

PERPETUAL **IDENTITIES**

BY KATYA A. TRABOULSI

- Presentation -



A PROJECT DEDICATED **TO THE GLORY OF HUMANITY**

BY KATYA A. TRABOULSI



**« Identity is a force
that no war can eliminate.
It bounces back inevitably. »**

Katya A. Traboulsi, the artist.

BACKGROUND

"In times of war, unconsciousness is a survival instinct."





1975, Lebanon is in flames and I am fifteen. For my birthday, I receive the empty sleeve of a mortar shell which I automatically place on a shelf, without reflecting any further on its nature or the journey which led it to me.

Thus, this object, which had blindly sown death where it fell, ended up in my room, raised to the status of a trophy celebrating the courage of fighters or the defeat of enemies who later would exchange roles as alliances and the masters of war willed.

In times of war, unconsciousness is a survival instinct.

2014, as the Arab Springs wilt into winters, the memory of this object, trinket or trophy, calls to me again. **Reflections on the mortar shell inspire an installation project which seeks to divert the weapon from its morbid destiny and make it serve Life.**



THE ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE

« Identity is not a document, but a bouquet of behaviors, senses, genes, a heritage which is the expression of a culture. Perpetual Identities is the inspiration of that emotional creativity. »

« Perpetual Identities » was born of the basic mortar shape. The many cultures and societies involved in the project enrich the object with seemingly infinite meanings. Cultural identities are constantly added as a palimpsest, until the mortar became so enriched with reflections and revelations, the transformed object's new mission is to celebrate the glory of Humanity.

Removing the primary function of the object permits it to carry universal and immortal messages. It becomes a melting-pot of perpetual identities. The mortar as Art transcends its destructive origin.



WHY PERPETUAL ? WHY *IDENTITIES* ?

The struggle for the survival of identities cannot find a more resounding echo than in those desolate times when minorities are persecuted and their heritage pulverized or distributed as spoils of war.

Also, endangered are the identities sacrificed on the altar of globalization which imposes an aseptic and effective language, melting the peculiarities and the wealth of the peoples in undifferentiated, gradually leading to the loss of ancestral know-how and of the original language with its tools and its land.

Since we all perpetuate by nature a heritage rooted in our mother land, our past and our culture, interaction with other cultures mostly enriches and develops our identities.

Identity becomes a perpetual identity in motion.



THE SHELL

A distinctively shaped object that, since the invention of the canon, has become one of the most violent symbols of destruction and invasion in history. A remote act that starts with a sound upon departing, a whistle upon approaching, an explosion upon impact, spreads flames, death, panic and fear. Importantly, bombardment eliminates pride before escalating to eliminate culture and life itself. Representing the bomb, the destroyer; and the phallic power of an invasive object, the shell is a symbol of destruction and renewal, the never ending revolution of humankind.

These 46 shells, clothed in the arts and crafts of 46 countries, become body of designs, themes and skills, bearing the glory of every people and inviting them to join in the universal banquet of Humanity. The shell becomes "Book", an inventory of myths, of traditions of embodied know-how, and invites the discovery of the Other. Its deadly one-way trajectory becomes an exchange. The shell becomes "Arrow" and sows not death, but knowledge and civilization in the territory of the Other. Its scope becomes sociological, theological and philosophical.



THE INSTALLATION

This installation and its book are a testimony of faith in Man and his greatness. Art as anti-destiny, triumphs over death and restores human dignity in creation. Thus an object of death forgotten on a dusty shelf, finds itself rehabilitated, transfigured in the sparkling whiteness of a museum, a place of beauty and life.

"Power lies in reason, resolution, and truth. No matter how long the tyrant endures, he will be the loser at the end."

