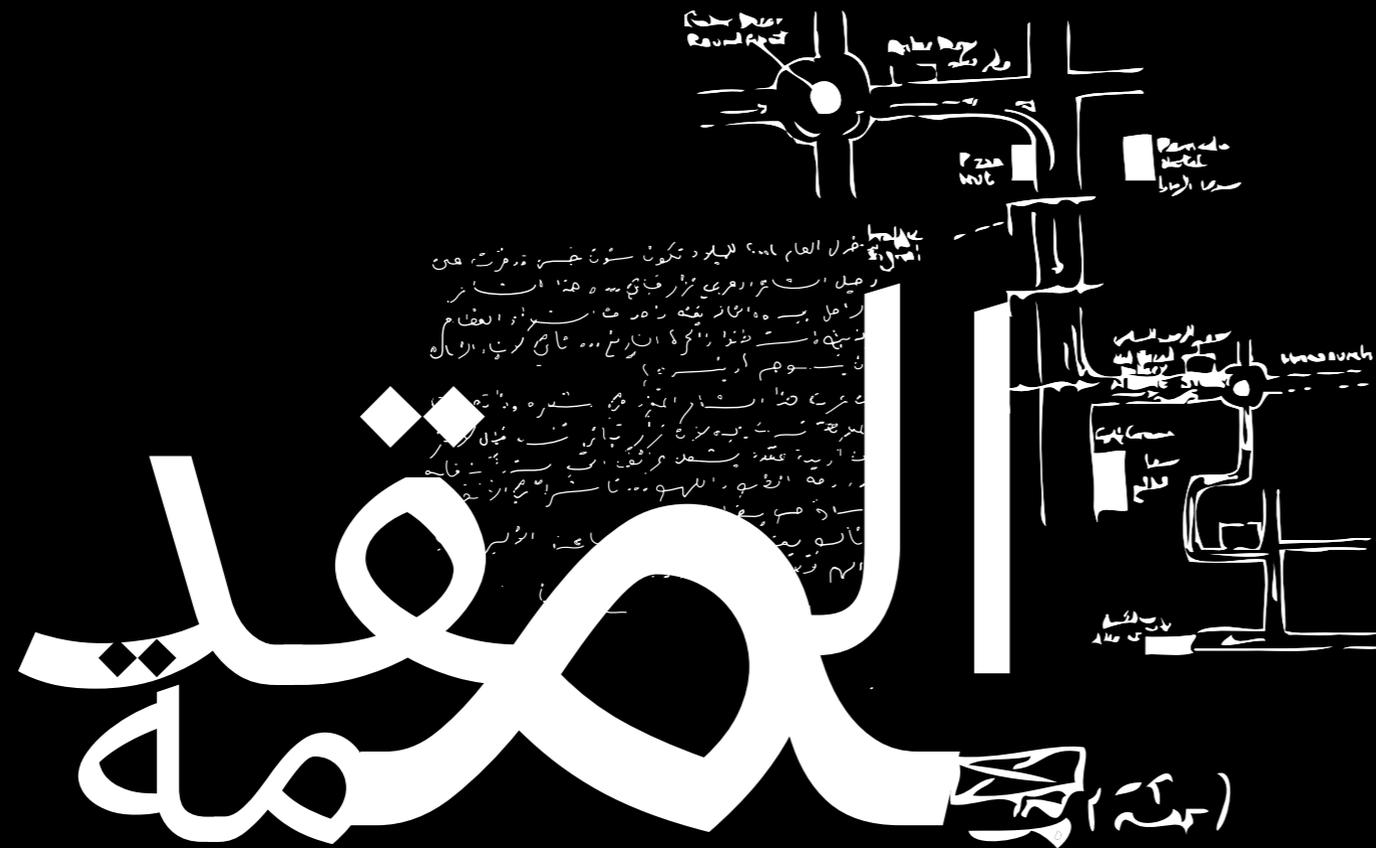
Preface	11
<i>by Abdel Moneim Osman</i>	
Higher Education through e-learning	13
<i>by Teemu Leinonen</i>	
Course content	23
• Introduction to Art and New Media in the Arab States, with a case-study of Lebanon	
<i>by Ricardo Mbarkho</i>	
• Arabic typography and design culture	
<i>by Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès</i>	
• Typographic Landscape in the Arab World	
<i>by Tarek Atrissi</i>	
Acknowledgements	98



Starting together >>Application Procedure >> Part 1.1: Introduction to Art and New Media in the Arab States, with a case-study of Lebanon>> Part 1.2: Arabic typography and design culture >> Part 1.3: Typographic Landscape in the Arab world

Maya Chami
Mohamed Taman, Rasha Hamdan
Joelle Farkh, Céline Khairallah, Sami Yeha
Kinda Hassan, Kinga Saab, Dima Radwan, Alexandra Zambon
Laudia Awad, Aïham Dib, Doris Blok
Gomaa, Laced, Mohamed Kabhani
Rania, Aïda, Amal, Chudac
Alma, Othman, Ghada, Majed, Mourad Benali
Omar, Safa, Omar, Kabhani, Johnny Hajj
Leen, Halwani, Paola, Hounla, Djamil, Benghida
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In a world where information and communication technology (ICT) have become present in all walks of life, changing the way people live, work and learn, and at a time when research has shown that Art provides a significant contribution to the economy that can improve educational goals and serve to enrich the cultural life of communities, the importance of integrating technologies to expand and reshape the role of Art in education has become quite vital. Hence, the rise of what has become known as Digital Art.

Art has been around for centuries, but it wasn't until the 1990s that a revolution sparked the way people produce and experience artwork. This period marked a turning point in digital technology which became widespread, popular, more refined, and more widely used as a medium for Art. Nowadays, Digital Art and Creative Design have become so widespread that one cannot go anywhere without seeing some form of it. Digital Art and Design has indeed made huge developments since it was first introduced, and as technology continues to advance, so will Digital Art.

Within this spirit came UNESCO's DigiArts initiative, aiming at the development of interdisciplinary activities in research, creativity and communication in the field of media arts. Moreover, following the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva in 2003, UNESCO also became engaged in the promotion of training and human resource development in the use of information and communication technology in higher education

institutes. In order to pursue this engagement, and knowing that ICT is influencing more and more creative practice, UNESCO, in cooperation with its partners, proposed the creation of a master module on Art, Design and Technology for the Arab States.

This project came as part of the global UNESCO DigiArts initiative and seeks to bridge the gap between university spheres of computer science and creative practice. Opportunities for learning across multiple disciplines are less common in the Arab region, as most universities and educational institutions mainly focus on established disciplines such as



art, design, computer sciences, etc. Thus, the master module aims to contribute to the establishment of tailor-made teaching purposes, resources and contents, combining creative practice, design and computing. In the long run, the construction of an academic structure would formalize the development of the emerging alliance of ICT with culture and design. It would assist new creative expressions, reflecting and preserving the cultural diversity of the region. From here, it is our

pleasure to present this publication that includes the pilot parts of the master module. We hope it will not only be a source of information, but also an asset to help develop projects in this field for our region.

Abdel Moneim Osman
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Higher Education through e-learning

by Teemu Leinonen

The master module on Arts, Design and Technology for the Arab States was an experimental educational program with the objective to explore possibilities of having a new kind of multi-disciplinary educational program in the Arab States. The pilot program was targeted for postgraduate students with an interest to use new digital technologies in creative areas, such as art and design. The aim was to bring together students with different kind of expertise to study together and to learn from each other in the context of the cultural wealth in the Arab States. The first module was offered during the academic year 2005-2006. The module was designed and implemented by UNESCO in cooperation with Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA), American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University (LAU), and Media Lab, University of Art and Design – Helsinki.

When the master module was announced in September 2005 it received a lot of interest among students from several Arab States and students with Arabic origins living abroad. Students were asked to apply to the program

with portfolios and CVs. From more than 100 applicants, 40 students were selected to the first stage of the module with three online courses. Based on the students' performance on the three courses, 16 of them were selected to participate in the second and third stages of the program. The second part was planned to take place in summer 2006 in Beirut. Because of the security in Beirut we were forced to cancel the second and the third part.

The pedagogical approach of the program was designed around the best practices and traditions of art and design education. The study work in the online courses included exercises and course assignments with requirements for students to practice creativity. The online courses emphasized the community of learners and teachers. All communication in the courses took place in a transparent and open online environment where each course participant had an equal right to speak up and comment on each other's work in the course. This way, the online learning environment evoked the atmosphere of a shared studio space commonly used in art and design schools and universities.

In the following, some of the characteristics of online learning in the fields of art, design and technology will be presented. These characteristics had a great impact on the educational planning and implementation of the master module. I will also introduce the instructional design process and explain the final course structure. Furthermore, I will reflect upon the teaching and learning in the online courses and analyze the best practices developed and achieved in the master module. I will try to show where we were successful, but also discuss the issues that I found challenging.

In the following I will present some characteristics of online learning in the field of art, design and technology. These characteristics had a great impact to the educational planning and implementation of the master module. I will also introduce the instructional design process and explain the final course structure. Furthermore, I will reflect the teaching and learning in the online courses and analyze the best practices developed and achieved in the masters module. I'll try to present where we were successful, but also discuss the issues found challenging.

Art, design and technology education in information society

The distinction of science and art, as well as technology and design, comes as a result of economic and cultural change, especially in Europe and United States in late 18th century. We may ask if this distinction is reasonable in a time when more cultural, economic and civil social activities are carried out in a digital environment. We may claim that in an information society, these domains would best serve the people, culture and society at large if their relationship to each other were examined and discussed.

From a historical point of view, the separation of technology, design and art is a relatively recent phenomenon. In most cultures they are not separate domains. Craftsmen and -women everywhere have always been innovators of new techniques and technologies with a natural interest in art and design. In the tradition of craft making, the border between engineering and artistic mindsets is blurred. Those who practice a craft always think of their "artistic ideas" in the context of technological possibilities.

From the late 18th to the early 19th century in Europe, the Romantic Movement introduced the myth of the artist as someone with a strong vocation and mission. The ruling noblemen gave artists a special role

in society: to provide "beauty" to the world. The Romantic Movement transformed some of the craftsmen into artists. Later on, the myth of the artist evolved to include characteristics of a suffering and misunderstood genius. This tradition continues to live strong in our minds.

Later in history, the industrialization process required an increasingly skillful individual able to develop new goods and products to the continuously expanding consumer markets. Industry needed products that were primarily intended for mass production. Industrialization transformed those craftsmen who were not yet artists into technicians, engineers and designers. Slowly, crafts became a hobby. The new craftsperson would take classes, or buy craft magazines, their specialized tools and materials available only in special shops.

During the industrial era, standardized and fixed concepts of an "artist," "designer," "technician" and "craftsman" became important. Formal educational qualifications build around the professions served the rationalization within industrial production. If you need a designer or technician, or at some point even an artist or craftsman, you can always search easily for one from the Yellow Pages.

Several significant social, cultural and industrial movements have combined art, design, technology and crafts. For example, in the early 20th century, the art education reform in Germany that resulted in the Bauhaus – the most famous art school in Europe – based its arts and crafts program around a focus on design and technology. In the Bauhaus, the reason to take a multidisciplinary approach to art education was vital for economic reasons. The ability to produce sophisticated and high-quality goods was seen as essential in Europe when competing with the rest of the world that was richer in raw materials. The Bauhaus school's program included foundation studies on materials, color theory and three-dimensional design, which supported students in locating their own areas of interest, in which they could employ their creativity. The aim of the school was to rescue all the arts from isolation by educating future craftsmen, painters, sculptors, architects and designers that were able to establish and work in cooperative projects where different skills were combined. The Bauhaus Manifesto proclaimed "there is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman." Information society requires multidisciplinary professionals that are able to work in

multicultural teams. Societies around the world need people who are able to produce products, artifacts, media and art that are meaningful. Such people contribute to the development of information society. In this development, we should focus on people's well-being and happiness.

It is known that the challenges of information society are wicked. Traditional professional roles should be reconsidered, as single professions can not solve the problems. To tackle the challenges of our time, we need multidisciplinary professionals with skills to collaborate in multidisciplinary and multi-cultural teams.

Professor Pelle Ehn from the School of Arts and Communication at Malmo University in Sweden has introduced the concept of the digital Bauhaus. Ehn sees the Bauhaus School as a model for art and design institutions of the 21st century. According to Ehn "the Bauhaus designer was a collective designer and his design manifestos envisioned a new unit of art and technology in the service of the people". In a digital world, the educational system should prepare designers to be reflective and to work collectively. Designers should be able to participate in networks of minds and to unite art and technology to serve humanity. In the digital Bauhaus, the objectives and working environment should be the same as in the original Bauhaus, even though the materials and the context are new.

In the planning of the master module on Arts, Design and Technology for the Arab States, we took the digital Bauhaus as a starting point. The cultural wealth in the Arab States was considered to be the foundation of the program. Students were expected to bring their cultural wealth to the program and, based on it, develop skills and knowledge on digital creativity. The digital paraphernalia was given the role of tools and material – not much different than paper, pen, canvas, pallet or plaster. The objective was to open up students to think and see what could be done with the new tools and materials. Like the traditional craftpeople, students should learn to reflect their "artistic ideas" in the context of the possibilities offered by digital technology. They should become reflective practitioners of the digital era.

Instructional design

The instructional design process seeks to analyze the target group's learning needs and goals. Decisions can then be made on the kind of

implementation that will best meet the needs and guarantee the set of goals that will be achieved. Instructional design plans the type of content and services that will be developed for the program. It also includes planning of the participants' (students, teachers and other stakeholders) activities and roles in the program.

Instructional design should provide answers to such questions as: What is the general concept of the program? What is the target group and what are their learning needs and goals? The general concept should include the title of the program and outline the course structure. Target group definition should describe the audience, whether general or specific. Defining the target group makes it possible to plan according to the audience. For instance, the study program may offer possibilities for professional development, or enrich and help participants in their work and life in general. The analysis of the target group should lead to the definitions of the group's learning needs and goals. From the needs and goals, one should come to the conclusions of the course content, as well as teaching and learning methods used in the study program.

A team of experts, including representatives from UNESCO and the participating universities, carried out the instructional design of the master module on Arts, Design and Technology for the Arab States. UNESCO gave the general concept (Master Module on Art, Design and Technology for the Arab States), but the content of the concept was discussed widely among the participants.

The master module was an initiative of UNESCO's Digi-Art program. Because of this, the program was primarily striving to focus on such issues as creativity, art and design rather than technology or engineering. Technology was to be used exclusively as tool and material for creativity, rather than the primary means.

In an early stage it was discussed and decided that the program will be implemented as a blended learning program. Blended learning means solutions that include both traditional face-to-face classroom learning and e-learning that can take place largely in a time and space decided by the students.

In a blended learning solution, one may mix several teaching and learning

methods with different activities and technology. In the case of the master module, it was decided that the weight would be in the e-learning activities taking place online. This way, the program could be economically feasible, but also potentially a more efficient and fruitful experience for the students.

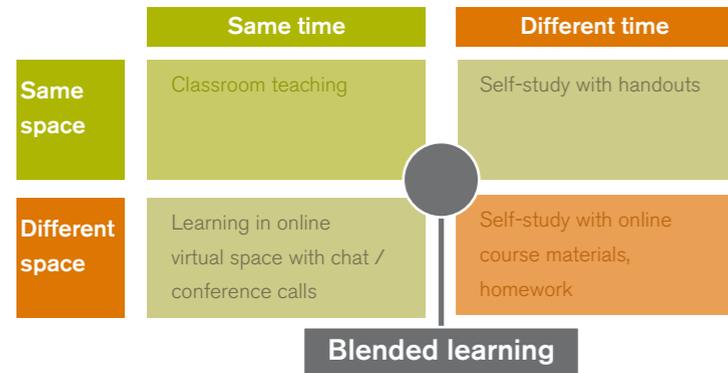


Table 1: Time and space in different learning programs and blended learning.

It was decided that the one year program would include only one face-to-face course of a week or two. Intending to keep the courses interactive, contrary to the traditional art and design education, we recognized that the lack of classroom teaching is a major challenge in the instructional design. Usually, art and design is taught in studios. In a studio, students and their work are in the same time and space. Studios are used for sharing the students' works-in-progress with their teachers and fellow students in the class. A lot of emphasis is put on the interaction between the teachers and the students. We faced the challenge of how this could be implemented in a course relying mainly on activities taking place in different times and places. How could the e-learning be kept highly interactive? How could we organize exercises and build a community where each participant receives constructive feedback, critiques and evaluations on their work?

We decided to set up a web-based online learning environment that would primarily support community-building among the students. One critical feature was the online chat and discussion forum, integrated to email. The online chat was to be used for social discourse among the participants and the discussion forum would be the main space for students to share their work with each other. The integration of the discussion forum to email guaranteed that students would receive updates on the course

progress directly to their emails, which they use everyday anyway. As a platform for the online learning environment, we decided to use Moodle (<http://www.moodle.org>) - the world's most popular learning management system. The Moodle was designed and modified to fit to the needs of the program. This was possible because Moodle is open source software; therefore, anyone is free to change it.

It was understood that to organize online courses with a lot of social interactivity, it would require not only an interactive online learning environment, but also a lot from the teachers of the online courses. They should be able to build an online community with trust among the participants. To do this, it was firstly decided that everyone involved would try to build a community of teachers. They would be asked to share their course plans in the early stages of constructing the online learning environment. We recognized that the teachers should be not only knowledgeable on the themes of the master module, but also proficient online facilitators with skills to make students to do their best with the exercises and ability to make all feel comfortable in the online community.

To facilitate the community building, it was decided that before the online course starts we would host informal online events for the students. The aim was to get to know each other and to build a feeling of belonging to the community. Furthermore, two experienced online facilitators were assigned to help the teachers and the students start the online community.

The ability to teach an interactive online course was seen as the first criteria in the selection of the teachers. Because of the extraordinary requirements for the teachers, the decisions on the course subjects and content would be left, by and large, for those selected faculty.

- The teachers and the online courses of the first section were:
1. Ricardo Mbarkho's "Introduction to Art and New Media in the Arab States," with a case-study of Lebanon;
 2. Huda Abifares' "Arabic Typography and Design Culture;"
 3. Tarek Atrissi's "Typographic Landscape in the Arab world;"
 4. Teemu Leinonen and Joanna Saad-Sulonen from the Media Lab in Helsinki were assigned to work as online facilitators with responsibility of supporting the teachers in their course planning and community building with the students.

Time	Course Title	Teacher	Weekly program	Exercise
October November 2005	Introduction to Art and New Media in the Arab States, with a Case-Study of Lebanon	Ricardo Mbarkho	Week 1: • Introduction to art, science and technology in the Arabic speaking countries Week 2: • A case-study and an analysis of the new media art scene in Lebanon	• General discussion and reflection on the programme and the first course
November December 2005	Arabic Typography and Design Culture	Huda Abifares	Week 1: • Introduction to Arabic typographic design • Research on national Arab typographic identity Week 2: • Propaganda design: stamps from the Middle East • Image research and analysis • Stamp design	• Propaganda design: Stamps from the Middle East • Image research and analysis • Stamp design
December 2005	Typographic Landscape in the Arab World	Tarek Atrissi	Week 1: • Course and project description, revision of resources • Explore the rich environmental graphical language that surrounds us • Feedback - develop a concept for the typographic visual project Week 2: • Project development • Final refinement, further development of project and chance to get a last round of feedback • Final Presentation, discussion / wrap-up	• Explore the rich environmental graphic language that surrounds us documentation/ taking photos • Develop a concept for the typographic visual project • Final refinement, further development of project and chance to get a last round of feedback • Final Presentation • Discussion/ wrap-up

Table 2: The part 1 - the three online courses.

Program structure and the implementation of the online courses

Students were selected to the program based on their CV, portfolio and accomplishment of an online self-evaluation test measuring participants' basic computer skills. We required applicants to have a prior degree (at least BA, BS or equivalent), from one of the following fields:

- o Design (graphic, industrial, furniture, fashion etc.) or architecture;
- o Fine arts;
- o Music;
- o Computer science;
- o Video / film;
- o Media / journalism;
- o Politics / social science;
- o Humanities (e.g. history, art history, languages);
- o Psychology / education.

We also asked students to show previous experience of working with digital media. As a proof of the applicants' experience, we asked them to provide a portfolio of past works, projects and examples of creativity practices. The third criteria for entrance were solid basic computer skills. Students taking part in the program needed to already be able to use file management, handle word processing, use the Internet, produce basic graphics and know the basic concepts of information and communication technology.

The applications, CVs and portfolios were all delivered to the online learning environment. To get an idea of the participants basic computer skills, we designed an online test, which each applicant was asked to complete. The idea of the online test was primarily to showcase what kind of skills the students would need, rather than to make any decisions regarding their acceptance to the program. We also encouraged students to study basic skills by themselves if they felt they did not do very well with the test. Students were allowed to take the online test as many times as they wanted.

All steps of the application procedure, from the uploading CVs and portfolios, to the online test and communication with the applicants, took place in the online learning environment. This way, students got to know the environment well before the courses started. During the application

procedure, we also arranged several scheduled online chat consulting times for applicants to ask questions about the program.

The master module was announced 1 September 2005 on the UNESCO website and in several mailing lists. The deadline to complete applications was set to for 14 October 2005. The program received a lot of interest not just from students from several Arab States, but also from students with Arabic origins living abroad, as well as students from other countries without any connection to the Arab world. As the program was targeted to the Arab States, we limited the enrollment to students with nationality from one of the Arab States.

The master module on Arts, Design and Technology for the Arab States, announced in September 2005, consisted of three parts. The parts and the schedule planned are as follows:

Part 1: Three online courses and preparation of project proposals for the second section of coursework

- o 16 weeks (31 October 2005 – 29 April 2006);
- o Selection of 16 students to the Part 2 and 3.

