We often think of artists in terms of their origins, even when much of their life and work takes place elsewhere. This is problematic with artists from the Islamic world, particularly in light of the Islamic influence currently directed toward Islam from the West. In academic curricula and lectures, and in articles in the art press, artists such as Mona Hatoum, Shinn Nishitat, and Shahla Eshkimi—of Pakistani, Iranian, and Pakistani origin respectively—are regularly described as "Islamic." Yet these artists share neither nationality nor religion, have studied in Europe and the United States, and live and work in London and New York.

When the adjective "Islamic" is so regularly attached to quite different bodies of art, the question bears asking whether it is applicable to them. The region we call "the Islamic world" stretches from Indonesia to the Atlantic coast of Africa; to call the art of this entire area "contemporary Islamic art" is surely reductive, like calling the art of the entire Western hemisphere "contemporary Christian art." Without Boundary sets out to look at the work of a number of artists who come from the Islamic world but do not live there. Only active consideration of this kind will slow down the race toward simplistic conclusions and binary thinking.

The study of "Islamic art" is an accidental invention, originating in Europe in the 1800s. Definitions of the term vary from one context to another; the scholar Ciege Grebeer cuts through them by defining Islamic art as "art made in and for areas and times dominated by Muslim rulers and populations." In our present polarized moment, the term is loaded with political and religious subtexts, and yet it has been applied to artists who would not necessarily use it to describe their own work, who do not live permanently in Islamic areas, and who produce art for European and American art spaces in which Muslim visitors are only a fraction of their audience. Is there any identifiable commonality in their art?

Without Boundary approaches its subject from a variety of perspectives, the first of them formal. Classic traditions of Islamic art that have become well-known in the West include, for example, calligraphy, the painting of miniatures, and the design of carpets. These forms might lead a Western viewer to label an artwork "Islamic." To explore to what measure the artists in Without Boundary actually depart from any conventional notion we might have of Islamic art, then, this exhibition and book will examine their work in part by approaching it through just these taxonomic types. A second focus of Without Boundary is the question of identity, whether secular or religious—a frequent issue in an exhibition of artists the majority of whom have experienced long-term dislocations across national borders. Finally, a third section of the exhibition explores questions of faith. In all of these areas, the artists in Without Boundary defy the expectations imposed by the term "Islamic art"—a term that was in any case originally devised in reference to traditional art forms. To impose categories on artists who resist categorization, of course, is a contradiction in terms, and I do not intend Without Boundary to share in the homogenizing impulse that has become widespread. To highlight the difficulty of making origin a defining factor in the consideration of art, then, the exhibition also includes two Western artists, and one or two more will be discussed in this essay. Although not influenced by artists from the Islamic world, these artists share interests, references, and strategies with them.
aspects. Unlike those artists, though she arrives at abstraction by concealing a text.

Unlike Hashkaniy, the Algerian artist Rachid Koraichi makes his text highly visible, embroidering it in gold letters on large silk tapestries. Yet the sign system he mostly uses is his own invention, and indecipherable. The message is coded. Even when Koraichi does use Arabic script—when he inscribes his signature and the date at the bottom of a tapestry, for example—he usually writes it backward. The mirror image has an important place in Islamic thought; as the artist points out, for example, the Sufis believe that knowledge of the still is never direct, and must always rely on the mirror.8

Salome (plate 6), a series of twenty-one textiles from 1993, sets a veiled and cryptic tale, according to Koraichi, about a doomed personal relationship, while also referring in its title to the biblical story of the infamous dance that led to the death of John the Baptist.9 In choosing this text, Koraichi underlines the importance of Christianity in Algeria, a hybrid nation in religious terms. His ideograms, too, have links to the many visual cultures of North Africa, old and young, including numerology, Talmudic inscriptions, calligraphy, tattoos. Sulfic banners, and the rock paintings of the Ahaggar region of Algeria, to name a few.

Adding to this gene pool in Salome is a symbol found in Ancient Egyptian tombs, to which Koraichi draws attention with arrows: the bird that carries life beyond the grave. Among all these references, a family resemblance to the banners (fig. 3) of Islamic North Africa remains apparent.

KUTLUG ATAMAN is best known for video installations incorporating interviews with people who are in some way exceptional or remarkable. Since the interview by nature involves language and narrative, it is consistent with Ataman’s practice that he should also have turned to writing, a basic medium of these modes. In a series of six animated videos from 2003, he addresses the separate semiotic premises of word and image, which he shows merging, separating, and merging again. An image pregnant with meaning hides words: words become moving images, as if aspiring to visual status. In this sense Ataman’s animations are metaphors for film-and-videomaking.

