DIVINELY IMPRINTING PRINTS,
OR, HOW PICTURES BECAME
INFLUENTIAL PERSONS IN
Mandate Lebanon

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How did art teach people to live in (and out of) a Mandate political system? What can artworks teach Mandate historians about people’s imagination and mobilization? Mandate-made art confounds standard historiography because its origin seems compromised by a political conjuncture: in situations of tutorial control, whose will does artwork manifest? Art history developed in the context of competing European nationalisms for analyzing artworks as the expression of sovereign communities. I reverse the standard inquiry, starting not with a will but a genre, the “Lebanese landscape painting.” I locate the genre in public exhibitions to reveal how it engendered processes not of expression, but incorporation. I argue that the aesthetic structure and materiality of “Lebanese landscape painting” influenced understandings of self, nature, and piety and composed the grounds for an ethics of nonsectarian citizenship.

Lecturing in 1947 on “The Rise of Lebanese Artists” at the Cénacle Libanais, an assembly of the new republic’s most influential persons, Moustapha Farrouk (Mustafa Farrukh, 1901–1957) recounted a professional crisis that occurred when he was a teenage student with Habib Srur (1860–1938), the prominent painter. He found his teacher huddled in the dark, fervently sketching a most unexpected object: a wizened tree branch. Seeing his pupil’s shock, Srur upbraided him:

This mean branch has given me the chance for an instant to perform a prayer to the Almighty Creator. I was in a divine seclusion chamber prepared for me by these humble leaves. For I find in its inner-folds wisdom and secrets, and in its wrinkles and curls, a prayer. In its hue, I find a harmony and melody, and in its structure and the interlocking of its parts, a world full of marvels and morals. What more could I want? I find in it my mihrab. I read my Holy Book. I chant my hymns and give praise to the Lord for his power and creativity.

Two governmental regimes and 30 years later, Farrouk’s lecture positioned his distinguished audience before the self-demeaning professor and his desiccated bough that they might understand as he did that drawing is an act of supplicating to learn one’s proper role. He credited “good Lebanese art,” which he distinguished for “its piety, love of nature, freedom from materialism, and distance from politics,” to artists’ interest in al-manazir al-tabi’iya, literally “natural views (sing. al-manzar al-tabi‘i)”: images of things directly from the realm of the divine, as opposed to
urban views or portraits. Borrowing Srur’s series of devotional similes (from each of the three major faiths), Farrouk staged manual reproduction of *al-manazir al-tabi’iyya* as a nonsectarian performance of prayer.

Many of Farrouk’s listeners could conjure images of the art hanging in their own living rooms. This educated, salaried, middle-class—for-the-moment patronized locally produced art, but this had not always been the case. When Omar Onsi (‘Umar al-Unsi, 1901–1967) had his debut solo show in 1932, he charged highest for his figurative works: 5,000 francs for an allegory, 1,000 for a self-portrait, and 500 for a *Garçon libanais*. The few landscape paintings were priced below 200 francs. Still, it was these that formed the bulk of the sales, mostly going to the Mandate government or foreign diplomats. The calculus rapidly shifted. A third of Onsi’s next show consisted of “*al-manazir al-tabi’iyya al-lubnaniyya*” (Lebanese natural views), and half their customers were local elites, such as Charles al-Qurn, Jack Thabit, and Husayn al-Ahdab. Soon, Onsi was taking 500 francs on average for a landscape-painting, equivalent to approximately one month’s salary for a middle class professional. Farrouk’s receipts from the period testify to the same trends. Sales of landscape paintings by Beirutis to Beirutis had set a whole new scale.

“Lebanese landscape painting” differed in its particularistic detail, illusionistic space, and naturalistic coloring from the *manazir* found in notables’ homes since the previous century. Mostly murals, those images were citations of elite Ottoman décor, where examples of the form demonstrated parity with Western culture through sheer presence rather than the imaging process. Thus, they signaled a double displacement. People associated them with “local (*mahali*)” and “native” or “national” (both *watani*) views only recently. A first instance was the 1932 show at Beirut’s School of Arts and Crafts where an “unusually large number” of views of Lebanese mountains and villages struck one critic for the “local hue.” The press quickly touted the artist, our same Onsi, as a skilled “*paysagiste*” and launched him to fame for the “pioneer” pictures.

Onsi’s *Village in Lebanon*, dated to 1937, exemplifies the new approach (Figure 22.1). A sandy road reaches into the composition in the form of an isometric triangle, cradled by rippling steppes.

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on the left and a sash of lush foliage on the right. Peasant dwellings fit perfectly within the contours of the hills, and the hills, in turn, are contained within the mountain’s silhouette. Its triangular shape subsumes the natural elements in a mathematical logic of balance and stability. Onsi’s use of one-point perspective and the Rule of Three manifest his commitment to the continental *paysage* genre developed out of Renaissance pictorial theories by French artists such as Poussin and Corot. Chromatically, the brilliant sunlight structures and sparks the scene. Contemporaries especially revered the effect Onsi achieved in handling watercolor, “*shaffafiyya* (translucency),” deeming it a sign of his “national” sensibility.

Holding Srur’s withered bough before them, Farrouk commanded his listeners to contemplate the origin of the genre. Art historians have variously attributed it to itinerant Orientalist artists, Ottoman décor fashions, continental art academies, and even the land itself.  

Ironically, these interpretations disregard the actual artworks, let alone the audience’s viewing experiences. Treating the pictures as instances of a preformed school, philosophy, or political destiny averts our sight from that encounter in the atelier, when a student looked upon his master’s looking. Further, it mutes the student-cum-master’s appeal to his audience to ponder the process of pictorial formation as an act of self-formation. Here, I aim to open the historiography to other factors and agencies than can manifest when we do not allow codified concepts to illuminate their own meaning, but consider the specific enactments that made them meaningful.

To return to *Village in Lebanon*, my description above relies on *paysage* terminology and theory, and brochures at Mandate exhibitions sometimes used “*paysage.*” More often they were written in Arabic and used a term, “*manzar tabi’i* (natural view)” that, by contrast, simply categorizes scenes according to their basis in nature. The term raises the question that Farrouk raised with his master’s bough: “How could nature meet paint, paper, and frame, in Mandate Beirut’s rapidly urbanizing society?” “How” is an issue of selfhood and ethics: what does it take to let nature become a picture? What does doing so make of the picture? The answer requires denaturalizing “nature.” It requires scrutinizing the ways artists and audiences connected evolving verbal categories and the pictorial constructions that are primary documents of their evolution. It requires accepting Farrouk’s invitation to look at people looking.

