



CULTURAL Catalyst

Rising nationalist movements in countries such as the USA and France are affecting the practices of creative minds. But as AD Middle East finds out, the impact of hate-filled rhetoric is not always negative

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Since he assumed the Presidency of the USA, Donald Trump has pursued an inflammatory immigration policy which targets Muslim-majority countries, setting off a cultural backlash



Mounir Fatmi might be an established conceptual artist living in Paris, but the outside world doesn't always regard him in the same light. "When I am physically inside an institution showing my works, I am the artist," says Moroccan-born Fatmi. "But when I leave the museum, I am an immigrant worker. At any time, authorities can ask me a thousand questions." These feelings of insecurity experienced by Fatmi—thanks in large part to the steady rise of the xenophobic Front National party in France (at press time, campaigning for the French presidential election was still ongoing) where Muslims are increasingly stigmatised and victimised—are echoed by many creatives living in France and the USA, countries that are witnessing a rapid rise of populist movements.

Since Donald Trump assumed the Presidency of the USA earlier this year, he has pursued an inflammatory strategy of relentlessly profiling people with Middle Eastern origins and roots through a ban on immigration from a number of Muslim-majority countries and a suspension of the US refugee programme. In tandem, the Trump administration has also proposed the elimination of multiple cultural funding bodies, including The National Endowment for the Arts, which provides critical support to grassroots arts programmes. Although the "ban" is still being contested in courts at the time of publication, its very suggestion has normalised hate speech and acts, not to mention heightened harassment at borders. Case in point is Egyptian-American designer Karim Rashid, who in a post on his Facebook page dated March 28 reported that despite holding an American passport, he



Designer Karim Rashid was denied entry to the USA despite holding an American passport

Below: Parviz Tanavoli's The Prophet at the MoMA

The increasingly charged environment has surprisingly worked to catalyze a number of positive initiatives. In one of the most powerful protests by a major cultural institution against the 'ban', the Museum of Modern Art rehung seven works from its permanent collection by artists from some of the majority-Muslim nations whose citizens were targeted by the policy in February. Works by Parviz Tanavoli, Zaha Hadid and Tala Madani among others replaced those by Picasso, Matisse and other greats. On the heels of the travel ban's first iteration, Qatar's Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Al Thani announced the launch of The Institute of Arab and Islamic Art in Manhattan. Meanwhile, architect and Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design (GSD) Mohsen Mostafavi responded to January's attempted ban with an open message on Harvard's website: "Let me be clear that the intolerance and prejudice signaled by this action cut against the core values that the GSD stands for."

As a long tradition of fairs and biennials has proven time and again, exceptional works of art, design or architecture are able to bring people together when hard diplomacy often falls pitifully short. Let's hope that great bodies of work arise from this hate-filled era, inciting the courage to cling to common ground instead.

was refused entry to New York, then interrogated without explanation based on his name—presumably resembling that of someone on a terror watch list.

After *AD* Middle East spoke to prominent architects, designers, artists and dealers, it became clear that the current climate is already affecting the way that creative communities function and thrive. Previously straightforward collaborations may soon become arduous, including the ability to offer or receive funding for projects, acquire visas to participate in fairs, exhibitions or residencies, or easily ship work across borders to galleries, institutions, or collectors based in the Middle East.

Influential Iranian-American dealer Leila Heller, who owns gallery spaces in both New York City and Dubai, says: "That the Trump administration has both decided to cut funding to the arts and pursue racist, xenophobic policies does not make the world a better place. At the end of the day, in America we are all immigrants."



PREVIEW *The Institute of Arab and Islamic Art holds its opening exhibition on May 4 at a temporary venue at 3, Howard Street in lower Manhattan and includes works by four female artists: AD cover star Monir Shahrudy Farmanfarmaian (left), Dana Awartani, Zarina Hashmi and Nasreen Mohamedi. Exhibition 1 presents the works of artists who "share the experience of living with Islamic architecture despite originating in vastly different places and environments and leading vastly different lives," a statement says. Meanwhile, the Institute continues to search for a permanent home.*