Word (no. 1) (2003; plate 4) and Beautiful (no. 2) (2003; plate 5), each containing the Turkish word of its title, combine this interest in cinema with an origin in a marginal tradition of calligraphy in which artists design religious invocations in the form of horses, lions, birds, and sometimes human faces (fig. 4). Turning to this veris/visual genre but rendering it secular, Ataman also returns to the use of Arabic script, which the modern founding figure of his native Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, banned in 1929 in the so-called “alphabet revolution,” part of the country’s project of modernization. The ornamental letters of Ataman’s calligraphy, then, belong to an outlawed alphabet, a status sometimes elaborated through the profane spirit of these animated works—as in World, where the letters, as they rotate, form into a phallic erection.

In video animation and Ismamic calligraphy are newly allied in Ataman’s work, handwritten calligraphy also makes a strange

bedfellows for the mechanically reproduced medium of photography. The early work of Shirin Neshat, however, involves just this partnership, comprising words in Persian handwritten on her photographs to render each print unique. I was always fascinated by the art of calligraphy,” Neshat recalls, “and most importantly in how text and image fuse in both Persian and Islamic art, from miniature paintings to other forms. Also, I collected in Tehran’s bazaars small plates, good luck charms, where mythological figures of men, women, and animals are completely covered with inscriptions, both inside and outside.”10 In works of this kind Neshat replicates the upheavals she found when she visited Iran in 1990, after a sixteen-year absence. (She had left as a teenager in 1974, five years before the revolution that toppled Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.) The contradictions implicit in these works show her grappling with a revolution that had turned the familiar into the uncanny.

In Speechless (1996; plate 3), from the Women of Allah series, begun in 1993, a woman wears a gun barrel in place of an earing, while her face is veiled with script—a eulogy to martyrdom in the name of Islam, quoted from the writings of the contemporary Iranian poet Tahereh Sahezadegan. Evoking the alliance between religion and politics in postrevolutionary Iranian culture, Speechless also considers the revolution’s empowerment of the social classes that toppled the Westernized regime of the shah. In Untitled (1996; plate 2), meanwhile, a photograph from the same series, Neshat points to an internal discord, this time writing text on the hand of a woman shown raising her fingers to her lips. The gesture might signal a kiss as well as a self-induced silence, and the time Neshat quotes France Claud (1935-67), a poet known for the sensuality of her writing—in fact a poet whose writings fell into official disfavor

in postrevolutionary Iran. Neshat lets the poem grow vertically on the hand’s upward-pointing fingers; below, on the back of the hand, is a religious invocation, set in a circle and written in letters evoking traditional Islamic calligraphy. Disputing the divisions in culture that she saw in postrevolutionary Iran, Neshat sets on the same body an assertion of faith and the words of a poet of life.

This fusion of religion and sensuality is often missed in the West, where the women in Neshat’s images are frequently interpreted as one-dimensional Islamic types. The writing on Neshat’s photographs has been similarly misunderstood: an audience that does not read Persian, and may not distinguish clearly between Iranians and Arabs, assumes that her texts are in Arabic and perhaps even excerpted from the Koran, which Neshat has actually never quoted.11 Ghada Amer leaves less room for misunderstanding. Even when she was still a student, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Nice, Amer defied her teacher’s expectation that the Egyptian-born artist use Islamic calligraphy. Instead she chose to work with Roman script, legible to her audience in France.12 The sources of her text works range a wide territory, from banal popular culture (fashion magazines) through reference material (the French dictionary Le Petit Robert) to translations from historical Arabic literature. In Love Park (figs. 5 and 6), for instance, made for a town park adjoining the SITe Santa Fe exhibition of 1991, Amer planted signposts inscribed with quotations from Shelah Nathan’s Perfumed Garden, an erotic handbook written in North Africa in the sixteenth century—and perfectly respected, no anomaly, in the Arab world of its time.13 The critic Diu Ogibe accordingly notes of Amer, “Her work may be seen as the continuation of a long tradition of Arab investigations of both sexuality and human passions” and simultaneously as an offensive against “present configura-


4. Lion termed of ornamental (Arab) script. Persian, probably 19th century. The script reads in English, ‘At an Ali Talib, may God Almighty be pleased with him and honor him!’
Ismailic Art

