

ظرفیت شناسی دیپلماسی و برندسازی ملی هنر معاصر اسلامی در خاورمیانه

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هنر معاصر اسلامی به مثابه یک ابزار قدرتمند برای توانمندسازی و برندسازی نرم ملت‌های خاورمیانه در حال تطور و تکامل است. این رویکرد هنری ریشه در میراث جهانی اسلام داشته و به شیوه‌های نوین و گاه انتقادی میراث فرهنگی غنی و خلاقیت اسلامی را عرضه می‌کند. این مطالعه به بررسی استراتژی‌های بازیگران اصلی هنری در خاورمیانه بر پایه خوانش و تحلیل سیاست‌های اصلی، مضامین، رویدادها و سازمان‌های فعال در ترویج هنر معاصر اسلامی می‌پردازد. همچنین این جستار، تصویری را که هنر معاصر اسلامی برای مسلمانان به عنوان یک امت و یک ملت بزرگ در جهان، از منظر مفاهیم قدرت نرم و برندسازی ملی بر می‌سازد، بررسی می‌کند.

روش‌شناسی پژوهش حاضر یک روش ترکیبی است؛ بدین معنا که از سه چهارچوب مفهومی و رویکردهای مختلف در تحلیل و بررسی مطالب خود بهره می‌گیرد. تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها بر مبنای نظریه قدرت نرم جوزف نای، و به طور خاص خوانش الکساندرال و وینگ از این نظریه صورت گرفته است. برندسازی ملی یکی دیگر از مفاهیم کلیدی روش شناختی این جستار است، که با بهره‌گیری از مفاهیم مطرح شده توسط کیت دینی صورت می‌گیرد. همچنین در این مطالعه به عنوان یک ابزار رتبه‌بندی جامع از شاخص‌های برندسازی ملی سیمون انهولت (NBI)، که گزارش‌های سالانه شاخص قدرت نرم جهانی (Brand Finance (GSPI بر پایه آن صورت می‌گیرد، استفاده شده است. این شاخص‌ها قدرت نرم و برند ملی یک کشور را در چشم‌انداز جهانی اندازه‌گیری می‌کنند. نتایج این مطالعه نشان می‌دهد که ترکیه، ایران، امارات متحده عربی و عربستان سعودی بازیگران کلیدی ترویج هنر معاصر اسلامی در منطقه هستند و از پتانسیل‌های این هنر برای تقویت قدرت نرم و برندسازی ملی خود در گفتمان‌های مختلف بهره می‌برند. توسعه هنر معاصر اسلامی، می‌تواند کلیشه‌ها و تصورات غلط در مورد اسلام و پیروان آن را بازآرایی کند و درک عمیق‌تری از فرهنگ متنوع و پر جنب‌وجوش جهان اسلام عرضه نماید. از سوی دیگر، رویکردهای انتقادی، که هسته اصلی هنر معاصر است، می‌تواند قدرت نرم ملت‌ها را در دیپلماسی فرهنگی بر پایه سبک زندگی مردم یک ملت به چالش بکشد. همانطور که جهان به طور فزاینده‌ای به هم پیوسته‌تر می‌شود، نقش هنر معاصر اسلامی در فضاهای دیپلماسی عمومی و برندسازی ملی نه تنها رشد خواهد کرد بلکه ابزاری موثر و مهم در شکل دادن به ادراکات جهانی و تقویت تبادلات فرهنگی در سال‌های آینده از منطقه خاورمیانه خواهد بود.

واژگان کلیدی

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Conclusion

As this research shows, initiation in the 1960s, developing in the 1990s and booming after the 2000, Contemporary Islamic Art has experienced several discursive practices by nations and artists. From Orientalism to Middle Easternism; in the recent years countries of the region have tried to activate the potentials of contemporary art to attract tourists, improve investments and education, giving their nation a new cultural identity and gaining reputation by the means of Islamic and regional concepts. In this arena two main practices are prominent, the pro-Islamic artists who are using contemporary arts to draw attention of the world in the current and common language of art to valuable Islamic concepts, rituals, sights, landmarks (mainly grand and holy mosques and shrines), events and other potentials of Islamic culture and lifestyle. On the other hand, we also have artists critically speaking through their artworks on global issues in the Islamic world and nations including gender, political, social, environmental and religious concerns. In both ways contemporary art draws attention to the themes and subject it covers. It depends on how countries are hegemonizing the issues through events and exhibitions. Some countries have had a more global and liberal approach leading to the increase of their soft power and some have practiced more fundamentalist and traditional approaches decreasing their soft power in global indexes and accordingly their reputation.

All in all, contemporary Islamic art is a powerful tool for nation branding and cultural diplomacy, allowing countries to showcase their rich cultural heritage and creativity on the global stage. By promoting contemporary Islamic art, nations can challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam and its followers, fostering greater understanding and appreciation for the diverse and vibrant culture of the Islamic world. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the role of contemporary Islamic art in nation branding will only continue to grow in importance, shaping global perceptions and fostering cultural exchange for years to come.

