

University of North Texas, College of Visual Arts and Design, Fall 2021  
**ARTH 5825-Secs 001/791**

**Abstraction in the Middle East and North Africa**

Tuesday 5:00-7:50 pm

**Dr. Shabout, She/Her/Hers**

**Office: Art 215**

**Office Hours: Tuesday 4-5 pm, or e-mail me**

**E-mail: [nada.shabout@unt.edu](mailto:nada.shabout@unt.edu)**

Do you have a profile on [www.Linkedin.com](http://www.Linkedin.com)? Maybe you should!

**Welcome to UNT!**

As members of the UNT community, we have all made a commitment to be part of an institution that respects and values the identities of the students and employees with whom we interact. UNT does not tolerate identity-based discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. UNT's full Non-Discrimination Policy can be found in the UNT Policies section of the syllabus.

**Course Description:**

Art is always political. However, art from the Arab world and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is further politicized and generally received in the West in connection to wars and conflicts. This notion assumes a direct correlation in the production of this art to politics, war and today terrorism. Meanwhile the new discourse is rethinking contemporary art during what is perceived as a global crisis considering recent geopolitical, economic and health crises and their impact on visual culture and artistic practice. This course investigates the relationship between abstraction as was negotiated and understood through the history of the region that occupies today's MENA, and particularly the Arabic speaking countries. History, culture, power, and politics, are important aspects of this formulation. The course provides the context for the development of abstraction in connection to Islam and secular modern history, including the interwar period, colonialism and the age of nation states. We will start by trying to understand the region in terms of its values, culture and history. We will consider production, reception, exhibition, in both local and global markets, through exploring and reevaluating discourses of culture, identity, and globalization. The course explores specific case studies through primary and secondary sources with particular attention to artists voices and intentions as well as wider public reception. We will also explore the contemporary interest in abstraction in the MENA and few of the key exhibitions on the topic.

**Course Material and Requirements:**

All required readings are on Canvas, which means you do need to have access to a computer with internet access. You will need to upload and download text and images on Canvas for asynchronous meetings and assignments. At times you will need a digital camera--your smartphone camera is fine. At other times you will need Zoom for synchronous not F2F

meetings and when necessary for other reasons. You are required to be seen as part of zoom discussion sessions. For that You'll need a webcam.

**Course Objectives:**

1. Further develop your critical thinking, speaking, writing and research skills.
2. To develop and practice the skills needed to think critically about relationships between politics and visual production.
3. To develop an understanding of key concepts, methodologies and terminologies for modern and contemporary art from the Arab world and larger Middle East.

**Course Evaluation:**

Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) is the student evaluation system for UNT and allows students the ability to confidentially provide constructive feedback to their instructor and department to improve the quality of student experiences in the course

**Grading System:**

You will be evaluated on your preparedness and performance in the course. You will also be evaluated on the organization, thoughtfulness, and resourcefulness of your writing assignments. Every student is expected to fully participate in the course.

<b>Class Component</b>	<b>Weight of Grade</b>
Class Participation	10%
Discussions and Assignments	50%
Final Project	40%

**Course Structure**

This is a course that meets for 3 hours every week. We will have both Face-to-Face meetings and a percentage of synchronous via Zoom class time and other asynchronous discussion boards on Canvas. You are expected to be in class for the Face-to-Face part. If you are not able, please notify me to set up zoom for you or discuss an alternative.

**For Zoom Classes:**

- We will hold few zoom class through the semester for live discussion.
- If you are unable to attend the zoom class, please email me to work on an alternative solution.

**Assignments**

Designated students will be responsible for a virtual reading presentation that will take the form of initiating a discussion thread based on the readings for that week. Your thread should provide a brief outline of the reading's main arguments and 2 questions for discussion on the thread. Topics for the discussion thread can relate to specific images or the readings. Uploaded related images encouraged!