When Shazia Sikander took up the study of miniature painting as an art student in Lahore in 1988, Pakistani artists had long considered this time-honored form an anachronism. "It supposedly represented our heritage," she says, "yet we reacted to it with suspicion and ridicule. I had grown up thinking of it as a kit. In this context Sikander's decision to study miniature painting as an act of defiance is striking. Right from the beginning, her transformation of the miniature capitalized on its innate, preexisting hybridity, which, however, she extended by incorporating it into both personal content and references to Western modernism. In Perilous Order of 1997 (plate 9), for instance, Sikander depicts a friend in the guise of a Mughal prince or emperor, one of the Muslim rulers of India. This one, though, Sikander surrounds with figures from Hindu mythology—gopis, worshipers of Krishna, derived from a miniature of the Basholi school, which flourished in northern India during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The dots regularly punctuating the surface meanwhile recall a regime of repetition that she associates with Minimalism. Finally a pure invention of Sikander's hover in the lower center: the shadowy silhouette of a female figure, perhaps an altar ego, with roots in place of feet—interconnected roots that absorb energy only from themselves, suggesting that this woman is self-nourishing.

In Pleasure Pillars (2001; plate 10) Sikander again embraces heterogeneity. Dancing figures drawn from Mughal miniatures, the classical Venus matched by a figure of the Hindu goddess Devi, a portrait with swirling horns, the high-tech war machinery of a modern fighter plane, and battling animals plucked from miniatures of India's Safavid period form the elements of a narrative without a story line. For Sikander these layers of ideas, or thought processes, create "open-ended possibilities." Her art education, it should be remembered, did not stop in Lahore: having moved to the United States in 1989, she studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she was exposed to semiotics and post-structuralist theory. Among the Western artists she admires is the German painter Sigmar Polke, who similarly mixes images of varied origins in an attempt to destabilize fixed meanings (fig. 8). The comparison with Polke, Sikander comments, "never comes up in conversations," but she "studied his work to understand laying paint and narrative." Sikander's work reflects the issues and events of today's world. Post-9/11 politics seep in. Wolo (2002; plate 11), with its fighter planes caught in the spider's web of some dusty, oil-rigged corner of the globe, could be a poet's antiwar editorial. The context suggests a new interpretation for the traditional motif of a lion devours a deer: The series 51 Ways of Looking (2004) sees Sikander finding argumentative possibilities in abstraction. In some cases, abstraction showing traces of representation. In #2 (plate 12), for instance, a floral border recalling Islamic book illustration frames a rectangle of monochrome black that conjoins a modernist art history running from Kazimir Malevich to Reinhardt. In the next drawing in the series (plate 13) the border breaks down: the black marker overflows into the margin while the margin grows into the center. This mutual intrusion invites metaphorical interpretations to do with other kinds of center and periphery, whether in arming—the relative positions of abstraction and ornament in the modernist hierarchy, say—or in the world beyond. Elsewhere in the 51 Ways of Looking series Sikander telescopes farther into the realm of abstraction, drawing straight and curving lines that intersect to form squares, rectangles, triangles, and circles (plate 14). Such drawings recall the modernist idea of a universal language, free of any cultural association, but as it to contradict that notion Sikander points out that geometry is fundamental to Islamic art. In Sikander's work, as Eugene Tian has written, "Categories of culturally specific and universal have become totally irrelevant." Yet another drawing from the series (plate 15) again plays on the idea that representation and abstraction are each other's nemeses: the apparently abstract elements making up a winding, circular pattern are in fact derived from the calligraphy of female figures in the iconology of the Krishna cult. Abstraction through reduction to their hair, disengaged from their usual narrative burden, they wheel and dance in the supposedly neutral zone of abstraction, quintessences of themselves.

