



23
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BOLOGNA ITALY

fiera internazionale d'arte moderna e
contemporanea
international exhibition of modern and
contemporary art

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Opening January 22 - 7 p.m.

**TOO EARLY TOO LATE
MIDDLE EAST AND MODERNITY**
curated by Marco Scotini

Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna
January 22 – April 12, 2015

Following the success of last year's exhibition *The Empty Pedestal* on the former Soviet bloc, the 2015 programme of Arte Fiera Collectors' World now features the most far-reaching exhibition ever held in Italy on the Middle East art scene: ***Too Early, Too Late. Middle East and Modernity***. Curated by Marco Scotini, the show will present almost 60 artists, more than 100 works - on loan from Italy's most prestigious private collections - and historic documents to examine how this part of the world relates to Western modernity and how it narrates the story of its own complex social structure in a 'cultural area' undergoing a sea change.

Too Early, Too Late will be staged in the temporary exhibition area of Bologna's Pinacoteca Nazionale (National Art Gallery) but will also spill over into spaces occupied by the gallery's magnificent collection of 14th century artists (from Vitale da Bologna through to the late Gothic schools). This is a reminder that Bologna, "the Learned", was, with Paris, Oxford, Avignon and Salamanca, one of the five cities in which the Council of Vienne of 1312 decided to set up faculties of Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac, laying the basis for Oriental studies in the Christian West.

But it was in 1798 with the arrival in Egypt of **Napoleon's army of exploration** that modern Western thought burst in upon Muslim thinking.

The exhibition alternates documentary evidence - including original archival material - with installations, photographs and film footage illustrating many fundamental cultural, political and social episodes that marked the progressive Westernisation of the Eastern world - from the introduction of the 'nation state' to the spectacular, Western-style museums of the Arab Emirates. By showing the historic background and spanning a broad timeframe through many narratives, the exhibition allows visitors to put more recent cultural and artistic production into perspective.

In light of the area's current urgent geopolitical situation, the exhibition ***Too Early, Too Late*** tries, through the prism of art, to examine the commonly held beliefs that have down the years underpinned both the clash but also the dialogue in this area between traditional systems and western-style modernity.

"With the collapse of the Soviet Union", writes the exhibition's curator Marco Scotini, "the two bloc system of the Cold War seems to have been replaced by a new dichotomy - between Islam and the West. By the same token, the void left by the alternative to capitalism seems to have been filled by nationalist, ethnic and religious identities. The former 'political' stand-off seems to have been replaced by a 'conflict of civilisations' based on a range of political systems whose cultural traditions range from the archaic to the advanced, each with their own idea of modernity (al-hadatha)."

The term Middle East sums up a European geopolitical concept and was coined by a British newspaper at the turn of the previous century. Although still used widely, today, however, it denotes a theoretical concept rather than an actual geographical region. ***Too Early, Too Late*** uses the term to represent an area that extends to North Africa, the Caucasus and Central Asia, especially since today's centre of gravity is tending to shift from the Arab world towards Turkey and Iran: from Egypt to Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and from Azerbaijan to the edges of Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. Indeed Turkey and Istanbul are central features of the exhibition, their geographical position making them the gateway to the East, something that was reinforced politically with the advent of the Ataturk Republic in 1924.

The curator has not attempted with this Exhibition to record or rewrite history, even a broad spectrum of momentous events are considered. Nor is there any attempt to sum up with hindsight the visual and linguistic



BolognaFiere spa
Viale della Fiera, 20 - 40127 Bologna, Italia
Tel. +39 051 282111 - Fax +39 051 6374004
segreteria.generale@bolognafiery.it
PEC bolognafiery@pec.bolognafiery.it
Capitale sociale 93.780.000,00 i.v.
C. F. - P. IVA e Reg. Imp. BO 00312600372 - REA BO367296

Informazioni e prenotazioni / Info and reservation
VIP Desk Arte Fiera
Tel./Ph. +39 051 282856/46
Fax +39 051 6374022
vipdesk.artefiera@bolognafiery.it



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codes used in the West to represent the Middle East. **Too Early, Too Late** tries to reconstruct the story of when the West encountered the Muslim world. With its focus on the contemporary art scene, it adopts a specific 'topographic viewpoint' from which to observe this area, developing a series of linked themes that together make up the overall discourse of the exhibition.