Tracing Farrouk and Onsi’s landscape paintings from their humble origins in small encounters with nature to their aggrandizing display at exhibitions in Mandate Beirut reveals their agency in forming a new, civic ethics. In fact, *al-manazir al-tabi’iyya* were influential persons – on par with the activists, reformers, and intellectuals listening at the Cénacle Libanais. They, too, agitated for and debated the social and political transformations out of French Mandate subjecthood and not back into the Ottoman imperial subjecthood. Yet, almost uniquely, the ethics these painted persons instantiated and incited opposed the sectarian configuration of identity proposed by Mandate authorities with a nationalistic, public, and pious one. To encapsulate the genre’s ethical goals, I propose the term “secular piety.”

My oxymoronic neologism introduces a second aim: a new methodology of researching colonial encounters. The clunkiness of Mandate-era motives when rendered in our vocabulary registers a gap in our understanding that art studies may fill. Apart from a few explorations of moral aurality, studies of Arab ethics focus on language and discourse. If images invite, host, and shape enactments of monotheistic piety in mundane settings, they constitute a record of “moral visuality.” For historiographical purposes, landscape paintings are material practices and sensorial phenomena that document the multiple agencies involved in constructing new, sensible conceptions of citizenship and piety in transitional political situations, such as Mandate Lebanon. As I will show, “Lebanese landscape painting” arose from a conception of aesthetics as a necessary vehicle of and between religious and civil virtues, between divinity and politics. For this reason, I treat it as a *sense-realm*, by which I mean a specially regulated social activity in a carefully managed
place that involves a person’s full being to work out ideas viscerally and live them intellectually.\textsuperscript{18} This attention to sense avoids predetermining the geographical, political, and epistemological boundaries of those citizenship projects. Amidst the political ideologies colliding under the French Mandate and coinciding with the first free elections, fine art made “sense” of why and how people could participate in the new nation, and it did so in unprecedented, unmapped ways.

The occasion of Farrouk’s solo exhibition in 1933, which has left behind not only paintings and press reviews, but also a guest registry, is especially helpful for considering how \textit{al-manazir al-tabi`yya al-lubnaniyya} became influential persons and what they can teach Mandate historians today.

### Landscapes at an exhibition

Friday, 22 December 1933 was an unusual day in Beirut. Ramadan had just begun, and Christmas was nigh. Leaving the festive bustle, Muhammad Shamil, a renowned actor, headed to the School of Arts and Crafts on the outskirts of town. Perhaps Shamil learned about Farrouk’s exhibition by reading the newspaper. If he read in French, he could have seen an announcement in \textit{La Syrie} on the day of the opening the week before. Amidst news stories about the unresolved constitutional crisis, the unfinished annual budget, the High Commissioner’s frantic consultations, demonstrations in Syria and Palestine, and Franco-German negotiations, and alongside advertisements for polylingual gramophone discs and the “marvelous” astrologer Muhammad Bey Falaki, three lines ran:

> The painter Farouk will have an exposition of his latest works at the School of Art and Crafts under the patronage of Mme. Charles Debbas and Mme. General de Bigault du Granrut. The opening will take place on Friday December 15 at 3 pm. The exhibition will be open every day from 10 to 12 and from 2 to 6, until Sunday, December 24 (included).\textsuperscript{19}

If Shamil preferred taking his news in Arabic, it would have been more difficult to learn about Farrouk’s exhibition. The Mandate authorities had closed the offices of the major Arabic papers. What provoked the censorship, one weekly demurely discussed on Farrouk’s opening day under the rubric of “rumors”: rumors about a constitution being hammered out, a coup to ensue, and divisive plans for sectarian and regional distribution of parliamentary representation.\textsuperscript{20}

The same weekly also covered accounts of the public water company’s exorbitant prices, annual earnings, and protests.\textsuperscript{21} The citizenry had just mobilized for months of semisuccessful strikes against the tramway and electricity company, and the water company looked to be next. The earlier strikes had galvanized the populace to see infrastructural utilities as “fundamentally public assets and tools for economic improvement.”\textsuperscript{22} The debacle of the strikes and now the scandal of the waterworks would have loomed over Shamil’s visit because the School of Arts and Crafts was located at the Ministry of Public Works. It housed not only the waterworks but also the recently launched public works program, promoting workers’ technical education to reduce both unemployment (at 30 per cent) and heavy dependence on imports (up 65 per cent in the last decade).\textsuperscript{23}

After passing the municipal garden, Shamil entered two rooms with 55 oil and watercolor paintings by Farrouk. Prior the construction of UNESCO Palace in 1947, public exhibitions occupied classrooms or reception halls. Walls that still bore the traces of their normal usage were crowded with images, and windows were sometimes blocked to allow more pictures (Figure 22.2). Tiny quaswindows dotted the walls with views onto an impossible collection of places: mountain villages, desert palaces, valleys and the shoreline all lay within centimeters of each other (Figure 22.3).
Figure 22.2 Exhibition room at the School of Arts and Crafts, Omar Onsi Exhibition, 1931, photograph from *Al-Ma`rad*, 22 January 1931:8–9.

Figure 22.3 American University, Green Room, West Hall, photograph from Moustapha Farrouk’s exhibition, December 1932. Collection of Hani Farrukh, Beirut, Lebanon.
For Shamil, the effect of the dusky, visually crowded environment was otherworldly. Deeply
affected by the display, he left a testimony in the guest registry:

In my eyes there are two tears: a tear of happiness and a tear of sadness. Each is deeply
significant. The first rolled down when I saw the ayat (signs) of beauty revealed in the
book Farrouk has written with the ink of his liver, the pen of his art, and the inspiration
of emotion. The second rolled down when Farrouk came to read his book to a people
whom he found uncomprehending of the meaning of the language in which he pub-
lished it. Muhammad Shamil²⁴

The term ayat gives pause. It translates as “signs,” particularly incontrovertible signs of a
divine presence, and especially the Qur’anic ayat that convey God’s word to Muslims. What was
it about Farrouk’s art that sacralized Shamil’s viewing and turned an art show into a holy book?
I will discuss later Shamil’s devout diction (which echoes Srur’s), but here, we must address the
pictures’ materiality.

In contrast to Farrouk’s earlier exhibitions, landscape paintings of nearby sites dominated here,
being shown first in the order of the hanging and mentioned first in the art critical response.²⁵
For example, the first canvas facing the viewer upon entry, Qabb Elias, showed a village bordering
on the vast and verdant Bekaa Valley (Figure 22.4). In this perfectly balanced composition, a ser-
pentine, dirt path leads past verdant cypress and carob trees cradling a miniature village to a tawny
horizon where craggy foothills meet a barren mountain. La Syrie’s critic singled it out for praise
and affirmed that the show offered many “sunny paysages that certainly come from the Levant.”²⁶

The critic’s “certainty” hints at the difficulty of affixing a localizing adjective, “Lebanese,” to
an imported, mobile genre, “the landscape-painting.”²⁷ Yet in this conjuncture, the term mapped
out an aesthetic realm encompassing multiple paradoxes: it imported a continental genre to deal
with local spaces. It suggested a territory’s self-evidence, but could not erase its tendentiousness.
And, although man-made, it seemed “magical” and “mind-boggling” according scores of entries
in the guest registry. Seeing the phantasmic realm of the Lebanese landscape painting provoked
more paradoxes for Shamil: it made him at once hopeful and tearful. It prompted him to write
his thoughts, but convinced him no one would understand. It connected him to an “uncompre-
hending” people, and yet revealed that he (thankfully) stood apart.

