

Introduction: Transnational Feminisms and the Decolonisation of the History of Art

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DURING THE PREPARATIONS OF THIS book, in January 2020, the Department of History of Art at Yale University announced that they would stop teaching their decades-old introductory survey course due to ‘the impossibility of adequately covering the entire field—and its varied cultural backgrounds—in one course’. Reports claim that ‘this change is the latest response to student [and, one can only surmise, some faculty] uneasiness over an idealized Western “canon”—a product of an overwhelmingly white, straight, European and male cadre of artists’.¹ Of course, Yale is not the first institution of higher education in the USA to bring global art histories to the fore in teaching. For example, a number of institutions have strong ties with modern and contemporary art from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)—such as the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Initiative at the University of North Texas. What is ‘new’ about Yale’s latest endeavour is that an established and influential art history department in the ‘West’ has publicly announced its plans to modify its curricula and remove a long-established survey course in order to incorporate the decolonisation of art history *at first-year level*. Over thirty years since the rise of postcolonial art history in the late 1980s, we are only now starting to witness the integration (albeit slow-paced) of these ideas into undergraduate survey teaching in the History of Art. Therefore, it is not surprising that in its January 2020 issue, *Art History*, the peer-reviewed publication of the UK-based Association for Art History (AAH) invited international art historians, curators and artists to discuss the ‘current calls to “decolonize art history”’.² The compelling way that Pamela N. Corey, one of the thirty respondents, describes the project of decolonising art history resonates deeply with the purpose of this volume. As Corey notes, ‘To decolonize art history now is to cite, expose, and critically respond to the structures and residues of the colonial project as they have shaped the discipline and its institutionalization.’ She adds that transparent art historical responses and interventions are required and the decolonisation process ‘also involves engaging in the work of decentralizing and reconfiguring modes of creating, representing, and disseminating knowledge’.³

¹ Margaret Hedeman and Matt Kristoffersen, ‘Art History Department to Scrap Survey Course’, *Yale Daily News* (24 January 2020), <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2020/01/24/art-history-department-to-scrap-survey-course/> (accessed 26 January 2020).

² Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, ‘Decolonizing Art History’, *Art History*, 43:1 (2020), 10.

³ Pamela N. Corey, ‘Decolonizing Art History’, *Art History*, 43:1 (2020), 19.

The debate around the idealised ‘Western canon’ and calls for decolonising the History of Art are not new to the field.⁴ Art history has always been restrained within the politics of the (art) world, which has been entrenched in colonial histories investing in the art of certain countries only for the long-term global economic interest, in order to market them as ethnic or religion-specific products.⁵ Recognising these issues in the discipline, a number of scholars called for pioneering change to open the art canon to acknowledge modern and contemporary art produced by artists in various countries around the world; many also demanded ‘deep historicization, evaluation and critical study’ of art from areas such as MENA.⁶ The framework provided by postcolonial studies, feminism and intersectionality has offered tools to move art history beyond the limits of an outdated canonical tradition. Griselda Pollock was one of the first scholars to point out that the discipline has long upheld a structure only focusing on white, European, male creativity.⁷ Okwui Enwezor and Salah Hassan raised important questions about looking beyond the conventional European and American practices of art history; alternatively, they considered local and regional influences in the production of art.⁸ To the same end, Hamid Keshmirshakan argued for the exploration of the encounters among local, national as well as global discourses which condition the production of art in order to understand the art from these geographies.⁹ Responding to the conventional ‘centring’ of art history in Europe and America, in their book *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel claimed that the traditional ‘Western’ methods in art history seem ‘increasingly unsatisfactory, as notions of cultural mixing, decentering, and interchange have become prevalent’.¹⁰ Building on Enwezor and Hassan, James Elkins emphatically claimed that further emphasis on translocal and transnational encounters, in order to tease out conditions of global exchange, could lead to the development of new methodologies in art history.¹¹ In keeping with Hassan and Enwezor’s ideas, yet adding a gendered dimension to art and transnationalism, in 1994 Salwa Mikdadi curated

⁴ In the context of this book, when reference is made to ‘Western’ or ‘non-Western’ or ‘Western canon’ (all in quotation marks) we are referring to outdated historical definitions.

