



Media Relations

NEWS RELEASE

CATEGORIES: Fine and Performing Arts

Impassioned Art by Middle Eastern Women Set to Intrigue during Rutgers–Camden Exhibit Open through Dec. 15.

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CAMDEN – Unconventional media like cement, lace, and sequins reveal distinct world views from women artists hailing from the Middle East, North Africa, and India, but who now live abroad, in the compelling exhibit *Ornament and Narrative: Women Artists of Eastern Diasporas* through Dec. 15 at Rutgers–Camden’s Stedman Gallery.

Featuring well-established artists like Moroccan photographer Lalla Essaydi, whose work has been purchased by the Louvre and is now on view at the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum of African Art, and newly discovered talent like Egyptian graphic designer Najla Arafa, the exhibit, presented by a team of Rutgers–Camden curators, offers a riveting immersion into the traditions and tensions experienced by women representing countries that also include Iran, India, and Israel.

Feminist scholar Martin Rosenberg, a professor of fine arts at Rutgers–Camden, says this exhibit continues his and the campus’ longstanding interest in art by women. In 2009, Rosenberg with J. Susan Isaacs of Towson University co-curated *A Complex Weave: Women and Identity in Contemporary Art*, which launched from Rutgers–Camden, and has since been seen by 10,000 viewers across the country.

“The region these artists represent is the central focus of much of the world right now, and is one of the cradles of human civilization,” he says. “It is fascinating to see how the artists draw on traditions and make their own contributions in such rich and imaginative ways.

Given various faiths’ sanctions against religious images using the human figure, artists from this region traditionally focused on abstract ornamentation and secular narratives. Ornament and Narrative curators connected the works by this diverse group of artists in how they reclaimed these traditions.

For example, patterns which might be found in mosque architecture are reimagined to encompass larger existential commentary. Henna is employed in an extremely intricate manner to not just cover subjects’ bodies with the artist’s words, but their coverings and entire backdrops.

“Awareness of women’s position in this part of the world is heightened at this time, with the Arab Spring, and with particular events, such as the Taliban’s attempted assassination of a young girl just for promoting education for girls,” says Rosenberg.

“As a curator I look for works that are conceptually rich and multi-layered in meaning, as well as visually compelling, and all of the pieces in this exhibition fit that description to a T.”

Curated by Rosenberg with Cyril Reade, director of the Rutgers–Camden Center for the Arts and an associate professor of fine arts and Nancy Maguire, curator of the Stedman Gallery, the exhibit also features works by artists Roya Akhavan; Siona Benjamin; Sissi Farassat; Naomi Safran-Hon; Soody Sharifi; Mitra Tabrizian; and Shahar Yahalom.

Ornament and Narrative: Women Artists of Eastern Diasporas has been curated in conjunction with the program The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art, and Society, organized by the Institute for Women and Art at Rutgers University of which Rosenberg serves as an advisory council member.

The Stedman Gallery is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursdays. Admission is free. The Rutgers–Camden Center for the Arts is located in the Fine Arts Complex on Third Street, between Cooper Street and the Benjamin Franklin Bridge on the Rutgers–Camden Campus. For more information, visit rcca.camden.rutgers.edu.

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