Many visitors were similarly vexed by having to relate the hero-artist to imagined compa-
triot. Take these comments from a doctor and architect, respectively. They evaluate viewing
practices to assess citizenship and rightful access to the public realm:

Let God invigorate this great artist who has reached the peak of glory despite his exist-
ence among a nation that does not properly appreciate him except for a few among
them. Dr. Nassib Barbir²⁹

I congratulate you on your courage and even more your talent. I hope that one
day you may be understood by a people so indifferent to what is obtained by sacrifice.
M. Altounian³⁰

Farrouk’s audience, perhaps numbering a thousand, included professionals, educators and stu-
dents, merchants, aristocrats, clergymen, fellow artists, Mandate officials and aspiring politicians,
and friends from Farrouk’s lower-middle-class neighborhood.³¹ Outside, they ardently debated
the organization and character of the nation to emerge from the French Mandate. Here, they
called for a new ethics of citizenship through the language, as Shamil put it, of a new type of
Figure 22.4 Moustapha Farrouk, Qabb Elias, oil on canvas, 55 × 45 cm, reproduced in Moustapha Farroukh, 1901–1957, exhibition catalogue (Beirut: Musée Nicholas Sursock. January–February, 2003).
book. To become a nation that appreciates art properly would mean becoming a people who are literally different and deserving.

The question of citizenship entered a novel space, the exhibition hall. The hushed and bizarrely lit rooms infused the viewing experience with a sense of strangeness. Many guest registry entries ask us to ponder how that unusualness altered visitors’ consciousness. Read, for example, page 17, with entries respectively by a law student, a teacher, and a paper merchant:

His figures are strong, speaking, and bewildering, and his views enchant. Muhammad Fathallah

Mr. Farrouk’s pictures are arrows that pierce the heart. Rashad ‘Ariss

My going from one picture to the next is like travelling from one town to another, where new, speaking countenances and enchanting, bewitching views can be seen. ‘Adil ‘Itani

Fathallah witnessed the inert become alive. ‘Ariss felt its dangerous intrusion. ‘Itani found himself transported by it. The typical paysage makes a window onto objects of view, but here, the depicted objects became the viewing subjects. Confronted with articulate pictures, audiences found their eyes activated as the primary means for social interaction. They responded with bewilderment, confusion, and even vertigo. Then they learned. The first thing they learned was that they should learn to stand quietly and rigidly, to face an inert object, and to let it alone – not their companions – demand their attention (Figure 22.5).

The logistics of viewing in these secluded rooms compounded the social disorientation. Disparate ranks, ethnicities, nationalities, and languages that were carefully segregated in other public

Figure 22.5 Moustapha Farrukh, untitled illustration from Qussat Insan min Lubnan (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma’arif fi Bayrut, 1954), 58.
spaces crowded together here. People of “every place and type” were merged “by an innate inclination towards art,” as one commentator later noted. Imagine the effect on Sami ‘Aradati, a high school student, standing in the packed space of Farrouk’s show when the French High Commissioner and the Lebanese president arrived. When he went to write in the registry, he found his native Arabic mingling with Turkish, English, French, Spanish, and Italian. Still learning his signature, he penned his name several times in their midst, orthographically rubbing shoulders with le tout Beyrouth and beyond.

Visitors’ vocabulary, too, confronted serious constraints and underwent contortions. What do you say when pictures talk to you? In the registry, many resorted to formulaic language, penning the cliché “wishing you success” or “congratulations.” Clusters of comments imitated each other – for example, on page 30, five signees in a row remarked on the “magic” of the event – as if participating in a grand, super-social, intertextual conversation. A week after the opening, one visitor baldly declared, “I participate in the feelings that precede me in this book and in the songs that will follow.” So strong was his conviction that the art provoked a single, all-encompassing response that he could let voices yet unrecorded stand for his. Altogether, the registry suggests a sense of commonality to which people willingly relinquished their voices.

The sense of commonality that emerged in exhibition halls exemplifies communitas. Divested of their normal markers, restrictions, and expectations, participants faced a vagueness that required them to “think about how they think . . . to feel about how they feel,” in the words of anthropologist of ritual, Victor Turner. Significantly, many focused in the registry on how Farrouk’s pictures made them see, not what they saw; moreover, they reflected on what they might see were they better viewers. They wrote in a “subjunctive mood, not about actual facts but suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities,” for reconsidering the moral and conceptual bases of their lives. In such magical, liminal moments, they embraced what Turner calls “designs for living” that previously would have seemed neither imaginable nor sensible. Several entries affirm that visitors sought the self-reflexivity in exhibition halls:

We came to the school of taste [dhawq] (Mr. Farrouk’s exhibition), and we refine ourselves. Waﬁq Daﬀab on behalf of the students of Tharif School

Thanks to the brush of the artist, Mr. Farrouk, we grasp the truth of social life. Your admirers, Jirjis al-Khuri Maqdisi, Philip Mash’alani, Ibrahim Isbir al-Khuri, and Georges Mash’alani

I knew you as a beginner and now I know you as a master. So I believe in the correct path of growth and evolution. Illegible signature

These testimonies pledge to become a new type of person, a schooled believer; yet, who could teach people to enact the newly conceivable designs-for-living? Authorities were not organizing art exhibitions; they were hardly heeding calls to support them. Despite a long presence in press advertisements for domestic décor (alongside porcelain, silver platters, and imported glassware) and hospitality service (in 1929 Urman’s store listed them with cheese, tea, and coffee), paintings were not such common commodities that people knew what was expected to happen when they stood quietly before one. How were artworks signposts for a “correct path” or lessons in the strange school?

Although catchwords like “dhawq” (taste), “hadara” (civilization), and “akhlaq” (ethics) resounded in the press and framed daily intercourse, their precise meaning was frustratingly unclear and generated numerous debates. Agreement on such social codes and classes of desired commodities only heightened anxiety and disagreement about what constituted best practice: who could teach people how to behave in the midst of such social and political instability?
Who had the credibility to dictate the new designs for living? For an answer, the pictures must be brought into the picture, as primary documents of Mandate citizens’ new ways of ascribing credibility and developing conviction.