⁵ Hilary Robinson, ‘Introduction’, in Hilary Robinson (ed.), *Feminism–Art–Theory 1968–2010* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 3–4.

⁶ Nada Shabout, ‘Art without History? Evaluating “Arab” Art: An Introduction’, *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 42:1–2 (2008), 16. See also Saeb Eigner, *Art of the Middle East: Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World and Iran* (London: Merrell, 2010); Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi and Nada Shabout (eds), *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009).

⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

⁸ Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994* (Munich: Prestel, 2003); Salah M. Hassan, ‘The Modernist Experience in African Art: Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-Cultural Aesthetics’, in Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (eds), *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1999), pp. 214–35. For an extended discussion on transcultural exchange and contemporary art from the MENA region in the History of Art see Mary Kelly, ‘New Meanings for Orientalism: A Visual Dialogue with Contemporary Artists from the Middle East and North Africa’, in William Greenwood and Lucien de Guise (eds), *Inspired by the East: How the Islamic World Influenced Western Art* (London: British Museum with Thames & Hudson, 2019), pp. 94–103.

⁹ Hamid Keshmirshakan, ‘Trauma, Memory and History’, in Hamid Keshmirshakan (ed.), *Contemporary Art from the Middle East: Regional Interactions with Global Art Discourses* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), pp. 18–22.

¹⁰ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1–3.

¹¹ For a comprehensive discussion on a global history of art see James Elkins, ‘Art History as a Global Discipline’, in James Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 3–24.

the exhibition *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, which attempted to challenge the distorted views of Arab women prevalent in American societies. In addition, the exhibition and accompanying catalogue of essays further challenged conventional understandings of modern and contemporary art as centred in ‘Western’ civilisations.¹² Likewise, building towards a transnational dialogue which includes Arab women’s art, in 1999 Fran Lloyd produced the exhibition and book *Contemporary Arab Women’s Art: Dialogues of the Present*. Lloyd brought together eighteen Arab artists, including Malika Agueznay and Rima Farah, who presented their statements and biographies, while scholarly essays by Lloyd, Siamee H. Keelan, Tina Sherwell and Mikdadi highlighted artists’ engagements with the broad subject of Arab identities. The book and exhibition evoked themes such as gender, religion, regionalism, heritage and diaspora, as well as the reception of Arab women’s art in America and the issue of capitalism—all for the purpose of galvanising a more engaged cross-cultural discourse in contemporary art.¹³

Highlighting the inherent issues concerning conventional understandings of modern and contemporary art, Nada Shabout also noted that art history as a practice is ‘often disengaged from the historical development of the art it describes’.¹⁴ Shabout pointed to the scholarly issues that arise if only certain art historical practices and theories—combined with limited knowledge of various local histories—are employed during analyses of art objects. That is, the conventional European and/or American understandings of modern and contemporary art could create numerous ‘borders’ and potential misreadings when working with art objects from MENA. Departing from conventional ‘Western’ scholarship, various MENA countries have very different art historical ideas about the origins and timelines of modernism, and the knowledge of this recent scholarship is imperative to understanding contemporary art from the area.¹⁵ In addition, the cultural, historical, socio-political and religious variances depicted, as well as language difference and issues of translation, all create countless ‘borders’ in the making of meaning. These matters demonstrate the ways in which the discipline is still deeply rooted in colonial art history and the English-speaking world, indicating the crucial need for publications such as *Under the Skin: Feminist Art and Art Histories from the Middle East and North Africa Today* to further challenge and structurally intervene in art history.