Exhibits include rare pieces like the only remaining copy of the film footage of *Tel al Zaatar* (1977) and the "Taccuino Persiano" by Michel Foucault written for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* on the pro-Komeini uprising in Teheran (1979).

The title of the Exhibition, **Too Early, Too Late**, echoes **Jean-Marie Straub** and **Danièle Huillet's** 1981 film on Egypt **Trop tôt/Trop tard** that puts historic events into a quite different perspective. A true masterpiece, the film looks at the peasant uprisings in France in 1789 and in Egypt in 1952. Shifting from the Breton countryside to rural Egypt, in the first half a voice-off reads a letter by Engels to Karl Kautsky dated 1897 in which he considers what the French Revolution has left behind. In the second part, the commentator reads a passage of the postscript of the book *La lutte des classes en Egypte de 1945 à 1968* by two Arab writers who published under the pseudonym Mahmoud Hussein (Maspero, 1969). Throughout the film the two directors constantly searched the horizon of the deserted Egyptian countryside for an ideal point between sky and earth where Engels could have said: "if the 1793 Commune with its aspirations of fraternity came too early, Babeuf, for his part, came too late".

Serge Daney's description of the film as one of the few that have tried to film the wind could also be the metaphor for this second exhibition. In the first, *The Empty Pedestal*, the invisible force - something that is there but cannot be seen - was the spectre or ghost. Here, it is the wind that in the Straub-Huillet film shakes the trees, first in the French then in the Egyptian countryside. It is the wind of revolutionary that overturns the established order. In the compacted space and time of an exhibition, **Too Early, Too Late** takes a new look at the Middle East – a Western colonial concept – and proposes a different narrative, one of dominion and emancipation.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a volume edited by **Mousse Publishing**. As well as an interview with Jean-Marie Straub on the film that gives its title to the project, the book includes numerous contributions on how they see the West, an essay by Hamadi Redissi and a critique by the exhibition curator Marco Scotini.

The exhibition has been made possible thanks to the curatorial consultancy given by Lorenzo Paini and the loans of artworks generously offered by major private Italian collections, especially Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Collezione Enea Righi, Collezione La Gaia di Torino,

Fondazione Giuliani, Fondazione Fotografia Modena, Collezione Agiverona, Collezione Palmigiano, Fondazione Nomas, Fondazione Videoinsight.

Artists:

Lida Abdul, Mustafa Abu Ali, Bisan Abu Eiseh, Etel Adnan, Vyacheslav Akhunov, Can Altay, Omar Amiralay, Ayreen Anastas, Said Atabekov, Kutlug Ataman, Fikret Atay, Kader Attia, Vahap Avsar, Mahmoud Bakhshi, Gabriele Basilico, Neil Beloufa, CANAN, Céline Condorelli, Dina Danish, Cem Dinlenmiş, Peter Friedl, Rene Gabri, Sadhi Ghadirian, Yervan Gianikian - Angela Ricci Lucchi, Barbad Golshiri, Mona Hatoum, Malak Helmy, Emily Jacir, Khaled Jarrar, Lamia Joreige, Alimjan Jorobaev, Hiwa K., Hassan Khan, Abbas Kiarostami, Taus Makhacheva, Mona Marzouk, Ahmed Mater, Sabah Naim, Moataz Nasr, Navid Nuur, Walid Raad, Koka Ramishvili, Hany Rashed, Mario Rizzi, Ahmed Sabry, Roy Samaha, Hrair Sarkissian, Ariel Schlesinger, Hassan Sharif, Wael Shawky, Ahlam Shibli, Eyal Sivan, Jean Marie Straub-Danièle Huillet, Jinoos Taghizadeh, Lawrence Weiner, Mohanad Yaqubi, Amir Yatziv, Akram Zaatari.



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