Moral visuality and agential aesthetics

As I noted above, many registry entries focused on how Farrouk’s pictures made them see: Muhammad Fathallah was moved to confess his confusion by the mechanics of a visuality that constructed a disjuncture between flat, figurative forms and a pulsating capacity for speech and movement. These “speaking faces” and “bewitching landscapes” were not transparent windows onto another world, but active, charged “arrows,” as Rashad ‘Ariss wrote after Fathallah. Paintings became socially influential “persons” at exhibitions to the degree that viewers could reasonably attribute meaningful events in their milieu to them.2 Shamal was moved to tears. ‘Itani was yanked like a young Odysseus “from one town to another.” Wafiq Dabbus and his classmates received lessons they had never had at Tharif School.

In his theory of agential art, Alfred Gell locates the potential for art to be attributed with agency in its appearance. Because common techniques of production cannot sufficiently explain their extraordinary form, artworks “fascinate, compel, and entrap as well as delight the spectator.”43 From contemplating an object’s external appearance, viewers are “abducted” to recognizing the power that (they assume) created it.44

Crucially, a morality inhered in their experience of the artworks’ visuality:

Farroukh’s brush catches our eye on account of its good description of nature as shown in the many pictures of it. They are a true reflection of his sensitive, poetic soul that provides a correct exemplar for the sons of Lebanon by encouraging nature and following its path. Ibrahim Kan’an.45

The “good description of nature” was, as Ibrahim Kan’an put it, “an exemplar for the sons of Lebanon.” It invited the viewer to relate to his world and belong to a “national family” in a new way. Obeying the abducting artwork’s lessons meant embodying them – crying in Shamal’s case and refining oneself in Dabbus’ – and, ultimately, enacting them, and engaging in social critique. Shamal’s entry noted both the overwhelming beauty of the ayat in this public book and the crushing possibility of their unintelligibility to unreceptive audiences. Abducted viewers called on each other to acknowledge the new masters who taught them “the truth of social life.” Others loudly declared their receptivity and intellectual response. Taken together, their anxious script indicates that the paintings on display were not reflections of an extant social being – community, land, or way of life – but agents in interactions that produced new ones: a “we” who has graduated together, “sons of Lebanon,” and a nation that appreciates sacrifice.

Dhawq

If Farrouk’s exhibition in the School of Arts and Crafts became a school of its own sort, there are two issues to consider: one is the ability to receive lessons, the other is the lessons’ content. For the first matter, the key term is taste, or actually “dhawq,” a term whose meaning needs to be unraveled. When Dabbus designated “Mr. Farrouk’s exhibition” a “school of dhawq,” he answered a call social activist Labiba Hashim had issued two decades prior for an “effective means for training dhawq.”46 Speaking in 1911 at a newly established public reading room in Bhamdun, a train stop in Mount Lebanon, Hashim asked her audience to think about “the variety of people with
different backgrounds, customs, and knowledges intermixing without agreement on principles or opinions on a daily basis.”47 “We need a basis for building our lives and a principle for conducting our social customs,” she averred. Dhawq could be that basis, because it establishes organizational, sensual, and postural conditions to guide one through the plethora of shifting challenges and opportunities. Not only does “the schooling of dhawq help man with the acquisition of all good traits and respect for great works,” but it is indeed “the foundation of human happiness because it is a capacity to distinguish relations between similar things.”48 It is the difference between robots and artists, she summarized, arguing that the modernity of the one was useless without the creativity of the other.

This difference requires reconsidering the standard, sociological approach to dhawq as a marker of class distinction in Lebanon (following Bourdieu).49 Here, I pursue a folk understanding of dhawq to get at how people consciously sought to activate this ability to fathom entities and fashion relationships.50 Dabbus’s decision to look to paintings as lessons in dhawq indicates that visitors saw dhawq as an experimental medium for social change.

By no means a new concern, dhawq seems to have undergone significant shifts for activists struggling to manage new economies, migration trends, and political arrangements at the turn of the twentieth century. When Edward Lane translated dhawq as “taste” in the 1860s, he referred it both to a quality revealed “by means of the moisture of the tongue” and a capacity to perceive such quality.51 Although particularly responsive to some things, such as eloquence, it was at base a neutral capacity for assessing essences and correlating value.

The correlational entity Lane described became more active and relative in fin-de-siècle thinking. Writing for al-Muqtataf in 1892, essayist Yusuf Shalhat generated categories of things that were its proper subject: architecture and domestic interiors, the fine arts and industrial works, and habits and daily customs.52 All were composite entities, i.e. defined by the integration of parts, like a watch. Their compositeness made them vulnerable to states of the environment that impinge on how things can come together. Shalhat held that well-cultivated dhawq produces more intense feelings more swiftly, so that a person will immediately and consistently be repelled by repugnancy, drawn by beauty, and aware of deficiencies and unnatural affectations.53 Thus, dhawq enables and explains functional integration of fixed entities.

Shalhat studied dhawq to offer an empiricist description. By contrast, when Hashim addressed dhawq, she sought a prescription, “a basis for building our lives.” On the eve of the First World War, there was such constant “interaction and overlap” between people of different types of means, backgrounds, and political outlooks that it became difficult to speak of social categories that could predict personal trajectories. As Khuri Makdisi puts it in her study of late Ottoman reformist intellectuals, “they were almost in a molecular sense unstable.”54 Indeed, Hashim is one of the anarchist activists whom Khuri Makdisi tracks, so it is useful to note how antimaterialist dhawq is for her. Neither is material value secure, nor is personal status hermetic. Matters of coordination and integration, how one relates assets, will increase them, and knowing how to achieve that is a matter of dhawq. Thus, from the reading room next to Bhamdun’s train station, Hashim offered dhawq as a means for forming and storing lessons for an unknown future out of interaction with novel entities. Her main concern, then, was to boost its presence in each of her listeners and in their social interactions.

Here Hashim had to chide her audience for failing to observe the “great natural beauty” amidst which they lived. She explicitly affirmed that dhawq was a basic capacity found in everyone, regardless of ethnicity, class, or community. Being holistic and organic, it could be neither bought nor taught.55 “Training” (tarbiya) simply established resonances between an ideal setting and the person’s postures, attitudes, and concerns. In line with the project of “patriotic motherhood,” Hashim located the most potent setting for training dhawq in the domicile that
encompassed the child fully as a physical, emotional, and intellectual creature. However, she also allowed for a paternal, public role, giving the example of a father who takes his son to archaic ruins (such as Baalbek) or natural views (such as the Cedar forests) to “think about and imitate the masters.” Hashim’s training emphasized experiencing relationality and incorporation, as opposed to establishing equivalences or identifying universal signs. She closed her speech with an aphorism about the futility of debating dhawq to assure her audience that the goal of its training was not to make difference disappear, but to make it matter productively. Dhawq is as deliberately relative here as it is relational.