**Discussion Threads**

For each discussion thread, there will be a guiding topic and/or question. You are required to submit 2-3 entries (100-250 words/per response) that engage with the specific questions and each other's responses. The course discussion thread will be posted on an agreed upon day of the week by the designated students. Your responses will be collectively graded based on their

thoughtfulness, thoroughness, and ability to make connections across course material and each other's arguments.

### Criteria:

- Read the postings submitted by other students. Threaded discussions provide the opportunity for interaction and learning from one another. This requires you to follow the posts of other students in your discussion group.
- Make reference to the relevant material from the text and other assigned readings.
- Make reference to information or ideas expressed by your classmates in their posts.

### Final Project and Presentations: You have the option to choose from the below.

1. **Art History Paper:** (10-15 pages): In this paper, you will explore one of the themes of the course through a case study in its historical, cultural, and personal contexts. Papers should be typed, double spaced, with 12 point font and 1" margins.
2. **Exhibition Projects:** (5-7 pages): You may choose to complete an exhibition project in lieu of the Research Paper. You will still have to submit an abstract by the dates listed. You could choose to work with a partner. You are to curate an exhibition that explores the meaning and politics of abstraction in art from the MENA region or its diaspora. You will need to include at least 15 works of art in your exhibition and develop accompanying "label/wall text"—name of artist, date, media, dimensions, etc. In some cases, and for certain works, you might need to provide extended labels contextualizing the work. You will also submit a 5–7-page paper outlining the premise of your exhibition, its major themes, its historical context/s, a list of its included artworks, and its value to the art historical community. You will need to include bios of your artists and reasons why you chose them, you will then present your exhibition in class. How you chose to organize the exhibition and the presentation is up to you as long as it is coherent and well communicated. **Be creative!**
3. **Studio Project:** (5-7 pages): MFA students may choose to complete a studio project in lieu of the Research Paper. You will still have to choose and provide an abstract by the dates listed above. For the studio project you will investigate the course topic by producing a work of art that explores an aspect of a chosen theme. This can be interpreted in many different ways and you are encouraged to be creative. You will then write a 5-page paper outlining the arguments and motivations behind your created work. Check class schedule for dates and deadlines.

## Technical Assistance

### UNT IT Help Desk

**Email:** [helpdesk@unt.edu](mailto:helpdesk@unt.edu)

**Live Chat:**

<https://it.unt.edu/helpdesk/chatsupport>

**Phone:** 940-565-2324

**In Person:** Sage Hall, Room 330

**Hours and Availability:** Visit <https://it.unt.edu/helpdesk> for up-to-date hours and availability

For additional support, visit [Canvas Technical Help](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328)  
(<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328>)

### Course Useful Resources:

**Aramco World:** We produce *AramcoWorld* to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global interconnections, past and present. In print, *AramcoWorld* is distributed six times a year, without charge, to a limited number of interested readers; online, it is published on this site and available in tablet and mobile editions using the *AramcoWorld* app. Back issues from 1960 are searchable, and texts are available in full; photographs from archival articles are online from 2004 to the present.

**Artsy:** features the world's leading galleries, museum collections, foundations, artist estates, art fairs, and benefit auctions, all in one place. Our growing database of 800,000 images of art, architecture, and design by 70,000 artists spans historical, modern, and contemporary works, and includes the largest online database of contemporary art. Artsy is used by art lovers, museum-goers, patrons, collectors, students, and educators to discover, learn about, and collect art.  
<https://www.artsy.net/artists>.

**CULTURUNNERS:** an independent arts organisation which supports artists journeys and production across physical and ideological borders: <http://culturunners.com/#>

e-flux: Announcements about contemporary art exhibitions, events, and publications:  
[www.eflux.com](http://www.eflux.com).

