Transforming perceptions of Islamic culture in Australia through collaboration in contemporary art

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Transforming perceptions of Islamic culture in Australia through collaboration in contemporary art

A thesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Master of Creative Arts – Research 2008

From

University of Wollongong

By

Annette Tzavaras
Bachelor of Visual Arts University of Sydney 2004
Bachelor of Creative Arts Honours University of Wollongong 2005

Faculty of Creative Arts
I, Annette L. Tzavaras, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Creative Arts in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Annette L. Tzavaras
5th June 2008
Table Of Contents

Glossary ................................................................. ix
Abstract ................................................................ x
Introduction ............................................................ xiii
Chapter 1 .................................................................. 1
  Visual Background ................................................. 1
  Arthur Streeton ..................................................... 3
Chapter 2 .................................................................. 11
  Emily Jacir ............................................................ 11
Chapter 3 .................................................................. 16
  Abdul Karim Rahimi ............................................ 16
  Elizabeth Ashburn ............................................. 20
  Aloma Treister .................................................... 22
Chapter 4 .................................................................. 26
  Creative Exegesis ................................................ 26
  Collaboration in Western Sydney: Curatorial innovation ........................................ 26
  Transforming Perception Via . . . the exhibition .............................................................. 32
    Khaled Sabsabi .................................................... 33
    Aghnar Niazi ....................................................... 35
    Fozia and Zahid husband and wife artists ................................................................. 37
    Aroha Groves ...................................................... 39
    Annette Tzavaras ............................................... 40
    Summery ............................................................ 41
Chapter 5 .................................................................. 43
  Kabul, Afghanistan ............................................... 43
  Dialogue in Diversity exhibition .............................. 47
  Afghani Darkness ................................................ 47
  Whiteout ............................................................... 51
  Fragility and Fragmentation .................................. 53
  Mashrabiyya ........................................................ 61
  Niqab and Burqu’ah ............................................. 64
  Gallery ................................................................. 66
  In Partnership with Diversity Week ......................... 70
Bibliography ........................................................... 71
Table of Figures

Figure 1  Left to right, Jo-Jo the family dog Philip, Robert, Helen, Beryl, Eadie and Annette playing in the snow at Surge Tank 1953. Property of Annette Tzavaras

Figure 2  Eagle Hawk 1A and 2nd class school photo 195. Property of Annette Tzavaras

Figure 3  Arthur Streeton. Fatma Habiba 1897. Oil on canvas on paperboard. 29 x 27 cm. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Gift of Mr and Mrs Douglas Mullins (Benjamin 137)

Figure 4  Jean-Leon Gerome The Snake Charmer c 1880. Oil on canvas. 84 x 122 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Mass, USA (Benjamin 99)

Figure 5  Arthur Streeton with a tourist party on donkeys at Giza, 1897 (Eagles 112)

Figure 6  Arthur Streeton. Cairo Street 1897. Oil on canvas 33.4 x 17.1 cm Collection, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Bequest of Henriette von Dallwitz and of Richard Paul in honour of his father Dr Oscar Paul 1965 (Benjamin 140)

Figure 7  Left Henri Bechard, Cairo mashrabiyya (Le Caire, moucharabich) c 1875. Right J. B. Greene Old Street in Cairo 1845 Salt paper photograph 22.4 x 29.8 cm Collection Gerard Levy, Paris (Benjamin 214)

Figure 8  The Snake Charmer (Le Charmeur de Viperes) 1889. Oil on canvas 175.6 x 180.4 cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased 1890 (Benjamin 44)

Figure 9  Edward Poynter The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon 1890. Oil on canvas 234.5 x 350.5 cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Purchased 1892 (Benjamin 91)

Figure 10. Details of Arthur Streeton painting of Fatma Habiba. Left you can make out the under drawing around the crown and right, details of the brass nose cover

Figure 11  Arthur Streeton Left Egyptian Drink Vendor 1987. Oil on paperboard 33.2 x 18.3 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. The bequest of Henriette von Dallwitz and of Richard Paul in honour of his late father, Dr Oscar Paul 1965. Right A Seller of Drinks, Cairo 1897. Oil on canvas on wood panel 42.2 x 21 cm. Private Collection (Benjamin 138-9)

Figure 12  Artist Emily Jacir, 2000 (The electronic intifada p 2)

Figure 13  Part of the installation and performance space by Emily Jacir at the Zones of Contact 2006 Biennale of Sydney (The electronic intifada p 3)

Figure 14  Emily Jacir photo from the project Material for a film 2006 (McDonald 153)