Part 2: Face to face course in Beirut, Lebanon

- o 1 week (June 2006)

Part 3: Final Project work online

- o 8 weeks (August-September 2006)

In total, more than 200 people registered to the website and more than 100 registered themselves as applicants. From this pool, 40 students were selected to the first part of the master module. The selection was carried out by a team of experts from UNESCO, participating universities and teachers of the program. From the 40 students, 26 students were from Lebanon, 4 from Jordan, 3 from Egypt and one from Qatar, Algeria, Palestine, Syria, Morocco, Bahrain and Luxembourg, respectively. The large number of selected students from Lebanon was due to the number of participating universities located there.

Right after notifying students of the application results, we organized several get-togethers in an online chat room. Students were actively

getting to know each other and interested to chat with the online facilitators and teachers about the practical things related to the courses.

During the applications procedure the teachers of the first section had already started to plan their teaching by creating the weekly schedule, course readings and online exercises. To help implement their plans, an online course space was opened for each teacher. They were asked to plan and produce the course directly to the online learning environment. All the teachers were also given access to each other's online courses. This way, the teachers were able to learn from their colleagues. In addition to the peer support, the online facilitators were helping teachers in the course planning.

The courses and the schedule of the first section is presented in the table above. That section started with Ricardo Mbarkho's "Introduction to the New Media Art in Arab States," with special focus on the field in Lebanon. Students were asked to read some basic texts about the development of media art in the region and to get familiar with some groundbreaking projects. The first course did not include any art or media production exercise, but the participants were asked to present their opinions and analyses of the new media art in the online discussion forum.

The second course by Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès required students to study Arabic typography and design culture. A large part of the design culture in the region is based on the long tradition of typographic design. This way, it was expected that through studies on typography, students will better understand the whole Arabic art and design culture and tradition. During the course, students were asked to collect and share examples of Arabic postal stamps and to design their own stamps. The exercise was very successful.

The third course, taught by Tarek Atrissi, explored the rich Arabic visual culture. Students were asked to explore their surrounding physical environment, nature, urban environments and architecture. The first task of the students was to document with photos their everyday environment and analyze it from the perspective of visual culture and typography. Very strong pictures from different parts of the Arab world were uploaded to the online learning environments. The visual material generated lively discussions in the forum. The final task of the students was to

develop their own visual project, share it with the other participants and to comment on each other's proposals.

When the first section was finished, an expert group including representatives from UNESCO, participating Universities, teachers and online facilitators of the first section made a selection of students for the second and the third part of the master module. The selection was based on a student's project proposals for their final project and on their performance in the first section. The expert team selected 16 students to the second and third sections.

After the selection, the arrangements and planning of the week-long course in Beirut were started. To prepare the course, students started an online discussion about the upcoming coursework. The greatest distinction of the upcoming sections was the opportunity for many of them to meet in person. However, in July 2006, a week before the course was to begin, the security situation in Beirut became so difficult that the second and third sections were canceled.



Conclusions

In art and design education, long term production projects with presentations, demonstrations and final exhibitions are important elements. As a multidisciplinary expert, one must have skills to prepare and present work to colleagues, partners and the general audience. The second and third sections were planned to meet these objectives. The intention of the coursework in Beirut was for students to get deeper into their own final project plans and to work on them again online in the third section. That final section was planned to end in an exhibition of the students' final works. Even though the master module was never completed, due to the cancellations, we may say that the online courses of section one were very successful. There are several issues that made the learning experience special.

First off, from the very beginning we were able to build a real community. The online chat sessions prior to the online courses were crucial in the process of getting to know each other in an informal way. The rigorously selective application process also made enrolled students feel special. The students, the teachers and the online facilitators became a community of practitioners with a shared interest to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding on the topics related to art, design and technology.

Secondly, the teachers of the online courses were able to create from the online learning environment a real art and design studio. The exercises and tasks assigned to the students were creative and made students work hard. The teachers also took real responsibility for their online students and gave feedback to each of them. This resulted in a great learning experience for the students. Teachers were honestly interested in their students and their work. Students highly appreciated the feedback and critiques they received from the teachers. As a result, the online learning became much more than an e-learning course. It became an art, design and technology course with all the benefits of a studio setting.

Thirdly, the decision to use an open and transparent online learning environment facilitated peer-learning and tutoring. Students were able to compare their performance and results with the work of their peers and learn from each other. Partly because of the open environment, students were truly helping, supporting and encouraging each other. If a student

faced a challenge, any number of the 39 students, 3 teachers or 2 facilitators were able to help. The openness of the community also made the selection for the second and the third section easy and transparent. Everybody could see how each student had worked in the three online courses. Furthermore, for each of the 40 students, we gave "another chance". They could get to the second and third section by presenting an excellent project proposal for their final project.

The cancellation of sections two and three was a big disappointment for all. We hope that at some point we will still complete them. The master module should be finalized. We gained a lot of experience during section one and we may claim that we now know how art, design and technology should be taught online.





Introduction to Art and New Media in the Arab States, with a case-study of Lebanon

by Ricardo Mbarkho

Background

Being interested in communication media in Lebanon during both the wartime and post-war periods, I have been concerned with cultivating a spot of freedom and tackling it. This is mainly the result of the oppression human beings inflict on each other. In such a case, people seek among other things their own safe places where they can discuss current issues. In doing this, many people become activists that stand up to tyranny.

During the war, a local network was invented by the Lebanese – a sort of unofficial ministry of communication. It used the wireless technology such as the Japanese YAESU handy walkie-talkies, bases, linears and boosters. On one hand, these replaced the nearly obsolete analog phones. On the other hand, they became a new place for the conflicting dialogue of different communities. With these wireless machines, it was possible to share a common wave, but only for each speaker on his turn. People who possessed the stronger transmission machine could dominate the

speech priority and could “close the wave” if they wished to. This type of communication made a great impact on people, for they were capable of overhearing discussions that took place on the network. This developed into a certain kind of voyeurism – voyeurism through a machine that links an individual to a complete stranger, to someone from the other side of the green lines (the physical borders that separated Lebanese areas in conflict with each other). Thus, this “Other” became a despised myth of which people are convinced and satisfied. This voyeurism helps the former to view the latter and know him in a clearer way, despite the fact that the main topics shared on these wireless connections were those insulting the other’s religion, culture, identity, and ideology.

What used to be wireless relations during the war migrated onto the Internet, taking place in chat rooms and forums. The Internet provided the Lebanese citizens with a new space to communicate within families or social groups. Hence, it offered them a more regulated forum for better communication and became the realization of everyone’s thoughts.

Therefore, in its first stage, Internet was considered a tool to preserve certain thoughts and beliefs being fought for, such as Arameanism, Arabism, Nationalism, Communism, Christianity, Islam, Socialism, "Zoneism", Secularism, and so on. Internet then operates here as a magnifier of each community's ideas. Nevertheless, as it was introduced into a region characterized with multi-cohabitations, the Internet led people into a paradoxical phase; they had to find a self positioning between two extremes: total polarization or total globalization within the regional conflicts. As a consequence, citizens carried a double burden: the possible consequences of isolation and the fear of dissolution. This inner-conflict resulted in a common tendency for all people to start the path of democracy, the dispute and debate of ideas and dreams, and, even better, an e-war to virtually achieve those dreams, those too-many utopian models of Lebanon.

Consequently, many issues became open to the public. Thus, the definitions people have given to "intimate" and "private" changed, since what used to be private became public. Hence, there was a stronger need to redefine what could be considered private and intimate. This attitude was later reanalyzed by the reality TV wave that worked well in the Arabic speaking countries, projected with the voyeuristic themes in shows such as "Lofts."

All this led to two opposite behaviors: perceiving issues indifferently as banal and amplifying one's own reaction towards them. Thus, the diversity of content strongly satisfied the interest of the former attitude. For instance, a newly-set satellite which enables the viewer to watch around 3000 channels gives him the possibility to experience zapping back and forth throughout the 3000 channels instead of watching one specific channel or program. Thus, he would simply be watching zapping. This becomes the result of diversity; people start enjoying it as much as they enjoy sitting for hours and hours, days and nights, observing people enclosed and monitored in a container, a



phenomenon which embodies the second attitude satisfied by content based on voyeurism. These two tracks became a major concern for artists of the war and post-war generation.

This context paved the need to update the question concerning the role and the dimension of art in this current history and geography. How could we locate or understand Diversity, Research, Collaboration, Interdisciplinary, Access to Media, and Creative Content? When meeting with the Other, there is always a question mark instead of established solutions; this dominates the search and compels people to remain close to democracy. The former preserves the possibility of an ongoing transformation of

the communities' thoughts or dreams - a characteristic that cannot be found in a totalitarian system. This is why, I believe, totalitarianism is not favorable in the Middle East. However, research does not imply direct and quick answers. There has to be a continuous self-investment, volunteering, and individual efforts next those of the government. In consequence, the results appear in a way that maintains the reasonable equilibrium of society that sustains peace. The deeper one goes into this path, the more answers he discovers, and the more they open up and become clear to him. Nevertheless, this outcome is established only when communities seek it; individuals alone will not easily or even possibly suffice.

Concerning the dimensions of Art, these dimensions stretch out from the real to the imaginary. Art has the experimentation and research that are some of the important bases of creative content. So, for uniqueness and diversity to take place in content, one has to refer to some international standards that focus on the individual rights, freedom, equality, and dignity. To respect these human rules, one should, through the interaction of groups, perceive the others through understanding; this understanding is achieved via mobility. Practically speaking, this means that the artist must be opened up to what is happening in the other disciplines and

interact with artists in different regions, cultures, backgrounds and environments. This interaction could be distant or face-to-face and hence updates the creation process with modern scientific and technological achievements. With the digital revolution, many disciplines met around common equations and grounds: the New Technology of Information and Communication. So, transforming the analog representation into an interactive and mathematical digital set shook many disciplines in art, such as music, sound, visual arts, writing, theatre and so on. They all meet today on a crossroad within the information society.

The access to media with regards to freedom and respect is important to transform communities, ethnic groups, religions, and cultures into familiarity. There is no single and unique e-culture of the global village because the Internet space is the place where people are connected and varies by the interface they are using. Had the Internet been comprised of only one virtual space, it would have been a global village with a single culture. Instead, the Internet is a group of independent local villages. People in the Middle East do not interact with Chinese as much as with people who speak their languages and dialects: Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, French, and English. Hence, interaction is bound to common characteristics between participants. This humanizes the networked software and hardware, makes them less neutral, and gives them their own ideology. Information and Communication Technology expands our access to the real through the virtual in a way that allows us to define the Internet as connected people instead of connected machines. Internet is a human invention; the emphasis on the human being and the mixture of his subjectivities form an e-world, where e-communities and e-cultures exist. The Self and the Other, with all the differences in the way they think, are the atoms and the body cells of this virtual world. In other words, they are the units of the Information and Communication Society.

The unity of human gender complemented by the singularity of each and every person gives way to difference and multiculturalism. It also facilitates agreement between people. But, although we all want to be one, at the same time, we want to be unique to preserve our existence. Therefore, in spite of globalization, and although each person is a member of the whole humanity, he is attached to a specific part in this world. Hence, in order to make e-cultural diversity and pluralism emerge, Information and Communication Technology should harmonize

between the universal and the particular, and not sacrifice the cultures in favor of only one world and only one universal culture, for the cultural richness rises from a contact between the various cultures. Besides, creative content in the e-world is a result of not only the exchange of information about our different cultures, but also the construction of a new e-culture that is different from where the exchange has started. In this sense, each bit of content is far away from being totally associated with other cultures. Additionally, it does not aim to associate other cultures to it. The belonging extremism operates here as the basis of collective contest for the creativity rush. Thus, the remedy to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, between the connected people and the off-liners and to build creative content for a new e-culture is everyone's responsibility. Hence, countries with poor accessibility must accept the e-culture, and rich countries must work politically, legally and economically to establish a universal and global development that touches all the people and all the individuals, materially and ethically, for this creates in everyone the curiosity for knowledge and research. This is how dialogue can establish international standards and criteria to evaluate how and when e-culture could strengthen cultural uniqueness, diversity and pluralism and decide what cultural differences need to remain and which need to be abolished. For this result to happen, a dialogue that protects the rights of everyone is the starting point for any change. Most importantly, people should start by putting aside their prejudice. Furthermore, technology necessitates teamwork to uncover new domains and to build up a new language particular to the field. Industrial models and universities provide appropriate contexts for this issue. Therefore, artists should observe how socio-political contexts affect the use of new media (and vice-versa) in order for them to build new judgment criteria, new meanings, and new questions.

The course development

The e-course was given over a two-week period. Students had to read the online resources I have provided to them, discuss them on the forum and in real-time chat, to conduct further online/offline research related to the topic being discussed and post them on the forum. We discussed art, science and technology in the Arabic speaking countries, as well as art and new media in Lebanon. We also scrutinized Arabic speaking countries according to their use of new media and consequently defined

them as prepared or unprepared to become a part of “the global information society”.

The first resource was about the June 2005 UN WSIS contributory conference on ICT and Creativity that was hosted by the government of Austria in Vienna. This conference, which centered on e-culture, creative content and DigiArt, gathered many experts from around the world to share their visions on ICT and Creativity and to discuss how to build bridges to fight the “Digital Divide” and “Content Gap.” At the workshop “eCulture, Creative Content and DigiArts” (chaired by Tereza Wagner and Gerfried Stocker as rapporteur), we (Mark Amerika, Mark Federman, Carlos Cabral Nunes and I) ended our panel with this conclusion:

“Rich and free artistic practice is the foundation of a creative Information Society and the prerequisite for any cultural industry. In the same way as any other industry needs a continuous flow of new ideas stimulated by “basic research” which is not directly valued by direct return of investment, the cultural industry, too, depends on a prosperous artistic production that can be considered as the ‘basic research’ for the development of e-Culture and e-Content.

Art prepares the ground for new ideas. But artists ‘don’t just fall from the sky.’ Therefore, we have to ensure a supportive environment for artistic production, which accepts and respects art in its experimental nature.

Cultural richness is an effect of contact, understanding and respect between various cultures. In order to overcome skepticism or mere curiosity and to respond to the collaborative nature of digital art, we have to stimulate the mobility and exchange of people and not just the mobility of information. And we have to promote consciousness for a mutual respect for art in political and social environments.

In order to strengthen cultural diversity and pluralism (which are key to the successful development of an Information Society), we have to provide non-discriminatory access to media and information infrastructure to allow and to support the self-representation of individuals as well as communities, cultures and religions.

Most important for artistic production and research is a strong

interdisciplinary and intercultural approach. It should not only link art and science but also promote educational efforts and relevant economic strategies.

The unique quality of digital artistic work does not lie in the production of content and artifacts alone, but even more in the ability to create new forms of expression that are adequate to local cultural and socio-political needs as well as to new technologies.

Thus, DigiArt should be considered as “applied research” in the culture of our Information Society. With its unique aesthetic characteristics, DigiArt helps to design a human-centered culture of new technology that also gives room to the spiritual dimension of our life.

The ability of artists to create links to the tangible and transcendental aspects of human life, and also to connect the physical with the virtual realities of our Information Age should be considered as another reason to put artists on centre stage of e-Culture. This is why: ICT + Creativity + Collaboration x Interdisciplinary Intercultural Education = Potential Artists Networks Increasing their Political Capital by Positioning Themselves as Cultural Value Generators.”

The second resource was a text I wrote especially for the online course. It introduces Art, Science and Technology in the Arabic speaking countries. I presented a panorama on the history and culture of the Arabs since the 7th century and showed how the students can understand this history as common and/or different from theirs. Although great parts of the invaded people adopted the new religion which entails praying in Arabic – introduced by the Islamic Conquest in the 7th century – several ethnic groups like the Syriacs and the Berbers preserved their own cultures and languages. Moreover, those groups helped spread the Arabic language through the translation of their works into it. Thus, various cultures combined with the Arabic one under the name of the latter. This is very similar to modern globalization. After the 11th century, the Ottoman Empire caused the Arab world a four centuries of cultural decline. However, few new contacts with Europe awakened the Arab region again. Besides, the English created Arab Nationalism in order to find a track against the Ottoman “Holy” Empire. After World War I, the French and English replaced the Ottoman Empire and caused the

Hello Rima, You said: "NEW MEDIA means a new support. Art is not any more a rectangular canvas, it is not any more a decorative object. New media is now a CONCEPT, can be a THOUGHT, a gesture, a way of living and thinking. New Media can now be the human mind as a support, it is more abstract!!! It is neither technological nor esthetic!!!! However, it can make use of digital technologies and internet, however it is NOT THAT!!! I believe it can be deprived of its esthetical aspect, but personally I do not like art without esthetics. How do you work/deal with it? i simply live it and try to make my mind as support." You are mixing the meaning of New Media with the meaning of the new supports, while you are also considering that new supports are now something abstract/conceptual... and that the conceptual and the abstract has no link with technology and esthetic. Don't you think that esthetic gained/changed definition throughout art history? As to New Media, you can basically refer to them as a new medium or support, but it has not to be abstract. In any case, New Media are related to esthetic as long as they are used in art works; unless you can elaborate more about your definition... Ricardo

birth of political states that currently constitute the "Arab world," which is still made up of a mosaic of cultures. This fact proves that neither the language nor the religion can create a single culture, even after hundreds of years.

The text also highlights the early Arabs' engagement in history, sociology, mathematics and science until the current use of media technology in the age of globalization. With the emergence of ICT, these Arabic speaking countries replicated this new system to familiarize themselves with the global world, based on the opportunities provided by each one's political system. On one hand, Arabic speaking countries were brought close to each other in certain fields, but on the other hand were distanced from each other as well as from the Western world, mainly because of different levels of censorship due to the existence of totalitarian regimes and to the absence of democracy. Another factor that distanced some Arabic speaking countries from the rest is the perspective taken by certain Arab groups of a continuous Christian-Western crusade.

The third resource was about the lecture I gave at Transmediale (Berlin) in February 2005. It was about Art and New Media in Lebanon. At this conference, I spoke about the methods artists follow and their positions in the current Lebanese multi-cultural society, where identity and belonging are affected by religion, politics, war and heritage in an attempt to show how the current Lebanese art field deals with new media.

The fourth resource was a case study that I conducted on the current Lebanese art scene dealing with new media. It focuses on emerging artists' approaches and positions in today's Lebanese society, and how they use new technology. The issue of how artistic, cultural and commercial institutions are initiating and funding projects is raised. It also examines how some individual efforts are invested to organize new media events. An overview of roles played by the public, critics and press is covered. In my opinion, art in Lebanon is strongly related to socio-politics. Thus, in order to see how society is reflected by art, it is important to review the Lebanese historical background, especially political events such as the Arab-Israeli war, The Cairo Agreement, the

war on Lebanon from 1975 to 2005 and the numerous assassinations of prominent Lebanese figures. All this is mentioned to give an idea about what historical icons our generation shares today as part of its common geographical and historical context in Lebanon. Of course, not all of them have the same translation or understanding of that the various events they or others have caused. Additionally, these images are a collective and hidden standard and certitudes for the Lebanese. They are also a kind of basic and raw material for artists, on which to build new judgment criterion and questions.

The start of the forum discussion was energetic. Students were familiar with the interface since prior to the course, they were in interaction with the e-learning staff and started reading the adequate and appropriate resources. The discussion in this course revolved around the most

sensitive issues in the Arabic speaking countries. It was in the form of an e-round table that is a necessary step for project-based learning. It all started with a conversation about the first week theme; there were comments, replies, questions, analyses, arguments, and so on. Furthermore, many URLs were exchanged among students. As a consequence, this discussion created a sort of a thematic bibliography.

To be fair, it should be mentioned that the discussion was sometimes conflictive while some other times bashful.

Most of the students were distinguished from the first couple of days while some were timid in their participation mainly because of their English language skills (the medium of the discussion was English), or because they were not used to the tool.

Starting from the title – Introduction to Art and New Media in the Arab States, with a Case Study of Lebanon – problems occurred. The method of the discussion was based on asking good questions that helped the participants define themselves; it eventually resulted in different ideas and opinions which were made problematic. These questions were the result of worries spinning around people as individuals and communities, mainly on how artists should have a positioning in their socio-political-cultural environment. Good questions also resulted from the urge to get a more profound knowledge of one's goals, motivation, and deeds, in relation to new media, and yet more specifically in relation to how new media breaks into each individual and community history and

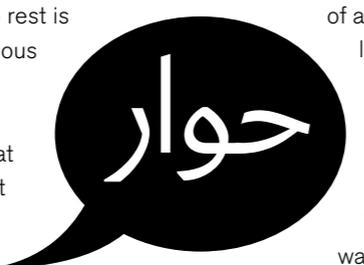
geography. From this point, topics popped up: isolation vs. dissolution, polarization vs. globalization, Americanization, Arabization, Arabophone, e-multiculturalism, commercialism, heritage, e-culture, identity, minorities, human rights' conflicts, religion, fundamentalism, diversity and pluralism, singularity, pedagogy, artist's role, media adaptation, creative content, ICT development, biotechnology, personalized software and interfaces, aesthetic of media, interactivity, virtual, cyberspace, networking, art and new media and politics, art and war, language, e-censorship and how the censorship got new mechanisms with the digital network, "Christian-West vs. Arab-Muslim world," 9/11 and new media, Lebanon, Dubai, United States, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Mardine, Polizario, e-countries, e-world, not only the e- that replicates the real world but as a world in itself, Phoenicians, Berbers, Syriac, Arameans, Assyriac, Chaldeans, Copts, radical-Islamists, Orientalists, standards and common grounds, e-citizen, e-laws in the double sense (laws of the virtual world and the laws taken from the real world and adjusted to fit the virtual world), how new media, such as laptops, mobiles, iPods, PDAs, and so on, penetrate the privacy of each person, and the link between new technology, each of the Arabic speaking countries, and creativity.