Gibran Khalil Gibran



**« My creations are inspired
by historical events.
The artisans that took part
in the project are the perpetual
memory of that history,
glorifying through their
handicraft talents the heritage
of their identity. »**



AFGHANISTAN

The 62-meter-high minaret of Jam is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in western Afghanistan, next to the Hair River in the nearly inaccessible region of Shahrak, in the Ghor Province. The minaret, built around 1190, is famous for its intricate brick, stucco and glazed tile decoration. The tiles form alternating bands of Kufic and Naskhi calligraphy, geometric patterns, and verses from the Qur'an. The date of the Arabic inscription dating the minaret is unclear; it seems that it was built to commemorate the victory of the Ghurid sultan Ghiyas-ud-Din over the Ghaznevids in 1186 in Lahore.



ALGERIA

The Kabyle are a Berber ethnic group native to Kabylie in the north of Algeria. They are the largest Berber-speaking population in Algeria and the second largest in Africa. Today, Kabyle tribes strive to strengthen their cultural identity and return to their cultural roots by perpetuating the production of their traditional pottery. This artisanal practice is passed on from mother to daughter: it takes on a distinctive feminine style that reveals the Kabyle women's mentality, and gives a glimpse into their ancient practices, shrouded in secrecy within traditional society. Kabyle pottery's typology and motifs are an independent semiotic system, reflective of an autochthonous culture, but also incorporating some foreign cultural influence.



ARMENIA

Unique to Armenian culture, Khachkar art was born at the crossroads of East and West, North and South. The word khachkar is a fusion of the Armenian words for "cross" and "stone." Both are mainstays of the Armenian identity: the cross represents the Armenian Christian heritage, and it is often carved on rocks in the highlands, or on mountains themselves. Khachkar art dates from the 9th century, reached its highest points in the 13th, but gradually lost popularity in the following 500 years. In the 20th century, especially after Armenian independence, its practice was revived and taken up by a rising number of artists.



AUSTRALIA

The Aboriginal culture is one of the oldest ones in world history: Australian Aborigines settled on that continent somewhere between 60,000 and 80,000 years ago. Aborigine people are historically nomadic, and live in small family groups, traveling from one rock hole to another, in search for water and food in the desert. Aboriginal artistic activity, in the form of rock art, has dated to at least 20,000 years. Dot painting describes indigenous nature as well as dreams, stories, and legends with religious and emblematic significance. In the mid20-th century, most Aborigines settled in sedentary communities but they kept their culture and identity, despite Australian policies that sought to annihilate their lifestyle and force their integration into Western Australian society.



AUSTRIA

Gustav Klimt is arguably the most famous member of the group of artists known as the Vienna Secession. Founded in 1897 by Klimt, alongside fellow artists Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffman, Joseph Maria Olbrich and Max Kurzweil, the Secession came about out of a desire to overthrow the traditional and conservative style of the Vienna Academy of Arts. In contrast to the latter, the members of the Secession were keen on exploring personal expression, building new means of representation in the spirit of Art Nouveau and Symbolism, and breaking free of historicism. The group exhibited in the Secession House, an iconic building designed by Olbrich. It was a monumental white cube marked by an extravagant gilded dome of 3,000 laurel leaves symbolizing victory, dignity and purity. Their motto, "To the age its art. To art its freedom," was embossed in gold lettering above the entrance.



BRAZIL

The pre-Columbian culture of Marajó once boasted a population of 100,000 people living in the Amazon rain forest. These Native Americans may have used black ground called terra preta to make the land suitable for the large-scale agriculture needed to support the large population and its complex chiefdom structure. In the 19th century, European travelers noticed the presence of mounds (maybe remains of temple structures), with ceramics stored inside or scattered around them. European and American museums began collecting them, in particular the large funerary urns. These elaborately decorated vessels contain the remains of deceased significant individuals after their deaths, their flesh was ritualistically cleared from their bones, which were placed in the urns, sealed with a bowl or platter.