Muslim nations must hold mega art events in the region, supporting young artists to create innovative arts inspired by Islam from their local and shared values. Touring the selected works and presenting them in famous world museums through intelligent curatorship, telling stories and casting images about shared rituals and values of Muslims enhances the soft power of the Islamic World and gives the nations to use the soft power of Contemporary Islamic Art in public and cultural diplomatic contexts.

In one hand some artists look at Islamic concepts critically and use contemporary art as means of questioning not only Islamic policies practiced in their countries of origin but also in the Islamic culture. For example, Shirin Neshat, an Iranian-born artist, is known for her photography, video installations, and films. Her work explores themes of gender, identity, and politics in the Islamic world. Neshat's most famous work is "the Women of Allah" series, which features photographs of Iranian women with Persian calligraphy written over their faces and bodies; criticizing the mandatory hijab practiced in some Islamic countries. Her work has been exhibited in major museums around the world, including the Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Tate Modern in London.

Lalla Essaydi, a Moroccan-born artist, known for her photography and mixed media installations explores themes of gender, identity, and the representation of women in Islamic culture. Essaydi's most famous work is the "Les Femmes du Maroc" and "Harem Revisited" series, features photographs of Moroccan women in traditional dress with Arabic calligraphy written over their bodies is a critical look at the concept of harm in Islamic lands. Her work has been exhibited in major museums around the world, including the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

On the other hand, some other use Islamic concepts such as Hajj to promote the nation branding of Muslim Ummah. For example, the Saudi artist, Ahmed Mater has a collection of contemporary installations entitled Magnetism. These works of art are not only a part of the royal court's collection of the Saudi King, but also is presented in political and cultural diplomatic events. His work has been exhibited in major museums around the world, including the British Museum in London and the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C.

The works of another Saudi artist, Nasser al-Salem has been branded by Saudi Arabia through national and international art events such as edge of Arabia to develop the soft power and nation brand of this country from Islamic elements vivid in his works. This paper will explore some of the most famous contemporary Islamic art artists and their contributions to the field.

In this approach the works of Ahmet Güneştekin and Rachid Koraïchi from Türkiye are important. Güneştekin is known for his large-scale sculptures and installations that explore themes of spirituality and identity. His work has been exhibited, branded and medialized by galleries and museums around the world, including the Venice Biennale and the Istanbul Biennial. The works of Rachid Koraïchi in a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, and installation art has made Islamic concepts a means to present Islamic Sufism, calligraphy and crafts. His work explores themes of spirituality, identity, and the history of Islamic culture. Koraïchi's most famous work is the Les Maitres Invisibles series, which features ceramic sculptures of Sufi saints and calligraphic inscriptions. His work has been exhibited in major museums around the world, including the British Museum in London and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha.

Since reintroducing the sale to the London auction calendar in 2016, Sotheby's has achieved great results for artists in the Islamic and Middle Eastern Contemporary Art category, breaking sales records and setting new industry benchmarks (Sotheby's, n.d.). They actively support young artists, artistic communities, and the broader cultural ecosystem, including artist estates, museums, and scholars who contribute academic and historical depth to the field (Sotheby's, n.d.). Sotheby's has been steadily gaining market share, establishing London as the hub for selling artworks from the MENA region (Sotheby's, n.d.). This has turned the attention of policy makers towards not only Sotheby's but also other auction houses as means of nation branding due to their high media coverage and propaganda.

Bonhams has also maintained a significant international presence in the modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art market since its early development (Bonhams, n.d.). During their inaugural sale in Dubai in 2008, Bonhams broke 33 world records and witnessed the first Middle Eastern artwork to achieve an auction sale of over one million dollars: Farhad Moshiri's mixed media work "Eshgh" (Bonhams, n.d.). Since then, Bonhams has solidified its position as an important auction house in the category, holding regular bi-annual sales in London to cater to the growing international market for art from the Middle East and surrounding regions (Bonhams, n.d.).

In the field of Art fairs, "Contemporary Istanbul" in Türkiye is the leading event in the region and a major platform connecting artists, galleries, and collectors from around the world. Launched in 2006, it is committed to showcasing exceptional contemporary art and advancing new ideas. Strongly rooted in the rich local context, the fair actively contributes to the dynamic culture of Istanbul and supports its creative industries. Through new initiatives and multiple collaborations with Turkish and international partners, Contemporary Istanbul is aiming to shape the future of art in the region. The fair attracted an overall attendance of 48,700 in 2022 throughout its VIP preview and general admission days. (Contemporary Istanbul. (n.d.)