The first commentary targeted the identity of the Arabic speaking countries: the common link and differences among them. It also focused on how objectivity and inter-subjectivity can be maintained. The historical background was referred to in order to capture the starting point of the issue. There were also commentaries about how cultures interact, who is an Arab and how the media is participating in answering this question while it is biased when dealing with multi-cultures in the Arabic speaking countries. For instance, from the point of view of the constitution, Lebanon is an Arab country (after the Taëf accord in 1989 considered unofficial by a large part of the Lebanese), but from a cultural point of view Lebanon becomes a multicultural country where Arabs are a part of its population, same as peoples such as Syriacs and Armenians. Within the discussion process, emersion of many clarifications took place such as the link between the religion and culture, and the concerned country. There was also a certain confusion and mixture between religion and language and culture on the part of the students. For some, a Saudi Arabian has the same culture with a Moroccan; however, the discussion made these students aware of what is behind their first intuition: what

is correct is the opposite of what they say. When Arabs were thought of as one culture for all the Arabic speaking countries, we had to look at whether Arabs are minorities in the Arabic speaking countries.

The process of the discussion evolved and caused students to interact in an inter-subjective field. Thus, many students discovered and improved their position as creators, a criterion that would help them build their own projects later on. Furthermore discovering the Other and having impacts on each other clarified each participant's origin to himself and made him much more rooted in it. Consequently, every individual became more aware of the Others' dignity and rights, which are the same as his; this has given positive characteristics to diversity where dialoguing could be a good way to understand facts and reconsider them on the emotional and official level. Therefore, this discussion made clearer the role of new media, here in one's country and there in another's country, now, before, and after.

Consequently, ideas were shaped through the online discussion: how to "culturalize" new technologies? How to protect and sponsor cultural activities? How is technology used in multiple parts of the Arabic speaking countries? How is it customized and personalized? The importance of having national permanent art museums and national show galleries in this unstable region was stretched. The nature of the artist as being initially a thinker and a philosopher and whether he needs to gather all what he carries as language, heritage, ethnicity and technology and embodies those to set his thoughts and aspirations. Culturalizing the technology is exemplified by a missed call in Lebanon and how it has different implications than a missed call in France. The Lebanese missed call reflects the socio-economic impact on human behavior. Besides, the existence of mobile devices, such as iPods, mp3 walkmans and mobile phones, in contrast with fixed devices, adds new needs to the individual, whom is being connected and so, existing in a global network. This goes with today's concerns on how technology is dispatched between the personal and the collective spheres. How the mobile technology is affecting one's relation within the public sphere where he evolves. This mobile technology that can be worn operates as a plug-in for the body; from the customizable artificial eyes to the customizable artificial mind, or yet an artificial self, a mutation between the presence and the machine. Thus new technologies are culturalized once they are personalized. This personalization is the consequence of using and exploring the



new technologies with a critical assimilation of their possibilities. This brings the information and communication to a more humanity-related technology. But here the question of copyright is raised as well: who is the author, the one who built the machine or the one who is creating via this machine?

Another topic was how the media affects the language, since the language is an important tool for cultural preservation. In Arabic speaking countries, since the Arabic language is often the only official allowed language, it leads many non-Arabic speakers to learn Arabic and to stop using their original language, and even to consider it as non-useful and even obsolete. What is replacing these disappearing languages is becoming not only Arabic but also French and English. However, The Arabic language cannot solely form a culture. Saïd Akl invented letters for the Lebanese dialect that he considered a language in itself. These letters were inspired from Latin. Many agreed while many others opposed his view, accusing him of being an Isolationist. Another opinion considers that the Arabic dialect does not fit all the people who live in Lebanon; so it should be replaced by other languages or dialects that reflect the native Lebanese ethnical identities. Here again we talked about the Latin letters used to write Arabic on the net. This is somehow like the Saïd Akl alphabet, yet more accessible, and most importantly, more acceptable, as it is not linked to the same ideology of what is considered as an extreme right wing behavior on the local and Arab levels attached to Christian Lebanese aiming to detach Lebanon from the Arabic league. But this conflict of culture is sometimes reanimated when one proposes to have three more keys on the keyboard that replace the 2, 3, and 7 used to cover Arabic letters that don't exist in the Latin Alphabet; would this formalize this new "Arabic writing?" What would happen then to the Arabic alphabet? How will they be used and when? Besides that, the Arabic typography remains calligraphic while the Western typography improved analogous to technological innovations. Thus, as the latter changed from calligraphy fonts to pixel fonts, the Arabic typography could evolve and people, then, may possibly cope with the new system.

Many other questions were raised: what kind of role each artist has in his local environment in order to be active in art? What are the needs of artists? Should they have a pre-set role? How does each one's position make up an identity in the field of art, and where is the political ideology

in this process? How is new media understood: is it an aesthetic term or a technical one?

A popular crack in Arabo-Muslim countries is discerned between those who wish for good relations with the West, called Christian, and those who do not see the West but as a symbol of colonialism and imperialism. The first group includes what is known as liberal Arab Muslims whereas the second group ranges from the moderate through the radical Islamists. It is not necessary to choose only one of the two identities, Arabic and Western. Otherwise, this will generate too many conflicts and oppression which would lead to the interpretation of local ideas as propaganda. For instance, in Lebanon some local and national ideas are considered as propaganda for Zionism, or as a pro-fundamentalism and pro-terrorism. Is it right to have restrictions in identifying the cultural belongings? Or should one be for the mosaic of cultures? But here again, this mosaic would stay in harmony, as it would sometimes become the oil that someone needs to turn a region full of conflicts into flames. Corruption and ignorance are two elements that cause potential instability in sensitive Arab areas, which in turn explains why main interests and efforts are oriented to political struggle.

As for bridging the gap between the West and the Arabic speaking countries: it was thought that the Western politics towards Arabs and the way they dealt with them made it possible for those countries never to rise in science and technology. Moreover, these countries were ignored on the media and art levels, since the prospect of international art used to focus solely on Europe, the United States, and Japan. However, after 9/11, this same West opened up to the Arabs and became interested in its most minute details, whether historical, cultural, or political. This interest existed before 9/11 but not on the cultural and media level. The focus was rather on the market and energy level, which was later on revealed by the media. One of the West's strategies that were used to control the market is supporting Arab dictators; they even preferred to work with one instead of many governors in order to have their decisions applied faster. But this affected the people living in the Arabic speaking countries negatively. They abandoned their ambition to seek knowledge in order to seek food instead. Comparing how Arab dictators used media with the way the West used it, it is clear that the methods are different though the purpose is the same: gaining power. Arabs censored media

and did not broadcast but what suited them, whereas the West found that the media is powerful, and since they cannot democratically censor it, every party used it to gain the maximum power they can get. Thus, the West promoted diversity to blur any ideology that might have in a specific period of time a great popularity. This results in a Western people less passive towards the media.

The Western media would usually show a bad image of the Arabs. But why don't Arabs take what the media shows as an image of issues that still have to be solved? Is media then pushing Arabs toward an ideal situation by always showing the "bad" side (like a devil's advocate)? Or on the contrary, behind this or that media, there is a kind of propaganda aiming for nothing but destruction?

New media is a window opened to the world. This explains why Arabic governments are afraid of any riots led by the people against them if the latter liked the democracy discovered via new media. But why is there this fear? The answer is because people in here are patriarchal and many communities are also not Arabs. This is why there is always a fear that if people discover their histories and rights they would want to decide their own fates and become independent. For instance, there are a lot of Internet bloggers that were jailed because of their ideas which opposed their governments' interests. Thus, the issue here is about identity reconstruction and discovering the hidden history of people forced to stay ignorant more than 1000 years ago. With new media, the audience is at the same time content producer. In this case, propaganda may own new capacities that help to fix and cure the Identitarian bug. In order for openness to take place, there should be standards that would help it to occur away from political control and the religious imposition. Of these standards are the objective sciences. However, there are also other successful trials in combining the Western and the Arabic such as in music, through the combination of instruments and composition. Moreover, when the West produces and programs the media for industry, the Arab's use of the media may also be taken into consideration in order to make the software compatible with the Arabic language.

The e-world is a representation and a digital reproduction of the real world, but it can also be a presentation rather than a representation where it carries within itself particular rules and new esthetic codes that

make a new base out of it - a base that would stand on its own. Thus, new media becomes a mix of technical, esthetic, and cultural terms. It is a medium like any other medium that allows artists to embody ideas and emotions in it. Moreover, technical possibilities of new media are being used as a place where a new esthetic is discovered. This must go at the same time with a theoretical development accessible to people so that it can be better understood. So technology developed the conscience and improved it; it didn't replace the body as is the case in countries where the virtual connection replaced the physical body. Like any weapon, new media must be placed in safe hands in order for it to be used appropriately.

In the discussion about globalization and polarization, it was assumed that the world is going into globalization because it is its time. That is, the conditions that necessitate its existence are met. To know the effect of this globalization on people and vice-versa, artists must investigate the behavior of people in societies, and the constituents of this society such as economics, politics, security, religion, and so on, because culture is descendent and ascendant at the same time. One advantage of globalization is that it has improved education because wherever the individual is, he has access to the learning environment and by that, he can better position his own culture. Another advantage is that globalization has improved technology, just as technology has contributed in the spread and nourishment of globalization. This process can be explained as follows: technology is the application of knowledge and since knowledge is strengthened by education and education by globalization, then globalization strengthens technology; it is also true the other way round.

But, globalization does not imply that individuality is annihilated. Globalization and individuality should go together. On one hand, globalization dealt with individuality: as the individual cannot by his own nature surrender to globalization, the commercial globalization gave him what he wants by making him more unique if he gets more global. Thus, it played on this paradox and offered him this true illusion. For instance, the more one is connected to the global information society, the more he has to pass through a customized interface, such as profiles, wallpapers, ringtones, and so on. All these are personalized. As for diversity, the same producer offers the audience a greater range

of products distributed by interest: food, cartoons, movies, reality TV, nature, music channels, and so on. But here again intimacy borders and limits are questioned in relation to diversity. Again the amplification and magnification of the ego goes against the indifference and diversity since both are bases for the content quality.

But this kind of commercial globalization that places on the first level the general and personal profit is less dangerous than the cultural globalization, because the first is a material one, while the second is an ethical one that touches upon the person himself and his belongings. So globalization succeeded on the short run in terms of technological, commercial, and scientific aspects but surely failed on the humanitarian, political, and cultural levels. Thus, Individuality alone leads to fatal isolation and it easily affects the mind and the self, while Universality alone completely erases one's identity and opinions.

Another topic mentioned was globalization and mobility. Globalization did not take the place of mobility. It did not make it static because which is static – the body or the self? On the Internet, one may have virtual tours while at home. Hence, this mobility is virtual and could sometimes be self-satisfaction against loneliness. This would be viewed as if one is disconnecting from the real world and living in another world that may be harmful, even physically. But one of the advantages of virtual mobility is that it would have more tele-shapeless-presence. This lack of physical mobility does not imply that it affects an individual to an extent that he starts living in a cocoon, and even if he goes out of his home it does not mean that he is not in a cocoon. Sometimes when people leave their home countries they coagulate with others from their own countries or cultures or religions. So, if new technology offers people the possibility to be in one global village, they would always have links between real and virtual spaces, real and e-real. Otherwise, if we neglect the effect and the role of the real world on the e-world, the real will have no sense and people will find themselves in an imaginary country or planet. In such global environment, one could say that it is better for someone to have strong cultural affiliation and engagement (with all what these affiliation and engagement include) from where he can interact with the Other on the basis of freedom, dignity and rights. Here again the question is: do freedom, dignity, and rights have the same meaning in this or that culture? The answer is (proven to be) no.

Talking about the nature of art resulted in the discussion about the role and dimensions of art. There was a dominant meaning that makes art the reason and emotion embodied into artwork through some means. So art becomes a fertile field in order for the imaginary to take shape. Consequently, everything becomes possible in this field. As the artist plays an essential role in developing the ideas and the questions asked in his society, he also has a role to transmit his work to his audience in a comprehensible way. Furthermore, he has to take a position even if the latter is only his interaction with the e-world. But in many Arabic speaking countries, this question may be asked: what can still be offered to societies that have lived everything to the fullest? The imagination of the artist in such a situation would face the fact that it has become already a reality in some societies. Thus, this question is transformed to the following: has art in this region become an entity in between reality and imagination, documentary and fiction, reason and insanity, objectivity and subjectivity, all at once?

In addition to these questions, there is also the identity of the artist. The artist, whoever he is, is still perceived by others to be linked to a received idea. In this context, he is invited artistically not to create art that serves a specific politic, but to have his own ideology that asks questions about the other's ideologies, for the sake of new meaning of entities. However, these meanings can have political concerns and the answers to them can be related to an existing politic. Moreover, the artist should not place the project he is working on at the head of the pyramid. That is, it should not be prioritized and he should not be at its service, because he is not creating an advertising campaign, a fiction or a video clip. Rather, he is creating art that reflects his own position; the product is the artist himself. And from here, it is asserted that political concerns are taking their places in art. In parallel, a further question is asked about whether the artist and his political concerns change anything in society the same way politics does? Parting from here, there are ideas that consider if an artist is anyone who has anything to say. This is why the job of curators, critics, the press, and estheticians is filtering the values. Hence, these political concerns of the artist can use art to fit themselves into the media without being trapped by censorship. If one looks at what and where artists speak in the newspaper, they can be located in the cultural section and not in the political section. This allowed many artists' political statements to pass to the public with no problem for the government, when one was

never able to read the same stands in the political sections, because of censorship in this section. This is a way that shows how the umbrella of the art can protect people from injustice sometimes. Thus, art raises the awareness of society to capture issues that it might have otherwise missed; people live in a society that needs its counterbalancing utopian spirit to reconstruct its present.

The chat session was set to take place on Saturday, November 12th, 2005, from 11 AM to 12 Noon, Beirut Time - Standard Time Zone: GMT/UTC + 02:00. The chat was scheduled to discuss the course topics.

When I was a kid, I used to watch Treasure Island. On the last episode, almost at the end, during an intense scene, the electricity at Ain el Remmeneh was cut. After a couple of years the series was broadcasted again, but the same happened again at the exact shot.

At the beginning of the eighties, I received a gift: a toy walkie-talkie. But each time I went to the bedroom with my walkie-talkie switched on, I would start hearing people talking but they could not hear me if I talked, for they were using professional handies; It was a great mystery for me at that time. Another incident happened in my bedroom; my PC computer would catch radio signals and emit songs while I worked on it.

A further incident happened in year 1989; during the Liberation War against the Syrian army, Achrafieh was under the Syrian siege. I was there and used to spend my time trying to call any random number. Whenever it rung I would simply close the line. I was curious to know if any of these lines were still working, in order to find out if the siege was getting heavier and if any connection with areas outside East Beirut was still possible. Many days later, one of the randomly dialed numbers connected to a kind of a telephony centre. Each time I dialed it, I could hear people talking. Only sometimes they were able to hear me speak. This was something that amazed me and so I kept on calling this number to listen to people talking to each other. Once, there was someone talking from Tripoli to Beirut, and another time there was someone asking to talk with people from Terbol. Not knowing where this place is, I hung up the phone. I once shared a similar experience with my uncle. I must be convinced now that having given to the machine the role of a telephony centre it reacted to my will and became itself a telephony centre.

Once I was awakened by my answering machine: someone was talking in a foreign language but I was able to recognize my name that was repeated many times. The call was ended before I could reach the answering machine, and the blinking screen notified me that a message was recorded. However, when I pressed the key to hear the message, it had disappeared.

I was at LibanCell Centre to buy a new mobile number. When I asked the operator to give me a special number, she replied that she couldn't do this, because it is the machine itself that chooses the number randomly. So I said "then let's hope that the machine will give me a special number". Later, I realized that the number I had was considered to be a very special one: 03 7177 03.

Another time, late at night, a friend of mine called me but I could not answer because I had my mobile phone set on silence. So, she kept on calling me many times. When I answered her about an hour later, she heard a woman speaking at the same time with me. Here in Lebanon we call this phenomenon "scrambled lines."

Recently, my car radio started changing frequencies randomly. Sometimes, it stops transmitting the channels, gives me the "Phone call" signal on the screen and sends out a phone-call ringtone. I showed this to the radio repairman, but he proposed changing the device.

In April 2007, I asked for a legal paper to be sent by fax from abroad, and I gave the sender the fax number. But later in the evening, I was thinking that it should have been sent more privately. So, after the weekend, when I went to get the paper, I have been told that a paper was received and the document that was printed on it was covered with black ink. After the employee who has received the paper showed it to others, not knowing to whom it belongs, she has thrown it away.

My current mobile phone sometimes switches on and off on its own to show me the screen up side down and reversed, rings with a blank screen and when I answer no one answers at all.

For the class chat session, the students and I designated a one hour meeting. When I tried to connect to the Internet at home, I was frustrated that it was not connecting. I tried many times but still no connection

worked. When I was late for the meeting, I decided to move to the closest Web Café. I drove to Fanar and entered a Web Café where I was asked to use a specific computer. Surprisingly, the connection was not working either! The man working in the store told me that he is not the one in charge of the machines, and that he has no idea why the Internet is failing to connect. He proposed that I wait until his brother arrives to fix the problem. I then decided to move to the next Web Café. This time I went to Sed El Bouchrieh, to a Web Café I used to frequent. I found someone sweeping the floor who asked me if I could wait a little bit until the floor dries. I told her I was in hurry, so she let me in, yet the connection was blocked. She was very surprised that it was failing to connect and tried other Internet lines in vain. At that time I was around half an hour late. So, I went to Johnny's Web Café and tried to connect. I finally connected!

The chat was evolving in a chaotic-like environment; a common context to chatters. The style was friendlier than the style of the forum, and students had already gained familiarity. The online discussion covered the connection problems that can plague Internet connectivity – rainy seasons, limited bandwidth capacities when it comes to huge simultaneous connections, storms destroying motherboards and network cards, firewalls and the kind of impact humans have on machines and vice-versa. Hazardous things happened and we creatively cultivated and analyzed them.

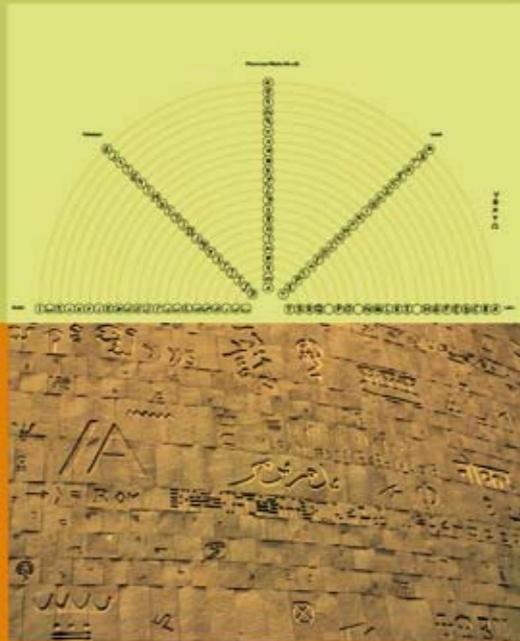
Conclusion

Compared to a class in a single room in a physical space, the online discussion was more individual for each student, because emails arrived to personal inboxes and the time lapse between posts gave the necessary occasion for all students to get involved. This online part was already a live example of how new media could develop knowledge and thus artistic practice.

Students learned to be critical, to think before reacting and to imagine adequate entries that best suited their position in society. They developed a personalized way to consider art, science, and technology based on their own experimentations, while linking these to their place among the collective approaches. It was a continuous questioning to define the

limits and the meaning of freedom in art as well as in any other discipline. There is definitely nothing that has remained the same for all participants after this e-course, as the latter dealt with the person himself in relation to art and new media, and contributed to self-criticism that in turn assisted the achievement of the pedagogical objectives. This was mainly reflected in answering the nature of Arabic speaking countries that all shared a single political concept – that of being named Arabs. It was also reflected in answering whether this concept is still available in the age of the nations' reconstruction and liberation, starting through discoveries and creativity via global networking.





Experimental Arabic Type and the Contemporary Arab Identity

by Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès

Over five thousand years ago, the first writing script was born in Mesopotamia. Two thousand years later, the Arabic alphabet, like most of the world's alphabetic systems, started to take its form based on the first developed system invented by the Phoenicians. In many civilizations, especially in the East, letters soon became considered the only worthy carriers of Holy Scriptures and divine revelation. The word of God materialized for human eyes to perceive. This, in turn, led to the creation of an elite profession, that of the Scribe. A person who, through painstaking calligraphic craftsmanship could visually express words, and in so doing join the many strands of the human spirit – wisdom, knowledge, art and spirituality – into a tangible form.

Typography has been regarded throughout history as an influential representation of the prosperity, and the political and cultural authority of a state. Alphabets and scripts represent a strong form of cultural identity through their embodiment of the written form of spoken languages. They facilitate the transmission of a culture's history and

recorded thought. The Arabic script has come to represent all Islamic cultures, as an emblem for the scriptures of the Holy Quran. Nevertheless, Arabic script is not restricted to holy texts. It is deeply integrated in daily life. Its use as a secular and pragmatic tool of communication is far reaching. Since then, the world has changed enormously, but the power of letters and words remain as strong as ever. We have only to look around us to see how letters can imbue all kinds of values simply by the fonts chosen. There are now literally thousands upon thousands of fonts around the world, all speaking in a distinct voice and alluding to different memories and aspirations. Typography remains a fundamental part of modern life. It embodies modern trends, and is ever changing in congruence with the developments of tools and communication needs. Like all the tools with which we surround ourselves, the way we perceive and make use of type is also constantly modified over time. Gutenberg's invention of movable type in the 15th century, and the mass-produced books that resulted from this invention, facilitated the dissemination of knowledge. It sparked a cultural revolution that



transformed Europe, liberating creative energies and advancing every area of intellectual expression. This invention also marked the birth of typesetting and the shift from calligraphy to typography in an inevitable break with the past. For Latin type, this meant that a clear dissociation from the calligraphic past had to take place, in order for typography to flourish in its own right. Latin type has since been visually evolving along with the technological advancements of each era. This same shift from calligraphy to typography has yet to happen for Arabic type. Arabic calligraphy continues to be one of the most beautiful and expressive of all calligraphic traditions, yet there is still a need for Arabic to evolve into equally beautiful and expressive type. The rich Arabic calligraphic tradition has had a long and influential history in shaping and regulating the visual aspects of the Arabic script. The Arabic script holds a unique role within Arab/Muslim cultures. Though originally conceived for secular purposes, it later assumed a special position within Islam due to its veneration within religious tradition; its perceived beauty and reproduction became a matter of religious piety. This same veneration has laid quite a heavy responsibility (or burden) on designers involved in developing new designs and styles for the Arabic script. This attitude to the script resulted in a conservative tradition that saw any deviation from age-old calligraphic rules as a disfigurement of the script—a purely visual insult akin to blasphemy. Inadvertently, this has slowed down the progress of Arabic type, discouraging playful experimentation and instilling the fear of attracting vicious criticism. The belated introduction of Arabic typographic printing into the Middle East has had little effect on the visual representation of the Arabic script. It is only natural that the first cut types would be modeled after fine examples of calligraphy, yet Arabic calligraphy did not eventually evolve into typography.