CANADA

Totem poles are important communicative tree carvings used by the indigenous tribes of the Pacific Northwest coast of the United States, and in British Columbia in Canada. Made out of cedar trees, due to their hardness and resistance to rot, the freestanding poles reached unprecedented heights in the 19th century, when the local people became wealthier and better carving tools were made available to artisans. The poles are used to memorialize indigenous culture's legends and history, to commemorate places or events, or to depict the rich and complex pantheon of animals, spirits and heroes of indigenous mythology. The intricate carvings were also present in the interior of homes, as decorations to house posts.



CENTRAL AMERICA

The Mayan civilization flourished artistically during its classical period (c. 200 to c. 900) in and around the Yucatán Peninsula. Mayan artists sculpted in all media, from wood to clay, but stone sculpture, with reliefs and engravings representing human figures and gods, epitomizes their art and architecture. Usually with a ritual or funerary end in mind, the rulers of powerful city-states commissioned limestone statues and stelae, often carved to their image and showing them as gods, and had buildings' walls and pyramids' monumental stairs engraved with mythological stories in hieroglyphic writing. The decorative program carried on to lintels, altars, thrones, funerary urns, and ball courts. Mayan art also reveals artistic influences and tells the story of the cultural, commercial and warfare interactions, between them and the people surrounding them, such as Teotihuacan, the Toltecs and the Mixtecs.



CENTRAL ASIA

Suzani is a type of embroidered and decorative tribal textile made in the Central Asian countries of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. Suzani (in English: needle) usually has a cotton fabric base, which is then embroidered with silk or cotton thread. Chain, satin, and buttonhole are the primary stitches used to fashion motifs such as the sun and moon disks, flowers, vines, fruit, and the occasional fish and birds. Traditionally made by Central Asian brides as part of their dowry, Suzani were presented to the groom on wedding day. Recognized for centuries for its fine jewelry, the city of Bukhara in Uzbekistan was a major stop along the ancient Silk Road, the web of trade routes connecting goods and ideas between the East and the West.



CHINA

Blue and white porcelain, the epitome of Chinese pottery, baked at a high temperature, is characterized by the purity of its kaolin clay body. It was first mass produced during the Yuan Dynasty (1368 -1279 AD), and perfected by potters of the subsequent Ming Dynasty (1644-1368). During this period, styles of decorative motifs and vessel shape changed along with the ascension of each new emperor, but the quality of Ming blue and whites remained superlative. The city of Jingdezhen, in the Jiangxi Province, became the center of a porcelain industry that not only produced vast quantities of vessels for the Emperor and the elites, but also exported products to places as far afield as Turkey.



EGYPT

In Ancient Egypt, from the time of the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic period, four canopic vases were destined to contain the embalmed viscera of the deceased, as part of the mummification process, to insure they would remain intact in the afterlife. Made of limestone, terracotta or ceramics, they were deposited near the sarcophagus, in the tomb's funerary chamber, sometimes in a row beneath the bier, or at the four corners of the chamber. Since the Nineteenth Dynasty, canopy jars lids were often shaped as the heads of the four sons of Horus, the guardians of the organs: human, falcon, baboon, and jackal, protected, respectively, the liver, intestines, lungs, and stomach. The deceased heart's was kept inside its body, as Egyptians believed it to be the seat of the soul.



ETHIOPIA

Ethiopian art is highly conservative, despite the discernible modern interferences that have found their way into its enduring expressionist style. A highly fertile and productive territory, Ethiopia has the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Africa. The ancient Ge'ez script, also known as Ethiopic, is one of the oldest alphabets still in use today, especially in illuminated manuscripts. Ethiopian painting on murals, in manuscripts, and in religious contexts is distinguished by a style and iconography that are closely related to the simplified Coptic version of Late Antique and Byzantine Christian art. Traditional Ethiopian artworks feature stylized figures with large almond-shaped eyes. Their bright intense colors are their most emblematic feature.