**Hyperallergic:** a daily online art publication on art and the art world: <http://hyperallergic.com>

**Ibraaz:** Initiated by the **Kamel Lazaar Foundation** in 2011, *Ibraaz* is the leading critical forum on visual culture in North Africa and the Middle East. We publish an annual online platform – consisting of essays, interviews, artists' projects, and platform responses – that focuses on research questions conceived through a network of editorial contributors based in the Middle East and beyond. Our key editorial aim is to publish, alongside work by internationally renowned writers, academics, curators, activists, and filmmakers, emerging writers and artists:  
<https://www.ibraaz.org>.

**The Mathaf Eyclopedia of Modernism and the Arab World:** The bilingual Mathaf Eyclopedia is a free online scholarly resource providing basic facts and in depth information on modern art of the Arab world:  
<http://www.encyclopedia.mathaf.org.qa/en/Pages/default.aspx>

**Nafas Art Magazine:** Nafas was developed by **Universes in Universe - Worlds of Art (UiU)** commissioned by the ifa, and published since March 2003 as one of the first online magazines for contemporary art from the Maghreb to the Middle East, from Central to Southeast Asia: <http://u-in-u.com/nafas/>.

**Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism:** An accessible and intuitive online platform, Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism brings together a wealth of interdisciplinary content about the Modernist period, and is the ideal starting point for any research in modernism.  
Access through UNT Library: <https://libproxy.library.unt.edu:4199>

**Selections:** a bi-monthly magazine with high quality content on all subjects related to Art, Culture, Design, and Style: <http://www.selectionsarts.com/category/art/>

## Course Policies

### Face Coverings

UNT encourages everyone to wear a face covering when indoors, regardless of vaccination status, to protect yourself and others from COVID infection, as recommended by current CDC guidelines. Face covering guidelines could change based on community health conditions.

### Attendance

Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with me and your reading partner prior to being absent, so we can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals. Please inform me if you are unable to attend class meetings because you are ill, in mindfulness of the health and safety of everyone in our community.

If you are experiencing any [symptoms of COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or [askSHWC@unt.edu](mailto:askSHWC@unt.edu)) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Team at [COVID@unt.edu](mailto:COVID@unt.edu) for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure.

### Course Materials for Remote Instruction

Remote instruction may be necessary if community health conditions change or you need to self-isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19. Students will need access to a webcam and microphone to participate in fully remote portions of the class. Information on how to be successful in a remote learning environment can be found at <https://online.unt.edu/learn>

### Policy on Quality of Written Work:

Translating visual signs into verbal language is not an easy task. Thus, in the visual and subjective realm of art history, clarity of presented ideas is vital. Therefore, your written work will be evaluated in terms of proper grammar, syntax, and spelling, as well as the clear and logical presentation of ideas and argument. If you make errors in any of these areas consistently, your grade will be lowered. Any student needing or desiring certain kinds of assistance or general support in matters of writing should visit the University Writing Center.

Some warnings and guidelines: Be sure and proofread for spelling and grammar errors! If you have problems with your writing, feel free to seek out help from the University Writing Center. The Writing Center is located in Rm 105 of the Auditorium Building. The services are open to all students, free of charge. M-F 8am to 5pm. 565-2563. [www.unt.edu/writinglab/](http://www.unt.edu/writinglab/).

Papers must be formatted in 12-point font with 1" margins.

Save all work. That means save soft on your computer and on a back-up of your choice. Also, save hard copies. We will not accept excuses for lost work, printers out of cartridges or computers crash. Always plan for the worst and hope for the best when it comes to your technology. Always save your paper on a disc, and save often!! That way, if you have a problem with a hard drive or printer, you can go immediately to another computer to finish your work.

Not all computers are created equal. To guarantee success, use computers in the computer lab in the Art Building and not in your dorm, the library, Student Center, or even your own at home unless you are sure of its capability.

## **UNT Policies**

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

### **Cheating and Plagiarism Policy:**

Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and violate UNT's Code of Student Conduct. Any suspected act of dishonesty will result in a grade of "F" in the course. Further, the professor will write a letter to the Dean of the School of Visual Arts and the Dean of Students, who will pursue disciplinary actions at their discretion. Cheating includes looking at another student's test for any reason.