The principles for drawing the Arabic letters were normalized for the first time by the calligrapher Ibn Muqlah (10th century AD). He set down rules with the aim of creating a standard for unification, an evenness of rhythm, harmony and balance between the letters on a page. These general principles left ample room for creative interpretation and remain to this day relevant to all calligraphers and typographers around the world. When the printed typographic Arabic book was first introduced in the Middle East by the Roman Catholic Church (16th century AD), it was merely for religious and political propaganda, and so the emphasis was mainly put on making the type look as close as possible to the calligraphic styles that were most popular at the time. Later versions of

Arabic printing types (late 1800s to late 1970s, on hot metal, photo and digital typesetting machines), whether of European or Middle Eastern provenance, never deviated much from that formula. Old calligraphic models were still copied (and sometimes slightly adjusted and digitized) for use on the typesetting and type manufacturing machines available at the time. Though there have been some movements towards modernizing the Arabic script and adapting it to modern means of type production (c.1930s-1960s), these ideas were neither popular nor widely integrated into the visual culture of the Arab/Muslim world.

In fact, the technical and aesthetic developments were minimal and slow. Arabic type became an unimaginative copy of fine examples of handwritten scripts. Little was done to rejuvenate the design field with innovative typefaces. Arabic typography became merely a mechanized version of calligraphy. Formal experiments in Arabic typeface design came to their highest point with Letraset's invention and marketing of the dry-transfer type (1960s to early 1980s). The low cost and flexibility of this method of producing type brought typeface design close to Arab designers, as opposed to the high-cost typesetting machines of that period which were exclusively in the hands of Western manufacturers. The latter was also the reason why the groundbreaking digital technology (mid-1980s to the present) had little influence on Arabic type design.

Since the Industrial Revolution, Latin type has undergone progressive change, and has harmoniously evolved along with the technological developments of its times. By contrast, Arabic type has experienced disjointed jumps in its development into today's digital fonts. Fortunately, this situation has dramatically changed with the advent of the Personal Computer (PC), the Internet, and a growing awareness of the potential market benefits of a global world culture. It is presently almost as easy to design Arabic fonts as it is to design and develop Latin ones. Nevertheless, in comparison to the exponential growth of Latin type designs, Arabic fonts are still lagging behind in terms of cost, variety and design quality, which may in part be due to the lack of a well-established Arabic typographic tradition that can guide and educate newcomers to the field of Arabic type design.

At the dawn of every technological development, a need for setting new standards arises. This is never the work of one sole individual, but of a group effort of professionals sharing a common goal. It is precisely

the same kind of involvement of past Arab calligraphers, which brought calligraphy to the high level of sophistication practiced from the 10th century onward. Arabic calligraphic styles would not have developed, had the calligraphers not been progressive and experimental in adapting their script to the technological developments of their times. The tools of pen and ink, and the traditional dedication of calligraphers to their old masters, are no longer useful for type design; in fact, they may prove to be more of an obstacle. Arabic calligraphy is no longer sufficient for contemporary communication needs, or indeed appropriate for modern tools and media. Every age has its requirements and its trends, and every medium its inherent aesthetics. The visual style of a typeface carries within it a symbolic meaning that enhances the linguistic message, and alludes to a specific historical period's technological, political and social developments. Arabic type should be perceived, like any written script, as a collection of shapes designed to serve specific design objectives and media. Arabic type should not be merely concerned with traditional book design; it should also find a way to retain its aesthetic livelihood on unforgiving computer screens. Arabic type needs to be adapted to the low-resolution limitations that require clarity and formal simplicity.

Type design is not only 'the craft par excellence,' but also much more than that. Letterforms are the conscious and creative endeavor of their designers. On one hand, they portray an individual's artistic vision, and on the other hand the spiritual, social and economic aspects of that individual's society at a particular time in history. Since the early ages of printing, type has been the most effective ambassador of world civilizations. Although the affluent Arab nations have taken an active part in today's progressive global culture, their script is still under-developed for proper representation in today's digital media and communications channels. Arabic calligraphy has seen developments of remarkable beauty at the height of the Arab empire's power and expansion, examples of which can be seen to this day in countries that were once under Arab rule. For the past hundred years, some of the most distinguished as well as lesser-known Muslim calligraphers have been dedicated to refining their craft. However, they have distanced themselves from the realities of contemporary Arab visual culture, and their work has become confined to art exhibitions rather than to applied design. This may be due to the fact that the art of calligraphy and the craft of typography have become two separate and independent professional fields, each with its

own conventions and applications. In the Arab world this separation is dramatically expressed, whereby calligraphy is still venerated as Islamic Art's highest achievement and typography is seen as a mere commercial necessity with little aesthetic refinement and value. Nonetheless, it is important to learn from Arabic's rich calligraphic heritage in order to reinterpret the Arabic letterforms in ways that are familiar to readers. But it is equally essential to move forward and be creatively engaged with creating new design styles. The design of contemporary fonts should strike a balance between aesthetic judgment, social concerns, and practical constraints (such as how the type may be used and in which context). It is therefore essential to design digital Arabic fonts that meet all the diverse aspects of today's visual communication needs, and to keep the Arab culture and its script healthy and alive.

Arabic typography today is the ultimate embodiment of the Arab/Islamic world's visual identity. It should be created, subverted and freely manipulated from within the culture. The responsibility of shaping Arabic typography is a cultural endeavor that needs to be undertaken by the very same people who use the script and need it the most. The development of type design in the Arab world has been slow in comparison to other fast growing commercial developments. The state of Arabic fonts is lamentable; there is a shortage of readily available Arabic fonts that can meet the diverse design needs of contemporary communications media. This shortage of both high-quality and variety of readily available Arabic fonts is a serious impediment to the development of a mature design culture. There are perplexedly very few legible Arabic screen fonts for online reading and TV motion graphics, mobile phones, and other digital devices. Moreover, there are hardly any Arabic fonts that are visually compatible with Latin fonts in a world where dual-script typography is the norm. This has had a negative effect on the development of the fields of graphic design and new media in the Arab world. On the whole, the number of talented graphic designers in the Middle East is increasing rapidly. Yet the fonts which Arab designers need for creating contemporary-looking design lack sophistication and diversity. The market is ripe for new design developments and professional advancement in the field of Arabic typeface design. In addition, innovation has become crucial for asserting the modernity of today's Arab cultures and for portraying them positively as vital members of our global society.

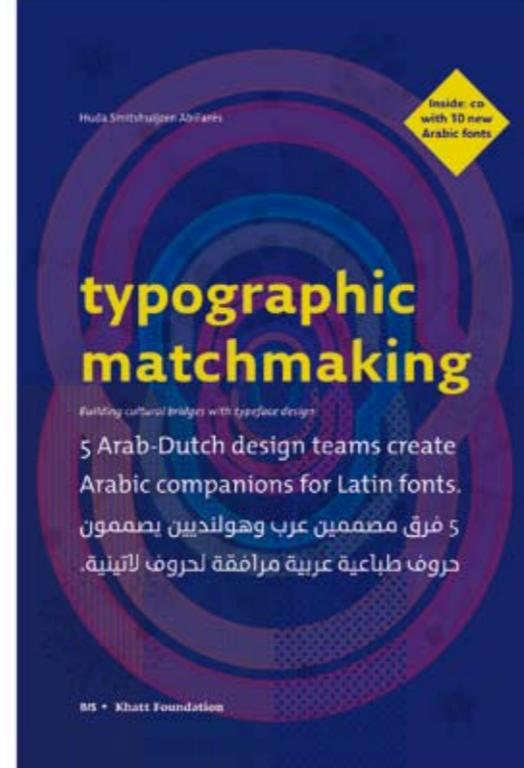
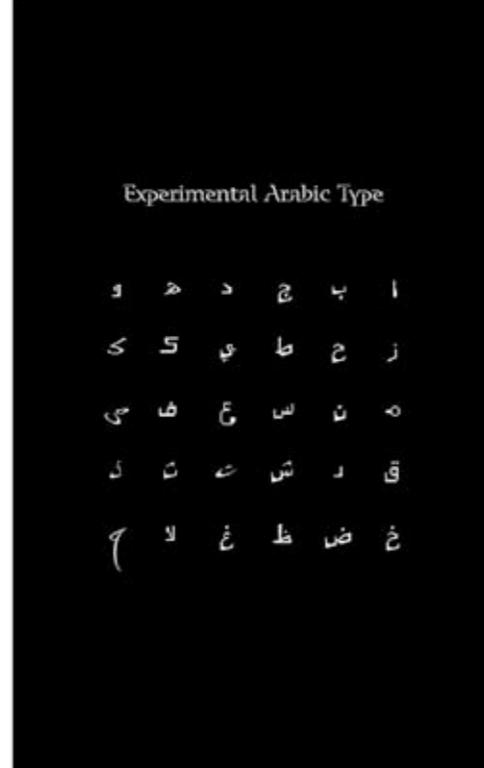
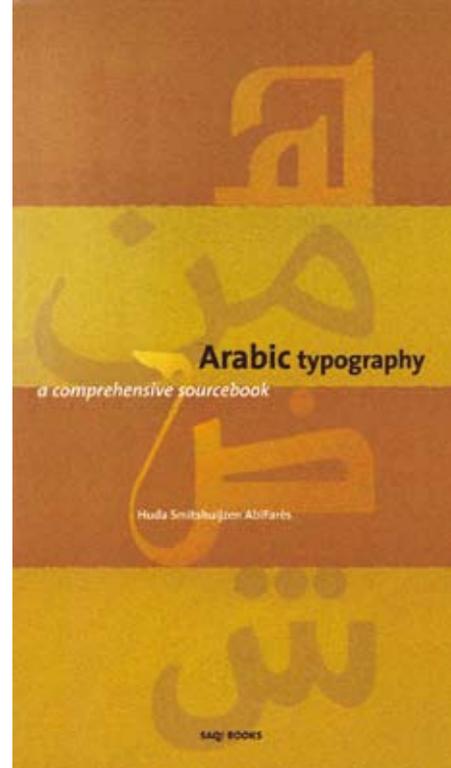
There is a glimmer of a new dawn. The developing Arab States are undergoing major cultural and demographic changes. Located on the dividing line between Western and Eastern cultural models, they are in the process of reshaping their identities to suit their contemporary and cosmopolitan societies. Their media are responding to these changes at spectacular speed in order to compensate for the lack of a smooth evolution of typographic and design conventions. This atmosphere has set the stage for an adventurous attitude toward type creation, type manipulation and experimentation with multilingual visual communication. In this past decade, many design programs have mushroomed around the Middle East, graduating a generation of talented graphic designers. This new generation is striving to shape its visual culture in a way that best represents their modern identity. These young designers are embracing Western ideologies, appropriating them and subverting them to their own ends and needs. They are defining their cultural identities by marrying East and West, Old and New, in search for the most honest and inspiring representation of their true social, political and professional realities. Their creative design endeavors are spreading, creating a refreshing change and making a distinctive mark. Acceptance of their work is slowly growing and influencing the general public's design sensibilities. There is definitely a new understanding of the power of design in the Arab World, and modern typographic design trends are taking shape and being encouraged not only in schools but also in society at large. A new digital aesthetic for Arabic type is being created. Arab type designers are breaking new ground with largely experimental typefaces; they question conventional calligraphic styles, reinterpret them by taking advantage of the available technological possibilities and limitations, and often move beyond the rules of pen-drawn letterforms. Their design solutions range from traditional to modern and to typefaces inspired by global popular culture. Often injecting wit and humour into the process, Arab type designers are challenging prescribed notions of Arabic typography and infusing fresh blood into what has been for a long time a highly conventional art form.

In order to contribute to positive developments and diversity in the field of Arabic typography, the Khatt Foundation (an independent non-profit cultural organization in Amsterdam) launched a new initiative. Its first pilot project was conceived to address the issue of dual-script typographic communication. Five teams of designers (each composed of one Dutch and

one Arab designer) were given the task to develop new Arabic fonts that could work as a matching companion for one of the existing Latin typefaces of the Dutch designers. This project has led to discussions and experiments that ended with each team producing both a Regular and a Bold Arabic font. The whole project is documented in a bilingual book (English/Arabic), entitled 'Typographic Matchmaking', to be published by BIS Publishers in Amsterdam by the end of August 2007. More detailed information about this type design project can be found on the online Khatt Network for Arabic Typography ([http:// www.khnt.net](http://www.khnt.net)). The intention is to repeat this experimental and collaborative project and expand it to create partnerships through design. The next projects should include collaborations between more Arab and/or Iranian designers and type designers from various Western countries such as France, Spain, Germany and the United States. In addition the Khatt online community, which is free and open to everyone interested in Middle Eastern design and typography, is a good example where the use of new media is facilitating dialogue between people of various nationalities that may not meet otherwise due to geographical and/or physical limitations. This kind of initiatives is highly needed to boost the level of design and typography in Islamic/Middle Eastern countries using the Arabic script in their daily visual culture.

There are lucrative opportunities to be a pioneer and to acquire a fresh creative perspective about Arabic type design. When designing Arabic fonts, one must assume the responsibility of taking creative risks that may challenge established conventions; of recognizing present realities of contemporary design and visual branding; of being ready to constantly question what we take for granted; and of setting the stage for constructive discussions around the future of Arabic type.

Excerpts from 'Experimental Arabic Type' (a book by Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès. Dubai 2003), and from 'Typographic Matchmaking' (a book by Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès. BIS Publisher, Amsterdam. 2007). Both texts were distributed in PDF format as introductory assigned reading material for Part 1.2 of the Masters Module Online Course.



Above: Books on Arabic typography written and designed by Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès. From left to right: Arabic Typography, a comprehensive sourcebook (Saqi Books, London, 2001). Experimental Arabic Type (Saatchi & Saatchi, Dubai, 2003). Typographic Matchmaking (BIS Publishers, Amsterdam, 2007). Opposite page: Preview of the Arabic typefaces developed in the typographic matchmaking project.

لو كان قلبي معي ما اخترت غيركم
ولارضيت سواكم
 في الهوى بدلا نسّم علينا

الهوى من مغرق الوادي، يا هوى دخل الهوى خدني

على بلادي

يا لور حبك قد لوّع الفؤاد

وقد وهبتك الحب والوداد

ألا تذكري ليالي السهر وعهدنا عهدنا على الوفاء

أعطني الناي وغني

فالغنى سر الوجود وأين الناي يبقى بعد أن يفتى الوجود



The Course Structure and Assignments

The course was planned to function as a multidisciplinary framework for creative production. It was designed as a hands-on research with the application of that research to a concrete art/design project. The project had to focus mainly on the conceptualization of an image that would portray 'the Arab identity' without glossing over the diversity amongst Arab nations, and without leaving behind each individual's unique identity often built on personal experiences, memories and education. Because of Arabic typography's emblematic role in Arab visual culture, the balance between image and Arabic type had to be expressed, but how that balance was to be achieved was left entirely to each student (designer/visual artist) to work out on their own. The course was divided into three phases spread over the period of two weeks. The course objectives were set as follows:

- 1- Discovering own cultural heritage
- 2- Using own heritage as a source of inspiration for new design developments
- 3- Understanding the deep relationship between cultural heritage and the visual expression of typographic design
- 4- Realizing the similarities and differences between various Arab countries
- 5- Learning to create culturally sensitive designs

Week One: 21 November - 27 November Phase I: research national Arab typographic identity

The first part of the course consisted of two assigned readings (excerpts and summary, plus additional book reference*), where students were asked to comment on these readings and use some of these ideas (directly or indirectly) in their research on Arabic type and vernacular examples of what could be called a visual typographic identity of their direct environment (city, country and culture, and in this order). Students were asked to post their written and visual research on the allocated forum pages (showing images collected as required by the assignment) and to comment on each other's findings and share knowledge and resources, and to explain how they define their own identity and their perception of their 'own culture' beyond the cliché stereotypes. They were also encouraged to raise certain questions and issues, specific to this first assignment, at the first chat session.

The design first assignment was posted as follows:

- Select a landmark or artifact that is representative of your own country or city.
- Select a calligraphic style that was originally devised in your own country, or is widely favored as the style to use for many vernacular designs (for example on street signage, in posters, in advertising...etc).
- Describe in writing how your selected 'landmark/artifact' represents a national identity, give historical facts about it, and provide an image showing it.
- Describe in writing how your selected 'national typeface' represents a national identity, give historical facts about it, and provide several images showing it in vernacular design from your direct environment.

* Optional book resource: Arabic Typography, a comprehensive sourcebook. Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès. Saqi Books. London 2001.

Week Two: 28 November - 4 December Propaganda Design: Stamps from the Middle East

The vehicle of the design problem (or object/item to be designed) was to be a stamp. This choice was made for two reasons. First, a stamp is typically the smallest and best traveled ambassador of a nation. It is a simple and inconspicuous yet loaded vehicle of national propaganda. Second, this small vehicle of constrained communication is also a pre-e-communication culture and may possibly become in the not too distant future an endangered species on its way to extinction. Therefore, preserving its tradition and documenting in order is a way to preserve the history of and to maintain contemporary developments of design and communication culture in the Arab States of the Middle East. Third, working on a project within such a short and defined period of time while wanting to achieve some in-depth studies and thoughts, calls for coming up with simple design problems that can be finally executed with a minimal level of production endeavor. So designing a stamp requires very little design elements yet very high skills in visual editing and conceptual thinking. In the cramped space of 2.5 x 3 cm, every detail counts – legibility of text, clarity of idea, and directness of the message to create a strong and effective transmission of the message is of utmost importance.

Stamps... they are often such precious design pieces and their size implies a beautiful combination of intimacy and



economy in design, they say so much, invoke strong emotions with the absolute minimum amount of elements... it's a good design lesson for anyone working at this time and age of information overload. To start with my proposal, I thought about finding some samples of stamps, old or new to give me some insight how they used to design them or still do today. I found in my house a shoebox filled with stamps from all over the world, even from the time of the Reich, Communism, World War II... you name it. Among these 100's of stamps, I could find a few from Lebanon. There are some really old ones and some more recent ones. I wanted to share them with you. Maybe they can be an inspiration for the work ahead of us for this week. They sure are to me, it was a pleasure to sort them out and look at them. I did not realize that stamps could be so beautiful until I found this box. I was aware that usually stamps represent heads of states mostly, historical events... but that they can be so beautiful and meaningful to look at. It was for me a 'ding dong moment'!—Doris Blok.

Phase II: image research and analysis & Phase III: stamp design

Students were asked to document and reflect on the definition of the 'landmark' that best represents their image of their society and country. They were also asked to collect, document and analyze stamps that have been produced in their countries of residence and to discuss the propaganda mechanism used over the ages in terms of the images used, the events or aspects of the country chosen as topics, and the design style used to execute the final artwork of the stamps. Some students have gone far with this part of describing their collections and others opted for simply showing various examples with very little text explaining their choices. Nevertheless, these overviews of existing visual material over 60-70 year period of visual design in the Arab World, is an issue that deserves its own study and is well beyond this course and this book. But these overview did help students familiarize themselves



with the various aspect of what designing stamps really entails and helped them in avoiding clichés and tried ideas in order to come up with their personal creative interpretation.