FRANCE

The origins of Marianne as an allegory of liberty date back to the 1770s, but she was only taken up as symbol of the Republic and its civic values after the Revolution, while her use as France's emblem was made official in 1848. Characterized by her Phrygian cap, originally worn by freed slaves, she thus signifies the liberation of France from the Ancien Régime. Although the reasons for choosing a woman to personify France are unclear, it has been suggested that she could embody a motherly figure, watching over French citizens. Soon after the Revolution, Marianne started appearing on medals, in paintings and in sculpture. She also regularly features on government-issued items, such as coins, and stamps, and her bust stands in all official buildings. Marianne is most prominently displayed in a monument on Place de la Nation, in Paris.





GCC

The "Mandoos" chest is still often found in Emirati homes. Young brides would usually take one with them when they moved to their husband's family home. It would contain the carefully prepared clothes and jewelry they had made and acquired before their wedding, as well as their most treasured possessions. Younger women would visit grandmothers and aunts –during the Eid al Fitr celebrations and were given small gifts for their "mandooos." At other times, they sat in a circle, while the family elder removed items from the chest and told the stories associated with them.



GERMANY

Built by the German Democratic Republic in 1961 to prevent emigration to the Federal German Republic, the Berlin wall was the most potent physical manifestation of the Iron Curtain separating democratic Europe from the Communist Eastern bloc.

The weakening of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's perestroika, and revolutions in Poland and Hungary, together with weeks of protests in East Germany, contributed to the wall's demise. In November 1989, people streamed through the checkpoints, climbed the wall, and hammered away at it in celebration of its fall.

Despite the difficulty of integrating East Germany this symbolic event is one of survival, thrive and triumph over ostensibly indomitable challenges.



GREECE

Red-figure vase painting was developed in Athens around 520 B.C. and flourished until the end of the fourth century B.C. With its red figural depictions set over a black background, it supplanted the earlier black-figure technique, where the reverse was the case. Attic red-figure vases were disseminated across Greece and in Southern Italy, and, with them, traveled the names of Greek artists or schools, which are often signed on the vessels.

Red-figure vases were usually not made for display. They could sometimes be destined for ritual occasions, but most often fulfilled everyday household purposes, with amphorae serving or transport wine and food, craters to mix wine and water, and hydria to hold water. The pictorial decorations on the vases provide avenues to understand many aspects of Ancient Greek life, from their everyday practices, to their mythology and cultural attitudes.



INDIA

One of the world's greatest architectural feats, the Taj Mahal is a grand testament to love. Built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, it commemorates his wife, who died in childbirth. The white marble mausoleum took over two decades and 20,000 craftsmen and workers to build, and was completed in 1653. With its combination of Islamic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Indian aesthetics, it is the apex of Mughal architecture. The Taj Mahal is distinguished by its use of motifs, calligraphy and intricate marble designs, ranging from latticework to more traditional motifs, as well as the use of gems and precious stones in its inlays. The Taj Mahal was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983.



INDONESIA

The Kenyah and Kayan people, native of Borneo, produce impressive painted wooden shields called klau or klebit. Carved, with their handle, from a single piece of jelutong wood, the ovoid shields insured the physical and spiritual protection of warriors, being painted with a variety of fearsome graphic motifs, such as interlocking spirals, circles and hook designs, or with figurative ones, including dog dragon heads, figures with menacing eyes and fangs, and representations of spirits. Historically, the shields could sometimes be inserted with tufts of hair taken from the heads of killed enemies. While headhunting is no longer practiced, decorated shields still feature in ritual performances.



IRAN

Composed between 966 and 1010 by Persian poet Ferdowsi, the *Shahnameh*, or Book of Kings, is considered today as the national epic of Iran. The sweeping poem is made up of more than 50,000 couplets. It retraces the story of Greater Iran, from the creation of the world until the 7th-century Arab conquest, all of which unfolded over the reigns of 50 mythical and historical monarchs. Drawing on written and oral history, as well as pre-Islamic sources including the Zoroastrian Avesta, the *Shahnameh* stages the combats of kings and heroes against fearsome, sometimes supernatural enemies, while narrating its protagonists' moral struggles and romantic entanglements. The poem's timeless themes account for its continued popularity, and it remains central to the cultural identity of Iran and the surrounding region. Over the centuries, Persian kings and dignitaries would commission richly illustrated copies of the poem, many of which are considered some of the best examples of Persian miniature painting.