According to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, plagiarism is defined as "the deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas, words or statements of another person as one's own without acknowledgement" ([www.unt.edu/csrr](http://www.unt.edu/csrr)). Copying material from any source without providing a citation (footnote or endnote) is a form of plagiarism. Likewise, if you paraphrase another author's words or ideas, you must credit that person with a citation. While most incidents of plagiarism at the graduate level are unintentional, it is your responsibility to ensure that you accurately indicate which words and ideas are those of others.

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### **ADA Policy**

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the [ODA website \(https://disability.unt.edu/\)](https://disability.unt.edu/).

### **Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)**

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age,

disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

### **Emergency Notification & Procedures**

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

### **Retention of Student Records**

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

### **Rules of Engagement**

Rules of engagement refer to the way students are expected to interact with each other and with their instructors. Here are some general guidelines:

- While the freedom to express yourself is a fundamental human right, any communication that utilizes cruel and derogatory language on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law will not be tolerated.
- Treat your instructor and classmates with respect in any communication online or face-to-face, even when their opinion differs from your own.
- Ask for and use the correct name and pronouns for your instructor and classmates.
- Speak from personal experiences. Use "I" statements to share thoughts and feelings. Try not to speak on behalf of groups or other individual's experiences.
- Use your critical thinking skills to challenge other people's ideas, instead of attacking individuals.
- Avoid using all caps while communicating digitally. This may be interpreted as "YELLING!"
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm in emails or discussion posts as tone can be difficult to interpret digitally.
- Avoid using "text-talk" unless explicitly permitted by your instructor.
- Proofread and fact-check your sources.

- Keep in mind that online posts can be permanent, so think first before you type.

See these [Engagement Guidelines](https://clear.unt.edu/online-communication-tips) (https://clear.unt.edu/online-communication-tips) for more information.

### Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's [Code of Student Conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) to learn more.

### Access to Information - Eagle Connect

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: [my.unt.edu](http://my.unt.edu). All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail [Eagle Connect](https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect) (https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect).

### Disclaimers

*Content in the arts can sometimes include works, situations, actions, and language that can be personally challenging or offensive to some students on the grounds, for example, of sexual explicitness, violence, or blasphemy. The College of Visual Arts and Design is devoted to the principle of freedom of expression, artistic and otherwise, and it is not the college's practice to censor these works or ideas on any of these grounds. Students who might feel unduly distressed or made uncomfortable by such expressions should withdraw at the start of the term and seek another course.*

*The professors reserve the right to alter this syllabus if and when necessary*

### Course Outline:

For the latest news on culture and politics always consult

<http://www.merip.org>

<http://www.jadaliyya.com>

**1- August 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Introduction and Terminologies**

**Review of Syllabus and Introduction to topic**



**2 – August 31<sup>st</sup> Intro to Arab Abstraction and Modernism**

**3 – September 7<sup>th</sup> The Politics of Abstraction**

**4 – September 14<sup>th</sup> Modern Arab Art in Iraq**

**5 – September 21<sup>st</sup> Arab Modernism in North Africa**

**6 – September 28<sup>th</sup> Modern Art in Iran**

**7 – October 5<sup>th</sup> Hurufiyya: The Arabic Letter**

**8 – October 12<sup>th</sup> Modernity and Colonialism**

**9 – October 19<sup>th</sup> Women and Feminism in Arab Art**

**10 – October 26<sup>th</sup> Islamic and Modern/Contemporary Abstraction**

**11 – November 2<sup>nd</sup> Islamic Art and Cartier**

**12 – November 9<sup>th</sup> Political Interventions\***

**13 – November 16<sup>th</sup> Diasporic and Stateless Arab Art**

**14 – November 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

**15 – November 30<sup>th</sup>**

**FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

**16 – December 7<sup>th</sup>**

**FINAL PRESENTATIONS**