Wafiq Dabbus brought his fellow students to a “school,” not a store or showroom; he related to the displayed objects not as potential possessions, but as accessible lessons. The dhawq he sought to train was an ability to respond appropriately to difference, so as to know what to incorporate into himself and how to integrate himself, and when it came to public works, budgets, and places, dhawq was a responsibility. The pictures at the school of dhawq did not reflect a given world, but refashioned the viewers to make them fit the world differently. Ibrahim Kan’an noted that Farrouk’s “good description” could encourage viewers to follow nature’s path. This brings us to the content of the school’s lessons. The intersection of dhawq with ideas of nature made landscape paintings the most important genre for this new civic project.

The intersection of dhawq and tabi’ā

For Omar Onsi, the painter of Village in Lebanon, the cultivability of dhawq structured his vocation and charged it with an ethical mission. He discussed this in an unpublished manuscript titled “al-Khuluq al-khalq [Character – Creation].” He started with the example of a lemon. Bite into it, and your muscles will contract. Your face will become ugly. Your nature transforms. By contrast, the sight of flowers will make your face serene and beautiful. Onsi’s understanding of “nature” conforms to nineteenth-century Arabic lexicons’ entry for al-tabi’a. From the root form ta-ba’-a, meaning to print or impress, al-tabi’a is not a type of space, but the trace of a force that encountered a passive surface, as in the case of a mark, imprint, or impression.

Al-tabi’a is both more processual and transitive than admitted by the English translation. Onsi experiences its malleability in the polarity between sour and sweet. That which is stamped contains the essence of that which stamped it and may in turn stamp another entity. Therefore, the choice between the acidity of the lemon and the fragrance of the flower will gradually form your character. Here your dhawq – capacity to respond to qualities – intersects with your nature. Ultimately, your face is a canvas on which is imprinted that which you have chosen to let impact you. But more importantly, the achieved nature does not end with you. The sight of the human canvas will convey its accumulated effects to its viewers in turn. It is an imprint that prints.

Onsi elaborated this philosophy of dhawq as responsiveness to tabi’ā for a lecture on the role of the artist. I reproduce the draft, strike-throughs and all, to emphasize the emergent quality of his thought:

Two attitudes: 1) Those who communicate love Nature and feel all the thrill before in their hearts before arriving at an adequate expression in view of the poor means at their disposal; and 2) those who look at discard nature and the traditions with contempt, and proud of the colors means at their command, cry out their disposal, dream and strive for creation and construction.

The artist who “discards Nature” does not recognize his place. He arrogantly and loudly sets himself up as a rival of the “true creator.” Arrogant artists depart from “natural” color schemes.
The artist who “thrills” at “Nature” recognizes the poverty of his means. He is humble. Artists who are proud strive for “creation and construction”; artists who “love Nature” do not. Hence, in recognition of his “poor means,” the “true artist” refashions his very being so that his “heart echoes the universe,” as he concluded in another manuscript.\textsuperscript{64} That echo is the Creator’s stamp guiding the artist’s being.

Onsi’s musings undermine the equation of art making with self-expression or mechanical reflection of a world out there. If human nature is literally impressionable, external forces will change it. The interpellation of external views and inner states disallowed the artist from expressing what was already within her. Rather, the \textit{manzar tabi’i} offered a technology for stamping and thus reforming the artist’s “heart.” It is also an ethnically loaded technology; the reflection of the artist’s “heart” (and her surroundings) in art will never be automatic. It must be consciously achieved and reflexively performed. As an artist carrying the imprint from the countryside to the exhibition hall, Onsi had to choose which “echo” to amplify for audiences beyond the realm of its reverberations.

\textit{Al-tabi’i\textquoteright a at the school of Dhawq}

In fact, technically speaking, \textit{al-manazir al-tabi’iyya al-lubnaniyya} are not “Lebanese landscape paintings” but regionally accessible, “divinely imprinted prints.” The visual analysis by which I introduced \textit{Village in Lebanon} treats it as a derivation of European Academic formulae pasted onto a “Lebanese” place. This demonstrates how relying on an imported verbal construction – “landscape-painting” – can obscure what such a picture made possible: it was simultaneously one, a \textit{paysage} – affiliated to cosmopolitan genre – and two, a \textit{manzar tabi’i} – a view based in nature – and three, a divinely imprinting print – an agent of ethical formation selected through the integrative, sensually encompassing principle of \textit{dhawq}. In short, Onsi’s \textit{Village} was a sense-realm enfolding multiple and otherwise opposing associations to address viewers as aesthetic beings and civic actors at once.

Let us start over: the imprinting process of \textit{Village in Lebanon} began when Onsi set out early one morning in 1936–1937 in search of an appropriate view. His topics, colors, and painterly gestures were agential aesthetic choices. We can imagine Onsi taking up a seat on a rock by the road that leads towards the village. He sat for a long time, perhaps several days.\textsuperscript{65} Eventually, he sketched in light graphite the interlocking contours of the horizon, houses, road, and foliage. Because he then bathed the paper in a soft coat of water and worked almost entirely with a wet brush, few brushstrokes record his labor. There is also very little layering. Onsi mixed his colors in advance and applied them in defined dabs. He worked with a muted, harmonious palette. The whiteness left between the brush strokes generates a sparkling dynamism.

What do these acts mean as performative aesthetic choices? Borrowing the Islamic lexicon that Onsi (and Farrouk) knew best, we see that the picture allows for an Islamic ethics in visual form. The choice of a humble, anonymous locale reminds viewers that the world was not created in jest, to quote Sura 21:16.\textsuperscript{66} All contains “deep wisdom.” Standing long before a scene that is in fact a divine imprint and then sketching it rapidly, Onsi achieved its imprint on his soul. To one who pays attention, he reveals the fundamental logic and truth. Onsi’s translucent forms do not hide anything from the viewer; they seem to reveal an inner essence without mystery or deception. However, as a stage in the pictorial process, they are not forms, but forces pressing forth. Their beauty abducts the viewer to a divine origin: the sun, “the most evident manifestation of the all-embracing and permeating light,” subsumes everything equally, spreading celestial beneficence regardless of hierarchy.\textsuperscript{67}

Topographically, \textit{Village in Lebanon} is a vista. Vistas by definition lead the eye in many directions, visually disturbing and humbling viewers. Onsi’s composition harnesses this optical sensation. It
provides the viewing eye with a fixed entrance point and carries it from a chromatically and geometrically bustling foreground to a nearly monotone, mediating zone before it inexorably sends its virtual passenger to the horizon’s pale placidity. A majestic mountain summit tops the scene, visually locking the dynamism and energy in the foreground into a calm terminus: the access point to the one god.\textsuperscript{68} This imposition of divine logic on the chaos of a cornucopia of textures, shapes, colors, and characters is the ultimate artistic achievement, literally an earthly composition.\textsuperscript{69}

Onsi’s role is not to rival the divine print, but convey it. He uses his divinely refashioned heart to print, in turn, the watercolor paper with its effects. His famous translucency is a translation of the “open book” He has printed on the Earth’s surface. An “echo of the universe,” the print is now aesthetically agential. This process is depicted in Rifa’at Buhairy’s 1947 illustration for an article titled, “The Artist and Nature” (Figure 22.6).