Muslim Branded Artists

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in contemporary Islamic art, and many artists have gained international recognition for their work. Many branded contemporary Islamic artists have been introduced by museums, galleries, biennials, art auctions and other organs of the art world ecosystem in the last decade. Some of these artists have become national and international brands themselves that not only professional art institutes but also governmental and political institutes present them as Islamic and national brands. Along the names mentioned throughout the article in the previous sections, some of the world renowned and branded artists of Contemporary Islamic art are: Shirin Neshat (Iranian diaspora artist), Lalla Essaydi, (Moroccan-born artist), Ahmed Mater and Nasser al-Salem (Saudi Arabian artists), Ahmet Güneştekin and Rachid Koraïchi (Turkish Artists).

awarding prizes to innovative and avant-garde Muslim artists. The Jameel Prize is a prestigious branded prize that is awarded every two years for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition. The prize encourages artists to explore how long-established practices of Islamic art, craft, and design can inform modern expressions. The Jameel Prize aims to explore the relationship between contemporary practice and Islamic tradition as part of a wider debate about Islamic culture in the twenty-first century. The prize was established by the V&A in 2009 and is run in partnership with Art Jameel foundation a part of Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives (ALJCI) located in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. A branded patron of the event was Zaha Hadid; t regarded as one of the world's most innovative architects. It helps "widen public appreciation of the role played by Islam's great cultural heritage as a source for our own times," emphasizes Fady Jameel, president of Community Jameel International The prize's exhibitions has attracted international viewer attention, touring venues as diverse as San Antonio, Singapore, Moscow, and Morocco. The selected works of the prize have toured many countries such as France, the USA, Russia, Spain, and Singapore. Jameel is helping to move the art world away from its Western orientation and towards alternative modernities happening everywhere (Highet, 2023).

Art Auctions and Fairs

Renowned Art auction houses such as Christies, Sotheby's and Bonham had been active in Islamic works of art collection; from ceramics and carpets to miniature paintings and calligraphy, in the new millennia they spotlighted modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art. This not only gave a boost to the creation, market and exhibition of new tastes of Middle Eastern art, but also made contemporary art of countries such as Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia becoming much more branded leading to benefits of Nation branding. These auctions and art fairs expanded the brands of contemporary Islamic art, consequently improving the soft power of successful nations such as Iran, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE in markets leading to investments in the art market of the region and countries with more successful art works sold and marketed in such events.

Christies has demonstrated a long-standing dedication to the Middle East, being the first to establish a robust presence in the region with the opening of their Dubai headquarters in 2005 and the initiation of their Modern and Contemporary Middle Eastern Art auction in 2006 (Christie's, n.d.). Their biannual live and online sales feature exceptional works by Arab, Turkish, and Iranian artists, including leading modern names such as Mahmoud Said, Fahr-Elnissa Zeid, Monir Farmanfarmaian, and Shaker Hassan Al Said, as well as contemporary visionaries like Ali Banisader, Ahmad Mater, and Ayman Baalbaki. As a global market leader in this field, Christie's sales consistently have achieved outstanding results, attracting bidders from over 15 countries and reflecting the growing international appreciation for Middle Eastern art (Christie's, n.d.).

nurturing creative expression and instilling an appreciation for culture, the arts, and their transformative power.” (Diriyah Biennale Foundation)

Another mega event in Saudi Arabia promoting Saudi Arabia's soft power and nation branding from the Islamic perspective by the means of contemporary art is the festival Noor Riyadh. It is one of the largest light and art festivals in the world, celebrated recently in the capital city of Riyadh. It takes the advantages of making world records for branding Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and Islamic Art and Culture in the world. The strategy of using international institutes for the promotion of Saudi Arabia's nation brand through a conceptual theme of light and Allah, as stated in the Holy Quran: “Allāh is the Light¹ of the heavens and the earth... Light upon light. Allāh guides to His light whom He wills. And Allāh presents examples for the people, and Allāh is Knowing of all things.” (The Holy Quran, Sura an-Nur, 35)

This festival of light and art which launched in March 2021. The 2022 theme, was announced as ‘We Dream of New Horizons’, reflecting the futuristic digital artistic, innovative and developmental approach which Saudi Arabia is perusing in the shining light of dreams stemming from the light of Allah. The 2022 edition of the festival included over 190 artworks by more than 130 artists – with 34% from Saudi Arabia – including large-scale public installations, projections and interventions across the city of Riyadh, as well as a world-class exhibition entitled ‘From Spark to Spirit’. The event brings with itself a chain of interrelated activities that can boost the soft power of Saudi Arabia. The festival is accompanied by a diverse public and community program, including tours, talks, workshops, family activities and music. The festival aims to nurture local talent and inspire youth to drive Saudi Arabia's creative economy. (Kaddoura, 2022)

Some records and statistics achieved that have led to the branding of this event were the festival becoming tripled in size and tripled in record-breaking achievements! The record titles that the event achieved were:

- Largest light art festival in the world – consisting of 201 items
- Most multirotor/drones performing an aerial dance display - 1,990
- Largest laser show (area covered) - 14,459,160 m² (155,637,102 ft² 135 in²)
- Longest distance covered by a laser light show - 6.01 km (19,717.8 ft)
- Highest mesh screen on a building - 203.508 m (667 ft 20 in)
- Largest mesh screen on a building - 1,603 m²
- Noor Riyadh 2022 ("Noor" which means "light" in Arabic) was themed this
- The festival had over 1.5 million visitors across artworks spread out citywide in more than 40 locations.
- Brightest suspended ornament- 1.2 Million lumens and was achieved by Koert Vermeulen (Belgium) at Noor Riyadh Festival
- Largest LED structure - 272,160 LEDs and was achieved by Karolina Halatek (Poland) at Noor Riyadh Festival (ibid)

Middle Eastern Art Foundations have implemented a strategy to promote contemporary Islamic art by

have entered a new phase. This time, Islamic art was presented as contemporary art in exhibitions, and the biennials of Contemporary Art tried to present it as an artistic style beyond nationalism. However, what is displayed in these events as contemporary Islamic art is a narrative of contemporary art in Islamic lands. In other words, this current movement includes the experiences of contemporary art, which are often deconstructive and critical, rather than representative of Islamic art. (Moridi,2022)

In Türkiye "The Istanbul Biennial" was first established in 1987 and has since become one of the most important art events in the world. The biennial showcases the work of both established and emerging artists from around the world, and it has become a platform for critical dialogue and exchange between artists, curators, and audiences. It takes place in various venues throughout the city, including museums, galleries, and public spaces. The exhibitions feature a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture, video, performance, and installation art. The biennial also includes a program of events, such as artist talks, panel discussions, and film screenings. (Istanbul Biennial. (n.d.)).

The first biennial was curated by Beral Madra and featured the work of 36 artists from 16 countries. Since then, the biennial has grown in size and scope, and it has become a major event in the international art world. Each Istanbul Biennial has a specific theme that serves as a starting point for the curatorial process. The themes are chosen by the curators, who are invited by the IKSİ to organize the exhibition. Some of the past themes have included "The Poetics of the Reasoning Mind" (1995), "The Passion and the Wave" (2001), and "Saltwater: A Theory of Thought Forms" (2015). (Istanbul Biennial. (n.d.)).

This mega-event has had a significant impact on the art world, both in Turkey and internationally. It has helped to promote contemporary art in Turkey and has provided a platform for Turkish artists to showcase their work to a global audience. The biennial has also contributed to the cultural and economic development of Istanbul, attracting visitors from around the world and generating revenue for the city.

Saudi Arabia has recently played an important role in the promotion of contemporary Islamic Art through mega-events such as biennials, international art festivals and prizes putting the country under spotlight and fixing eyes of the artists, institutions (galleries, museums and foundations) and collectors on Saudi Arabia as an emerging brand in contemporary Islamic art.

As stated on its website: the Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale, "was established in 2020 by the Ministry of Culture, Diriyah Biennale Foundation produces Saudi Arabia's first-ever art biennales: the Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale, held in the JAX district of Diriyah; and the Islamic Arts Biennale at the Western Hajj Terminal in Jeddah. Diriyah Biennale Foundation is a catalyst for discovery and serves Saudi Arabia's communities by offering opportunities to engage with the burgeoning local art scene. Inaugurated in early 2023, the Islamic Arts Biennale is set to be the world's most significant showcase of contemporary and historic works of Islamic art from across the globe. Diriyah Biennale Foundation assumes a pivotal role in

by making use of technological developments and enables a multifaceted museum experience.” (Istanbul Modern)

In Saudi Arabia “Edge of Arabia (EOA)” as an example of an institution established to encourage cultural dialogue nationally and globally. Edge of Arabia was born in 2003 by British artist and entrepreneur, Stephen Stapleton, and a group of Saudi artists from the Al Meftaha Art Village in Abha, including Ahmed Mater and Abdalnasser Gharem, Edge of Arabia was. (Stapleton, Edge of Arabia, n.d.)

The first exhibition of the Edge is held in London in 2008, and then embarked on a tour across Europe and the Gulf. In the next 5 years, EOA introduced a new generation of Saudi contemporary artists in 14 countries. From 2011, EOA expanded its model to include artists from across the Arab world with landmark exhibitions in Venice (The Future of a Promise) and London (#cometogether). In 2014, Edge of Arabia launched a multi-year cultural diplomacy project crisscrossing between the Arab World and the United States. Travelling over 35,000 miles, the tour supported over 300 artists and reached over 1,500,000 people through landmark exhibitions and events in museums and institutions including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, MoMA, The Met, MIT, Rothko Chapel and the Smithsonian Institute. With over 3,000,000 visitors to date, EOA's exhibitions and events have been branded and distributed over 60,000 books and catalogues worldwide and reached a wider audience of over 10,000,000 through a various communications campaign. (ibid)