Streets scenes and national identity: Popular streets in Beirut form an interesting mosaic of vernaculars reflecting an expressive visual identity. The examples shown are much more than signs for specific shops, they are signs of the lifestyles of the people living in those streets and a vehicle of their socio-political beliefs. These spontaneous visual messages make those streets human by portraying the interaction between urban commoners and their public space. The examples show varied personal interpretations of the Ruqaa script used for different shops, hence every sign carries a personality of its own. This can tell us as designers about the need of the populace for a variety of scripts. The living street culture that these vernaculars reflect is an important part of the Lebanese popular culture and is essential to translate multi-subcultures within the Lebanese society, yet attempts to reconstruct urban space according to a Western model, will certainly eliminate this kind of communication and redefine people's relationship with their public space— by Rania Abou Ghaida

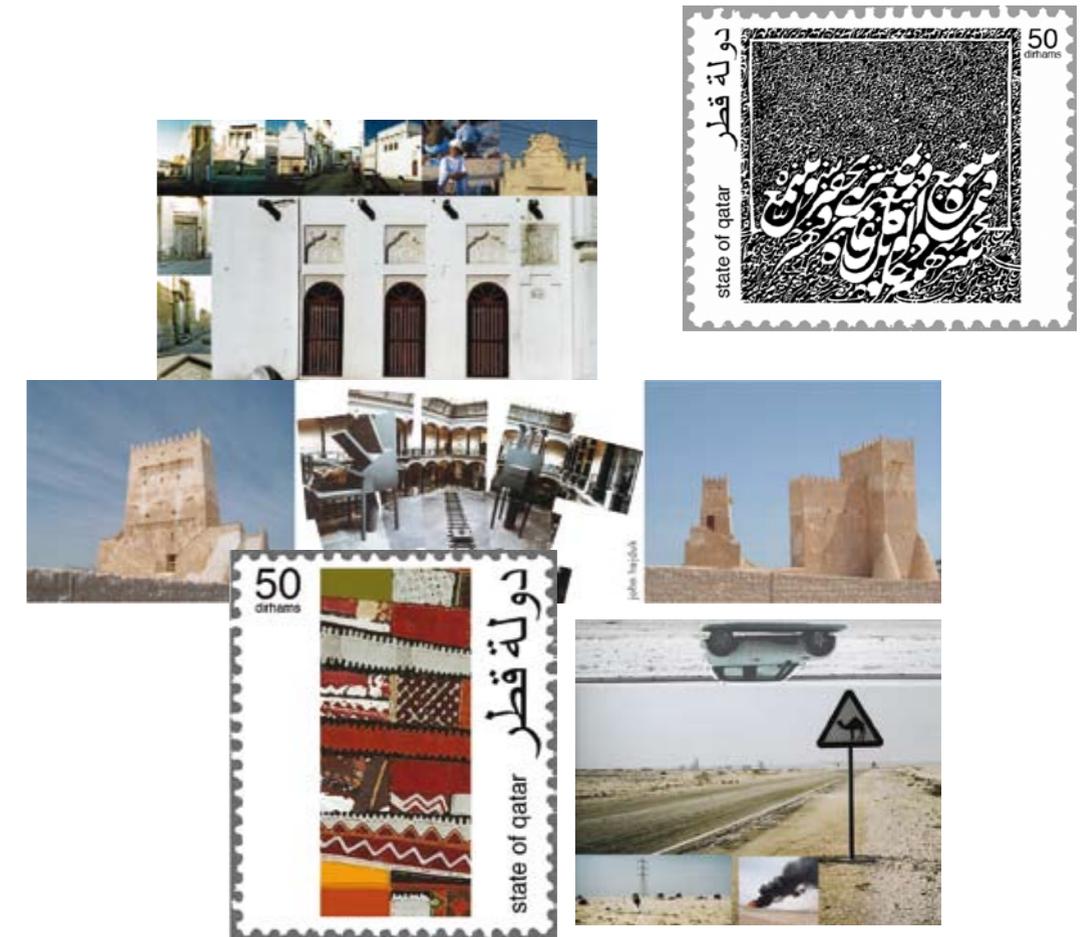
The assignment was posted on the website as follows (and later followed by questions and answer sessions and discussions).

- Combine the image of your selected 'landmark/artifact' and that of your 'national typeface', and describe in writing their similarities and differences and how their combination may give an even more exact 'national image' of your culture.
- Design a stamp that shows your selected 'landmark/artifact' (as a stylized photo or illustration) in combination with the country or city's name. The country or city's name should be drawn in the style of your selected 'national typeface'. Include a value (figure and local currency abbreviation) on the stamp design as is traditionally done in your own country.
- Show examples of stamps from your own country and describe in writing the

differences and similarities between the existing stamps and your own design. Explain how your design can be seen as an improvement to what is traditionally used to represent your country to the rest of the world. Keep in mind that a stamp is mini 'ambassador' and that it can be used effectively in portraying the heritage and treasures of nations to the rest of the world.

Design specifications

- Size of the stamp: The stamp should be presented in 2 sizes: the actual size (2,5cm x 3cm), and a 400% enlargement (10cm x 12cm).
- Color: the mount of colors used is unlimited, however, the choice of colors should represent a national set of colors (not colors from the flag, but colors that either represent the landscape, or are inspired by the cuisine, or the traditional fashion ...etc).



The Student Projects and Case Studies

Rania Abou Ghaida

–Image (Landmark) Analysis

The selected national type and landmark share many similarities, while having the relationship between people, environment and time the common denominator. Looking closer at the unpolished building we can decipher the improvised marks of its residents and the simplicity of their lives, as well as the imprints of time that are evident on the used walls of uneven color values. This matches the spontaneous and personal feel of the Ruqaa adaptation and rough textures found in popular vernaculars that also portray people's interaction with their streets and time in the same authentic way. The combination of the vernacular Ruqaa type with early 20th century building and the fusion of their elements greatly result in an active expressive human composition reflecting popular culture as an integral part of national culture.

–Stamp Concept

Lebanese stamps dealing with the concept of architectural heritage mainly focus on ancient ruins and historic buildings.

They depict heritage as a rigid and unchangeable subject, and maintain its state of mummified body and commodity for tourist consumption.

It is odd that until recently architectural heritage had neither occasioned a position nor significance for the Lebanese public. In fact, studies on this issue are quite scant. Except for few contributions as books by Jacques Liger-Belair in 1962, Friedrich Ragette in 1973 and Sursok Museum in 1985, the study of traditional architecture in Lebanon was never a focus until the past few years. Even Lebanese legislature have ignored this issue since Lebanon gained its independence and remains silent regarding Lebanese heritage ex-



cept for one law 166/L.R issued in November 1933 dealing with archeological ruins and a second one, the Environment and Natural Scenery Protection Law issued in July 1936. Recently, only few critics reacted when the Souks of old downtown Beirut were swept away, and very few are opposing the destruction touching various quarters from Ain el-Mreisseh to Ashrafieh where a whole heritage is being massacred by real estate competition. All of this provides a clear indication of the insignificance of architectural heritage in Lebanese society and culture.

The solution is to integrate our architectural heritage in our modern society and culture by expanding its field and connecting it with its surrounding culture while removing time boundaries. It starts with broadening the field of architectural heritage to include the city as a major center of collective memory in which the special relationship between people and architecture is cultivated. This heritage is to be further connected with human activities and as such moved out from museums to people's lives, and consequently be viewed as an active element in social life. The final emphasis would be on the breakdown of time boundaries that used to confine heritage within the products

of old historical phases. The new stamp is not only a tribute to popular culture, but also a reaction toward the ongoing destruction and obliteration of memory, and a call to include architectural heritage in our modern urban fabric. The stamp which main inspiration is derived from streets scenes, attempts to expand the concept of architectural heritage to include an unpretentious residential building and connect it with its popular environment which alone can give it its human value. Instead of picturing heritage as a mummified body disrupted out of its context and intended solely for display as old stamps do, the new stamp integrates heritage in public daily social life and connects it to the present giving the present its historical

depth. To further remove time boundaries and empower heritage relationship to modernity, modern elements are added or emphasized as the street light, car, Air Conditioning... From the graphical point of view, the new design uses vibrant attractive colors that revive the subject of heritage opposing old stamps dealing with the same subject, mostly applying a dull unsaturated color scheme that suggest a



distant nostalgic past. While old stamps appear symmetrically rigid and emotionally detached the new stamp is charged with a human value by means of design elements derived from popular culture as vernaculars and rough wall textures. All of this implicates subjectivity versus old stamps objectivity and contributes to an improved visual and conceptual approach aiming at integrating our popular culture and architectural heritage in our modern social fabric. Applying these concepts to a stamp can certainly provide great significance to this direction, hence, a stamp due to its daily use, is a very appropriate medium to vehicle this message in our daily modern life. In due course, this can awak-



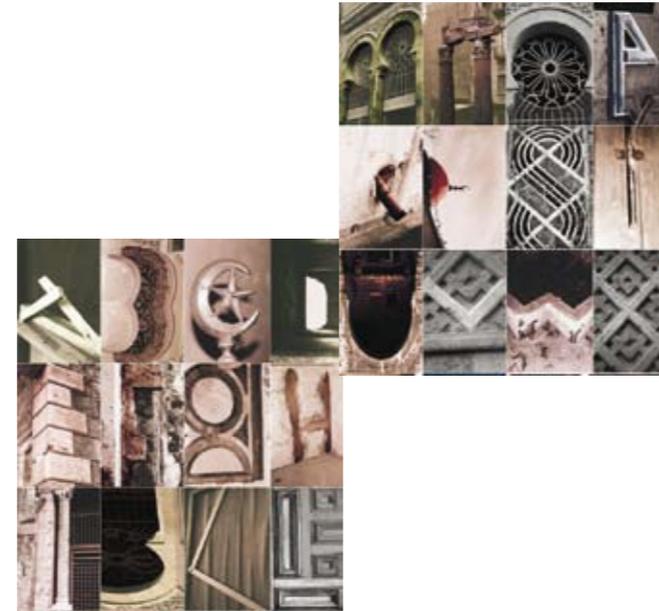
en public interest and help establish a healthy relationship between popular culture, heritage and modernity.

–Spears Street and national landmark

This building in Spears Street is worth being noticed and considered

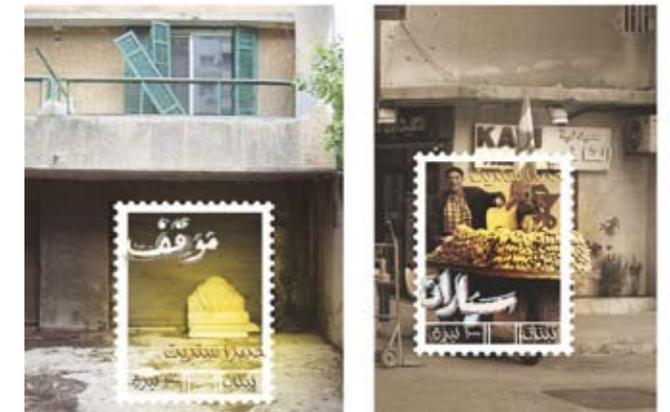


as a national landmark for the paradox it evokes with all its humble richness, messy beauty, and improvised structure that confer its poetic expressiveness. It is a building of the "colonial style" that flourished during the French mandate, inspired of the European architecture, mainly 19th century Venetian style and early French Modernism, and of Romantic Orientalism. Its hybrid influences of cultures developing through time, contributes to its unique character and makes it a multicultural landmark. The pure authenticity of this building and its disruption of the modern urban context in which it is standing, gives it an undeniable cultural power. All this makes me stop at this construction and ask multiple questions: To what extent should we apply modern urbanism on our architectural fabric? Should rebuilding be true to the original and will modernizing transformations risk transformations of our heritage and collective memory?



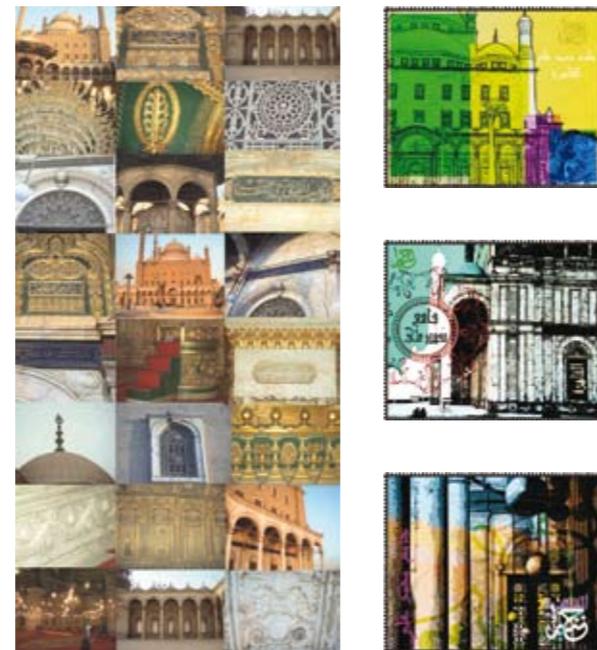
Rasha Hamdan

As for a national landmark, I have been looking for a truly secular icon that would not be associated with gender, age, religion, social background, history or political orientation. I have viewed students suggestions with great interest, however, I feel that relying on heritage-based landmarks is defrosting history, history is as fluid and infinite as future, thus, I feel that I need to give tribute to today's events, icons and personas. Which leads me to observe that some of the examples chosen might have excluded a minority – sometimes even a majority – of the population. For example, I wouldn't choose King Abdulla's mosque as an identity for Jordan, because it would exclude the Christian community. I felt that the white and red Jordanian scarf "hatta" (displayed in my last submission) is a great example of the national identity. The "hatta" is worn in Jordan by everyone in national occasions, men and women, old and young, Muslim and Christian, rich and poor. It's one of the rare examples that have expanded its multiple uses from apparel to a national symbol to a local pop culture gimmick. Other than language I have never seen something that bound so many people together. The benefits of my choice are that the pattern is highly recognizable in the Arab world as Jordanian, and around the globe as Arabic. This is a great visual ambassador to Jordan; moreover, it's highly graphic and abstract so it would still be legible even on a tiny stamp.



Omar Safa's

On landmarks/artifacts, I would like to work with the Hidden Beirut. It is a psychological thriller, and a task, to keep up with technology, to keep up with the new pubs that sprout all around town, to keep up with all new designs or fonts or designers, and finally what fascinates me, to keep up with the hidden. It exists, but I don't know about it. A landmark has to its credit that everyone knows where it is. A landmark 'marks the land'. What if no one knew it was there; a beautiful lonely unknown landmark. Forgotten, Unseen



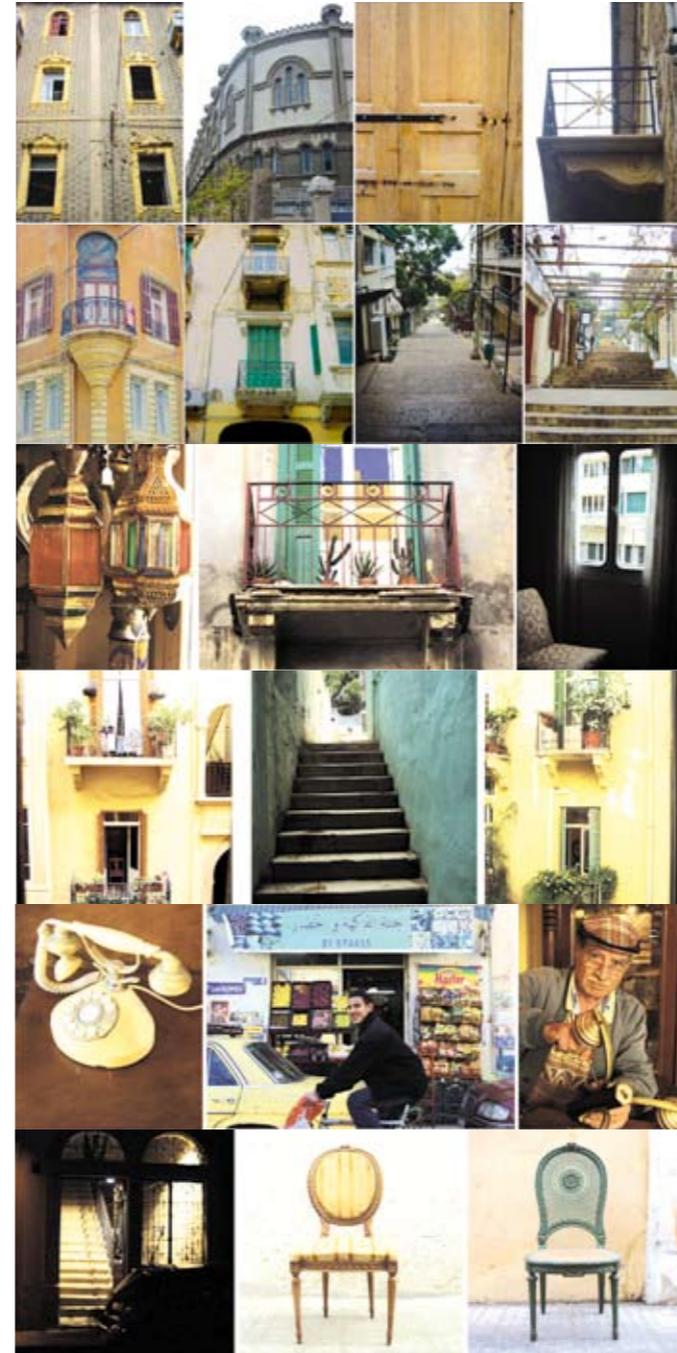


Kinda Hassan

—Beirut reconstructed: the national identity crisis of post-war Lebanon. The Lebanese civil war has destroyed the past for those who are left: people have no sense of belonging anywhere anymore. Beirut is the city in which past and future coexist as one and thus are indistinguishable one from the other; one is a replica of the other. Our few monuments preserved but detached from their original context have lost their authenticity, their real nature, and became images of what they were, stagnant in space and time. The reconstruction project of Beirut was and is making use of the past, and the nostalgic impulse that war generates towards it. Beirut's reconstruction is a destruction of an identity and a construction of a fiction of a past that has been forever lost. Its simulacra effect is to be achieved in visual terms of appearance and façade. It is tending to be an iconic parody of historical architectural heritage used for marketing and in an aesthetic of the surface, and by so being is a threat to heritage. It's the vulgarization of traditional forms of cultural expression and its modification into kitsch and overused consumerism. Kitsch feeds on collective amnesia and the desire for popular distractions.

My project for the stamp is an attempt to criticize Beirut today (Beirut reconstructed), by trying to combine in the kitschiest way possible the different common elements I will jump into with the time I have left; those elements that reinforce and deny one the other in the same time. I chose not to use a specific font for "Lebanon" for my statement is that there is no identity other than the lost one, and no heritage but the caricature of one.

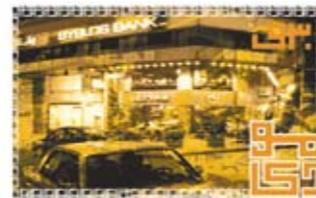
The landmark I'm thinking about is a map of Beirut, for it presents a simulacrum of a city that is simulating its own self. I will try to take out of the map all the streets and street names, and keep nothing but the representations of Beirut's buildings, so that the feeling of the superficial façade is pushed visually to its maximum by the multiplication and the juxtaposition of the same repetitive element. (I have a detailed map of Beirut, will scan it and edit it and post it as soon as I do).



Céline Khairallah

Gemmayzé, a street in Beirut, had glorious times in the beginning of the 20th century. During the war and after the reconstruction of downtown Beirut, Gemmayzé was forgotten. This maybe is what helped keep the authenticity of the street. Now the street is regaining popularity. Many restaurants, pubs and cultural events are taking place there, but unlike downtown, in Gemmayzé there is a glorification of the past. So, in my stamp, I worked on a picture I took in Gemmayzé this year. It shows the hall of an old building, stairs, wrought iron balustrade 'fer forgé,' an old bicycle, and an open ending in the perspective. A nostalgic picture from the past taken in the present times, treated in a modern look, with vibrant colors and new modern typefaces.





Laudia Awad's

I'm thinking of choosing Modca Café as my landmark because of its historical, social, and political aspects and I am trying to find out more about its history or some peoples' comments on its existence and eras.

Here is what I found:

“Unfortunately the neighborhood recently lost one of its landmarks on Rue Hamra, the Modca Café, a 1960s Mod establishment whose stainless steel front was still riddled by heavy machine gun fire and where an Israeli officer was assassinated while sipping his coffee during the brief occupation of West Beirut. Still, though Hamra is only a shadow of its glorious past, like Beirut itself...”

<http://www.counterpunch.org/long08232003.html>

Lefty hangouts offer sanctuary for Lebanon's avant-garde
http://dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=1&article_id=7540



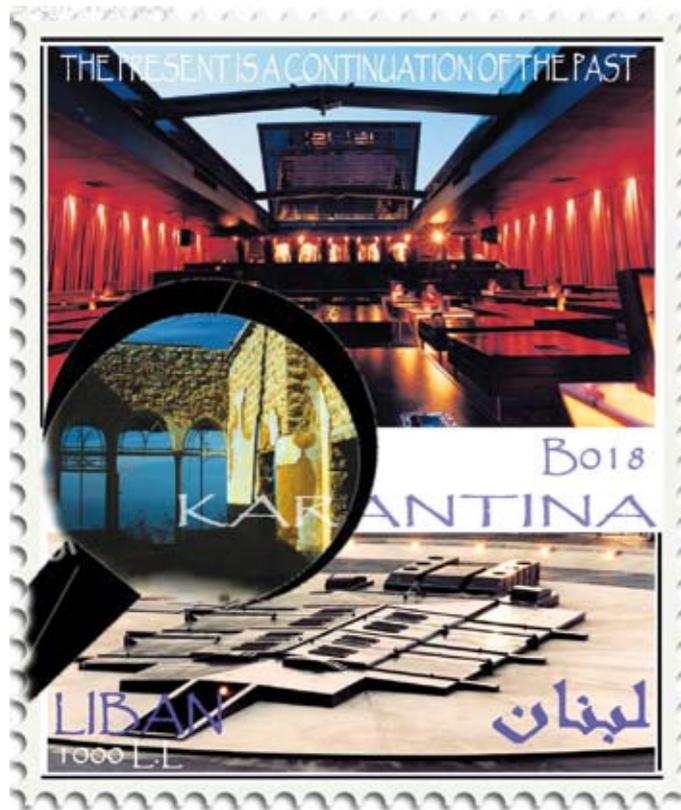
Maya Chami

Maya Chami's design concept revolved around the concept of currency, landmarks on bank notes and type used in such an official and value related concept, also the issue of equating currency with the stamp in terms of creating value and generating political/national propaganda was discussed.

For the assignment, I would love to research typography and landmarks on Lebanese currency. I have always been curious to actually grasp a bit how the whole “designing money” process occurs. Which landmark to use on the currency? Who is the decision maker? And on what do they base their decision? Is the Arabic typography created specifically for the currency or is it a ready font? How do they unify the whole currencies?

I was reconsidering the concept and I came up with the idea of having my landmark the 'exchange guy.' To be more specific, ever since I went to school in Hamra, on the intersection between the St Francis School and the Saroulla building, I have seen the same exchange guy standing for about 20 years. I still see him today. His hair popping from the 2 sides of his head with a bold front head made me think for a while that he was a clown; the way he carries money in the shape of half a circle (a bit like how we carry the playing cards) made me change my mind. He's not a clown; he's a joker. Later on, at around six years, my dad told me the ultimate truth... he's an exchange guy... I couldn't understand a thing, what's the concept! You give money to someone, so that he gives you money back! It was mind boggling for me... a lot of mental energy was spent on him... There are some people that can actually be considered as landmarks; they become part of the place. They become the 'point de repère'. I would love to use him as an extension of my proposed topic, as my visual.





