



Muslim Voices

ARTS & IDEAS

MuslimVoicesFestival.org

***Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas* festival June 5–14, 2009 to present visual arts exhibitions encompassing video art from Afghanistan, Iran and the U.S.; photographs of NYC mosques; masterpieces of Islamic calligraphy; Sufi mystical arts; and more**

Asia Society, Austrian Cultural Forum, BAM, Brooklyn Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and MoCADA celebrate artistic expression in the Muslim world as part of ten-day, multi-venue arts festival and conference

New York, NY/April 24, 2008—Asia Society, BAM, and NYU Center for Dialogues announce the visual arts programming for *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas*. The ten-day, multi-venue arts festival and conference features exhibitions at Asia Society, Austrian Cultural Forum, BAM, Brooklyn Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and MoCADA (in collaboration with Museum for African Art). *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas* celebrates the extraordinary range of artistic expression in the Muslim world with more than 100 artists from as far away as Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and as near as Brooklyn. In addition to visual arts, the festival features theater, films, exhibitions, talks, and other events, ranging from the traditional to the contemporary. The full festival press release, schedule of events, materials on participating artists, and more can be found at www.MuslimVoicesFestival.org.

Visual Arts

Sight Unseen: Video from Afghanistan and Iran

June 9–Sept. 13

Tues–Sun, 11am to 6pm; with extended hours Fri until 9pm

Asia Society Museum, 725 Park Ave at 70th Street, New York, NY

\$ 5, 7, 10



Rahraw Omarzad, *Opening*, 2005.

Asia Society presents *Sight Unseen: Video from Afghanistan and Iran* showcases two video works by Afghan artist **Rahraw Omarzad** and Iranian artist **Seifollah Samadian**. The exhibition will represent the first time either work has been presented in a U.S. museum. Both artists are ardent supporters of artistic independence in their home countries. Although the two works are stylistically different, *Sight Unseen* reveals each of the artists' intense exploration of the human condition.

Rahraw Omarzad (b. 1964, Kabul) is one of Afghanistan's first



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avant-garde video artists. A teacher and mentor to a younger generation of Afghan artists, he played an important role in establishing the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA), the only not-for-profit arts organization in the country. His work *The Third One* (formerly titled *Opening*, single channel video, color, and sound, 11 minutes, 31 seconds) is the result of a collaboration between Omarzad and his students and members of CCAA. This compelling video depicts an unidentified individual using scissors to cut a hole in a woman's head-covering or *chadri* (also referred to as *chador* in Iran or *burqa* by Muslims in other regions). Rather than passively accepting this apparent "liberation," the woman under the *chadri* begins to stitch colorful embroidery around the hole.



Seifollah Samadian, *The White Station*, 1999.

Seifollah Samadian (b. 1954, Tehran) is highly regarded internationally as an art director, and has worked with celebrated film directors such as Abbas Kiarostami and Martin Scorsese. His simple filmic works often document mundane everyday scenes, extracting drama and leading to an awareness of wider social issues. He emerged on the forefront of the Iranian art scene for his photographic work following the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. *The White Station* (1999, 35mm film transferred to single channel video, color, and sound, 9 minutes) depicts a woman wearing a black *chador* as she waits for a bus during a harsh blizzard in Tehran in 1999. The mesmerizing film was shot in one take from the artist's apartment window. Samadian's work has been

exhibited extensively in Europe and at major international exhibitions, including *Documenta* in Kassel and the *Istanbul Biennial*. He is the publisher and editor of the influential Iranian cultural magazine *Tassvir*.

The exhibition is curated by Miwako Tezuka, Associate Curator, Asia Society.

Please contact Elaine Merguerian at 212.327.9313 or elainem@asiasoc.org for more information.

New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York City

June 5–14

12Noon–11pm

BAM Natman Room, Peter Jay Sharp Building, 30 Lafayette Ave, Brooklyn, NY

Free



Edward Grazda, image courtesy Sepia International.

