

throughout Arab cultural history. As she articulates, “the dialogue is already ongoing, has been, and will continue” (p. 2). This insistence on queerness as a continuous and persisting dialogue makes two significant interventions: First, it refutes the Western Orientalist and Arab heteronationalist perspectives that wrongly suggest that queerness is new and/or alien to Arab cultures and comes from Western colonization. Second, it encourages readers to perceive the queer archives curated in the book not merely as historical evidence of past desires but as affirmations of queerness’s present existence and hope for potential queer futures.


Queer Arab critique’s emphasis on futurity is most palpable in Chapter 5, my favorite chapter of the book, which revisits the project’s central question: What would it mean to be queer, Arab, and OK? Shomali seeks answers to this by examining the works of multidisciplinary artists spanning illustration, fashion, design, literature, and cinema. What is fascinating about this chapter is witnessing how queer artists combine art and activism, take central roles in liberation movements, and insist on transnational organizing to create new paths toward freedom, healing, and justice for women. Drawing inspiration from the artists’ creative labor, Shomali posits that radical queer futures necessitate a rejection of authenticity, respectability, and inclusion politics, striving instead toward a world that centers joy, pleasure, and collective organizing.

*Between Banat* contributes to an array of fields, including gender and sexuality studies, SWANA studies, literary studies, film and media studies, and cultural studies. It is an essential read for everyone who wants to understand the complexities of queer Arab lives, especially given the myriad restrictive discourses and violent realities that make it difficult to narrate and embody this complexity. More importantly, it offers a much-needed road map for all those striving to envision and build radical queer futures. *Between Banat* powerfully asserts that being OK doesn’t merely mean to exist but to have hope, joy, and pleasure. It asks us to dare to imagine and build a world in which racialized queer subjects do not simply survive but thrive.

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## Fantasmic Objects: Art and Sociality from Lebanon, 1920–1950

**Kirsten L. Scheid (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2023). Pp. 374. \$85.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780253064233**

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From afar, the cover of *Fantasmic Objects: Art and Sociality from Lebanon, 1920–1950* appears to showcase one of Saloua Raouda Choucair’s well-known modular abstract sculptures, with uneven blocks stacked together like the stanzas of a poem. On closer inspection, however, one discovers the form is instead constructed out of thin scraps of sliced-up archival paper with Arabic words scattered about, including *al-fann*, *al-fanūn*, *al-fannān*, *al-fannānīn*, and *al-fannānāt* (art, arts, artist, artists, female artists). This cover art was made specifically for the book by New York-based, Beirut-born contemporary artist Walid Raad (b. 1967). The piece pays homage to Choucair’s legacy but also points to the prevalent discourse of lack both inside and outside Lebanon. Indeed, for many decades, despite active artists, art exhibitions, and art discourse, many in the Euro-American academy, and in Beirut, claimed there was “no art” in 20th-century Lebanon, a narrative that the book challenges directly.



*Fantasmic Objects* fills in those empty spaces and prompts us to acknowledge that they were never empty to begin with.

In *Fantasmic Objects*, anthropologist Kirsten L. Scheid blends ethnography and art history to explore modern art and its legacy in Lebanon. She focuses on three prominent artists: Omar Onsi (1901–69), Moustafa Farrouk (1901–57), and Saloua Raouda Choucair (1916–2017). However, this is not a straightforward art history of mid-century modernism in Lebanon. Scheid is an anthropologist who began fieldwork in Lebanon in the 1990s and has taught at the American University of Beirut for over a decade. While the book includes much historical material, it is also inflected with ethnographic analysis of the last thirty years of art exhibition, reception, and discourse in Beirut. The book's substantial contribution is the way in which it weaves these two disciplines together to establish new conceptual models for modern art history in the region and globally.

Scheid's book is part of a growing field of global modernist art history, which over the last two decades has been chipping away at the Eurocentric story of modern art. More specifically, her book is among a robust set of recent books on modern and contemporary art history of Lebanon, including Chad Elias's *Posthumous Images* (2018), Sarah Roger's *Modern Art in Cold War Beirut* (2021), and Hanan Toukan's *The Politics of Art* (2021), as well as modern art history of the wider North Africa and the Middle East, like Anneka Lenssen's *Beautiful Agitation* (2020) on Syria and Sarah-Neel Smith's *Metrics of Modernity* (2022) on Turkey. Among these, she is unique in her interdisciplinary method that joins art history and anthropology.