IRAQ

The most important archaeological discoveries of the Mesopotamian city of Sumer, whose civilization dates back as far as 2,500 BCE, are a large number of tablets inscribed with cuneiform writing. Sumerian writing is a milestone in the development of the Middle Eastern and Western civilizations, since it enabled the recording of History, of financial transactions, and of poetic epics, prayers and laws. The Sumerian language continued to be the language of religion and law in Mesopotamia long after Semitic speakers became dominant. The well-preserved statue of Ebih-II, discovered in the temple of the goddess Ishtar in Mari, Syria, is a masterpiece of craftsmanship and expressive style. The eyes of the statue have retained their inlay of shell and lapis lazuli, which came from Afghanistan, a testimony to the long-distance trade already taking place in the third millennium BC.



ITALY

Primavera, also known as the Allegory of Spring, one of the most popular paintings of Western art, is a 1482 tempera panel by the Italian Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli. The Italian Renaissance started in Tuscany in the late 14th century and spread the philosophy of Antiquity. It inspired cultural renewal throughout Europe in the next two centuries. Despite the constant political infighting between Italian cities at the time, art flourished more than ever. For the first time, artists became influential members of society instead of mere artisans. Adhering to the humanist philosophy, they delved not only in painting and sculpture, but also in philosophy and science, and helped disseminate them across the continent.



JAPAN

Japanese Imari is a style of porcelain named after the eponymous Japanese port. It emerged in the late 17th century and was actually first made in the town of Arita. Imari's porcelain production benefited from the proximity to the kaolin-rich Izumiyama quarry. It culled its designs from the colorful Japanese textiles of the day: Landscapes with gnarled trees and cranes and depictions of courtesans in exquisitely detailed kimonos are among its most common motifs. The popularity of the Imari porcelain led to countless imitations in the West, from Meissen in Germany and Spode in England for instance. By the early 18th century, China too produced inexpensive Imari of its own, making original Japanese Imari prohibitively costly in the West.





KOREA

During the Goryeo dynasty (1392–1398), the main type of ceramics produced on the Korean peninsula was made of gray-green celadon. The high-fired gray stoneware of the preceding Silla dynasty (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) set the stage for the manufacture of celadon, whose use represents a major technological and conceptual shift in the history of Korean ceramics. In the refined pieces used by the royal court in particular, a palpable aesthetic dynamic is evident in the ceramics' design, shape and decoration.



LEBANON

The Phoenicians flourished on the coastline of modern-day Lebanon and Syria between 1,200 and 300 B.C. A constellation of independent city-states sharing a common culture, language, and religion, most prominent among them Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, and Arwad. Dominated by the successive Assyrian, Babylonian, Hellenistic and Roman empires, the cities nevertheless preserved their commercial importance, and founded colonies around the Mediterranean, notably the cities of Carthage, Marsilia... This artwork is informed by an Assyrian relief depicting their interactions with the Phoenicians. Renowned for their shipbuilding and glass-making skills, the trade in cedar wood and of purple dye, their cultural legacy lies in their elaboration of the alphabet (1,050 BC). Its use spread quickly and influenced the development of the Greek alphabet.



MOROCCO

Morocco's craft culture fuses indigenous Berber and Arab traditions with Jewish, Andalusian, and other European influences. Techniques are passed on through specialist guilds, where masters train apprentices. Officially encouraged during the French protectorate (56-1912), Moroccan metalwork is particularly visible in architecture and furniture production from the workshops in the souks of Fes, Marrakech, and Taroudant.