BAM presents a selection of work from *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York City*. The documentary project by Edward Grazda explores the Islamic presence in New York by looking at various places Muslims assemble to worship throughout the boroughs. The project took root on February 26, 1993 amidst an urban crisis: the first World Trade Center bombing. But ultimately more destructive to the city at that time were the tidal waves of toxic and reductive one-line headlines that followed in the written and televised media: "Muslim Terrorist," establishing a simple familiar code name for terror. Grazda and scholar Jerrilynn R. Dodds not only

documented the mosques and analyzed their architectural forms, but also conducted interviews with

community members—in the process, revealing an alternative image of American Islam. Grazda’s photography displays a unique perspective on an emerging cultural identity that is American and Muslim. Grazda’s “penetrating black-and-white photographs” (The New York Times) were published as a book of the same title in 2002, *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York City*.

Born in New York City in 1947, Edward Grazda studied photography at the Rhode Island School of Design. Starting in 1972, he began photographing in Latin America. Later he concentrated on Asia, traveling to Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Burma, Pakistan, and India. During the past 20 years his primary focus has been on the people of Afghanistan. Grazda teaches photography at the Harvard University Summer School and is on the faculty of the International Center of Photography in New York. He has worked on the archives of Walker Evans and Hans Namuth.

The subject of three monographs, Grazda's work has also been published in *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *Doubletake*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Avenda-E-Afghan*, an independent Afghan newspaper. His photographs are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Brooklyn Museum of Art; The New York Public Library; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and others. Among his awards are grants by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1980 and 1986, and by the New York Foundation for the Arts in 1986. He has been a MacDowell Colony Fellow in 1994, 1996, 1999, 2001, and 2003.

Please contact Fatima Kafele, at 718.636.4129 x4 or fkafele@bam.org for more information.

Partner events

The Seen and the Hidden (Dis)covering the Veil
Austrian Cultural Forum, 11 East 52nd Street, New York, NY
May 21–Aug 29
acfny.org/212.319.5300

The Muslim woman’s veil is one of the most visible icons of contemporary Islam. It represents an important cultural tradition yet remains a very personal practice for Muslim women as well as a symbol communicated to others within the public sphere. By presenting contemporary artists from the Greater Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan), Europe (Austria, France, Germany) and North America (New York City, Canada), this exhibition intends to be a trans-cultural exploration of ideas that surround both the literal and, as importantly, metaphorical meaning of the veil. Works included represent a variety of media such as video, installation, photography, and painting. Curated by David Harper and Martha Kirszenbaum (New York) and Karin Meisel (Vienna).

Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam
Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY
June 5–Sept 6
brooklynmuseum.org/718.638.5000

This installation features approximately 25 objects from the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and private collections related to a mystical form of Islam known as Sufism. The theme of light and enlightenment is emphasized throughout, both literally and in its figurative or spiritual sense. Highlights include an extraordinary Egyptian gilded and enameled glass lamp inscribed with the famous “Light Verse” (*Ayat al-Nūr*) from the Qur’an; two brass candlesticks made in the Jazira region and Iran in

the early thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively; illustrated manuscripts, manuscript pages, and single folios of Sufi literature and subjects from Iran and India; an early thirteenth-century Iranian dish inscribed with mystical poetry; and a contemporary work on paper produced with rubbings of prayer stones. Organized by Ladan Akbarnia, Hagop Kevorkian Associate Curator of Islamic Art, Brooklyn Museum.

Masterpieces of Islamic Calligraphy from the Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue at 82nd St, New York, NY
June 2–Sept 1
metmuseum.org/212.535.7710

Masterpieces of calligraphy from the Islamic Art Department's collections will be on display for, showcasing the calligraphic art of the Islamic world, from Spain to south Asia and beyond. The works, ranging in date from the 8th to the 19th century, will include several richly illuminated Qur'anic manuscripts, as well as sumptuous album pages in a variety of scripts, examples of inlaid metalwork, fine ceramics, and rare textiles with calligraphic elements. Many calligraphic scripts from early *kufic* to the later refined *nasta'liq*, will be shown in a range of media, demonstrating the impact and importance of this most quintessential of art forms.