In her introduction, Scheid sets out a bold theoretical framework of new terminology for evaluating the work of Onsi, Farrouk, and Choucair, which includes the title of the book: "fantasmic objects." Derived from the philosophy of Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina, Scheid writes, "fantasmic art is neither purely imaginative nor purely material but stands at the intersection of both" (p. 30). Like Wendy Shaw in *What Is "Islamic" Art?* (2019), Scheid draws from Islamic philosophy to develop a new apparatus for analyzing art that is not based in Euro-American methodologies. Through the term "fantasm," she emphasizes that she will neither solely formally analyze the artworks nor only focus on the society that made and consumed this art but will instead turn attention to the space of meaning production in between the art and its audiences. Along these same lines, instead of "artworks" she encourages us to consider "art acts" (my emphasis) that "create *aesthetic encounters* enjoining you to evaluate yourself and your response" (p. 5, her emphasis). Throughout the book, Scheid also employs the terms *ṣūra* and *taṣwīr*, which derive from the Arabic verb *ṣawwara* (to form, shape, mold, create). Scheid theorizes *ṣūra* (often translated simply as "picture") as more than just an image; something that is molded or created by its maker through *taṣwīr* (making of forms, creating fantasms). Scheid writes: "the *sura* is the molded thing, and *taswir* is the temporally laden technology of molding" (p. 6). Again, instead of relying on Euro-American terminology, she turns to Arabic concepts to force us to rethink how modern art functioned in this local Beirut context through fundamentally altering the words we use to describe it. This is an important intervention into the Euro-American methodologies that continue to structure modernist art history despite its growing global reach. However, at times, the abundance of new terms she uses is confusing and muddies her analysis. Her arguments would have been stronger had she focused on only one or two of these potent concepts.

Despite conventional art historical titles like "Nudes," "Landscapes," and "Portraits," the book's central chapters present ethnographic observation, detailed analysis of art discourse, and deep theoretical conceptualizing alongside visual analysis of art works. The three chapters on Onsi and Farrouk (2, 3, and 4) focus on their education and exhibition up through the 1940s, while the chapters on Choucair (5 and 6) stretch further into the 20th century due to the artist's long life. Chapter 2 examines how art displays in Mandate Lebanon participated in the construction of national identity, which she dubs "exhibitionary sociality," putting "citizenship on display and into question" (p. 55). For example, Scheid evaluates the guest book for one of Farrouk's exhibitions, establishing the many different walks of life brought

together at the exhibit for a shared “sense of commonality” (pp. 52–53). In the early 20th century, French-style art education curriculum, which included the core technique of drawing, painting, and sculpting from live nude models, was still predominant throughout the Mediterranean region. In Chapter 3, Scheid addresses the tricky subject of nude painting in an Islamic setting through in-depth research into the complicated engagement of Muslim Mandate-era artists in this educational technique. Scheid uses the genre of landscape to explore Onsi and Farrouk’s spiritual engagement with nature in Chapter 4, highlighting how artists employed the “*pasyage lubnani*” (Lebanese landscape) as an “antidote” to the impacts of rapid urbanization (pp. 166–7). Chapter 5, “Art Lessons,” explores how art education “cultivated” pupils for their “potential for citizenship” (p. 195) and produced new conceptions of gender, ethnicity, and nationalism. In the last chapter, she traces how Choucair’s self-fashioning against gender norms in early self-portraits gave way to what some critics called abstraction, but what Choucair considered “sculpture as a living art” (p. 273). Overall, the chapters are chock-full of historical information, theoretical analysis, ekphrasis, and ethnographic work. While the thread of the argument sometimes gets lost in the wealth of information and the aforementioned multitude of specialized terms, the chapters will be a great resource for the next generation of scholars of modern Lebanese art.

Scheid’s prose sings when she describes her own personal interactions with members of the Beirut art world. In the opening to her chapter on nudes, she recalls an exhibition of Farrouk’s work in 2003 at the Sursok Museum, which she attended with Lina, “the wife of an industrial magnate” (p. 89). Scheid vividly writes that “in unison, we mounted the grand staircase, brushing up against Chanel suits, sleeveless gowns, and leopard-skin pants” (p. 89). And, later, she recounts a 1999 afternoon with Choucair when they looked at a 1962 newspaper review of her work, on which Choucair had written four times “GHALAT!” (WRONG!) (p. 245). Choucair hated to have her art described as feminine, telling Scheid: “I challenge all men. Why *feminine*? Just because I’m a woman?” (p. 245). In these moments of clear description, Scheid provides an unfettered view into art makers and consumers in Lebanon over more than two decades. Choucair’s words in particular will be a tremendously important archive for the field.

While the intense theoretical analysis and neologisms of the book were thought-provoking, as an art historian, I craved more attention to situating these artists in larger histories of modernism, in Lebanon, the Arab world, or even globally. Moreover, as I am not an anthropologist, I am certain that an anthropological perspective would differ considerably from my art historical one, and I do not address here the book’s contributions to that field. Nevertheless, the book’s broad and deep history, research, and analysis offers almost endless material for students and scholars to engage with. Overall, *Fantasmic Objects* enacts a *taṣwīr* of its own; responding to those empty spaces of Raad’s collage, it molds a new, innovative modern art history of Lebanon.

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