The affinities between Sikander's art and the miniature tradition remain apparent even as she moves from the miniature to animation (plate 8). The scale of Rabeq Shaw's paintings—which may well as much as fifteen feet wide—immediately dis- tances them from the miniature, but the jewellike quality of their color, Shaw's infinite attention to minute and multilayered details, and the presence of a note of almost hallucinogenic fantasy invites comparison to such Persian miniatures as Shah Tahmasp's Shahnameh, the Shahnameh, dated 1559 (fig. 9), a vision of a royal court as an earthly heaven presided over by a benign ruler. Shaw similarly, in The Garden of Early Delights III (2000; plate 16), gives his world an authority figure—but this is a haloed (fig. 10), a brooding beast, and where the Tahmasp Shahnameh describes a kingdom in which the civilizing influence of a leg- endary Shah extends to the taming of animals, Shaw glorifies libidinal excess. His Eden is governed by the id. Unlike the Garden of Delights (c. 1419-18) by the Maestro Bonino, the direct inspiration for the series from which this work comes, Shaw's triptych is free of moral burden: when man and animal copulate (fig. 11), no punishment threatens. Permissive and celebratory, the work seems to advocate—in the most literal way—the generation of new, hybrid possibilities.
Besides recalling the idyllic gardens of Islamic art, Shaw's Garden of Earthly Delights series may relate to the Kashmir of his childhood. "Kashmir," he says, "was named paradise by the Mughal emperor Jahangir, who said 'If there is heaven on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here.'" Shaw has also spoken of the "overdose of luxury" that he knew as a child—he came from a wealthy Kashmiri family. But that he gave up for the life of an artist. He warns, however, "My work has nothing to do with what Kashmir stands for because in a sense as a child I had so many influences. My parents are Muslim, my teachers were Hindu scholars and I went to a Christian school, and historically Kashmir was Buddhist." Shaw's work cannot be confined to any one geographic location. His sources range wide; he names among them Persian miniatures and Kashmiri shawls; jewellery; from Europe, old master painting and medieval heraldry; from Japan, Hokusai prints, byobu (screens), ushaki (lacquer ware); and uchikake (wedding kimono); and many hours in natural history museums and libraries.

Having studied at London's Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Shaw is well versed in modernist art history. In Pollock, for example, he admires the discovery of a medium or technique, and the balance the American artist struck between getting lost in that medium and knowing and controlling what he was doing. Shaw too has discovered a medium, a cloisonné technique in which he pours enamel paint onto a board, then draws it in with a porcupine quill. Also like Pollock, he works with an assemblage structure in which a dizzying sea of detail produces abstraction. At the same time, he is interested in the tension between abstraction and description—but the narrative must be pursued and sought out. This viewer is the seeker in a game of hide-and-seek. By withholding identification in this way, the painting discloses not a single story but the impulse for tale-telling itself.

**Looking Under the Carpet**

Many Islamic carpets express the idea of paradise as heavenly garden, to which the Muslim prayer mat is seen as a gate. Mona Hatoum's Prayer Mat (1995; plate 18) speaks of no heaven, however, unless it be the painty threshold to heaven that some see in manifrom or sacrificial self-immolation. From a distance the man's thick darkness promises a surface as soft as velvet; it is actually made of upward-pointing brass pins. Into this hostile site the artist has inserted a compass, such as Muslims use to orient themselves toward Mecca in their daily prayers.

Since Hatoum herself is a Christian, her choice of subject matter in Prayer Mat is unconnected to her faith. Nor does it relate to her origins: the child of Palestinian exiles, she was born in Beirut, and neither Palestine nor Lebanon is particularly known for the production of carpets. The meaning of the work must then be sought elsewhere. Having gone to England for a visit in 1975, Hatoum was unable to return home as Lebanon fell into a war of ethnicities and religions that would last until 1991. Although her work, with rare exceptions, is without explicit ethnic reference, it is profoundly infused with the experience of exile. When the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish asks "Who am I, without Exile?," he defines a condition that is also Hatoum's. The compass in the sculpture may then indicate the search for direction on the part of the exiles, of whatever ethnicity or religion, and the pins the painful bed on which he or she must kneel. The prayer mat imagery is Islamic but the content is both personal and universal.
On formal grounds too, Hattum treats contentiously turf. As a geometric floor piece in low relief, Prayer Mat immediately cites the work of the American sculptor Carl Andre and more generally Minimalism at large, even while its use of ready-made objects (compass and pins) derives from the antithetical tradition of Marcel Duchamp. The result is a hybrid offshoring, perhaps with a grudge against the Minimalist parent, who would not have shared Hatoum’s regard for either hand labor (the pins are handsewn into the canvas support) or referential, emotional, worldly content. Even so, both the Minimalist and the Duchampian references link Hattoum to contemporary art in Europe and the United States, as opposed to the context of Islam.