Figure 15  Emily Jacir, From Paris to Riyadh (Drawings for my mother) 1998-200. Marker on vellum Installation dimension variable, each sheet 30.5 x 23 cm (Bailey115)

Figure 16  A detail of the Installation. From Paris to Riyadh (Drawings for my mother)
Figure 17 Ornamental script used in many of the large copies of the Koran

Figure 18 Abdul Karim Rahimi 2002 - Our Home, 17 x 17 cm. Watercolour on paper. Courtesy Elizabeth Ashburn

Figure 19 Abdul Karim Rahimi - My Family, 2002, 23x28 cm. Watercolour and gouache on paper. Courtesy Elizabeth Ashburn

Figure 20 Abdul Karim Rahimi. 2003. Professor Peter Pinson. Acrylic and gouache on paper 22.5 x 14.2 cm (Rahimi 43)

Figure 21 Elizabeth Ashburn. Iraqi woman (Latfoya, burning oil tanker), 2005.. Watercolour on paper approx 40 x 28 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 22 Elizabeth Ashburn. City View. (Falluja, April-May 2004), 2004. Watercolour on paper, approx 40 x 28 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 23 Elizabeth Ashburn. The Crusades Series: The Allies 2005 acrylic, tempura and watercolour on canvas 200 x 250 cm. Courtesy of the artists

Figure 24. Elizabeth Ashburn. 2006 Garden of Eden Series – Looking for weapons of mass destruction. Watercolour, gouache on paper 19 x 34 cm. Courtesy of artist.

Figure 25 Aloma Treister 1998 Turquoise Flower Acrylic on gauze on board 60 x 60 cm. (Treister Plate 11) courtesy of the artist

Figure 26 Aloma Treister Scroll 1999 Acrylic on board 120 x 120 cm (Treister Plate17). Courtsey of the artist

Figure 27 Ahlam Shibli Dream from the Series Unrecognised, 2000. Invitation to the Home Ground exhibition Ivan Dougherty Gallery June 2006

Figure 28 Invitation for the Transient Visions Exhibition, Blacktown 2006

Figure 29 Invitation to the exhibition Inside Out Auburn 2006 provided by Aghnar Niazi

Figure 30 Meriam Bouderbala (Tunisia) Untitled, n/d Image from the front cover of the catalogue Breaking the Veils: Women Artists from the Islamic world. Shepparton Art Gallery Victoria

Figure 31 Mounira Nusseibeh 1980 Four Arab Women Mixed media on canvas 100 x 125 cm digital image Annette Tzavaras Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria

Figure 32 Artists Fozia Zahid, Aghnar Niazi and Annette Tzavaras with Elizabeth Ashburn at the Transforming Perceptions Via... exhibition FCA Gallery University of Wollongong, Property of Annette Tzavaras

Figure 33 Artist Khaled Sabsabi (left) with Salah Saouli at Liverpool Regional Museum 2007. Photograph John Fotiadis

Figure 34 Kahled Sabsabi and Salah Saouli Oversight Installation March 2007 Liverpool Regional Museum (Casula Power House web site)
Figure 35 Aghnar Niazi 2007 at the Transforming Perception Via… Photograph Rachel Ismen

Figure 36 Aghnar Niazi The Truth I Believe 1999. Mixed media on canvas 1.4 x 1.6 cm. Photograph Rachel Ismen

Figure 37 Artist from the Transforming Perceptions Via… 2007 Property of Annette Tzavaras

Figure 38 Fozia Zahid Untitled images 600 x 400 water colour on board. Photograph Rachel Ismen

Figure 39 Zahid Ahmed 2006 Untitled Installation. Dimensions variable. Photograph Rachelsmen

Figure 40 Aroha Groves with her work for the exhibition Transforming Perceptions Via…

Figure 41 Aroha Groves 2007 Untitled Installation. Wire, jute string, reeds and glue. Work in progress. Photograph Rachel Ismen

Figure 42 Aroha Groves 2007 Untitled Installation. Details of progress, documentation/photograph Annette Tzavaras

Figure 43 Annette Tzavaras 2007 Left; Visual Perceptions, 1200 x 1200 Stucco oil on board. Collection of University of Wollongong Dubai. Right, Fragility and Fragmentation Cast Plaster 600 x 400 cm 3D installation 2007 Transforming Perceptions Via… FCA Gallery University of Wollongong. Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 44 Widows wearing the blue burqa in the Panjshir Valley, Afghanistan. Photograph Liz Gilles.