NETHERLANDS

The thriving tin-glazed pottery industry of the Netherlands started in Antwerp, before Delft overtook it as the country's best-known center for its production. With its resemblance to porcelain, Delft pottery fast became one of the Netherlands' best-known exports. Thanks to the intensification of global trade during the Dutch Golden Age (16th century), it took inspiration from China's blue and white porcelain, as well as Oriental pottery styles. Popular images found on Dutch pottery include local scenes of windmills, fishing boats and landscapes.



NIGERIA

The bead-embroidered and veiled crown, or "ade", is an attribute of the Oba people that symbolizes the aspirations of the ruling authorities of their civilization.

The bird motif has layers of meaning: it is an emblem of the role of the king as an intermediary between his subjects and the gods, in the same way that a bird mediates between heaven and earth. Yoruba crowns thus connote power by divine sanction. The bead embroidery is made by men through a ritualistic process, turning beads into the symbol of the consistent continuity of generations, and of solidarity and unity.



OMAN

"Khanjar" is an Arabic word used to describe a variety of types of traditional daggers. One of them, the "ajanbiya," is particular to Oman, as opposed to other common types derived from the Near and Middle East and India.

Depending on the quality of craftsmanship and luxury, the Omani khanjar can be made of gold or silver, or brass and copper for more common daggers. Traditionally, its future owner designs the dagger himself, and the craftsman takes into account these specifications. The khanjar is a national symbol of Oman, and the Sultanate's national emblem.



PALESTINE

In the aftermath of the Nakba, or the 1948 Palestinian Exodus, the Palestinian right of return to their land became a paramount issue relentlessly advocated by the Palestinians and Palestinian refugees abroad. Along the right of return, Palestinians also asserted the right of first-generation refugees and their descendants to the property themselves or their forebears were forced to leave behind. Metaphors for this right are numerous. Among them, there are popular culture characters, such as Handala, created by the Palestinian cartoonist and journalist Naji al-Ali, and, more metaphorically, the key.





PERU

Huaco, or Guaco, is the name given in Peru to the pottery found in pre- Columbian burial sites, sanctuaries, temples and ancient ruins. They are linked to ceremonial, religious, artistic and aesthetic rituals of the ancient Huari (Wari), Nazca and Moche people, who dominated the Peruvian coast in the first millennium AD.



PHILIPPINES

The archipelago of the Philippines made up of 7,100 islands, home to some of the oldest tribal communities of the region, whose cultural traditions have come to incorporate Asian influences, English words, and Spanish Catholicism.

Two of the main historical artistic products of the Philippines are the mother-of-pearl and brass works. Polynesian people too harvested pearl oysters for their shells, art and decoration, unlike Japanese divers who found pearls but did not bother to keep and use them until the late 19th century.



PORTUGAL

Azulejo tile work, whose name originates in the Arabic term “zellige” (terracotta tiles), characterizes the interiors and exteriors of buildings in Spain and Portugal, from churches and palaces, to schools, restaurants and even subway stations.

Due to their unique design, Azulejo tiles acted as efficient indoors temperature control devices, and spread to the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies of South America, Africa and the Philippines. Reminiscent of Roman mosaics as well as Arabic aesthetics, they are recognizable for their interlocking curvilinear, geometric or floral motif. Their patterns often chronicled the major Portuguese historical and cultural events.



QATAR

The term "Catara" was used since 150 AD to designate the Qatar Peninsula in geographic and historical maps. Later on, it appeared on amazing 18th-century maps. The Qataris' attachment to their ancient roots, together with their commitment to modernization and technological advances, are at the core of their cultural values. Reviving Qatar's previous names upholds a lasting connection between today's Qatar and its place in History.



RUSSIA

Nested matryoshka dolls, whose name evokes the matriarchs of large Russian families, enjoyed immense popularity among Russian peasants. The nested- doll principle employs the recognizable relationship of "object-within-a-similar- object," common to the design of many a handicraft. The dolls often follow a theme, and can represent subjects as diverse as fairy tale characters and Soviet leaders. Vasily Zvyozdochkin made the first set of matryoshka dolls in 1890. Savva Mamontov presented the dolls at the Exposition Universelle (1900) in Paris, where the toys earned a bronze medal. Soon after, the Matryoshka dolls' popularity increased around the world, and their production expanded throughout all Russia.