Events of Contemporary Islamic Art (Biennials, Festivals, Prizes)

Artistic events have influenced the introduction, collection, documentation, categorization and conceptualization of Islamic art. We could distinguish three currents of "world fair", "national festivals" and "art biennials". The world fair began with the first exhibition in 1851 and continued until the Mohammadi Art Exhibition in 1910 in Munich. The event, sponsored by one country each year, was an arena for the colonial powers to compete and show their power and influence around the world. The Ottomans, first participated in the 1867 Paris Exhibition, and Iran was the first to officially attend the 1873 Vienna Exhibition. After the 1870s, unlike previous periods when booths were categorized by country, a special hall was created as Islamic art, which included works from Iran, Arabia, Türkiye, Egypt and India. This exhibition was an important step in documenting Islamic art and changing attitudes towards Islamic art. In these exhibitions, which were held from the 1920s to the end of the 1960s, Islamic art was considered as a national cultural heritage and part of the national wealth. The nationalist narrative dominated Islamic art. During this period, exhibitions were held not under the title of Islamic art, but on the basis of nations with the titles of art of Iran, Türkiye, Iraq, Egypt and included works of Islamic art as part of the national heritage; the 1976 Islamic Art Exhibition marked the end of this stream. As explained before, Since the 1980s, with the decline of nationalism and the rise of the globalization discourse, Islamic art exhibitions

artists, galleries, museums or artistic NGOs in national, regional and international arenas. By initiating and holding grand and mega events such as biennials, festivals and art fairs these foundations pave the way for countries to present their brands and improve their soft power. This is due to the fact that their activities, from the point of view of Anholt's hexagonal nation branding index, not only promote the culture and heritage aspect of a nation's brand but also develop tourism, investment, reputation of the artists and the people of that country and also present the governance of that country as an interesting and philanthropic destination to visit and maybe stay!

Contemporary Art Museums

In Iran, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA) was established in 1977. It has been referred to by many platforms on the web which contribute to the branding of a nation as one of the most important museums of the world. From the Guardian, and Bloomberg, to TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet, one can see the role this institute can play for Iran's public diplomacy and intercultural relations. Although in 1977, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art opened, boasting an important collection of both Western and Iranian artists, but its approach was more a nationalistic discursive one at that time. After the Islamic revolution it shifted towards the fundamentalist discourse showcasing art of the revolution, the war between Iran and Iraq and later art of resistance with Palestine at its nodal point. In the 1990s a new nationalistic and neo-traditionalistic taste was presented at the museum. But in the 2000s the policies practiced and exhibited by the museum and the Iranian Academy of Arts were focused on branding contemporary art of the Islamic world in the format of biennials held at the museum. Aside its unique collection of modern and contemporary art works from renowned artists of the world, exhibitions on the contemporary painting (2000), poster and graphics (2004), and photography (2008) of the Islamic World, all had the capacity of presenting the Muslim Ummah as a nation with new aesthetic issues on religion, intercultural relations of Muslims, politics and global concerns of the Islamic world in the form of contemporary art. Unfortunately, the series of events held by the museum were put on a halt due to a change in politics and economics of art.

In Türkiye the first museum of modern and contemporary art, Istanbul Modern became an institution for the country to mediate, sharing and transfer of Türkiye's artistic heritage on a global scale and bring together artistic productions from various geographies in Istanbul. The vision of the museum is announced to be "supporting the diversity of artistic expressions, it collects, preserves, exhibits, researches, and documents works of art. It works to increase access to art through interdisciplinary exhibitions, educational programs and events, and contributes to artists' production and international collaborations. The museum supports inclusivity and creativity to create a sustainable art ecosystem. It fosters a dialogue with modern and contemporary art for audiences of all ages and walks of life, encouraging people to wonder and think together. The internationally oriented programs strengthen the interaction between artists and audiences

The last and the most recent discourse dominant in the region is the Middle Easternism of art and culture. Middle East is not a religious identity but a geopolitical and strategic concept. This type of art is post-modern or post-Islamic according to Scheiwiller (2015). The signifiers of Middle Easternism art are critical themes on religion, gender issues (like hijab), ideological relations between religion and policy and disoriented identities such as art of the diaspora Muslims. Artists such as Abdunasser Gharem from Saudi Arabia, Faig Ahmed from Azerbaijan, Shirin Neshat and Soodi Sharifi from Iran are few famous names to mention. (ibid, p. 15)

Nation Branding and Contemporary Islamic Art

Several countries have successfully leveraged contemporary Islamic art for nation branding purposes. For instance, the in the Middle East, Qatar and United Arab Emirates have invested heavily in the development of art and cultural institutions, such as the Islamic Art Museum of Qatar, and also Louvre and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. These museums showcase a diverse range of contemporary Islamic art, positioning Qatar and UAE as global hubs for art and culture.