Doris Blok

For my design concept, I have chosen the 'Past and the Present' theme which I have tried (I hope successfully) to visualize by choosing two architectural landmarks that portray the past and the present. The old Lebanese house is an architectural/historical design typical to Lebanon. The red roofs as we call them cover the landscape of the Lebanese mountains. The B 018 club in Karantina region is a not only a place to dance and have fun, it is a historical landmark:

"B 018 is a music club, a place of nocturnal survival. In the early months of 1998, the B 018 moved to the "Quarantina", on a site that was better known for its macabre aura. The "Quarantina" is located at the proximity of the port of Beirut. During the French protectorate, it was a place of quarantine for arriving crews. In the recent war it became the abode of Palestinian, Kurdish and South Lebanese refugees (20,000 in 1975). In January 1976, local militiamen launched a radical attack that completely wiped out the area. The slums were demolished along with the kilometer long bordering wall that isolated the zone from the city. Over twenty years later, the scars of war are still perceptible through the disparity between the scarce urban fabric of the area and the densely populated neighborhoods located across the highway that borders the zone. The B 018 project is, first of all, a reaction to difficult and explosive conditions that are inherent to the history of its location and the contradictions that are implied by the implementation of an entertainment program on such a site. B 018 refuses to participate to the naïve amnesia that governs the post-war reconstruction efforts. The project is built below ground. Its façade is pressed into the ground to avoid the over exposure of a mass that could act as a rhetorical monument. The building is embedded in a circular concrete disc slightly above tarmac level. At rest, it is almost invisible. It comes to life in the late hours of the night when its articulated roof structure constructed in heavy metal retracts hydraulically. The opening of the roof exposes the club to the world above and reveals the cityscape as an urban backdrop to the patrons

below. Its closing translates a voluntary disappearance, a gesture of recess. The building is encircled by concrete and tarmac rings. The automobiles' circular travel around the club and the concentric parking spots frame the building in a carousel formation. At night, the continuous motion of the visitors' cars animates the parking and becomes an integral element of the club's scenario. The entrance is located at the south end of the low-lying metal construction where a stair leads to two concessive "airlock" spaces manned by scowling bouncers. Strewn across the concrete pavement floor of the underground hall, the sofas with collapsible backs serve as elevated dancing surfaces that stage the performers".

B 018 is a topographical landmark as well. An aerial view of the region will clearly show the circle with the black geometrical shape on the ground. The interior of the club is sinister for some because of the coffin-like center tables and the dead people pictures on them, for some it is a leisurely and

fun place to hang out in the early hours of the day. Moreover, it is one of the few super modern places designed after the war, which makes it one of the best known places in Lebanon and the world for its architecture, its atmosphere, its location and its purpose. I believe that the history of our country, our society, our culture is a basis for our existence on this earth. Without it, we are nobody. It shapes us, it molds us, it makes us who we are today. We can change certain aspects of it, reform it, reshape it, develop it, modernize it.. but it will always be there! B 018 is one of them. The architect wanted to use this area for a leisure place, contradicting many social norms, because of its history, but in the same time, he wanted to make it a special place of remembrance. I think he did a very good job in that.

I hope my stamp will change the way of thinking of many people and see the future, the way I see it. We carry our baggage and make something better of it for the future, for the generations to come. We need to get out of the box and change our traditional ideas and see the potential this country has if we all join together and work together for a better Lebanon.







Typographic landscape in the Arab World

by Tarek Atrissi

Background

As an Arab designer, my primary focus through my design work has always been Arabic graphic and typographic design. The challenges presented in bilingual communication, in various media, are often the subject of continuous research and analysis. My interest lies in exploring creative and innovative solutions to typical problems that comes with such projects. With most of the Arab world being bilingual, Arabic typography becomes a key element in graphic design in the region, as well as its integration with Latin typography becomes crucial. While the visual culture and particularly the calligraphic tradition in the Arab world is long and rich, graphic design is a relative newcomer, which leaves a lot of possibilities to be explored by the new design generation in the region. Most important, the challenge lies in creating a design and typographic language that is truly unique to the region, with a strong local design flavor and not as a typical Western design style, with the Arabic part of it added as an afterthought.

And this is exactly what designers aim at achieving in their daily design practice. In my experience, through the various and multidisciplinary projects we come across in our design studio (Tarek Atrissi Design, www.atrissi.com), all the above challenges become the critical factors that define the logic and basic principles behind every design solution. I have learned that the bi-lingual and/or multi-cultural thinking has to be taken into strong consideration right from the start and at the conceptualizing phase of every project. I have come across many projects, particularly in corporate identity projects, which had strong and direct concepts, but that simply failed to translate into the local Arabic market. It takes more than a good copywriter to translate an idea and put it in the right context. The initial conceptual thinking has to be in essence the outcome of the cultural and social environment. Just like Arabic typography and Arabic design elements have to be the main starting points, and not the last additions. What makes things more complicated is that the Arab world itself, despite sharing some strong cultural heritage, is still geographically very large, with different sub-cultures, different graphic taste and visual



heritage, and very different contemporary design approaches. Thus, even in simply defining what is “Arabic” in design, depends to a large extent on the specific target group in question. Basic terms such as “Traditional, Arabic, Modern, Local, Classic...” in the context of the Arab world are very differently seen in a Westerner’s eye than by someone from the region— not to mention the differences in points of views between Arabs from different countries. I take my experience in the Qatar Nation branding as an example. The task of designing an identity for an entire country, with such a vast target group of locals on one hand – who had to be evoked by their own visual identity – and of outsiders on the other hand, from other Arabs in the region and Europeans and Americans targeted as students, tourists, and business investors; made the tone of voice of the identity and design decisions a complex process. Eventually, the design solution was very simple in terms of logo design: Arabic innovative calligraphy was for the Arab reader a sort of a signature. It simply said what it was: Qatar. For the non-Arab reader, the calligraphy became the abstract shapes that made the icon, and people tended to come up with their own interpretation of this icon. Most importantly, the identity extended beyond the logo itself, to be an entire visual identity defined by the use of colors, calligraphic elements, and photographic style.

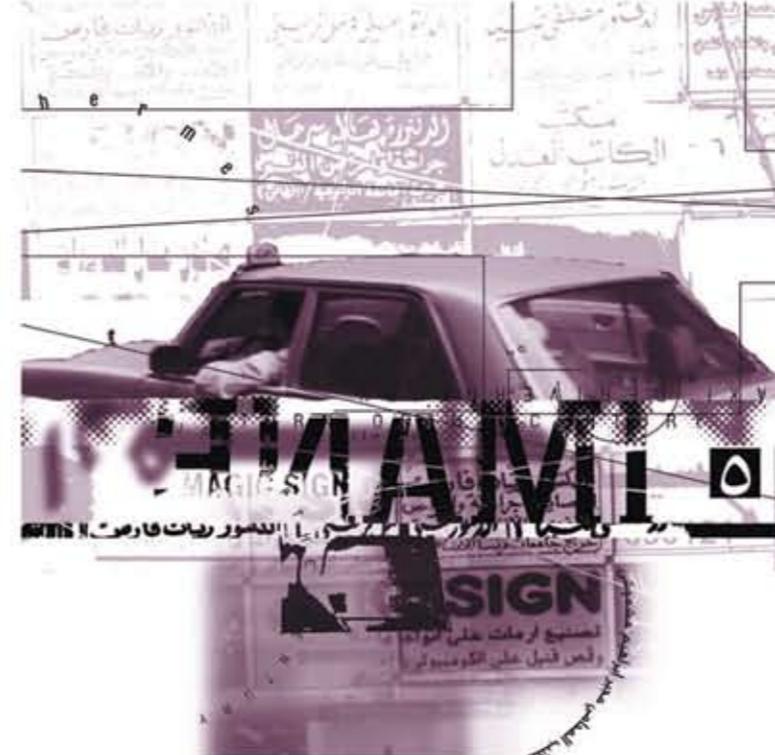
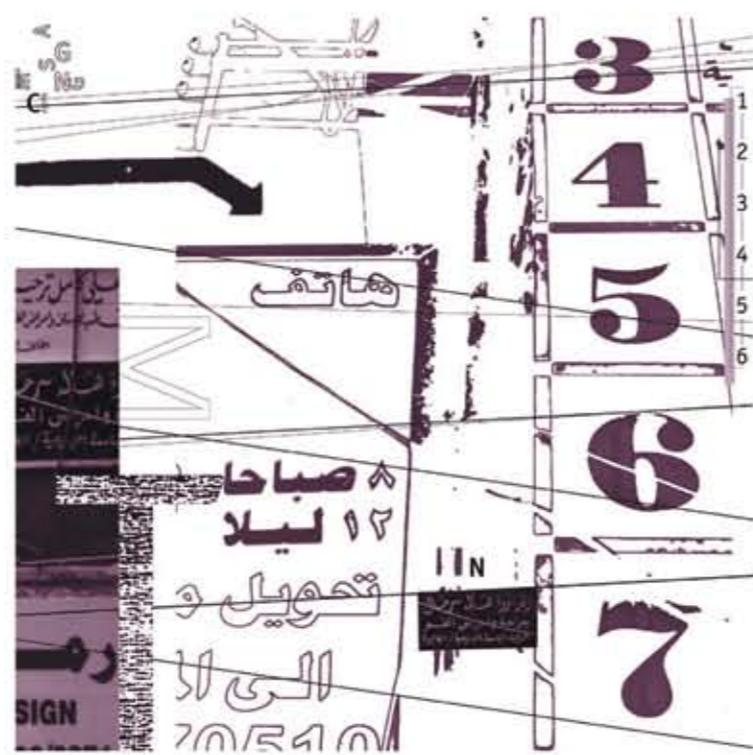
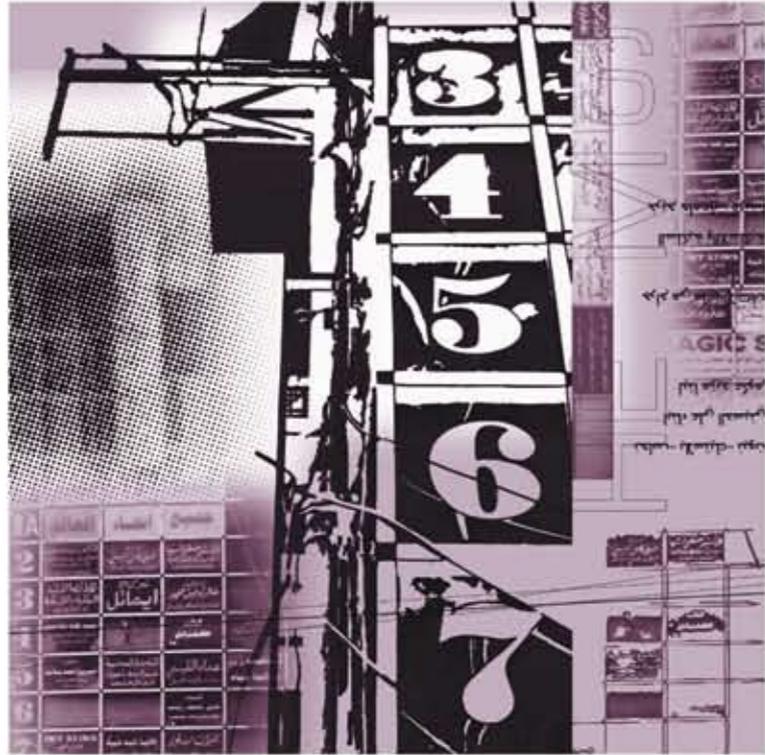
These factors are also crucial to other types of visual communication projects, such as publications and book design, poster design, wayfinding...etc. Take animation or motion graphics for example. How do you take the Arabic script – with its complexity as a connected script which makes it so different from Latin – and animate it in a pure typographic motion? How would you create a moving image or an on-screen identity that treats the nature of the alphabet properly, that is legible on screen, and that is creative with a strong Arabic feel? How would you use calligraphy without the risk of having a very traditional end result, or use modern typography and still appeal to a more classic target group?

Left: Several logos and identities developed at Tarek Atrissi Design



Above: Screenshots from the branding of the Dutch Muslim TV station. Below: Identity and packaging for Rahala/Explorers board game. Both projects designed by Tarek Atrissi Design (www.atrissi.com)







Above: Student work from the Arabic Typography course at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar.
 Right: From the typography workshop at the Higher Colleges of Technology- Abu Dhabi. Student work by Fatima Al Mehairbi.

Environmental Graphics in various courses and workshops

Besides exploring modern graphic, typographic, and interactive Arabic design in commissioned projects, I have taken interest in developing local Arabic design in an academic context through the various courses I have given in academic institutions across the Arab world. I am engaged in defining the key stages and key skills that need to be provided in the education of an Arab designer. A solid typographic basis should include separate introductory typography classes in both Arabic and Latin typography, as well as courses that cover the historical development of two different writing systems. At an advanced stage, Arabic and Latin typography need to come together when the focus shifts towards adapting the two scripts together, which is often the case. Logos, for example, especially typographical ones, are often adapted in two languages; corporate identities often work in two scripts yet look cohesive and consistent. And perhaps this is one of the most important factors in studying Arabic typography: namely the integration of Arabic and Latin alphabets for different communication needs.

It is also important to teach the difference between calligraphy and typography – knowing the characteristics of each discipline and how to use them separately. Arabic lettering is built on the calligraphic rendering of form. Calligraphy is hand-written and more of an artistic practice with a rich history for Arabs and that has always been closely related to religion. Typography on the other hand, is machine-made and is an

offspring of calligraphy as a result of the evolution of printing. Young designers do not have to learn calligraphy because it is a practice that needs specialization and long years of practice, and is a skill not directly useful to the contemporary field. Designers should, however, have an acute understanding of calligraphy in order to know how to use it for their specific needs. They have to be able to communicate to the (craftsman) calligrapher what they need or to be able to push his skills into challenging results. Indeed it is similar to hiring an illustrator or a photographer but



in that context the use of calligraphy is very much related to the typographical aspect of design. Even when a designer is involved in the design of a magazine or newspaper masthead in Arabic, he might need to initially work with a calligrapher and later abstract this calligraphy to create the typographical letter. Young Arab designers need to be encouraged

as well through their academic work to value and appreciate their unique surrounding visual culture, as well as their own historical visual heritage, and use it in their project in creative and expressive ways.

Through much of my own academic and experimental work, I have focused on exploring the environmental graphics through various Arab cities, starting by documenting the street language of the city of Beirut, and extending afterwards to document the same urban visual language across different Arab cities. In an academic context, I have assigned students to do the same and document and analyze the environmental graphics that surround them, and then use this material in their own design project, both in print and multimedia projects. These projects were often typographically driven, and explored specifically this notion of "local design".

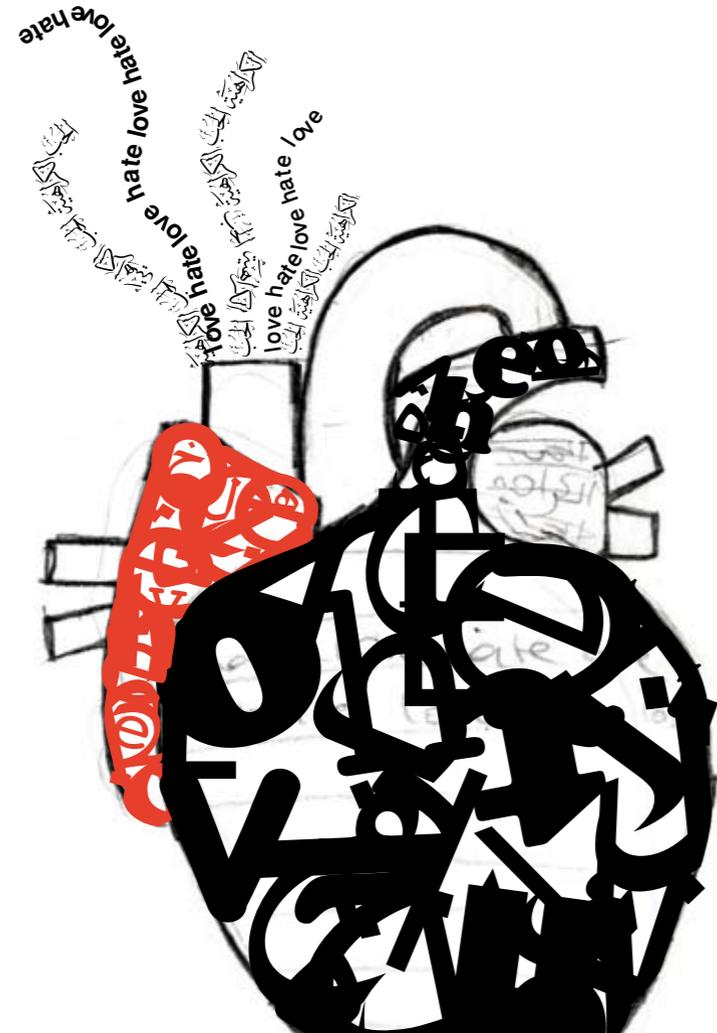


Above: Student work from the Arabic Typography course at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar. Right: From the typography workshop at NDU University, Lebanon.

The experimental projects often developed were focused on creating a graphic and typographic language that was a true reflection of their own visual environment, that belongs to their own surroundings, and that could not have been developed anywhere else. The results were often very exciting, and started with general themes and in some cases focused on specific themes or design issues. In Qatar at the Virginia Commonwealth University, students explored the old and popular neighborhoods of Doha City, and photographically documented the typographic language of these areas, and developed pieces that according to them represented graphically their city more accurately than any other attempts made to brand the city. Other projects focused more on the hand-made street typography, and explored new ways of designing self-made experimental Arabic typefaces. Students in Dubai at the American University of Dubai documented the typographic landscape of their city and incorporated their research in new media and motion graphics projects, with various themes explored such as type and the city; the spread of the Kufi script in modern Dubai; Dubai typographic night-scenes and a humorous look on some bilingual typographic solution done locally. Students at the American

University of Sharjah documented the typographic landscape in the news world, and collected and researched Arabic newspaper design, and reacted by designing their own versions of Arabic newspapers by creating solutions that are much more typographic and that broke much of the traditional limitations in layout design of Arab newspapers.

The most interesting part in conducting these workshops was to compare the different environmental graphics of different cities and different locations, and to see how the street typography is similar yet differs radically, and affects the outcome of the projects based on this documentation, no matter what the end medium is. The more traditional typographic landscape of Abu Dhabi clearly had an identity in its own, yet still resulted in modern typographic pieces developed by the students of the Higher Colleges of Technology. The Lebanese typographic landscape did not separate from its political environment, both in the documentation as well as the developed typographic projects of students from the Notre Dame University.



Above: Animation screenshots- by Marwa Hashim. From the Multimedia Course at the American University of Dubai- Typographic Landscape of Dubai project.
 Left: From the typography workshop at the Higher Colleges of Technology- Abu Dhabi. Student work by Fatima Al Mehairbi.

The DigiArt online course module

When the UNESCO DigiArt online course was planned, I saw in it a great potential to carry this line of research and academic projects. On one hand, the variety of the students' background would bring in an exciting addition to a design classroom, even if virtual. One of the problems that occurs in some design classes is that in most cases the students come from a similar educational background, having taken the same courses, being in a similar environment and exposed mostly to the design principles of their own school. This seemed to be a unique opportunity to mix people from different locations, with different design understanding, and different prior education to interact together and work on a similar project with a completely different approach. Furthermore, the fact that each of the students was physically present in a different geographical location made for a great addition to the type of project I gave in the course, which was based on analyzing and working with every student's own typographical landscape and environmental graphic surrounding. We could truly then have a mixed classroom active through the projects on a regional level. It also helped the students to learn more about the design scene in other cities and countries, and to experience the same process developed in a different environment and under different circumstances.

Looking back at the course and its process, it was surprising that the virtual aspect of it has served and enriched the creativity and efficiency of the development of the assignments. Students were more at ease in giving feedback, exchanging ideas, posting their opinions and being more involved and interactive than what typically a traditional design class atmosphere is in a design school. The virtual aspect of the Internet made almost none of the students shy about stepping out and voicing their opinions. Thus the quantity of postings and opinions given exceeded what I usually get from students in a real classroom. Also, the feedback became more structured and the conversations never drifted away from the initial subject, since the

postings were very well-organized in the course through threads and categorized postings. I think a main part of the success of the course was the efficient online environment created to support the process. The chat sessions were interesting, since they added a bit of a social aspect to the course. The content of the online module was also constantly being updated in various sections, through various posts, replies and uploading of research material, sketches and design trials, so that the user was busily involved and interacting with the rest of the students. One of the best aspects of the process is that every step of every single project was well documented, from idea to final product. You are able to browse through the postings of every student, the feedback of the teachers and the general feedback from other students, in regards to how every project developed all the way from initial idea to final form.

My course came as the third, after Huda and Ricardo's courses, which gave me some time to watch closely how the discussions and projects developed in those first four weeks, and gave me a good insight into the student's design level and overall involvement in the project. With the start of our two-week course, I began by sharing with the students the details of the assignment through three syllabi – one explaining the course in general; one elaborating on the schedule, process, and possible ideas for final projects; and the final with some links and resources that would be useful in the research part of the course, particularly through a blog that I launched in parallel with the UNESCO Online environment, to share some other related material from previous research, academic and professional work (www.atrissi.com/blog).

The course description, in all these documents, was as follows:

Typographic Landscape in the Arab World

Instructor: Tarek Atrissi (www.atrissi.com)

Two week course | Digiarts | UNESCO Master module on Art, Design and Technology



General course info

The course will consist mainly of documenting, analyzing, studying and working on the natural and unique graphic and typographic environment that surrounds us in the Arab world. The course will benefit from the students being in different parts of the Arab world, and will encourage students to appreciate the visual environmental language that surrounds them, and will let them see the common and different aspects of the street typographic language across our region.