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure22.6.png}
  \caption{Raf’at (Buhairy). Untitled illustration for “Al-Fanan wa al-Tabi`a,” by Thuraya Malhas, in \textit{Al-Adib}, 6(10):19.}
\end{figure}
Landscapes of citizenship

These thoughts about dhawq elucidate the increasing investment in natural views over the course of the Mandate. Remember that Hashim chided her Bhamdun listeners for not appreciating their nature and recommended fathers take their children to see Tadmur, Baalbek, and the Cedar forests. Ibrahim Kan’an upheld Farrouk’s natural views as a “correct exemplar.” Revealing that dhawq is a matter of responsibility and integration and exhibitions a site for abduction, these pictures deepen our understanding of how Mandate Lebanon’s intelligentsia sought to create a national public.

He who views al-manazir al-tabī‘yya becomes aware of his “painful condition” and his need for a “savior to rescue him from confusion and anxiety,” Farrouk explained in a radio lecture titled “Art and Religion” given in 1936.70 Nature–based art alerts him to a “greater, logical, caring power,” because it contains the “secrets of existence” and “the revealed signs [again, ayat bayyinat]”.71 He who assents to the paintings’ abduction “reaches a new stage of development,” Onsi likewise reasoned.72

Stamping nature’s divine features of harmony, serenity, and rationality on their viewers, landscape paintings “refine the feelings, elevate the soul, polish the psyche, and make one love life,” effused Farrouk.73 In that same lecture on “art and religion,” Farrouk argued that the cause of the 7.6 billion franc national deficit — accompanied by massive strikes, economic disparity, and desperation — was bestiality and greed. By bestiality, he meant the inability to appreciate one’s surroundings, to empathize, reflect, use logic, and overcome parochial self-interest. By materialism, he meant overconcern with one’s surroundings, greed to control them, selfishness, and willful unconcern for the well-being of others. In this reckoning, the first vice ignores humanity’s commonality; the second fears it. In this dire context, the malleability of human tabī‘a was treacherous. People were easily affected by the vices of others, and with such a variety of new goods, neighbors, and living quarters, they no longer knew how to make choices. They were demoralized and overwhelmed, explained the writer Salah al-Asir in a 1935 disquisition on “The Dhawq for Beauty and Art.”74

Yet, by the same logic, human impressionability and transiency allowed landscape painting a role for social criticism and change. Enter the fascinating “fitna (captivation)” of art. In fact, artistically mediated nature was superior to the original. The School of Arts and Crafts in which Farrouk’s admirers sought “the truth of social life” lay next to an elegant municipal garden.75 Even so, art reviewers enjoined people to leave the world of trees, flowers, and fountains, and enconce themselves in a world of paint, canvas, and frames. Unlike the quotidian experience of nature, the “signs of beauty” in nature–based views fixed visitors in quiet contemplation, emphasized international standards, and took them to “the heart of the thing” (think of Onsi’s translucency). This process of abduction presented viewers with each natural element for itself, as if decontextualized from the miserable world of materialism and bestiality.76 Nature–based art provided exemplary performances of “honesty and fidelity” in urban daily life, according to critic Joseph Hunayn.77

The nature of manazir tabī‘yya was not simply an unsullied realm outside urban Beirut, nor was it a window into an artist’s soul. It was an influential, social person, in Gellian terms. Abducting visitors to a liminal zone, it impressed on people’s internal, mental acts and informed their social behavior, i.e. the possibility of imagining new networks joining a disparate array of new neighbors, fellow voters, and potential business and marriage partners. By enrolling at the School of Dhawq, Wafiq Dabbas, Ibrahim Kan’an, and fellow visitors honored the artist’s ethical choice to be imprinted by natural views in particular.

Still, the sense of peoplehood that visitors experienced in this liminal zone was ambiguous and tentative. It was based on the inference of a common response to marvelous forms, so it required
both a program of displacement (people had to come to the shows, enlist in the new “schools of
taste”) and testimonial (people had to write and otherwise demonstrate the impact of the exhi-
bition on them). This matter of monitoring, and manifesting, one’s grasp of the lessons of moral
visuality calls for an exploration of the link between the exhibition and its larger sociopolitical
setting. What happened after visitors signed the registry and returned to the street?

Exiting the School of Arts and Crafts took visitors out of the Ministry of Public Works, past
still-impressive vestiges of Ottoman modernization and increasingly dubious signs of French
colonial tutelage. The utility strikes showed that the politics of reform, originally instigated in
the mid-nineteenth century by Beiruti notables for relating, first to the Ottoman imperial center,
then to the Mandate High Commission, was now supplanted by a politics of independence.76
But if the previous politics was about procuring the master’s favorable response, working within
their values and codes, the calls for self-assertion and self-reliance required people to consider
how the “self” was able to recognize and respond to needs. In other words, they raised the ques-
tion of responsibility: what would be the codes by which a community was defined, authorities
recognized its needs, and resources were distributed? How would “public good” be assessed and
weighed against communal and individual “rights”?

Let us imagine Muhammad Shamil casting a backwards glance at Farrouk’s Qabb Elias while
still clutching a copy of the day’s newspaper with the “rumored” plans for a new parliament
formed of sectarian-divided seats. The harmonious rendering of this mixed-confession village –
a strategic site in the conflict of 1860 – with its winding paths and luxuriant foliage here con-
tained by the mountain’s silhouette that might well have lingered in his mind’s eye. Presented
at an exhibition with the works of a “son of Lebanon” and an “exemplar” for their own social
development, Mandate visitors were called to ponder what Lebanon was. Was it a historical, eth-
nic (Phoenician) self-producing entity? Was it the creation of a Maronite god who subsumes all
others and is spoken through the Patriarch, as Phoenicianist poet Charles Corm was to suggest
in his tract La Montagne Inspirée, to be published a few months hence? Or, was it part of a larger
Arabo-Islamic entity?77 Each of these options fits pictures like Qabb Elias as spatial representations
into a larger geopolitical territory. Yet, the visitors’ testimonies suggest that artworks abducted
their viewers to entities that were not self-evident to social argument or intellectual articulation.
The tears that welled in Shamil’s eyes before a landscape painting like Qabb Elias were neither for
a representation of a land “out there,” nor for a presentation of an artist’s skill, but for his ability
to be abducted by this moral visuality. He cried out of responsibility and as a manifestation of
his ability to respond.