Similarly, countries like Türkiye, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have also embraced contemporary Islamic art as a means of promoting their national identity and cultural heritage. Art fairs, exhibitions, and biennales featuring contemporary Islamic art have become increasingly popular, attracting international attention and fostering cultural exchange. We will investigate the foundations of the region in charge of promoting contemporary art as general and Islamic art or Arabic, or nationalistic art as their specific mission in the following parts of the paper. Afterwards contemporary art museums, events of Contemporary Islamic Art (biennials, festivals, prizes), art auctions and fairs, and finally some branded Muslim artists are discussed from the perspective of nation branding and soft power.

Art Foundations

Modern and Contemporary art foundations in the Middle East are institutions that support and promote contemporary art in the region. These foundations aim to provide a platform for emerging and established artists to showcase their work, as well as to educate the public about modern art and its significance. Some of the well-known governmental or private modern art foundations in the Middle East include the Sharjah Art Foundation, the Barjeel Art Foundation, Lajevardi Foundation, Roudaki Foundation, Pejman Foundation, The Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, Turkish Cultural Foundation, The Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, İKSİV), the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Farjam Foundation, Art Jameel, Atassi Foundation and many other institutions. These foundations organize exhibitions, workshops, and other events to engage with the local community and to foster a vibrant art scene in the region. They act as a facilitator and promoter of artistic brands, whether solo

musealized works were classified not as artworks but decorative crafts. According to Naef this approach had the consequence of considering “Islamic art as “non-art” or at best as an applied art gained intellectual acceptance among the modernizing elites” (Naef. 2015, p 97)

In the second discourse which Pan-Turkism, Pan-Iranism, and Pa-Arabism emerged, the establishment of national institutions to foster national Identity became the main concern of the governments. Through this approach the national art style tried to create the image of the nation by the means of ancient motifs and folk embellishments. Artists such as Nurrallah Berk in Türkiye, Jalil Ziapour in Iran, Jawad Saleem in Iraq and Seif Wanly in Egypt were some of the prominent figures of this approach. (Moridi, 2023, pp. 10, 11)

The Returnism discourse was actually a solution in the Middle Eastern states to overcome the conflicts between the Islamists and the nationalists in the 1960s. Thus, a liberal Islamic approach is seen in policy and culture and a hybridity of traditionalism and modernism known as neo-traditionalism emerges among artists. The Saqakhana school in Iran, and Calligraphical-paintings; based on The Hurufiyya movement heritage and Islamic calligraphical legacy in a modern painting sense, are two innovative outcomes of such a discourse. Artists like Hussain Zenderoudi and Faramarz Pilarm from Iran, Wijdan Ali from Jordan, Erol Akyavas and Abidin Elderoglu from Türkiye are some famous artists of the returnism discourse. (ibid, p. 12)

The next important discourse of the region was the Fundamentalist discourse in which Political Islam become the main issue. Art of the war in a region full of domestic, inter-regional and international wars becomes the main issue of the follower of this discourse. Accordingly, they set up events, such as festivals, established museums and artistic institutions such as Contemporary Art of Palestine Museum in Iran to promote this view, especially in the binary opposition of Palestine-Israel. This discourse had the extremists at one side specially after the 9/11 and the fundamental governmental parties at the other side. The Jihadi and Salafi groups destroyed the image of Islam by for example destroying world heritages or acts of terrorism. The governmental sector on the other hand institutionalized and tried to promote this discourse via common Western ways of art appreciation, media and exhibition by branding “art of resistance” instead of “revolutionary art”. (ibid, pp 12,13)

The global discourse which initiated since the 1990s is a trans-modernistic art. It tries to link traditional, religious, mythical and logical ideas with universal modernism. This is somehow transcendental modernism and emphasizes on metaphysics and mysterious realism in the form of abstract and geometrica patterns. Artists such as Ahmed Mater from Saudi Arabia, Mattar bin Lahej and Hassan Sharif, and Najat Makki from Emirate. The features of this trans-modern art are:

1. Creating space of Islamic motifs by installation art as a new sacred public space open to everyone,
- 2.digitalisation of Islamic art in project mapping
3. Creating space of light and shadow. (ibid, pp. 13,14)

By using the nation branding hexagon, countries can gain insights into how they are perceived in different areas and identify opportunities to enhance their brand image. It helps governments and organizations understand the impact of their policies, culture, and people on their overall reputation.

Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index (GSPI) applies the core concepts of Anholt's methodology to assesses and ranks countries based on their soft power capabilities. Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence and attract others through non-coercive means such as culture, diplomacy, and values. The methodology of the Global Soft Power Index takes into account various factors to determine a country's soft power strength. These factors include:

- Cultural influence
- Global reputation
- Governance
- Education
- Business and trade
- Digital engagement

By analyzing these factors, the Global Soft Power Index provides valuable insights into a country's ability to shape global perceptions and build positive relationships. It helps governments, businesses, and organizations understand the strengths and weaknesses of different nations in terms of soft power, enabling them to make informed decisions and strategies. Also, the GSPI has the building blocks formed on the basis of 7 key pillars: Business & Trade, Governance, International Relations, Culture & Heritage, Media & Communication, Education & Science, and People & Values. (Global Soft Power Index, 2023)

A Discursive Typology of Middle Eastern Art

Nation branding and soft power are discursive concepts and before investigating the acts and events of contemporary Islamic art in Middle East we need to map the formation and transformation of modern and contemporary Islamic art in the region. According to Moridi Contemporary and "Modern Islamic art is studied not as an "artistic style" but as a "cultural discourse" that changes in social and political contexts. The six cultural discourses that have shaped modern Islamic arts are Orientalism, Nationalism, Returnism, Fundamentalism, Globalism, and Middle Easternism. These common structures lead to common experiences in different countries. These paradigms have experienced historical sequences but are still current and we are now facing a complex situation with a multi-paradigm that make contemporary art in Islamic countries." (Moridi, 2023, p.9)

In the Orientalist Discourse the Islamic works of art became musealized. As a western way of defining, classifying and exhibiting the legacy and heritage of Islamic countries. Mainly in this discourse the

is more concerned with national identity, politics, and economics of competitiveness than with branding as in business management and development (Anholt, 2007, xi). According to Keith Dinnie “the nation-brand is defined as the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2016, p.15)

Simon Anholt's nation branding hexagon is a methodology that aims to assess and analyze a country's brand image and reputation. It provides a framework for understanding how a nation is perceived by others and identifies areas for improvement in its branding efforts.

The nation branding hexagon consists of six dimensions that collectively shape a country's brand image. These dimensions include tourism, exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, and investment and immigration. Each dimension represents a different aspect of a nation's identity and influence. To evaluate a country's performance in each dimension, Simon Anholt's methodology involves collecting data from various sources such as surveys, economic indicators, and expert opinions. This data is then analyzed to assess the country's strengths and weaknesses in each dimension. (Anholt, 2006)



Source: Adapted from Anholt (2006, p. 186)

Methodology

This research applies a mixed methodology for the discussion and analysis of it inquires. It integrates methods of analysis rooted in Joseph Nye's concept of Soft Power specifically justified by Alexander L. Vuving's method discussed in his papers "How Soft Power Works" (2009) and "The Logic of Attraction: Outline of a Theory of Soft Power" (2019). Nation branding is another key concept applied as a tool for the analysis of the data in this paper. After a glimpse at the fundamentals of this key term from Keith Dinnie's book "Nation Branding Concepts, Issues, Practice" (2008). We also review and apply the methodology developed by Simon Anholt's nation branding index (NBI) hexagon and accordingly the annual Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index (GSPI). These are comprehensive ranking tool that measures a nation's soft power and brand in a global perspective.

Nye's concepts and Vuving's development of Soft Power

According to Nye, soft power could be understood both in its narrow and broad sense (Nye, 2006). In its narrow sense; soft power and cultural influence are synonymous. On the other hand, in the broad sense, soft power is a non-military power including both cultural power and economic strength. Vuving believes soft power stems from three main elements: beauty, brilliance, and benignity. Beauty refers to the connection with ideals, values, or visions, inspiring others through shared goals and moral support. Brilliance is the high performance in one's work, generating admiration by showcasing success. Benignity involves positive interactions with others, fostering gratitude and sympathy through reciprocal altruism. These three elements work together to create soft power by appealing to various human tendencies and needs. (Vuving, 2009, pp. 7,8).

The three main elements of soft power function through three major policy tools of soft power including cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and international development assistance. These tools facilitate and produce soft power by promoting a country's values, culture, and policies in a positive and attractive way. For example, cultural diplomacy involves promoting a country's arts, music, and literature to create a positive image of the country and its people through arts and cultural events such as festivals, biennials and art fairs. Public diplomacy involves engaging with foreign publics through media, exchange programs, and other forms of communication to build relationships and promote understanding. International development assistance involves providing aid and support to other countries to promote economic growth and stability, which can create goodwill and positive relationships. (Vuving 2009)

Nation Branding and GSPI

The concept of Nation branding was first introduced to the literature of policy studies by Simon Anholt in 1996. He then in about a decade later upgraded the term to Competitive branding as Nation Branding

In other words, we ask what the main policies of Middle Eastern or West Asian countries are in the development and application of Contemporary art? What themes in what mega or major events comprise the contemporary Islamic art as shared issues among the Muslim Ummah in order to share, negotiate and resolve Muslim issues and develop this contemporary cultural heritage? What organizations are active? And overall, what image does the contemporary Islamic art cast for Muslims as an Ummah and a Grand-Nation in the world?