This collection of chapters contributes to these ongoing discussions in art history by bringing together the latest debates and scholarship on modern and contemporary art practices and histories from MENA that are predominantly informed by feminisms and the aforementioned decolonisation of the History of Art. Discussing the diverse modes of art production, history writing and theoretical perspectives in approaching, displaying and analysing the visual culture from the area, the volume provides a cross-section of art, narratives and curating practices from the 1950s until 2020, while revealing new critical information for debates on feminisms from MENA. It therefore

¹² Salwa Mikdadi (ed.), *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World* (Washington, DC: International Council for Women in the Arts, National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994).

¹³ Fran Lloyd (ed.), *Contemporary Arab Women’s Art: Dialogues of the Present* (London: Women’s Art Library, 1999).

¹⁴ Nada Shabout, ‘Are Images Global?’ *Tate Papers: Tate’s Online Research Journal*, 12 (2009), 2, <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7276> (accessed 1 September 2019).

¹⁵ For select further reading on modern art from different MENA countries see Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Anneka Lenssen, Sarah A. Rogers and Nada M. Shabout (eds), *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Octavian Esanu (ed.), *Art, Awakening, and Modernity in the Middle East: The Arab Nude* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Patrick Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Prita Meier, ‘Authenticity and its Modernist Discontents: The Colonial Encounter and African and Middle Eastern Art History’, *Arab Studies Journal*, 18:1 (2010), 12–45.

offers an understanding on how art responds to and shapes cultural attitudes towards gender and sexuality, ethnicity/race, religion, tradition, modernity and contemporaneity, and local and global politics. Emphasising one of its main concerns in the title, *Under the Skin*, this volume is set out to show what is beneath the surface, under skin, body, colour and provenance, and not the cultural fixities or partial views detached from the realities of communities, cultures and practices from the area. It thus considers art informed by feminism through the translocal and transnational lenses of the diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups not solely as a manifestation of multiple and complex social constructions but also as a crucial subject of analysis in the project of decolonising art history and contemporary visual culture. To this end, *Under the Skin* brings together complex histories of diverse contexts from Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. The aim is not to represent all of the countries from MENA but to present a cross-section that reflects the variety of nations, cultures, languages and identities across the area, including those of Amazigh Berbers, Mizrahi Jews, and Kurdish, Muslim, Christian, Arab, Persian and Armenian peoples. And it strives to strike a balance by connecting the studies of the scholars based in Europe and North America with those attached to institutions in MENA in order to stimulate new and different feminist and decolonial perspectives and debates on art and visual culture from the latter area. The editors hope that this discussion will bring a challenge to the views that reproduce identical representations of MENA identities while providing a far-reaching understanding of diverse cultures.

Accounts of transnational feminisms have been rising in scholarly debates since the 1970s—since the first studies on the experiences of black women challenged European feminism, whose uniform views on women appeared to stem from only the cultural context of the white woman.¹⁶ Transnational perspectives in feminism have henceforth constituted a strong vein in the study of gender and sexuality. Frameworks that reconsidered the position and experiences of women from the intersecting perspectives of class, ethnicity, religion and culture emerged along the way, expanding feminism's outlook.¹⁷ In an effort to enhance a transnational feminist discourse, responding to the feminist works of Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman and Hélène Cixous, Chandra Talpade Mohanty highlights the issues concerning European and American women's activisms in the Global South. Mohanty shows the dangers of assuming that all women are one coherent group. The author states that 'Western' feminist writers tended to ignore cultural differences between women; she rightly claims that the global experiences of women are extremely diverse and dependent on one's own culture, history and geography. Mohanty states:

¹⁶ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'French Feminism in an International Frame', *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981), 154–84; Gayatri Spivak, 'Nationalism and the Imagination', *Lectora*, 15 (2009), 75–98; Hazel V. Carby, 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 212–35; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practising Solidarity* (1984; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 30 (1988), 61–88; Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), 1241–300; Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Nilüfer Göle, 'Snapshots of Islamic Modernities', *Daedalus*, 1:129 (2000), 91–117; Saba Mahmood, *Women Studies on the Edge* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (London: Oneworld, 2009).