Figure 45 Hope House Kabul, orphan children proudly displaying their artwork. Property of Annette Tzavaras

Figure 46 Kabul, Afghanistan 2005. A wall of mud bricks surrounding a family complex. Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 47 Left; National Gallery Kabul 2005. Photograph Annette Tzavaras. Right; Paintings and images destroyed by the Taliban at the National Gallery Kabul 2005 Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 48 The Centre of Contemporary Art Afghanistan 2005. Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 49 Annette Tzavaras 2006, detail of the painting. Afghani Darkness. 1200 x 1200 x 100 cm. Stucco, oil, plaster and oxide on board. Dialogue in Diversity FCA Gallery University of Wollongong. Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 50 Annette Tzavaras 2006, detail of the painting Panshjir Valley 1200 X 1200 x 100 cm. Stucco, oil, plaster and oxide on board. Dialogue in Diversity FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 51 Panjshir River, Afghanistan. 2006 A treacherous road running parallel to the mighty Panjshir river. Photograph Liz Gilles

Figure 52 Panjshir Valley, Afghanistan. 2006. Remnants of Russian army vehicles rust in the clean water of the Panjshir river. Photograph Liz Gilles
Figure 53 A concept by F. El Guindi and Composite Computer Graphics by D. W Read (El Guindi 102)

Figure 54 Afghani Widow in blue burqa. Kabul, 2005 Property of Annette Tzavaras

Figure 55 Annette Tzavaras. Whiteout, 2006. 1200 x 1200 x 100 cm Stucco, acrylic, oil on board. Dialogue in Diversity FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 56 Annette Tzavaras 2008. Fragility and Fragmentation, 3D installation. Dimensions variable Dialogue in Diversity FCA Gallery University of Wollongong. Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 57 Annette Tzavaras 2006. Left. Image of silicon mould and plaster cast. Right 2007 Fragility and Fragmentation 3D Installation in the Transforming Perceptions Via... Exhibition. Property of Annette Tzavaras

Figure 58 A diagram of hexagon’s from Critchlow’s book of Islamic Patterns (Critchlow 33)

Figure 59 Annette Tzavaras 2006 work in progress showing various stages and layers using handmade template. Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 60 Annette Tzavaras 2008 Fragility and Fragmentation Installation; Dialogue in Diversity Exhibition. FCA Gallery University of Wollongong. Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 61 Details of hexagon cut-out in installation titled Mashrabiyya 2008. Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 62 Annette Tzavaras 2007 Gold Bazaar I Stucco, acrylic and oil on board 1200 x 1200 x 100 cm. Collection of the University of Wollongong, Dubai UAE. Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 63 An example of the internal wall decorations in the shopping Malls, Dubai UAE. Photograph Lilly Clowry

Figure 64 Annette Tzavaras 2007, detail, Gold Bazaar II Stucco, acrylic, oil on board. 1200 x 1200 x 100cm. Dialogue in Diversity, FCA Gallery University of Wollongong. Photograph Juilee Pyror

Figure 65 The coffee shop under a domed roof at Ibn Battuta shopping mall Dubai 2007 Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 66 Left; detail of the Marble relief imported from Turkey for the Gallipoli Mosque in Auburn. Right; Mashrabiyya pattern applied to a souvenir trinket box. Photographs 2007 Annette Tzavaras

Figure 67 Annette Tzavaras 2007 Mashrabiya Installation 2.4 x 1.2 m (right) Ply board and acrylic. Detail of pattern. Dialogue in Diversity. University of Wollongong Digital image Annette Tzavaras

Figure 68 Annette Tzavaras 2008 Ameliorate 3D Installation. Acrylic on 5mm MDF board 2400 x 2200 x 200 cm Dialogue in Diversity FCA Gallery University of Wollongong. Photograph Juilee Pryor
Figure 69 Annette Tzavaras 2007 *Burqu’ah* 1200 x 1200 x 100 cm. Stucco, and oil on board *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong. Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 70 A section of the ceiling and the highly decorated interior of Ibn Battuta shopping Mall 2007. Photograph Lilly Clowry

Figure 71 Annette Tzavaras 2007 *Niqab* 1200 x 1200 x 100 cm Stucco, oil on board *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 72 Stucco applied in negative relief at the entrance to the 2008 exhibition *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 73 Detailed close up of the centre piece *Ameliorate* at the 2008 exhibition *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 74 Annette Tzavaras 2008 Detail of installation, *Ameliorate* Acrylic on 5mm MDF board. 2400 x 2200 x 200 cm. *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 75 Details of Cast Plaster pieces in shadow at the 2008 exhibition *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 76 Annette Tzavaras 2007 *Aide Memoire* detail 1200 x 1200 x 100 cm Stucco on board. *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 77 Annette Tzavaras 2008 *Untitled* 1200 x 1200 x 100 cm Stucco oil on board *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 78 Wall three, long view, 2008 *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 79 Wall one, long view, 2008 *Dialogue in Diversity* FCA Gallery University of Wollongong Photograph Juilee Pryor

Figure 80 Invitations to the exhibition Opening of *Dialogue in Diversity* and the 2008 Diversity Week at the FCA Gallery University of Wollongong
Glossary

There are many terms and translations for the Muslim woman’s traditional dress codes.