Prayer Mat has affinities with a work that in conventional terms may be the most Islamic-looking object in the exhibition, in the sense that it is visually closest to a source in Islamic art: the untitled carpet from 1996-97 by the American artist MIKE KELLEY (plate 17). The pattern is based on a Turkish carpet in the collection of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 12), and Kelley had it woven in Iran. But that doesn’t make it either Turkish or Iranian: the original is already a hybrid of Turkish and Persian influences.51 and Kelley, trying “to make something that wasn’t Turkish,”52 produced an object more hybrid still by changing the ground from red to green, a color more pertinent to his own, Irish-American background than to anything in Ottoman carpets.53 He also replaced the motifs in the central medallion with a group of the hex signs—fulp, heart, and bird—traditionally used by the Pennsylvania Dutch people of the northeastern United States to decorate houses and barns. The central, cloverleaf shahrook is of course an Irish emblem, indeed a symbol of the Irish nation. Kelley’s carpet may wear an oriental mask but it is a fully cross-polminated, like Hatoum in Prayer Mat. Kelley seems to be criticizing Minimalism in his untitled carpet. In fact the American artists of the 1960s attacked aesthetic procrustes and rigid, system-based intellectual procedures of all kinds, and Minimalism was among the most visible targets. Kelley’s carpet is ornament, handmade, and hybrid—hybrid to start with and made more so by his interventions. Both he and Hatoum have taken a reference from the Islamic world—an anomaly for both artists—and turned it against a Western aesthetic authority. At a time of escalating global divisions, Kelley’s carpet has an added meaning: as a combination of orientalism and Americanism, it undermines those who base quick identifications and analyses on a supposedly “Islamic” appearance.

The carpets of SHRIMAHA SAMBAHI render the rubric “Islamic” even more problematic. Born in Iran, Shahbazi lives in Zurich and travels the world taking photographs that she then transfers into a variety of different mediums including carpets. Subjects she may photograph in Zurich, Harare, or Shanghai (plate 22) join a global tribe of itinerant signs that migrate among mediums. The young Swiss woman in Women 02-2003 and Farah 08-2004 (plates 19 and 20), for instance, appears first in photographs that bear a family resemblance to advertising images and that Shahbazi passed to Iranian billboard painters whom she saw to Venice for the 2003 Biennale. There the artists converted the images into murals, oversized contemporary Madonnas—a reference clarified by the rendering of a giant lily, the Christian symbol of the Annunciation, on the ceiling above them (fig. 13). Inomatsted next as carpets, the images have shrunk back down in size, being reduced to the dimensions of small oil paintings. Now, as portraits, still lifes, and landscapes, they invite association with classic genres of Western painting. Although they address the Islamic carpet tradition, they do not function as carpets; the change in scale, and the transfer among mediums, affirm their identities as shifting signs, as well as Shahbazi’s resistance to rigid identifications and the right she claims of infinity to any supposedly rigid origin.

Identity in Question

The notion of gender looms large in discussions of Islamic identity, which often focus on the veil worn by many Muslim women. In Western perception, the veil or chador has come to symbolize an asymmetry of power between men and women in the Islamic world. Inside that world, however, the veil confirms no single set of beliefs. Rather the Islamic code of modest dress may indeed be repressively enforced, but the wearing of the veil may also signify respect to colonial and later secular powers, may be a relatively neutral matter of custom, may express religious faith, or may express social status. In short the veil involves a spectrum of meanings that shift from one geographic, historical, and social context to another.54 It is no surprise that artists react to this array of signification in highly idiosyncratic ways. Untitled I and II (1996, plates 23 and 24), a photographic installation by the Kandjani, half-Iranian artist JANANIE AL-ANI, conveys this complexity in visual terms. In part, Al-ANI is reacting to the orientalist vision of the idee, lascivious Orientalist exemplified in paintings such as Irving’s Turkish Bath (1862-63), or in photographs such as the Comtesse de Dior-Mesnil’s Portrait of a Mahometan Woman (1860; fig. 14).55 She also takes on that vision’s mirror image: the fully veiled Islamic woman whom many Westerners consider oppressed, Al-ANI’s work addresses, or reacts against, a construct produced in representation by the phenomenon of orientalism.56 The artist confirms that her work is “not about an East/West binary but about the construction of that binary through Orientalist art and literature.”57

In Untitled I and II, two photographs that in exhibition are installed facing each other, Al-ANI, her mother, and her three sisters perform a process of becoming: from left to right of the
Approached through the lens of her Egyptian origin, Fadwa El Guindi's work explores the complexity of identity, both as an expression of personal history and as a means of challenging societal norms.

El Guindi's work often delves into the intersection of art and activism, using photography to document and critique the experiences of women in the Middle East. Her images are powerful representations of the struggles and resilience of women in the region, highlighting the importance of maintaining cultural heritage and the impact of external influences on traditional practices.

In her photographic series, El Guindi often incorporates elements of Arabic calligraphy, which is a rich and ancient form of art that has been passed down through generations. This not only adds a layer of aesthetic beauty to her work but also serves as a means of preserving and celebrating the language and culture.

The series "Identity" is a poignant example of El Guindi's approach to documenting the experiences of women in the Middle East. The images are not just visual representations of the people and places she captures, but also serve as a means of empowerment and expression. El Guindi has been a tireless advocate for women's rights and has used her art as a tool to bring attention to issues such as domestic violence and the need for greater equality.