[T]he feminist writings I analyze here discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular ‘Third World Woman’—an image which appears arbitrarily constructed ... Universal images of ‘the third world woman’ (the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.), images constructed from adding the ‘third world difference’ to ‘sexual difference’ are predicated upon (and hence obviously bring into sharper focus) assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives ... It is time to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.¹⁸

Mohanty’s references to the ‘colonial’ or ‘Third World’ woman cannot be applied to many of the artists discussed in this volume. However, it is apt to state that many feminist approaches in art history are deeply fixed, with European and/or American theories about art produced by women, and—for the most part—these ideas stem from ‘Western’ historical and/or contemporary experiences. This was also evidenced by a number of scholarly works on the subject of transnational women’s art that have been published since 2010 in the English language, in which, unfortunately, women artists from MENA countries are rarely included. *Under the Skin*’s rationale also hinges upon and draws attention to this fact: despite calls for decolonisation and some influential writings and exhibitions, most major anthologies of art history have failed to include diverse artistic practices informed by feminism from MENA regions—thus these subjects and practices are excluded from most foundational undergraduate curricula in the history of art in Europe and the USA. Furthermore, many exhibitions also failed to notice the significance of contemporary artists from the area.¹⁹ Most notable is the negligence of recent international feminist exhibitions such as *Global Feminisms* (2007) and *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) that largely overlooked art from MENA regions. This occurred despite scholarship providing evidence that the long-established traditions of various MENA countries have been used in the production of modern art, leading to more recent contemporary practices.²⁰

Under the Skin therefore engages with the aforementioned art historical discourse and politics for the purpose of revealing new critical information about modern and contemporary feminist art practices and histories from the MENA region. As a new resource to be used in the teaching and research of art histories it endeavours to provide an analysis of multiple reverberations of feminist thinking to the extent to which this has been taken up by artists from MENA. *Under the Skin* herein attempts to demonstrate how crucial an understanding of the relationship between feminist politics and visual art in geographies such as this is for comprehending the diverse constructions of gender identities and sexualities in Muslim-majority cultures, ethnicity, dissent and global politics.

Cixous urged woman to ‘write about women and to bring women to writing’ all for the purpose of one goal: universal equality.²¹ Although she attempted to induce a positive move forward for all women, Cixous’ motivations for universalisation are flawed because the author did not adequately

¹⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’, *Boundary 2*, 12:3 (1984), 333–58, at 334, 353–4.

¹⁹ For a discussion of this issue see also Ceren Özpınar, “‘Why Not See Farther and Enlarge the Visual Orb’: Revisiting Fahrelnissa Zeid”, *Third Text* (2018), <http://thirdtext.org/Ozpınar-Fahrelnissa-Zeid> (accessed 20 September 2019); see also Chapter 11 in this volume.

²⁰ Sussan Babaie, ‘Voices of Authority: Locating the “Modern” in “Islamic” Art’, *Getty Research Journal*, 3 (2011), 133.

²¹ Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, in Marta Segarra (ed.), *The Portable Cixous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 27.

account for human difference. *Under the Skin* therefore calls for *all* historians, students and critics to have knowledge of and/or to write about art informed by feminisms. In addition, borrowing select aspects from Mohanty, *Under the Skin* highlights the importance of learning about local engagement with the global, which will further enhance the move towards an inclusive discourse about 20th- and 21st-century feminist practices in art history. It provides a simple acknowledgement that local art histories and individual experiences—which feed into the global—are extremely diverse and are dependent on artists' various culture/s, histories, geographies and methods of self-representation. In *Under the Skin*, the examinations of feminist responses to the transnational and intersectional needs of varied MENA contexts address this oversight. They do so by way of highlighting a number of feminisms, including indigenous, black, religious, queer, intersectional, ecological, socialist, postcolonial and transnational. The book ultimately considers the future of visual art, investigating the rise of new ways and spaces of art-making, such as the digital re-creation of traditional art techniques, and transnational and intercultural artistic networks and narratives. The editors believe these new futures not only arise from locality-specific frameworks such as displacement and migration but also from vernacular debates and ways of new thinking in the area.

