

The Ninth Biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art (November 2021)

As for the earth, We spread it out... and caused everything to grow there in perfect balance.

--Surah 15:19

The Environment and Ecology in Islamic Art and Culture

An eco-conscious ethos is intrinsic to Islamic scripture and culture. This sensitivity profoundly influences the relationship between human beings, deputized as stewards of nature by Allah, and the environment they inhabit. Historical and contemporary Islamic visual traditions have demonstrated this consciousness in urban planning, landscape architecture, water management, and many other art forms. Despite this awareness, in the present epoch of the Anthropocene, human intervention has caused irreparable damage to the planet's biodiversity and ecosystems. As art history shifts its disciplinary attention to the unfolding global crisis, this symposium considers how an ecological art history can examine objects, materials, and the built environment through the lens of Islamic culture. It also seeks to push beyond binaries of human/non-human and culture/nature in which the human and the cultural are privileged over other species and the natural world. Humans, within this ontological framework, are part of the environment and in possession of unique capacities necessary to address climate change, sustainability, and environmental conservation.

How might the study of the visual, rooted in disciplines such as art history, anthropology, and archaeology of the larger Islamic world, engage with these concerns on practical, philosophical, and methodological grounds? The co-chairs of the Ninth Biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art, scheduled for November 7 and 8, 2021 in Doha, Qatar, invite papers from established and emerging scholars whose research explores these themes through geological time across the arts of the core Islamic lands and the broader Muslim diaspora. Topics to consider might include but are not limited to:

- Anthropogenic transformations of landscapes and water bodies
- Conceptualizations and representations of the changing natural world
- Artistic and architectural responses to climatic events (ex. little ice age)
- Intersections with gender, race, and socioeconomic status
- Impact on contemporary artistic and curatorial practices

In light of the ongoing pandemic, the Symposium will adopt a hybrid format with both virtual and in-person panels. For speakers interested in traveling to Doha, the Symposium sponsors will cover airfare to and from the city and lodging for up to four nights during the Symposium at the conference hotel in Doha. Regardless of presentation format (virtual or in-person), each speaker will receive an honorarium of \$1,500 USD, and will be expected to give a 20-minute presentation as part of a panel. Select papers will potentially be included in the published proceedings following the symposium.

Please submit the following documents as a single PDF: a two-page short CV, presentation title, a 300-word abstract, two related images, and presentation format (virtual or in-person) preference for consideration. Submissions should be sent to islamicart@vcu.edu by February 20, 2021.

Symposium Organizers:

Radha Dalal, Interim Director of Art History and Assistant Professor of Islamic Art (VCUarts Qatar)

Jochen Sokoly, Associate Professor of Islamic Art (VCUarts Qatar)

Sean Roberts, Lecturer in Early Modern Art (University of Tennessee)