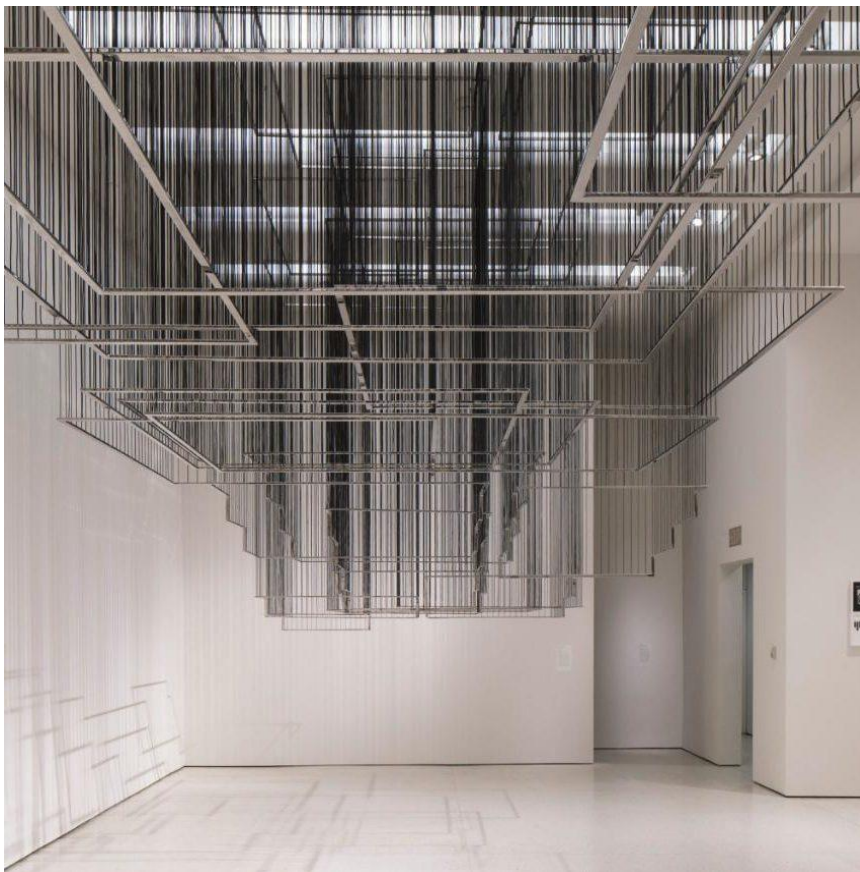


But a Storm is Blowing in from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa



Installation View: Nadia Kaabi-Linke's *Flying Carpets* at *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, April 29–October 5, 2016 CREDIT: DAVID HEALD

By **Caroline Roux**

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The exhibition *Under the Same Sun* has been shining brightly at the South London Gallery this summer. Meanwhile its counterpart – *But a Storm is Blowing in from Paradise* – is slumbering rather more quietly at the Guggenheim in New York. Both shows are part of a huge initiative on the part of the

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Guggenheim to de-westernise its permanent collection, and they are doing so with a donation of many, many millions from bankers UBS.

The project, called MAP, kicked off in 2013, with an exhibition entitled No Country that showcased contemporary art from South and South-East Asia. Next came Latin America in Under the Same Sun. The final leg, But a Storm is Blowing... (the title is a quotation from Walter Benjamin about the nature of progress) rounds up recent work from the Middle East and North Africa. In all, the Guggenheim will have acquired 126 new works from 88 artists and collectives.



Abbas Akhavan's piece with cast bronze fauna at But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York CREDIT: DAVID HEALD

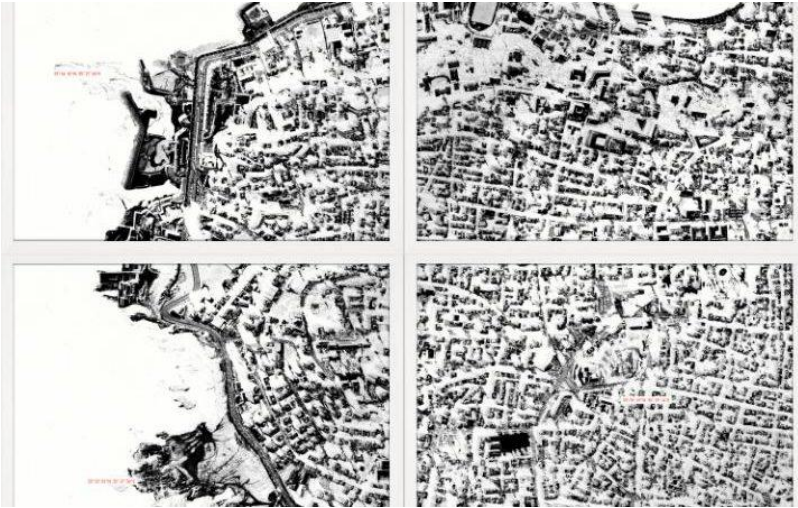
The show that Sara Raza has delivered in New York demonstrates a very particular curatorial approach. “I had a mandate,” says Raza, “and that was to gather work for a permanent collection. Work that will mean something in 30 years or 100.” This is work, then, that aims to explain, rather than to please. There is no painting, and little drawing. While there is plenty of beauty that is not the point. (Though Abbas Akhavan’s piece with cast bronze fauna scattered on white sheets is as lovely as it is disturbing. Are they sheets, or are they shrouds?)