But what of how Shamil cried? His intensely devout diction demands address.

The nature of secular piety

On 23 December 1933, Qabalan Riyashi, son of a prominent literary family, contributed a poem
to the visitors’ registry:

A divine language descended upon the eminent ones, engulfing secrets
Made of poetry, music, and art. A revelation
Bringing liturgies
Whose masters, with their creativity, were like messengers through whom history advances,
And through whose pens and lessons the wisdom of the ages runs
And leaves traces.
The lion of this language is Ibn Farrukh’s pen
That has produced a miraculous sign [ayat], the miracle of the ages [ayat al-’asar].
I came to believe in the Revelation manifested in his paintings
He, the chosen prophet.
All art is at his fingertips, all magic, all thoughts, all secrets of life.\textsuperscript{30}

Riyashi’s use of a liturgical vocabulary to interpret Farrouk’s painting borders on blasphemy. If Farrouk was a “prophet,” then his art was a message from God, a visual Qur’an. Yet Riyashi was merely the most eloquent of many visitors in his use of religious and mystical tropes, rivaling Muhammad Shamil’s invocation of a holy book with \textit{ayat} a few pages earlier. Indeed, Farrouk’s registry is full of talk of the “magic” of the paintings, their “miraculous” material forms that “commanded” viewers like holy “liturgies” and “revelations” brought by “prophets” with “lessons” about social progress and the “secrets of life.”

There are two things to note about the sacralizing language that Mandate Lebanese used to discuss fine art. First, it is saturated with monotheism and closely connected to the orthodox practices of piety. Sunni Islam reverberates in Farrouk and Onsi articulations of their experience of nature’s abduction. For example, Farrouk’s 1936 lecture aurally cemented the argument that nature is like a Qur’an by using Qur’anic sound patterns (for example, many phrases end with “\textit{...-in}”) and syntactical features (rhythmically repeating adjectives which are also the names of God, such as \textit{khaliq} [creating] and \textit{‘athim} [great]). Likewise, Onsi’s “Notes on Art” is replete with hadith-like phrasing: to extoll the nature to which he was inducted by his voluntary abduction, he exclaimed, “[h]ow many lessons are there to learn from the mosquito? The bee and the ant have deep wisdom!” To conclude his disquisition on the benefits of landscape viewing, he echoes the opening of the Qur’an: “Read, oh human!”

The second thing to note is that the use of language that is “divinely imprinted,” so to speak, did not signal a particular faith. Like “Riyashi,” many signatures in Farrouk’s registry indicate Christian parentage, yet they attested to appreciating the art’s Qur’anic “Revelation” and “becoming a believer” in its prescriptions without drawing sectarian divisions. Similarly, when channeling Srur’s soliloquy at the Cénacle, Farrouk deployed a multifaith, visual lexicon – chanting, sacred chambers, and scripture – without naming any sectarian names. Rather, he presented pious drawing as a \textit{substitute} for their respective media of prayer.

In equating art, nature, and religion, intellectuals, activists, and exhibition goers of Mandate Lebanon attributed the same benefits to landscape painting that were regularly attributed to prayer. Yet, they carefully distinguished between the spiritual uplift gained by following collective, hierarchically organized routes and that attained from the contemplation of this genre. Since the nation’s nature was a religious sphere and nationalist art a pious practice, appreciating them did not limit access to these resources according to sectarian affiliation. Notably, in the same lecture that invoked Srur’s withered branch, Farrouk suggests that, although icons and haloed stories can substitute for nature-based painting, they cannot offer the latter’s humble, noninstitutional, nonconfessional, objectively crafted aesthetics.\textsuperscript{81} In a word, nature-based art offered a means to organize society by what I call “secular piety.” Aesthetic attention could be cultivated by anyone, with nature as a means for transmuting Christians (Srur) to Muslims (Farrouk) and back. Or rather beyond. Founded on a common appreciation of the sublime, the natural, and the national, \textit{manazir al-tabi‘iya al-lubnaniyya} engendered a piety transcending confession.\textsuperscript{82}

Conclusion

The secular piety with which \textit{al-manazir al-tabi‘iya al-lubnaniyya} addressed viewers contrasted sharply with concurrent programs for regulating civic interaction along confessional boundaries. Upon taking control in 1922, French mandatory authorities intensified the pace of Ottoman
reforms that increased the arenas in which citizens met the bureaucratized state. The French, however, reversed the hierarchy by which access to state resources was allocated, putting Maronite Christians at the top and Sunni Muslims far below. In most areas of their daily lives — employment, education, commerce, health, landownership and love — Beirut’s colonial citizens were obstructed from full participation by a “variety of gendered, class, and religious obstacles.”

The role of religious law and sectarian authorities in organizing state resources was hotly debated, and it was to control the combustibility of the topic that the Mandate authorities had suspended Parliament, canceled the constitution, and closed several newspaper offices.

What exhibition records show is that, in Mandate Lebanon, audiences came to believe in new designs for living by using their physical, emotional, and mental senses to recognize the lessons of a secular piety. These lessons emphasized humility, fidelity, sensitivity, rationality, objectivism, monotheism, awareness of a common humanity, spiritualism, praise, and acknowledgement of a higher power. Nature/al-tabī‘a met paint, paper, and public through an artist’s act of becoming imprinted. The process of the artwork’s becoming gave it ethical agency in society and encouraged viewers’ ethical conduct. First, they must decide what to let impact them. Second, they must recognize the social implications of their choices. They are responsible for what and how they incorporate. If they allowed themselves to be abducted, to find their bodies fixed by pictures staring them in the face, people “from every place and type” could refashion their hearts to echo the vast universe and become members of an undemarcated citizenry joined by place and ethics. Here was a specially crafted sense-realm for developing a sensorium that could envision designs for living and claim the right to demand their enactment. Viewers who engaged landscape paintings’ unique sense-realsms performed liturgies and became “comprehending,” “socially true,” ethical actors. In short, the physical, emotional, and intellectual changes triggered by the liminal phase enhanced visitors’ dhawq and helped them make sense of their community, country, and self-pedagogy.

The sensible forms of al-manazir al-tabī‘iya were at once visceral and intellectual, beautiful and logical, and a “world full of marvels and morals,” as Habib Srur had preached. From Srur’s sketching to Shamil’s testimony, art provided a sense-realm within which people allowed themselves to make claims on their fellow citizens in the name of sacred beauty revealed by artistic sensitivity and moral visuality. The imprinting set underway by these divine prints did not stop at the exhibition halls’ doors. Average citizens and government figures alike were challenged to perform their commitment to their nation through interaction with art, carrying the lessons and imprinting processes further. That the pictures could become influential persons in Mandate Beirut highlights the role of agential aesthetics in programs for social change. That their projects are no longer remembered today underscores the importance of studying political movements and social aspirations in the many forms of media that mattered at the time.