In conclusion, Fadwa El Guindi's work is a testament to the power of art as a means of personal and cultural expression. Her photographs speak to the complexities of identity and the challenges faced by women in the Middle East, while also serving as a call to action for change and progress.
traditionally worn by Arab men—but the pattern of Hatoum’s kaftan is embroidered using strands of women’s hair, in an interweaving of the two gendres in one fabric. Hatoum recognizes “a kind of quiet protest” in the art of embroidery, which, like Reischak and Amin, she attributes to women.10 In Kaftan, then, she is subtly giving women visibility, through both the work’s medium and its technique. And she is engaging women’s voices in a garment that she sees as “a potent symbol of Arab resistance,”11 and one that, as “a symbol of struggle . . . has a definite macho aura around it.”12 Along with Prayer Mat, Kaftan is one of Hatoum’s few works with an ethnic reference.

Beside defacing machoism with a feminine intervention, Hatoum neutralizes another dualism. Her one visual, the regular, meshlike pattern of the kaftan is both constituted and outlawed by something literally organic, the women’s hair that in places overcomes the work’s edge and spreads beyond them in curls and tufts. In making political art, Hatoum does not sacrifice matters of aesthetic form but enlivens their oppositional possibilities. That central pattern, while traditional for kaftans, also recalls wire fencing, directing our attention to the loss of land, home, and country—topics of vital importance to Palestinians. But Hatoum addresses those issues metaphorically and through the intimation of the uncanny, making a familiar object seem strange and uncertain. The late Edward Said once wrote of Hatoum, “no one has put the Palestinian experience in visual terms so astutely and yet so playfully, so compellingly and at the same moment so allusively.”13

The Lebanese artist WALID RAAD takes the identity debate in the direction of fiction, pushing truth into a falsehood, authenticity into fabrication. Raad works in many mediums, including film, text, and performance, but his most frequent accomplishment is photography, perhaps because the photograph has so often been seen as a neutral, accurate documentary record. Simulating the roles of historian, archivist, and reporter of facts, Raad works repeatedly and serially, as many Western photographers have done. Concealing both his artfulness and himself, he hides behind a putative collective, The Atlas Group, supposedly founded to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon, and in particular the civil wars of 1975–1990. The Group keeps archives in Beirut, Raad’s native city, and New York, where he lives and teaches. It was founded in 1967, 1976, or 1999, depending on what you are reading,14 the confirmation of fact by error is part of Raad’s intention, reflecting an effort to keep the authority of the willers of history. Making frequent appearances in his work, for example, are documents supposedly bequeathed to The Atlas Group’s archives by “a Dr. Fakhoury,” the “most renowned historian of Lebanon” until his death in 1992.15 Dr. Fakhoury is actually an invention of Raad’s. Among the documents preserved in the archives is the group of photographs titled CivilRationality. We Do Not Olig Hotels to Buy Ourselves (2003; plates 39–62). An accompanying statement announces that these images, “the only photographs of Dr. Fakhoury,” are “a series of self-portraits he produced during his one and only trip outside of Lebanon, to Paris and Rome in 1996 and 1999.” Rumor has it that the actual photographer was Raad’s father, who took those self-portrait snaps (which in some cases the artist has scanned or otherwise manipulated) during trips of his own.16 Truth dispels, disappearances spread—but Raad has discussed his work in terms of the binary of fiction and non-fiction.17 Even if the photograph actually shows the father’s trip to Europe, in some less convincing way they may also represent the fictive Dr. Fakhoury, a Lebanese nationalist visiting the grand landmarks of the colonial civilizations. They may also be telling as mnemonic records of the times before 9/11, when a Middle Eastern visitor could pose innocently and unproblematically among the monuments of the Western capitals. As straightforward fact the photographs suppress tensions that in other dimensions they may reveal. Behind these innocuous tourist snapshots lurks a charged narrative.

On Spirituality

Griber has argued that the word “Islamic” does not refer to the art of a particular religion—that “works of art demonstrably made by and for non-Muslims can appropriately be studied as works of Islamic art.”18 In this postwar moment, the term may seem too tightly tied to the religion of Islam to allow any secular meaning, but artists from the Islamic world are by no means all practicing Muslims or, for that matter, Muslims at all. The Art In The Middle East currently refers directly to Islam and to religious beliefs, but a sense of spirituality does appear, not necessarily anchored in any one creed.