Kader Attia Untitled (Ghardaïa), 2009 Couscous, two inkjet prints, and five photocopy prints Edition 2/3 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York CREDIT: DAVID HEALD

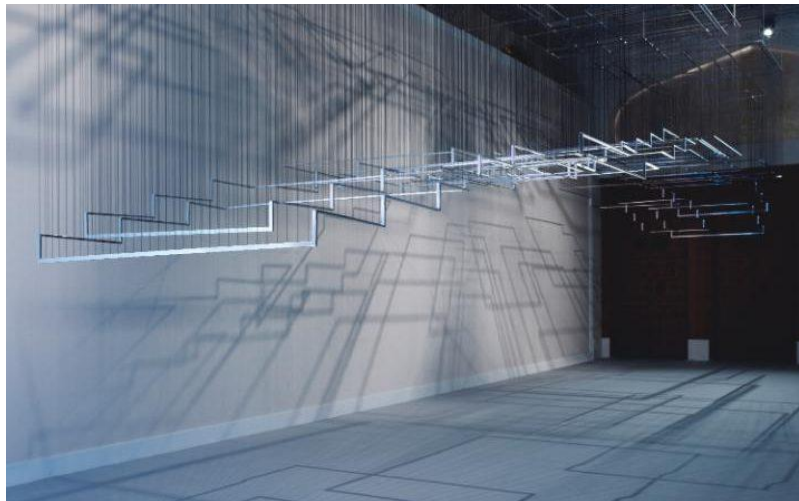
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Instead installations, many of an architectural nature, tell stories of movement, loss and cultural larceny. This last point features especially in Kader Attia's sublime city made of couscous, a perfect replica of the Algerian settlement of Ghardaia that dates back to the 11th century. It was colonised by the French in the 19th century, and went on to provide Le Corbusier with some of his best design ideas. It's accompanied by photographs of the architect and his colleague Fernand Pouillon – a stark reminder that it is sometimes the colonised who provide the higher culture and not the other way round.



Ali Cherri Trembling Landscapes—Beirut (Paysages Tremblants—Beirut), 2014 Lithograph and archival ink stamp, four parts, 70 x 100 cm each, edition 4/7

The Beiruti artist Ali Cherri has created ink-stamped aerial maps of cities including his own, Damascus and Tehran. On each he has marked the faultlines resulting from catastrophic earthquakes, as well as the centres of political unrest: it's as though the destruction of a city, and its people, is a closely drawn battle between nature and man. His Mecca is a city whose important Ottoman past is being rapidly eroded by rampant development, even in spite of its holy Islamic status.



Nadia Kaabi-Linke *Flying Carpets*, 2011 Stainless steel and rubber, 420 cm x 13 m x 340 cm Edition 2/2 (First edition commissioned by the Abraaj Group Art Prize)

Of course, the exhibition is particularly timely. It was conceived in the light of the Arab Spring, but subsequent events in Syria, Turkey and elsewhere in the Middle East make it more relevant day by day. Nadia Kaabi-Linke, who was born in Tunis and now lives in Berlin, has focused on the street vendors of Venice, mostly of African or Arabic origin. Her spectacular cage-like construction of steel, aluminium and

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thread takes its co-ordinates the escape routes followed by the street sellers as they gather up their blankets and fake handbags when the authorities appear. Nearby, a disembodied brass stair-rail suggests another kind of economy: it's a replica of one outside Egypt's first state-owned bank, Banque Misr, by Cairo artist Hassan Khan. Apparently floating in space, its disembodied nature does well to evoke the idea of the abstract nature of the contemporary world of finance.



Hassan Khan Bank Bannister (Banque Bannister), 2010 Brass, 209 x 206 x 22 cm, edition 1/3 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund 2015.94

In Spring 2017, the exhibition will open in the Pera Museum in Istanbul. There many of these conversations will feel even more poignant than they do in New York.

But a Storm is Blowing in from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa is at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, until 5 October.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/luxury/art/but-a-storm-is-blowing-in-from-paradise-contemporary-art-of-the/>