Notes
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Translation? Changing Views” organized by Avinoam Shalem at the Center for Advanced Studies, Ludwig–Maximilians-Universität München in 2010; the Kevorkian Center at New York University in 2012; and of course, “The Mashriq in the Age of Late Imperialism” conference Andrew Arsan and Cyrus Schayegh organized at Princeton University in 2013. The paper developed through many insightful discussions I had with Nadia Bou Ali, Tarek El-Ariss, Ilana Feldman, Hildred Geertz, Peter Lagerquist, Nada Mountar, Silvia Naef, Gyan Prakash, Nadya Shabti, Hala Shoukair, Wendy Shaw, Livia Wick, and Jessica Winegar. Drafts received the challenging, attentive reading of Lori Allen, Betty Anderson, Andrew Arsan, Ussama Makdisi, Karen Miller, Heghnar Watenpaugh, and over and over, Munir Farash Eldin. I was also assisted in completing the research by several inquisitive and meticulous graduate students at AUB, specifically, Sarah Sabban, Douaa Sheh, Mac Skelton, and Heghnar Yeghiayan. Ziad Abu-Rish, Simon Jackson, Samir Seikaly, and Elizabeth Thompson promptly and thoughtfully answered my research queries. None of the quest would have started without the foundational generosity of the following individuals in opening their archives to me: Saleh Barakat, Joumana Dabliz Kaaki, Hana Farrouk, Joseph Matar, Nada Onsi, Mai Onsi, Ihsan Onsi, Ali Raad, and especially Hani Farroukh. Lastly, I want to thank the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and Ussama Makdisi for hosting me in the spring of 2014 for an especially productive research retreat.

2 I use the transliterations the artists developed for their signatures, but provide the IJMES transliteration for sake of cross-referencing.


5 Ibid., 269.


15 *Paysage* literally is manazir rifiyya or wataniyya (rural or national views). The closest term in use was *mashahid wataniyya* (national scenes) for portraits of national figures or events. Unlike *manazir taba‘yya*, none connects the idea of “nature” and a viewing practice.


17 I owe this articulation to Munir Farash Eldin.

18 This use of “sense” draws on the anthropological literature of aesthetics as opposed to physiological or psychological analyses. See Kathryn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).


Kirsten Scheid

24 Exposition du Peintre Farrouk, 15–24 December, 1933, Guest Registry (Hani Farrukh Archives, Beirut, Lebanon), 30 – hereafter “Registry.”
26 Ibid., emphasis added.
27 In the registry, signees used the French paysage or the Ottoman-Arabic manazir. The first usage of “paysage libanais” I have found in the press occurs in 1932: Maurice Debbane, “Semaine de la peinture,” L’Orient 13 December 1932, 2; “al-manazir al-tabi’iyya al-libnaniyya” has to wait until 1938: Ahmad Mukhtar ‘Adada, “Athr Jawla fi ‘Alam al-Fann,” al-Makshuf 4, 23 May 1938, 6.
28 “Registry,” 37.
29 Ibid., 6.
30 Ibid., 7.
31 I reach this number from the observation that usually only a minority of visitors actually sign registries, and from consistent newspaper reports of attendance in the thousands for other shows in the early 1930s.
32 ‘Adada, “Athr Jawla.”
33 “Registry,” 26.
36 Ibid., 24.
37 “Registry,” 20.
38 Ibid., 21.
39 Ibid., 20.
40 The conventional narrative notwithstanding, both French diplomatic archives and contemporary Arabic newspapers support this assertion.
41 Wadi’a Mikha’il Urman, advertisement, Lisan al-Hal, 52:10529, 20 April 1929, 3.
43 Ibid., 23.
44 In Gell’s words, abduction is “a case of synthetic inference where we find some very curious circumstances which could be explained by the supposition that it was a case of some general rule, and thereupon [we] adopt that supposition” (ibid., 14).
45 “Registry,” 39.
47 Ibid., 111.
48 Ibid., 109.
50 For this reason, too, I refrain from referring to the concept by the standard, English translation, hoping that by holding to the Arabic, I leave open the possibility to pursue unexpected associations and implications.
53 Ibid., 86.
56 Ibid., 65. On the project of “patriotic motherhood,” see Thompson, Colonial Citizens.
57 Ibid., 111–112.
58 Ibid., 110.
61 This process of being imprinted is technically active, as the Arabic verb separates “to be printed” (tubi’a) from “to get imprinted” (intaba’). The medieval philosopher Al-Muqaddisi similarly discussed of tab as the source of the talisman’s agency. See Finbarr Flood, “Image against Nature,” Medieval History Journal 9 (2006): 155.

368
62 Omar Onsi, “Two Attitudes,” unpublished manuscript (Nada Onsi Archives, Beirut, Lebanon). Capitalization follows the original.

63 Onsi probably refers to the Impressionists, who developed chromatic schemes to emphasize the subjectivity of the artist’s perception, and subsequent schools such as Fauvism. Later in his talk, Onsi explicitly contrasts between “transient art,” exemplified for him by Picasso’s canvases, and “eternal art,” found in “God’s natural world.”

64 Omar Onsi, “Kuo-Hsi,” unpublished manuscript (May Onsi Archives, Beirut, Lebanon).

65 Onsi details this method in “Notes on Art,” and he describes it in an interview from that period with Marcelle Proux (“Onsi: Le Silencieux,” L’Orient 14:108, 17 November 1937, 1–2).

66 This iconographical exposition draws on Anne-Marie Schimmel, Deciphering the Signs of God (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

67 Schimmel, Deciphering, 227.


69 Schimmel, Deciphering, 227.

70 Moustapha Farrouk, “Al-Fann wa-l-Din,” in Notebook #1, 1936–1943 (Hani Farrukh Archives, Beirut, Lebanon), 3–6.

71 Ibid., 6.

72 Omar Onsi, “Ma Arahu,” unpublished manuscript (May Onsi Archives, Beirut, Lebanon).


79 For discussions of the geopolitical programs contending to incorporate and define “Lebanon” at that time, see Thompson, Colonial Citizens, 41; Kais Firro, Inventing Lebanon (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Asher Kaufmann, Reviving Phoenicia (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); and Raghid Sulh, Lubnan wa-l-‘Unba (London: Dar Saqi, 2006).

80 “Registry,” 37. I gratefully acknowledge the invaluable aid of Munir Fakher Eldin for this translation.


82 This eloquent formulation is Andrew Arsan’s.

83 Thompson, Colonial Citizens, 113.