The work of KULTUG ATAMAN offers little insight into what his faith might be. Whether his subject is a Turkmen opera singer, an Englishwoman with a passion for amyril plants, or a German artist-collector, his art in general testifies to an interest in unusual people, and so to a desire for pluralism. Twelve (2003; fig. 15) should be viewed in this context; it revolves around interviews with six members of the Alveva community, a Shiite subgroup—and in Turkey, a secular country with a Sunni majority. Shitais are already a minority, the Alvevas believe in reincarnation and the transmigration of souls. Ataman’s six interviewees reveal their past and present lives in seamless narrative, and in the context of his work this video installation highlights, in his own words, the idea that “all documentary is a narrative and all narrative is constructed. All narrative, hence all lives, are in the end created as art by the subject.”19

A more personal approach to spirituality, or to at least events implicating it, appears in Ataman’s 99 Names (2000; please 63 higher levels in the space, so that the man appears to take flight. The screens may also be set up so that his pounding movements seem directed against the architecture around him. Is this intention, or may we ask, an ecstatic experience or a baring of the darker side of humanity? Is his violence the logical conclusion of following a certain path or the result of a deviance from it? 99 Names is Ataman’s visceral response to 9/11.

The expression of spirituality need not be linked to any specific faith. As it was written by the thirteenth-century Persian poet and mystic Jalal al-Din Muhammad, also known as Mawlawi and as Rumi: What is to be done O Mawlawi? For I do not recognize myself. I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gazi, nor Moslem. I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea. I am not of Nature's mind, nor of the circling heavens . . . I am not of India, nor of China, nor of Bulgaria, nor of Saxen. I am not of the kingdom of Iskand, nor of the country of Khurasan . . . My place is this Piacicelo, my trace is the Traceless 'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved. I have put dusty away, I have seen the two worlds are one One I seek, One I know, One see, One I call'20

Houhliari, the Iranian painter Y.Z. KAMI, and the American video artist Bill Viola all draw strength and inspiration from Rumi and from other spiritual masters and poets. All proceed with an eye turned inward. This shared interest is striking in the context of this essay, which sets out to reflect the confluence of "Eastern" and "Western" and to affirm the common humanity confined by this binary structure. Kami’s posture may describe outer surfaces but seeks the inner light, what the artist calls “the soul.” A face for him is a site of epiphany, in the sense defined by Emmanuel Lévinas, whose classes Kami attended at the Sorbonne, Paris, in the late 1970s.21 A Kami portrait, then, is really about the sitter, each appearance partakes to something larger—a sense of some overall human self. Kami’s paintings create a human kinship, turning solitary individuals into a fraternity, a tribe, the community of humanity. Kami often conceals his portraits in series, through each one is highly individualized. The works of the early 1990s were inspired by Faramarz parallelle, painted in Egypt in the first to-third centuries A.D. as funerary imagery, and therefore intimating associations of mortality. In the series of the past decade, there are figures that blur, tremble, and visually withdraw. Their retreating presence, however, remains as intense as that of the other,
fully focused portraits. These essays encourage meditation on the flow between presence and absence, and on impermanence and change.

For the series to which the two works in Without Boundary belong, Kami began by photographing visitors to a meditation center in Vermont. His paintings treat the people he met there with old master grandeur. Speaking in terms of Jungian archetypes, Kami likens the female figure here (2004–5; plate 66) to Sophie, "the woman wisdom of God," also understood as the mother of God.19 Her regal serenity, Kami acknowledges, also recalls the Madonna of Piero della Francesca's Misericordia polyptych (fig. 16).20 The composition picture (2004–5; plate 66), an archetype of a different gender and age, is equally simple and serene. The series featuring these two figures, the former fully present and the latter on the threshold to elsewhere, passes from Christian to Eastern modes in its spiritual references, transcending geographic boundaries. The subdued palette and dry, freesco-like quality of the surface reinforce the paintings' aura of sanctity.

Kami's vocabulary derives not just from old master painting but from the academic realist art of his native Iran. Initially derived from Europe, and embraced in part in reaction against the abstraction of traditional Islamic art, this kind of work, close

16. Piero della Francesca, Polittico ecclesi Misericordia (Misericordia polyptych; detail), 1445–62. Oil and tempera on panel, 8' 11 1/2" x 10' 8" x 7/8" (273 x 336 cm). Musco Civico, Sansepolcro.


19. Constantin Brancusi, Endless Column (1917), Cast iron and steel, 90' x 320.8 m. High. Public sculpture, Târgu Jiu, Romania.

and the artist describes it in terms of "absence of form, absence of mass and presence of shadow." The form soars into space only to seem to remove itself and disappear, like a ghost. It becomes apparent through light while simultaneously converting light into shadow. As it dances around its skeletal axis, it too is engaged in the same.