Major issues in contemporary Islamic art makes it distinct from modern Islamic art. Terry Smith in “Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity” (2006) discusses that actually contemporary art is the New Modern! According to this scholar, contemporary arts are passages between cultures. Thus, a transformation of not only forms but also issues shared among different cultures would be visible in contemporary art. In the various forms of conceptual and abstract contemporary art of the region, in the mediums of installations, performance art, video art, painting, and other formats, global issues such as identity crisis, environmental concerns such as climate change, cultural disorientation, injustice, and gender issues are common themes among contemporary artists. These issues indicate and index nations as progressive and human nations making them key players in the world contemporary art ecosystem. Soft power is defined as the ability of a country to influence its global audience through its culture, diplomacy, enterprise, and education (Nye. 2021). By promoting contemporary Islamic art, nations effectively challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam and its followers, fostering a more nuanced understanding of their culture and values.

Necessities of Islamic Nation Branding

Temporal believes there are 3 main reasons for the necessity of Nation branding in the Islamic world: “The first reason is because the problems they face are the same: parity and the need to differentiate in the face of increasing competition... Second, countries must change if they are to survive in a changing world, because relying on past reputation doesn’t always ensure success in the future... Third, brands are strategic assets in their own right, and can bring both power and financial rewards. They can help countries by replacing the “push” factor with the “pull” factor. Strong brands differentiate and attract people to them, rather than having to chase after them. Islamic countries need talent and expertise in order to move forward, as well as retain the best and brightest people of their own nations. Finally, countries need to manage perceptions and control their image in order to manage particular issues of national concern. This has specific relevance to Muslim countries, where differentiation is lacking, images are very unclear, and the country-of-origin factor can often be detrimental to exports and domestic sales.” (Temporal, 2011, pp 15-18)

applied in the annual Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index (GSPI) reports, is also used in this study as a comprehensive ranking tool that measures a nation's soft power and brand in a global perspective. The results of this study indicate Türkiye, Iran, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia are the key players in the promotion of Contemporary Islamic art in the region, applying the potentials of this art to foster their soft power and nation branding in various discourses. By the development of contemporary Islamic art, nations have challenged stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam and its followers, fostering greater understanding and appreciation for the diverse and vibrant culture of the Islamic world. On the other hand, critical approaches, which is the core of contemporary art, have challenged the Islamic or a nation's soft power in applying hard power to culture and lifestyle of the people. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the role of contemporary Islamic art in nation branding continues to grow in importance, shaping global perceptions and fostering cultural exchange and public diplomatic concerns for years to come.

Keywords: Contemporary Islamic Art, Soft Power, Nation Branding, Art and Cultural Diplomacy, Middle East

Introduction

Soft Power and nation branding are features of modern geopolitics, as countries and communities strive to create a positive image and reputation on the global stage. The process involves the promotion of a nation's culture, values, and achievements through managing, presenting and casting a positive image, narrative and assumption by talented and great artists in mega and grand cultural events (such as biennials, festivals and awards/prizes), centers and organizations, in order to attract tourists, investors, and international partners. One of the most ways to achieve this is through the promotion of contemporary art, which as it has become the main trend in the world of artistic creations and creative industries. Contemporary art has the power to transcend borders and connect people from different backgrounds. In this context, contemporary Islamic art has emerged as a powerful tool for nation branding, showcasing the rich cultural heritage and creativity rooted in the Islamic world heritage through bringing the contemporary issues and values of Muslims into the spotlight of diplomatic, business, cultural and religious contexts and international relations.

The Main Issues

This research tries to understand the main policies of key stakeholders in the Middle East and Western Asian countries in the field of Contemporary Islamic Art; namely Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, with a glance at other active countries in the region. It investigates this issue through the behaviors visible in foundations, museums, events, auctions and art fairs, and finally artists that the countries apply to improve their soft power and nation brand through this form of culture.

Diplomatic and Nation Branding Capacities of Contemporary Islamic Art in the Middle East

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Abstract:

Contemporary Islamic art in the Middle East has emerged as a powerful tool evolving and reforming for empowering and branding nations softly, showcasing the rich cultural heritage and creativity rooted in the Islamic world heritage. This study aims to explore the main policies, themes, events, and organizations involved in promoting contemporary Islamic art in the countries that are the key players of the region. Furthermore, it investigates the image that contemporary Islamic art has cast for the region, in the context of soft power and nation branding as features of modern geopolitics.

This research employs a mixed methodology, integrating three conceptual frameworks of analysis rooted in Joseph Nye's Soft Power theory, specifically justified by Alexander L. Vuving. Nation branding is another key concept in this paper's methodological investigations, with a focus on the fundamentals of this term from Keith Dinnie. The methodology developed by Simon Anholt's nation branding index (NBI) hexagon,