Under the Skin has stemmed from the panels that were convened by Özpınar in 2017.²² Offering a critical evaluation of modern and contemporary practices of writing, curating and making art history from MENA regions, these panels channelled discussions into a cross-cultural debate on the latest interactions among feminism, art and art histories. In keeping with the conference vision, this expanded volume further encourages us to think about new ways of writing and reading feminist art histories and art from MENA countries. In addition to the papers presented in the sessions, the editors also sought other essays to comprehensively consider the state of research, and to introduce new scholarship on the work of renowned and emerging artists from the area.

Under the Skin is divided into three overarching parts, each exploring art histories and art practices informed by feminism and decolonisation through various theoretical lenses and themes. The editors recognise these practices cannot fit 'neatly' into the selected themes nor do we believe that the themes presented represent the vast subjects explored in art from MENA regions. Rather, what is presented in this volume are just some of the themes which have galvanised artists to make art—including the political, the personal and/or the aesthetic. Part I disrupts the workings of the colonial art history by putting female agency and resistance from MENA in direct confrontation with national and global discourses. Exploring women's art production in Nasserist Egypt, Nadine Atallah presents the paintings of Inji Efflatoun and Gazbia Sirry. Atallah explores the role of the Egyptian Feminist Union in creating a national voice for women, which infused select socio-political subject matter onto women's canvases. Moving from modern practices in Egypt to contemporary Syria, Charlotte Bank writes of the practices of young contemporary Syrian artists or 'social agents' who blend discussions on women's spaces with a broader national advocacy for social and political change. Bank cautions, however, that the female cause in Syrian societies is just one concern for artists: importantly, she emphatically claims that female art practices in Syria are *not* identified as explicitly 'feminist'. Tal Dekel offers a critical and transnational discussion on

²² Entitled 'Feminist Art Histories and Temporalities in the Middle East and North Africa', these panels took place at the annual conferences of the College Art Association in New York and the Association for Art History in Loughborough in 2017. These sessions brought together eight international scholars for a combined audience of 150 delegates of art historians, curators, academics, artists and an international cohort of feminist and Middle Eastern scholars.

Israeli women who embody colonial pasts, in particular the under-researched dynamic of French/Algerian/Israeli women in contemporary Israel. Through a case study on the works of Jennifer Abessira, Dekel carefully considers issues of identity, homeland and belonging via a complicated lens of gender *and* ethnicity. Through her chapter Dekel strives for a deeper understanding of shared experiences and differences among women from MENA countries. In a similar light, responding to contemporary moments of change and difference in Saudi Arabia, Lina M. Kattan presents an analysis of women's art histories in the kingdom, which the author claims both engage with and dissociate from traditional Islamic values.

Part II of the volume reconsiders the work of artists by drawing upon the cross-disciplinary frameworks of feminist and postcolonial thought, and by dealing with issues of ethnicity, trans-subjectivity, translation and gendered aesthetics. The part especially shows that employment of *select attributes* of transnational feminist thought and the project of decolonisation are useful to art history when engaging with art informed by feminism (from the Middle East, Europe, North Africa, America or elsewhere). Somayeh Noori Shirazi shows how the Iranian artist Katayoun Karami depicts her personal and contemporary perception of veiling, through which she deconstructs the tradition of the self-portrait and, simultaneously, destabilises the 'Western' Orientalist gaze. Focusing on the abstract, Isabelle de le Court addresses the legacy of Saloua Raouda Choucair and Etel Adnan. Iconic Lebanese artists who approach/ed abstraction from their personal experiences, both Choucair and Adnan push/ed back against the prevalent resistance to non-figurative art in Lebanon for the purpose of claiming their status as professional artists. Adding further to Part II's focus on subjectivity, Holiday Powers examines how the Franco-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira visualises personal/private collective memory within wider public histories—specifically the roles of daughter, mother and wife, and their transmission across generations and through the historical trauma of colonialism. Powers argues that Sedira's work manifests a very personal feminist resistance to the colonial past *and* the postcolonial present in Algeria. The last chapter in Part II is Akila Kizzi's comparative analysis of two Algerian artists, the singer Taos Amrouche and the painter Baya Mahieddine. Employing an intersectional approach, Kizzi affirms the historical importance of Amrouche's and Mahieddine's success in French colonial Algeria, claiming that the artists created active opportunities for Indigenous women in colonised space.