**Burqa:** is the spelling that I have chosen to use because it is used by my Afghani acquaintances. The *burqa* is an all-covering item of clothing, with a mesh patch over the eyes to allow for vision. The ‘Blue-burqa’ became the defining image of the subjugated Afghani women during the Taliban regime of terror. Other translations are *barqa, boushiya, boushiyyah, buknuk, burka, burq’ah, bushiyaand* and many more.

**Hijab:** refers to covering everything except the hands and face. Muslim women call it a prayer shawl, while it is mostly referred to in Australia as a head scarf, the *niqab* is different from the *hijab*, the *niqab* is the term used to refer to the piece of cloth which covers the face and women who wear it usually cover their hands. *Hijab* was the preferred spelling in the text of the Auburn 2006 exhibition *Inside/Love Out* catalogue.

A term used in the text of Roger Benjamins book *Orientalism Delacroix to Klee* and Lynn Thornton’s book *The Orientalists: Painters- Travellers 1828-1908, is Mashrabiyya* and is acknowledged as an enclosed fretwork balcony. The French translation as used in Henri Bechard c1875 photograph is *moucharabieh*, while other spellings are *moucharaby, mashrabiyyah, or mushrabiyyah.*

**Mashrabiyy** is the term I have used when referring to my art work or the decorative panels in the ancient Mosques and the old city of Cairo.

Foreign language words used in this thesis are italicised.
Abstract

My creative work investigates the negative space, the ‘in between space’ that leads to new knowledge about other artists and other cultures. The fundamental and distinctive elements of Islamic pattern in my paintings in the exhibition Dialogue in Diversity are based on my own experience of misinformation as well as rewarding collaboration within a culturally blended family.

This research explores the continuity of the arabesque and polygon. I experiment with the hexagon and its geometric shapes, with its many repeat patterns and the interrelatedness of the negative space, or the void indicative of the space between layers of past and present civilizations that are significant fundamentals in my paintings.

The thesis Transforming perceptions of Islamic culture in Australia through collaboration in contemporary art traces the visual history of Orientalist art, beginning with a key image of Arthur Streeton, Fatima Habiba, painted in 1897 and contrasts Streeton’s perception with that of important Islamic women artists working globally such as Emily Jacir who participated in the Zones of Contact 2006 Biennale of Sydney.

A core element of my research is working with emerging artists from Islamic backgrounds in Western Sydney. The February 2007 exhibition Transforming Perceptions Via . . . at the University of Wollongong brought together artists from east and west.

By adopting the Islamic pattern in my paintings, I hope to strengthen the interaction between the Christian and Muslim interface in Australian contemporary society. My work contemplates the human aspects of relationships and responsibilities within the cross cultural spectrum.

Annette Tzavaras.
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I would like to extend my warmest appreciation to my supervisors, Diana Wood Conroy, Richard Hook and Jelle van den Berg for their helpful advice and enthusiastic support.

I dedicate this thesis to the many artists I have associated with over the past few years, artists from different cultural backgrounds, Abdul Karim Rahimi, Aghnar Niazi, Fozia Zahid, Aroha Groves, Khaled Sabsabi and Sardar Senjawi and to my long standing friend ceramist Selma Fida, Jill Cassidy and Juliee Pryor as well as many other artists who have contributed to the diversity of contemporary art in Australia. Such collaborations have enriched my life, the object of ethical achievement; I hope was stimulated from both sides.

The enjoyment I have had from Roger Benjamin’s Book *Orientalism Delacroix to Klee* has been immense, and his findings have contributed greatly to my research and my Degree exhibition *Dialogue in Diversity*. I would also like to acknowledge the goodwill and contribution of artists Elizabeth Ashburn and Aloma Treister whose paintings bridge cultural and ethical differences that enrich our knowledge of the other.

Love and appreciation is extended to my husband Bill, my three daughters, and their diverse families who contribute to my wellbeing and my art more than they know.
in amongst the ruins a single rose bush
burst through the strangle hold of dust covered weeds and rubbish
a blood red rose opened its petals

Annette Tzavaras, Afghanistan 2005