The projects and the course simply investigate the possibility of creating a graphic & typographic based design or multimedia language that belongs to the students' own surrounding, a visual language that is unique to the location where the design work was produced, and that couldn't be developed elsewhere. It is a mission to create a true "local" design, either in print or multimedia. The ultimate goal is to make the participants aware of the unique Arab culture in what it presents in terms of visual environmental language, and have them appreciate this and use it more in their future projects. Because of the online nature of the course, the students will be encouraged to work with multimedia and to focus on motion graphics, but print work is also a medium the students may decide to work with.

Students will be provided with a variety of resources, and access to relevant visual examples through an online blog, as well as links to other inspiring papers or projects. The first phase of the course will consist of explaining the goals of the course by sharing and discussing the resources, and then have every student document and share

his own environment, mainly through photography or video footage. Students will be asked to select an area, a street or a corner in their city, and visually document it in all possible ways, focusing on Arabic & bilingual typography, street signs, graffiti, hand written postings, neon letters, commercial store signage, popular street graphics, etc. Participants will then analyze the visual data that they have collected, and work in the second phase on deconstructing and developing the graphic material they have collected: Students will create a collage of the images they have collected, and move forward in graphically developing their compositions into a series of typographic pieces. The exercise will take a different path with every student and every project. Work could be done graphically and then incorporated in a New Media environment, or developed from the start as a motion based project. The third phase will consist of the student developing a concept out of the exercise and defining their final piece in terms of medium, idea, and visual style. All projects will be shared with other students during the course, and will be posted online at the end of the course as an available online gallery of the results & projects created.

Objectives

Students will need to come up with a final product at the end of the project – a printed piece, a series of printed typographic pieces, a short animation or a short video, a typographic experiment, a graphic or typographic story or an installation concept – based on the research, documentation, study and concept development of their selected and analyzed environment in the first week.





Project detailed description and schedule—as well as suggested timeline / working phases for students:

In this online typography and design course, students will explore environmental typography in print, multimedia, photography and 3-D in both an experimental and conceptual design approach. The emphasis will be on Arabic Typography, but Latin Typography will be also included in terms of mixed alphabets as well as adaptation of the two scripts. Arabic Typography and Calligraphy are a major emphasis of the course. Research and visual documentation are another an essential part of the course, particularly the examination of the rich typographical local environment we live in.

Phase 1:

Week1 / Monday: Revision of course and project description, revision of provided resources and similar previous projects. Questions to instructor by e-mail, one e-mail per student before 2nd session on Wednesday; Questions to be sent before 6 p.m. Monday – students will get a reply by noon Tuesday.

Phase 2:

Week1 / Monday to Wednesday: Explore the rich environmental graphic language that surrounds us: graphics in the environment. Signs, neon

letters, big Arabic and English posting, wall graffiti, etc. Start by taking photos (preferably digital) of a corner, a street, an angle or an interesting space that has a cluster of signs with a lot of bilingual typography, particularly Arabic (type, handwritten lettering, Calligraphy...). Popular signs and streets are preferred. Document the specific environment you choose by a series of photos. Take photos from all different angles, with different focus and with attention to details. Your documentation could be of one specific location, but you could also document one element in different spaces and locations (for example, documenting street traffic signage across your city; or documenting political messages across an area; or documenting the use of Kufi script in different environments...etc). The more documentation you make, and the more photos you take, the more elements you have to develop your project and more ideas and inspirations you will have in hand to develop your concept. There is no limitation on how you want to approach your documentation and visual collection. Guide yourself to collect as many interesting photos as possible.

Submit your collected visuals and photos no later than 4 p.m. on Wednesday with a short description of your documentation process and thinking, and any other related questions. This could be done by e-mail, but you are advised to upload your photo online (own server or online album). In this case the link for your visuals should be send by e-mail to the instructor. Should a student be interested in working with moving image or video, then the material and visual collection should be made through video footage, possibly combined with regular digital still photos.

Phase 3:

Week1 / Wednesday to Friday:

Students will receive an individual or general feedback on the collected material by noon on Thursday. The next step is to analyze the documentation and develop a concept and an idea of the final product and project that will be developed out of the collected material. The concept and idea is the main element that will lead to the typographic visual project – and there is really no limitation on the direction this project can take. The final end result could be, but is not necessarily limited to:

1) Typographic pieces:

Final task should be the creation of no less than eight pieces. The first composition will be a collage or just a photo of the photography of your selected space. In six other different compositions, explore this first compositions by focusing on type, enlarging parts, highlighting some items while disregarding others. Take the first composition as your starting point to play around with the photographic/graphic/typographic material you gathered. Try to evoke a certain logic in your progress with your compositions. The last composition will exclude the use of any imagery and focus just on the type remaining from your exercise.

2) Short video:

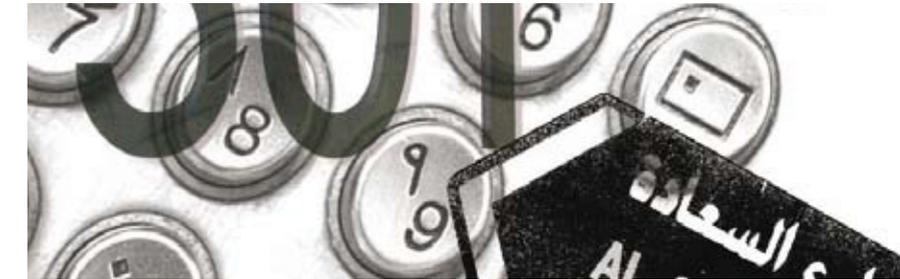
A concept could be developed based on the collected material (video or photos), and new footage could be taken or the initial footage could be used. The goal would be to create a 30-second clip with the title: "Typographic Landscape of (my city)." It should be a graphic, visual and typographic moving clip giving the viewer a taste of a particular local typographic environment.

3) Short animation/interactive piece:

This would also be inspired from the collected material, and the aim would be to create a 30-second animation for a specific concept developed by the student (stop motion, frame-by-frame, flash animation, aftereffect work...). There is no limit for medium or ideas. This could be an interactive piece resulting from the environmental graphics (interactive mapping of the space; interactive display of the typographic environment, etc).

4) Graphic/typographic story:

The space, environment, typography or street graphics could tell a story. The story could be narrated as the end result project, graphically and typographically, and through the traditional print medium, or even using multimedia. This direction could combine the narrative word and the typographic visuals, and could take as well the form of a typographic publication (or a poster, a series of stamps, calendar...).



5) Typographic experiment:

This will depend on the student's typographic interest, but this could be the result of a specific typographic or calligraphic focus during the documentation phase (specific usage of specific scripts, study or the usage of Arabic fonts in different environments, etc). Any interesting typographic experiment could be the final aim of this project (as an example, creation of an experimental typeface based on photographed letters; typographic pieces using the style of the environment...).

6) Installation concepts:

While this might be less complete in terms of end result, a well-explained and illustrated concept for an installation could be the end product of this project. This could be a different form of recreating the typographic landscape documented through the research part.

7) Others:

Students are welcome to suggest other interesting forms of graphic, typographic and interactive expression of the typographic landscape in the Arab world, and in their own city. (For further visual examples review the resources document). More ideas and project explanation of all information mentioned above will take place during the online course



and feedback communication. Students are expected to present a final medium and direction of work, concept, ideas or initial sketches by Friday 4 p.m.. Students will get feedback by noon the next day (Saturday).

Phase 4:

Week1 / week2 / Friday to Monday.

Students will develop further their ideas and concept and start implementing, designing or producing their final project. Advanced sketches and visuals to be presented on Monday of week 2 at 4 p.m.. Feedback will be provided by noon the day after.

Phase 5:

Week2 / Monday to Wednesday.

Final refinement, further development of project and chance to get a last round of feedback.

Final Presentation / Phase 6:

End of week 2/ Friday by 4 p.m.. Final pieces to be presented online, clearly labeled and presented. While final presented pieces will be optimized for online view [screen resolution or compressed files and videos], students should keep a high quality back up of their project that could be requested later for actual production purposes. An explanation of no less than 300 words will explain the concept, process and end result of the project. This should be presented with every final project.

Project keywords:

Graphics- signs- signage- typography- calligraphy- street graphics- graffiti-local-landscape- Arabic- bilingual- environment- visual language- visual-culture- design-adaptation- typefaces- handwritten- letters- abstract-written- messages- political-commercial-religious- personal- urban-identity...

(Refer to keywords when documenting your specific chosen environment)



Selected Students Projects

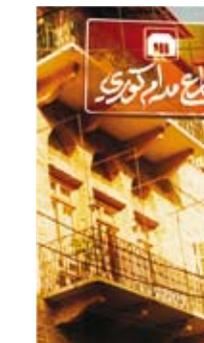
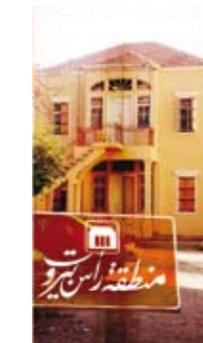
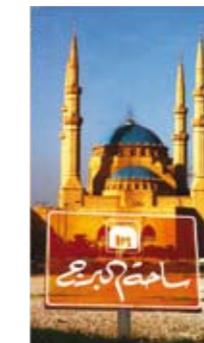
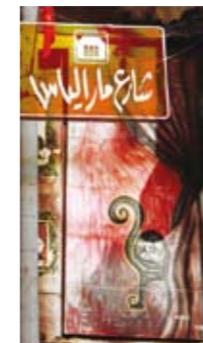
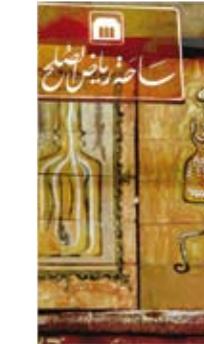
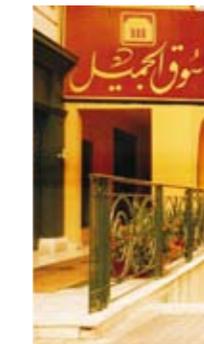
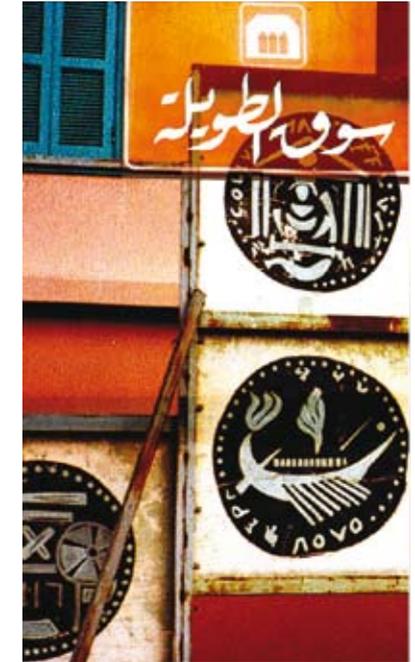
Based on the different research and visual documentation that the students explored in the first week, many interesting concepts were developed. These lead to the design of several interesting projects in a variety of different media. Below is a selection of some of the developed projects with explanations by the students of their design concepts.

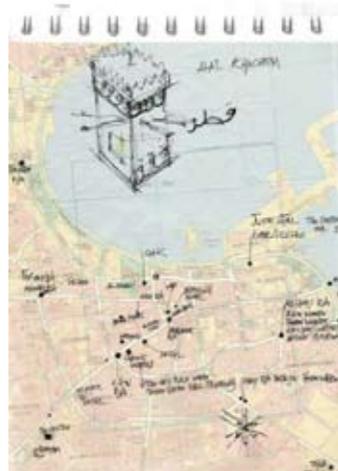
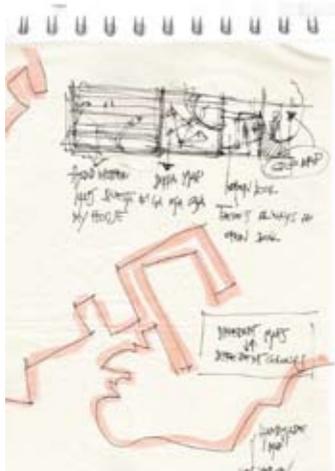
Ghada Majed

I worked on big promotional tourism posters about the city of Beirut. My aim was to promote calligraphy, using different calligraphic styles, and adapting them to the appropriate environmental landscape. I believe that through exposing the streets of Beirut, one gets the true feel of the capital. Whether old or renovated, buildings shown in the pictures aim to promote Lebanese architecture. I chose the title “Chaware3 el Madina” because I believe it represents the poetic feature of Beirut.

Ghada’s project was very exciting as she worked with different calligraphic styles, adapting an appropriate calligraphic style for every street name, and trying to match a calligraphic character with a specific environmental character from the city of Beirut that she documented in photos that focused on the architectural aspect of the city. The final compositions were visually appealing and served her aim of giving a tribute to calligraphy by making it the central element of traditional signage in neighborhoods. Despite the fact that her initial idea—proposing a new signage system—seemed a bit dry as a project, she managed to present the design of these suggested signs through posters with excellent compositions that served well the overall theme of ‘typographic landscape’, a landscape that she created by herself and that became promotional posters for the city and for Lebanese architecture.

منطقة الأثرية	شارع الحريك
ساحة كبرج	شارع مدام كوري
شارع فوش	شارع اللمبي
شارع مار الياس	شارع السادات
شارع المصناف	ساحة رياض الصلح
منطقة رأس بيروت	ساحة رياض الصلح
شارع ويغوك	سوق الجميل
سوق الطويلة	سوق السمارة



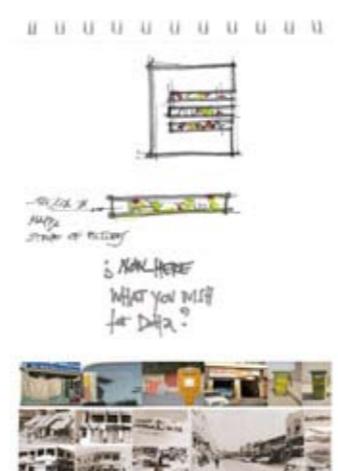
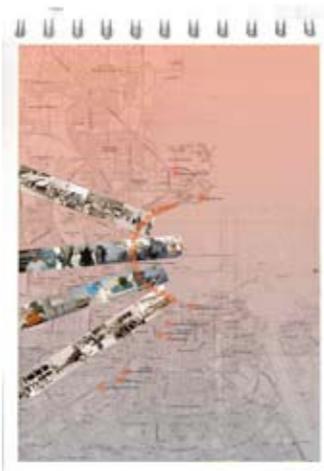
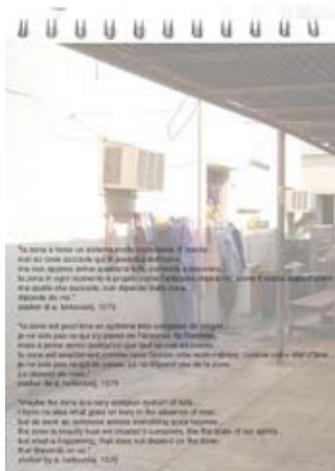
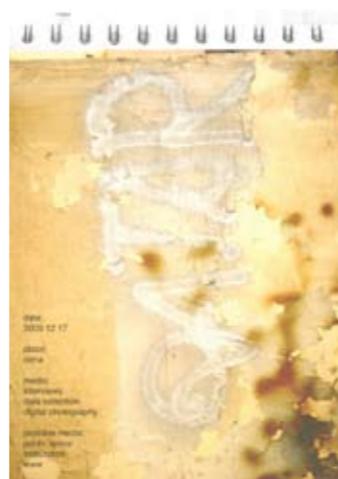
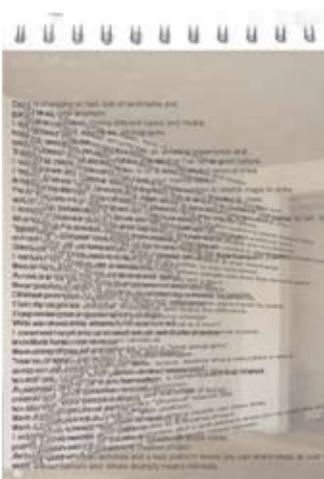


Alexandra Zambon

Project: Doha Behind the Scenes
Qatar

Doha is changing so fast, lots of landmarks and places don't exist anymore. I started my research mixing different topics and media: hand written maps, interviews, photographs, sketches and software.

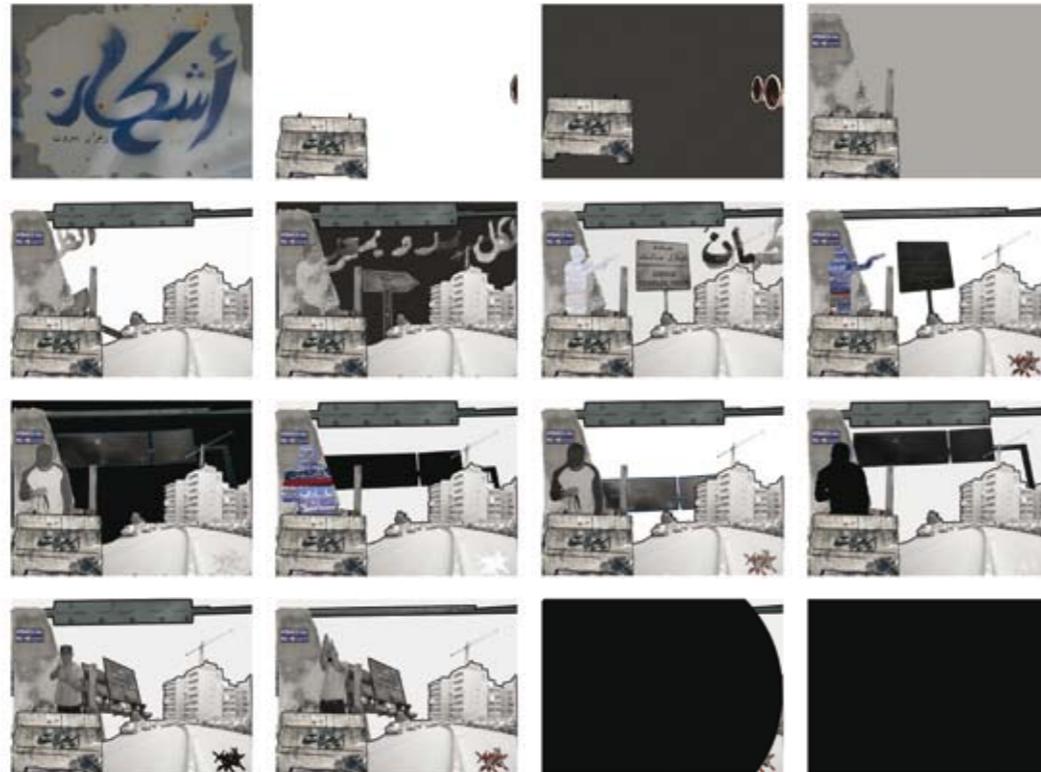
Taking pictures around Doha has been an amazing experience, with so many details behind the scenes that I've never seen before. I feel there are multiple Dohas – not just one downtown but several. It depends on your national identity and your marital status. I've focus my attention on maps starting from the customary map to sketch maps in Doha, and my intention was to draw different maps, physical and emotional ones. I interviewed people asking about the names of streets and roundabouts. It's easy to understand how names (words) are related to visual signs and easier to say "come to 'garage street'" instead of "come to Qatari bin Fujaah Street" or to say "al Muntazah area" instead of "Rawadat al Khail Interchange." Street names are too long and it's better to use nicknames. I want to make an interactive map where people can draw their favorite places, their wishes, their requests, or simply tell a story... a work in progress that grows in time and space. The perception of space is related to personal experiences... different perception for different experiences... signs traced by people. Each sign is unique, individual and makes the difference. Experiences grow and perceptions change. What was the identity of Doha? What is it now? I conceived my project as an aesthetical and social process. In-dividual versus con-dividual. The meeting of people to build a "new geography," "new topoi" (places), to create dialogue... a map of relationships, time, space and desires where places and persons are "connected." A geography of transformation, a contemporary map of social, creative and environmental concerns.



Mohamed Kabbani

Project: Ashekman (Lebanese rap crew)-Ze3rane Beirut
Lebanon

In his project, Mohamed got inspired by the street signs and typography of the city of Beirut and used its elements to visualize and animate the street/slang language in the lyrics of the Lebanese rap Crew Ashekman (Formed by him and his twin brother Omar). The Animation, shown in some screenshots here, draws a nice parallel line between the street language of the rappers and the street typographic language.



Omar Kabbani

Project: Awareness Campaign





Maya Chami

Project: Playground: 1956 • 1994

Lebanon

"Playground: 1956 • 1994" is a video essay that traces back the daily nightlife of my uncle who lived in 80s Beirut, or the battleground. Through the night of his death, I mapped the last places he visited and the last scenes he saw. I based my movie on the script I have written below.

Because I want you to laugh...And he showed me a big smile. And then I asked him what really happened. It was a normal night he said, he had a weird feeling, and it wasn't anything directly related to his death. He frowned and continued that it was just an awkward black cloud. That day, he went out of his studio located on the 6th floor at the Saroulla building in Hamra Street, a bit earlier than the usual, he added. He was heading towards Chez Andre, a block away, for an early drink. On the crossroad near Horseshoe, he bumped into his friend Vatche, who proposed a flipper match at the Lime Light in Jeanne D'arc Center, their favorite hangout place. After that they went to Chez Andre, the original plan. Arthur, the owner of the pub, was in a good mood that night; he was just arriving from his first trip to the beach for that

season. He offered them a Jameson for Vatche and a Red Label for my Uncle Radwan. That was the start. Later, they passed by my uncle's girlfriend's apartment in Mod House building for another drink, then continued bar hopping. And then? I asked, what happened? He slowly placed a hand on his head, he was trying to remember something, he answered regretfully that all he can remember is that he found himself outside Evergreen Pub, I was staring at the green carpet he said and laughed, that's when I realized that I was very drunk...