Perspectives: Women, Art and Islam
MoCADA (Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts) & Museum for African Art
80 Hanson Place, Fort Greene, Brooklyn, NY
June 4–Sept 13
mocada.org/718.230.0492

Spanning three continents and the mediums of video, photography and installation, *Perspectives* features work by five female artists: Fariba Alam (Bangladesh), Zoulikha Bouabdellah (Algeria), Mahwish Chishty (Pakistan), Safaa Erruas (Morocco), and Nsenga Knight (Brooklyn), whose works challenge preconceptions, defy categorization and raise timely questions about gender and the Islamic faith. Alam infuses ceramic tiles with personal archival photography of family in Bangladesh; Bouabdellah carves out space for gold high-heels in a series of prayer rugs, and takes self-portraits with couscous pots; Knight interviews Muslim women from her Brooklyn community for a video installation; Chishty projects Kufic script into a pool of water; and Erruas uses multiple sections of soft white textiles to set out the gallery's walls as spaces of perceived femininity. Curated by Kimberli Gant and Lisa Binder.

About the festival

Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas is an unprecedented ten-day festival and conference taking place June 5–14, 2009 throughout New York City. It is presented by Asia Society, BAM, and NYU Center for Dialogues. The festival features more than 100 artists and speakers from as far away as Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and as near as Brooklyn for performances, films, exhibitions, talks, and other events, ranging from the traditional (calligraphy, storytelling, and Sufi devotional voices) to the contemporary (video installations and Arabic hip-hop). Festival presentations and programs aim to present multiple perspectives from the Muslim world. In addition to the mainstage offerings and complementary education and humanities events from Asia Society, BAM, and NYU Center for Dialogues, programs associated with the *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas* festival will take place at locations including: Austrian Cultural Forum New York, Brooklyn Museum, MoCADA (Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, American Museum of Natural History and The New York Public Library. In celebration

of *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas*, the Empire State Building and Brooklyn Borough Hall will be lit green from June 5—7. The color green has many significant associations in Islam and is considered auspicious. More information about the festival can be found at www.MuslimVoicesFestival.org.

About the organizers

Asia Society is the leading global and pan-Asian organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of the United States and Asia. The Society seeks to increase knowledge and enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of policy, business, education, arts, and culture. Through the presentation of groundbreaking museum exhibitions and cultural programs, Asia Society provides a forum for both traditional and contemporary Asian artistic expressions. Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Asia Society is a nonprofit educational institution with offices in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, and Washington, D.C. For more information visit AsiaSociety.org.

Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) is recognized internationally for its innovative programming of dance, music, theater, music-theater, opera, and film. BAM presents leading national and international artists and companies in its annual Spring Season and highlights groundbreaking, contemporary work in the performing arts with its Next Wave Festival each fall. Founded in 1983, the Next Wave is one of the world's most important festivals of contemporary performing arts. BAM Rose Cinemas features new, independent film releases and BAMcinématek—a curated, daily repertory film program.

BAM also serves New York City's diverse population through a weekend concert series in BAMcafé, community events, literary series, artist talks, and a wide variety of educational programs. BAM, America's oldest performing arts center in continuous operation, has presented performances since 1861, and attracts an audience of more than 500,000 people each year. The institution is led by President Karen Brooks Hopkins and Executive Producer Joseph V. Melillo—each of whom has been associated with BAM for more than twenty-five years. For more information visit BAM.org.

NYU Center for Dialogues is an institution of New York University dedicated to knocking down the walls of misunderstanding between the Islamic world, the United States, and other Western countries and replacing them with bridges of knowledge, mutual respect, and reason. Founded in the aftermath of the Sept 11, 2001 tragedy by Director Mustapha Tlili, the NYU Center for Dialogues has established a solid reputation on both sides of the Muslim-Western divide. Its conferences are widely discussed in international policy circles and its publications are used as educational materials in university classrooms, while its initiatives have contributed to new connections made at the institutional and individual levels. Tlili is a NYU research scholar and senior fellow at the university's Remarque Institute. He is a former senior UN official, having served as director for communications policy at the UN Department of Public Information, director of the UN information center for France, and chief of the Namibia, Anti-Apartheid, Palestine, and decolonization programs in the same department. For more information visit centerfordialogues.org.

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CREDITS

Asia Society, BAM, and NYU Center for Dialogues are the partners for *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas*.

Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas associate partners are American Museum of Natural History, Austrian Cultural Forum, Brooklyn Arts Council, Brooklyn Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum for African Art, Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA), The New York Public Library, and the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC).

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