In its formal heritage too, White Shadow confirms the influence rather than opposition, giving influences that range from the spiral minaret of the Great Mosque of al-Mutawakkil in Samarra, Iraq (fig. 18), built in the ninth century A.D., to Constantin Brancusi's Endless Column (1917; fig. 19), in Târgu Jiu, Romania. The work is also the most recent of the series of towers created by Houshary and Homey—by the last of them, tellingly, in the vicinity of the absent twin towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. The contradictions of tradition and modernity, the spiritual and the scientific—or of Islamic and non-Islamic modes—are translated in these structures, which can link such opposites. In the physical structure of the towers, the artist animates the double helix of human genetics with the dance of a whirling dervish.

Like Kami and Houshary, the American artist BILL VIOLA is well versed in the mystical literature of Europe and Asia. In particular, Viola has said that he considers Rumi a "supreme source of inspiration."21 Viola has relented the video diptych Sundara (2001; plates 67–70) to the teachings of Rumi.22 Two vertically stacked screens show images of a man and of a woman, each image placed to suggest a minor reflection of the other. As if seeking to merge, the two figures bow in each other's direction. Each projection brings them closer to each other, until they finally seem to touch—at which point we realize that the images we are watching seem to be reflections in water, which breaks into shimmering ripples that dissolve into abstraction. Discussing this work, Viola quotes Rumi: "He who sees only his own reflection in the water is not a lover of love"23 Viol's search beyond the reflection unites him with Kami, who looks to the surface for something beyond the world of appearances. Houshary similarly seeks "to capture the substance or the essence of things rather than the thing itself."24 All of these artists observe human life with awe and compassion.

The artists joined in Without Boundary are a widespread, disparate group in art's global mainstream. They come from Algeria, Egypt, India, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, and Turkey, and their work manifest both ruptures and links with their places of origin. But the exhibition reveals what they share: a tie based not in ethnicity or religion, but in their way of relating, inverting, and challenging the aesthetic traditions they deal with, and of bringing preconceived notions of cultural homogeneity to an end. Their close juxtaposition in Without Boundary reveals the idiosyncrasies of their personal approaches, and therefore the fallacy of basing our perceptions of them—as artists, as people—on a single collective difference.

Where calligraphy rules elbowed with the digital and goons with abstraction, where carpet shrivels to the size of an academic still life and where the small-scale exedra of the miniature fills an immense all-over surface, we are no longer in territories defined by origin or by Western traditions. Rather, we face erased borders and an expansion of the pool of signs and references, a revelation of new possibilities. The ones these artists hold have of course sprung from specific situations, but their modes of expression take into account other histories and perceptions. A critique of calligraphy, for instance, may also subvert Abstract Expressionism; exile may be explored through a language that undermines Minimalism; a comic book may host stories from an Islamic revolution; veiled women may unsettle the Western gaze. Such complexities bar the use of "Islamic" as a term of convenience. "European" or "American" are equally inapplicable. The rich texture of expression exceeds the binary opposition. And this is the reason for bringing these artists together, although they belong to no one culture and have neither initiated nor constituted a movement or school. Pointing to a phenomenon one might call Post-Orientalism, they resist essentialist notions of who they are. Their multicultural selves speak not collectively but individually. Maintaining the freedom to criticize as well as to celebrate, they bald the mentality of division. They are unconcerned with the binary oppositions of present-day politics, whether cultural or global—including "Islamic or not."
Jananne Al-Ani
Kutlug Ataman
Mona Hatoum
Pip Horne
Shirazeh Houshiary
Emily Jacir
Y.Z. Kami
Mike Kelley
Rachid Koraïchi
Shirin Neshat

At a time when the Islamic world is the subject of extraordinary interest in the West, Without Boundary explores the work of a number of artists who come from that world but live elsewhere, in cities ranging from Paris to New York to Buenos Aires. How do these artists address the cultural legacy of Islam, and is their work connected by any common thread? Fereshteh Daftari, organizer of the MoMA exhibition that this book accompanies, proposes a pause in the rush to quick conclusions. Without Boundary also contains an essay by Homi Bhabha, the preeminent theorist and scholar of the postcolonial condition, and a prose piece by the Turkish writer and novelist Orhan Pamuk, author of My Name Is Red and Snow.

The Atlas Group/Walid Raad
Marjane Satrapi
Shirana Shahbazi
Raqib Shaw
Shahzia Sikander
Bill Viola