I am very upset, I said, I see your whole death story too ridiculous which makes this reality too painful, you should have went to the AUH, they could have taken care of you. I just wanted to find my way home and sleep, he replied. Why didn't you call any of your friends, you wouldn't have been dead. I am not dead he said, I am just sleeping. But this is delusional, I replied. I find your scenario too selfish and inconsiderate. You should add a bit of drama so that I can be able to assimilate the unfortunate event. Listen, he said, I have lived as a guerilla fighter all my life, combating, when Beirut was a battleground, and I don't want to tell you that I am exhausted, I enjoyed each and every second. It is about time that I rest and watch. I want to be an icon of that period, and I appreciate your efforts in trying to represent me, but I am not sure

that this is the ideal scenario where I would love to appear. Beirut is now alive, and I am not. It is not by accident though; you should keep that in your mind. I am aware, I said, and I stopped writing, shut down my computer, and went to sleep.

It is approximately 5 a.m., this is what he told me when he woke me up. We spoke about his law of the night, about how people respect and fear each other when they are out during the hours of darkness, about the survival of the image of death in the memory of the mourners, about how he was laying on the couch, sitting rather than sleeping, his eyes wide open reflecting the rays of the fading sun. I have a curious question, he interrupted, what was the thing that made you believe that I can possibly be dead. The girl with the sword, I said.

While tracing the daily alcoholic nightlife of her uncle, Maya investigated and revived pubs and nightclubs from the history of Hamra during war times: Chez Andre, Evergreen, So'far, White Dove, Abou Elie, Rose'n Crown, Captain's Cabin, Blue Note, Golden Plate, After Eight, Eagle's Nest, Lord Kitchener, Smugglers Inn, Chez Dani, Charlie Brown, Lonestar, Lime Light, American Dream, Cock'n'Bull,

Mr. Pick Wick, Fly High, Uncle Sam, Myrtom's House, Moustache, Charly's pub, Kalinka, Duke of Willington, Grill 101, Jackie O, Gold Rush, Megalite, Taverne Suisse, Backstreet, Nepton's Room... The project took her on a nice political graphic investigation of wartime Beirut, and an investigation of the forgotten visual identities of these pubs. His was a very interesting project and a really unique way of interpreting the brief of the assignment. The strongest part in the project was the personal flavor it took on, through the story Maya developed as a main idea behind the project. The concept is great because the typographic environmental documentation happens within a story totally independent from any directly graphic/typographic link. And the subject of environmental landscape she decided to work on is a very interesting one, typically related to a certain period of Beirut that was smartly linked to the story of her uncle, in a different timeline than most of the other projects. The final presentation of the project as a 'silent movie' combined the printed message, the visual hints of the environment, and the narration of the story.

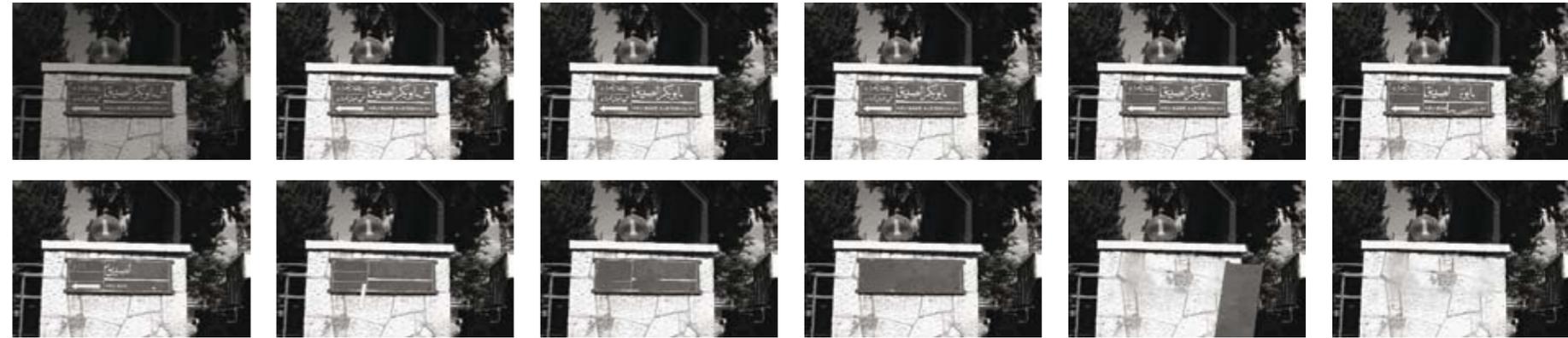


Mohamed Taman

Project: Presidential Elections
Egypt

١٦ سبتمبر ٢٠١٥ كان أول موعد لإنتخابات رئاسية داخل مصر على مدار تاريخها وعلى الرغم من العلم المسبق لنتيجة الإنتخابات والتي جاءت كمشروعية جمهورية كدليل على وجود الديموقراطية داخل مصر إلا أن المستفيدين "وهم كثير" منه وجود النظام الكافي تسابقوا في عرض أنفسهم من خلال الإنتخابات الرئاسية واستغلال جمهور ونخب الرئيس كأداة الدعاية الرخيصة التي تشبه دعاية الباعة الجائلين دونه أدب احترام لمنصب الرئاسة... وتصوير حالة البلد والشعب وكأنه تعيش أزمة مجور الرضاء والتقدم.. الذي ملحوه في حقيقة الأمر ما إلا نضاق لتقصيره مكاسب شخصية على حساب الشعب الكادح في سبيل توفير لقمة عيش لسد جوع بلطن لمثل ثلثي منه ملوون جموع... لذا جلت دعاية الرئيس كأنه نوع من الذنبا الهزلية "الترسو" الرخيصة والتي لا تسجل أبداً لواقع مصر الحالي من هنا جلت فكرة عرضي "أستري رئيس.. فتصعل على الآخر مجاناً" و"رئيس" هنا هو اسم المنتج مع استغلال جبهة الرئيس كما حدث في الدعاية الانتخابية... مع فلال ميدان من أهم موارده مصر وهو ميدان رمسيس فقد أريد أن أقول "كفى نفاقاً"

محمد



Racha Hamdan

Project: I Can't See the Rainbow
Jordan

When the project was assigned I was still coming out of an experience that tackled identity crisis in terms of place: the paradox between the official name of a street and the name commonly used by the locals in reference to a prominent establishment located in it, and more truly (and darkly), the name that should be given in reference to the real authority that governs the street.

The street is named Abu-Bakr Siddiq Street but locals call it Rainbow Street, in reference to one of the first Cinemas in Amman that opened there. But through my conviction-changing experience, I now secretly call it British Council Street in reference to the heavily guarded institute that is located right in the middle of that narrow street.

Typography should be a chameleon, photo-sensitive to its surroundings; don't blame us if the picture is grimly sarcastic, we're just telling it the way it is. I decided to tell the story of the lost identity of this street, of the erosion taking place in different aspects of our culture such as calligraphy. I narrated my story through an animation executed on Adobe Premiere. I chose to make the street sign bleed silently while Kate Bush wept in the background of her single "This Woman's Work" until the sign eventually falls, which is true; if you happen to pass by that street you'll notice the dirt marks of a once-upon-a-time sign that was taken down because I took its picture.



Rania Abou Ghaida

Project: 3al Manara: Sensing Urban Space
Lebanon

This is a conceptual experience of Manara that is lived through the two permeable realms of the driver and the pedestrian. At once the user passively experiences the driver's realm while the pedestrian is part of the driver's scene, yet another dimension is offered to him with interactivity: the subjective pedestrian experience that becomes his.

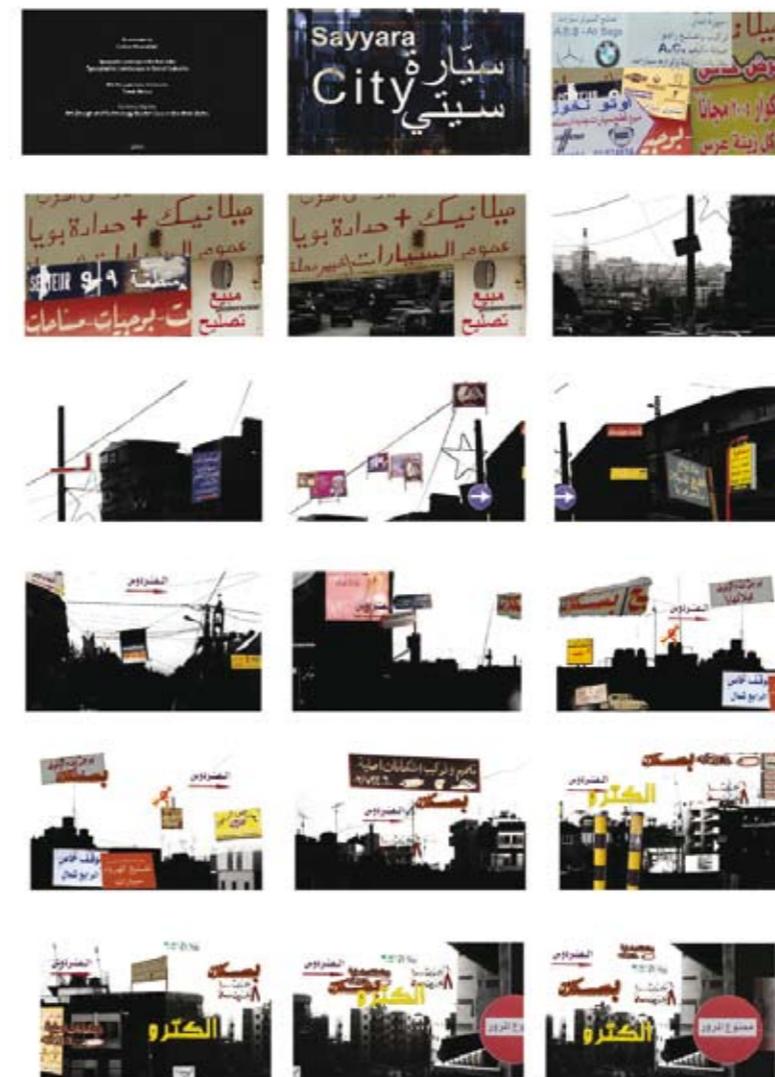
This work is not approached as a Surrealistic drifting but rather as a lived experience that explores the interpenetration of two realms: public and private. It depicts urban space from the driver's scope as a charged flow of information and constant stream of street graphics, revealing disorder, fragmentation and the messy space that one moves through.

Seen from an objective perspective, the pedestrian is incorporated into the graphical landscape where visual language is re-imagined within the everyday, to point at the frictional relationship of the subject to its visual environment. Street graphics, bilingual typo, shop signs, and ambulant merchant's handwriting define and resume urban space in which the pedestrian merges, and where multitude of possibilities and connotations are offered by chance encounters and juxtaposition of visual elements: bike rental ad vs. bike interdiction sign, disabled sign vs. marathon distance sign, no parking sign vs. ambulant merchant's handwriting, Pepsi vs. Sohat, moving subject vs. trash recycling

invitation... hence, questioning mobility, social integration, public life, life cycle... and putting across some composite messages with a Situationist accent.

Opposite to the bursting urban scene, the work takes on a contemplative direction with the sidewalk sea scenery, where "walking" is further developed to include the user himself who interactively engages in the walking experience and subjectively articulates space. Here, walking is explored as an ordinary but transformative way of using space, in which the walker introduces new personal meanings. As cultural theorist Michel de Certeau wrote. "Walking is a form of enunciation, akin to a speech act. Like figurative language which strays from literal meaning, walking strays from proper places, introducing new significations and ambiguities into an existing spatial system." On foot, the "walking user" perceives and senses space as a mix of subjective social, cultural, graphical and natural rhythms, this rhythmicity is emphasized by recurrence and repetition that mirror the actual rhythmic walking.

In this context, the imbrications of the subject and the urban public space that is mediated by walking confers a feeling of belonging and identity to the place described and personal engagement with its community, which is the ultimate reflection and end of this work.



Céline Khairallah

Project: Sayyara City
Lebanon

You wake up. You step out. You look at the buildings across; a panoramic view over Beirut suburbs. What do you see?

An animation, about the streets of Beirut and the cars available in large quantities in the country. But, this time, we don't really see the car, instead we go exploring the calligraphy and text on the street graphics and the shop signs related to car maintenance available on every building and corner, thus elevated to the rooftops. A word, a sign, a witness to the cars being the item most approved and cherished in the city.

Approximately one million cars exist in a country of about three and a half million inhabitants. These cars create an industry and a diverse business. The car is everywhere; the car is a show-off... but what's behind the scenes subsists what keeps the car going...

Laudia Awad

Project: What's underlying between the lines
Lebanon

"Baynal Soutour Ounwan" or "What's lying between the lines."

An intriguing neighbor, Issam, owns a bookshop but a very old bookshop! There, one can find books that may have been erased from historical record... I see homeless untidy men with garbage bags full of old rotten books giving them to Issam in exchange for money. Surprisingly, I pass by each day to find more and more books arriving at his door.

A sense of history and "a struggle for survival" underlies in this scene. Writers, poets, young minds always visit Issam, and I always see the younger generation just sitting outside his shop, enjoying reading their books even at this very tight sidewalk. Inside, no space is a lost space. A "cradle of thought," even with the smallest space imaginable, the young and talented manage to post their posters on his wall knowing its strategic intellectual location. A wall with history written all over it: poster overlapping another...endless words and messages recording the course of time. A place... a man...a celebration of art, history, politics... merely anything ever written and will be written still. Layers have come and gone past this wall carrying in its lines a record of a history, of life.



Kinda Hassan

Project: Ma btefham 3arabé?
Lebanon

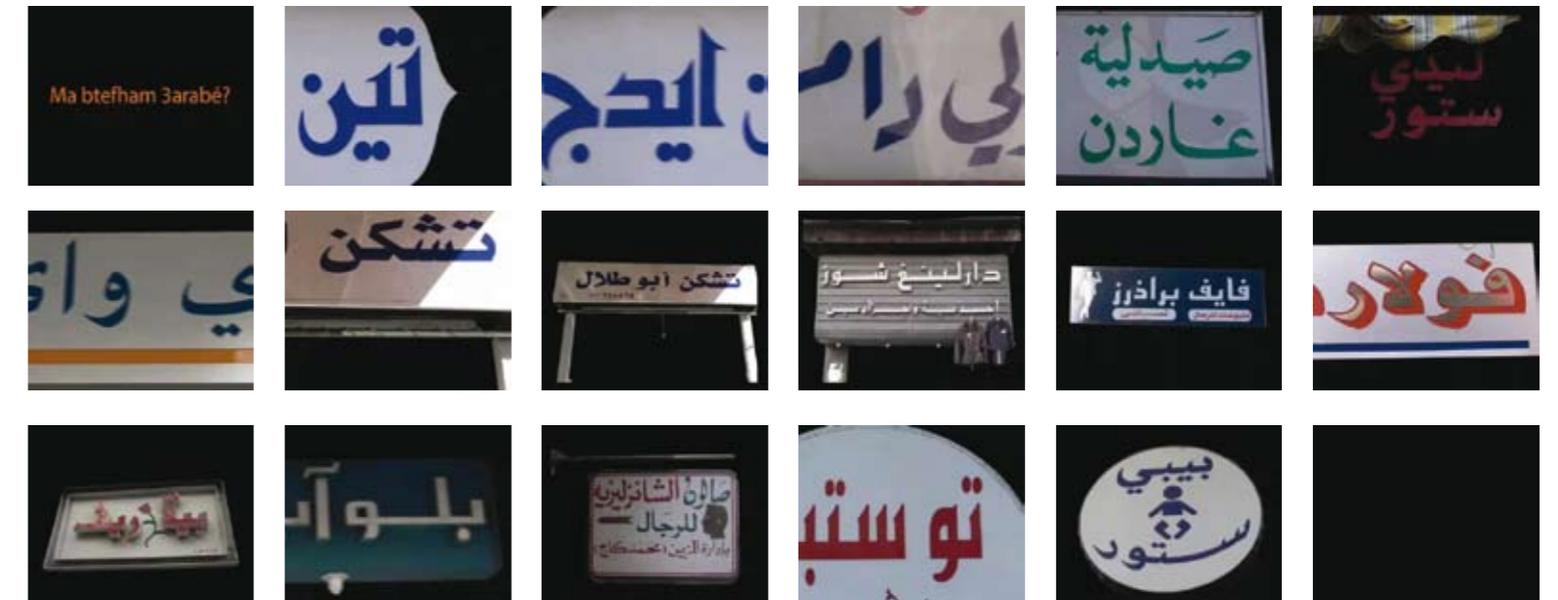
I have always been interested in those signs written in a language to which they are intruders. Those signs you can't understand if you don't let yourself hear: they are not words to be read and understood. There is no meaning linked to the word itself: the meaning resides in the reference of another word in another language, suggested only by the sound of the written word.

I wanted to emphasize this phenomena by installing a life-sized reproduction of shop signs I find around home in a space in which the spectator could take a walk (it would take him/her around 15 minutes to see the whole space), and experience this procedure of hearing written words in order to understand them.

Sensors that sense the presence of a person (movement) in a radius of one meter around each sign shall be installed. When stimulated, it would activate the sound of the word "as it should be read", not as it is meant to be read. The sound being heard after reading the sign (since the

latter is released once the person is in the area around it, so had read it and is moving forward), it is meant to provoke a certain awareness of the ambiguity of what they have just read/heard/understood. I wanted the sound to be created with Arabic text-to-speech software, but unfortunately I am not able to find one for the moment. (Apparently, the Arabic TTS software is something that is being worked on, but that is not available yet). So what I will do for the sound (for now) is use a human interpretation of the words, without (as much as possible) any reference to their meanings (automatic reading).

The space in which the signs are installed is the outline of the streets they belong to: a three dimensional representation of the area and the line following my walk: the signs are placed exactly where they were found, giving the installation a document's aspect. The map below is a top view representation of the exhibition space (some streets of Mazraa/Ras El Nabeh), and contains indications as to where each sign belongs. To stimulate an experience that could meet with the proposed installation's form and concept, I decided to use letters to mark the signs: The transposition of the Arabic letters of the signs into the Latin alphabet. The animation attached shows images of some of the signs and a demo of the sound that should accompany them. Enjoy!





Mr. Teemu Leinonen

Mr. Teemu Leinonen (b. 1969) holds over a decade of experience in the field of research and development of web-based learning. His areas of interest and expertise covers design for learning, computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL), online cooperation, learning software design, educational planning and educational politics.

Teemu is currently the leader of the Learning Environments research group (<http://legroup.uiah.fi>) of the Media Lab (<http://mlab.uih.fi>), University of Art and Design Helsinki (<http://www.uiah.fi>). The group is internationally recognized from its open source virtual learning environment for knowledge building, called Fle3 (<http://fle3.uiah.fi>), a web community and platform for finding, authoring and sharing open and free learning resources, called LeMill (<http://lemill.net>), and audio wiki platform for mobile communities, called MobilED (<http://mobiled.uiah.fi>).

Teemu conducts research, design, and publishes in different forums. He has delivered a number of talks and presentation in national and international conferences, has given in-service courses for teachers and carried out consulting and concept design for several ICT and media companies.

Teemu is an elected member of the University Senate (<http://www.uiah.fi>), founding member and the first president of Voipe Ry - the Finnish association of Libre and Open Source in Education, member of the Wikimedia Foundation's (<http://wikimediafoundation.org>) Advisory Board, and program committee member of several international conferences.

Ricardo Mbarkho

Born in Beirut in 1974, Mbarkho's net and video work questions the identity and belonging issues, especially in Lebanon and the Middle East region today. His interests also deal with the relational and the communicational environments between people, most often in the sociopolitical sphere. His work and lectures are presented in many festivals, exhibitions, universities, publications and in the press throughout the world, such as Goethe-Institut and Espace SD (Lebanon), ARS Electronica (Austria), La cinémathèque (Canada), Guislain Mollet-Viéville and le Cube (France), Transmediale (Germany), and Le Centre Culturel de Sousse (Tunisia). Mbarkho curated and co-curated many video screenings showing the positioning of the still emerging Lebanese video artists, such as at the Festival International de Film et Vidéo de Création (Lebanon), and at B-312 gallery (Canada).

Ricardo Mbarkho graduated from the National Superior Institute of Fine Arts of Beirut. He pursues his studies in the United States (Carnegie Mellon

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Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès

Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès was born in Beirut in 1965. Author of Arabic Typography: a comprehensive sourcebook (Saqi Books, London, 2001), Experimental Arabic Type (Saatchi & Saatchi, Dubai, 2002), Typographic Matchmaking (BIS Publishers, Amsterdam, 2007), and a number of articles on multilingual communication in the Middle East. She holds degrees in graphic design from Yale University School of Art and Rhode Island School of Design, and specialises in bilingual typographic research and design. She has worked as a designer for a number of years in the United States, Amsterdam, France and Beirut. She has taught typography and graphic design at the American University of Beirut and the American University in Dubai since 1994. She was the Chair of the Visual Communication Department for three years at the American University in Dubai and is the founder and active board member of the Khatt Foundation, Center for Arabic Typography (www.khatt.net).

Tarek Atrissi

Tarek Atrissi, was born in Beirut. He has worked and studied in Lebanon, the Netherlands, Qatar, Dubai and the United States. He holds a BGD in graphic design from the American University of Beirut, an MA in interactive multimedia from the Utrecht School of the Arts in Holland and an MFA in design from the School of Visual Arts in New York. His work was exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in New York and is in the permanent design collection of the Affiche Museum in Holland. His work is featured in major international design magazines and books worldwide. He has received several international design awards and is a frequent guest speaker at universities and design seminars around the world. He is the founder of the online platform for Arabic typography (www.arabictypography.com). He is the principal of Tarek Atrissi Design (www.atrissi.com), based in the Netherlands and serving a variety of clients from Europe, the Middle East and the United States. The studio's multi-disciplinary scope of work focuses on modern Arabic visual communication and the development of both original and custom Arabic fonts. He is a consultant for several International Branding firms.