The final part in the volume, Part III, presents new tools and strategies which aim to encourage further research into contemporary feminist art and practices from various MENA countries. The chapters in this part explore the various ways in which the scholarship on archiving, narrating, exhibiting and collecting practices from MENA regions both inform contemporary methods and strategies for the future of the discipline of art history. It opens with Jessica Gerschultz's chapter, which, building on Maghrebi discourse, considers feminist methodologies for new and further research on Tunisian women artists *and* art forms. Through extensive primary source research, Gerschultz demonstrates that during the 1960s and 1970s Tunisian tapestry artists were active agents of fine art, yet, today, they receive little to no art historical attention. Gerschultz adamantly calls for further feminist interventions which will enable active research into a variety of women's artistic practices, including a process which dissolves the term 'craftswomen'. Moving to Palestinian contemporary art, Rachel Nelson employs an interdisciplinary approach which provides insight into how Emily Jacir creates deep visual commentary on the mechanisms that keep Palestinian peoples displaced and dispossessed. Nelson's chapter was awarded the Rhonda A. Saad Prize for Best Paper in Modern and Contemporary Arab Art of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey (AMCA) in 2016. Engaging with what

Judith Butler refers to as the ‘frames of war’, Nelson scrutinises the roles of various ‘framed’ texts and images in Jacir’s oeuvre. Consequently, Nelson reveals the artist’s responses to the visual, textual and discursive dimensions of conflict that are deployed by the Israeli state and wider media, which are used as ‘tools’ to control, normalise and constrict how violence and war are represented and understood in public discourse. Nelson explains that, due to the use of soft power in contemporary social and mainstream media, the conditions in Palestine continue to deteriorate. Introducing museology to the volume, Ceren Özpınar scrutinises new museum exhibitions and curatorial strategies in Turkey. Using the exhibition *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey* as a case study, which ran at Istanbul Modern between 16 September 2011 and 22 January 2012, Özpınar examines the exhibition’s notions of gender and feminism as well as curatorial readings of difference, juxtaposing these with political discourse on national progress along with mainstream art historiography. While considering the flaws in large women-only exhibitions, Özpınar addresses how the politics of Turkey produce a particular version of this form of survey exhibition that reveals the tensions around modes of feminism within both historical and contemporary spans. Finally, Mary Kelly presents an artist interview with Diana Al-Hadid. The artist’s voice is included in the collection for the purpose of offering primary sources to scholars, students, critics and so on who are free to analyse and interpret the data through various theoretical lenses in order to produce new art historical work. Al-Hadid considers her Syrian and American cultural heritages in her artistic practice, yet the artist also looks far beyond her identity in order to conceive and produce her art. Kelly draws out a prominent theme in the interview for consideration: Al-Hadid’s various investigative practices which lead to the location of her first artistic mark on a new work of art.

Under the Skin demonstrates the need for greater and more intricate attention from the discipline of art history and the wider humanities towards the recent feminist visual culture produced in MENA countries, proving this collection imperative. It also shows the scholarly necessity for the exploration of encounters among local, national and global discourses in contemporary cultures, as well as the reconsideration of decolonising art history and diverse feminisms, which condition the production of the arts in the area. *Under the Skin: Feminist Art and Art Histories from the Middle East and North Africa Today* will thus broaden and confront the existing art historical literature in original and innovative ways. It will widen the scholarship on transnational art histories and feminism and contribute to the growing number of interconnected texts on contemporary visual culture from the area. At the same time, it will problematise the scope and undertones of enduring terms, dialectics and canons in the discipline of the History of Art.