SAUDI ARABIA

The floral patterns on the Kaaba Minbar, in Mecca's Al-Haram mosque (Masjid Al- Haram), were designed in a pan-Islamic style by Jay Bonner in 2002. (He also did the ornament for the 27 Sliding Domes for the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia (al-Masjid al-Nabawi) in the early 1990s.) Because Masjid Al-Haram is a major site of pilgrimage for Muslims from all over the world, it was appropriate that the floral ornament on the Minbar, the steps and platform used by the preacher, should be recognizably Islamic, but not specific to any historical epoch or region of the Islamic world. Instead, the minbar's floral pattern is a simplified derivative form of Egyptian Mamluk floral design.





SIERRA LEONE

The Mende people live predominantly in West African countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. These farmer-hunters are one of the two largest ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. Their cultural and oral traditions suggest that the Mende emigrated from Western Sudan in waves before the 16th century. They are famous for their wooden masks, which they wear on ritual occasions.

Unlike in the usual sub-Saharan tradition, only males are allowed to wear them. However, the black helmet mask is almost exclusively worn by women. It presents an idealized version of feminine beauty, with an elaborate hairstyle, large forehead and small facial features; the wood's gleaming surfaces denoting healthy, glowing skin.



SPAIN

The Cuir de Cordoue (Cordoban leather) is an ancient art of treating and gilding leather that was often used in lieu of tapestries as large-scale wall coverings. The technique involves molding wet leather (usually calf) into shape, before gilding it with oil and applying a layer of lacquer. This technique has other names, like 'guadameci' (from the Libyan town of Ghadames), as well as 'cordobanes' (for soft goat leather).

The Cuir de Cordoue went through numerous styles, sometimes drawing on silk damask and Chinese patterns. It retained its popularity from the 9th century through the 18th, but went out of fashion with the rise of printed wallpaper during the Victorian era (19th century).



SYRIA

Brilliant mother-of-pearl has been used as a decorative material since at least 2,500 BC. Over the centuries, Syrians have perfected an intricate inlay technique in which the underlying surface of the wood is almost entirely encrusted with mother- of pearl ornamentation, creating an elegant shimmering effect with delicate floral and geometric arabesques.

The development of Islamic calligraphy is strongly tied to the Qur'an: it commonly feature excerpts from this Holy Book. Moreover, the Islamic reluctance to figuration in art made calligraphy one of the main forms of artistic expression in Islamic cultures. Along with these Islamic themes, pearl motifs are also influenced by Europe, and in particular Victorian taste.



THAILAND

Ninety percent of the Thai population adheres to the Theravada school of Buddhism; their religion also integrates folk and traditional Chinese beliefs. Thai Buddhism is also influenced by Hindu beliefs received from Cambodia, particularly during the Sukhothai Kingdom of the 13th century. Hinduism played a strong role in the early institution of Thai kingship, just as it did in Cambodia, and exerted influence in the creation of Thai laws and government. Buddhist temples in Thailand are characterized by tall golden stupas (sites of worship to the Buddha's relics). In fact, the religious architecture of Thailand shares similarities with other Southeast Asian countries, in particular Cambodia and Laos, with whom Thailand has close cultural and historical ties.



TUNISIA

Tunisian ceramics have a complex heritage. Like many Mediterranean people, the Tunisians have historically been active traders, and it was only natural that in Nabeul, a port city, commerce would foster cultural exchanges. Berber, Egyptian, Punic, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Andalusian, Ottoman and European influences have all passed through Nabeul over the centuries, each offering another rich vein of inspiration.

Today, the Tunisian demand for utilitarian ceramic objects is declining, due to the increased availability of cheap European mass-produced alternatives. Nevertheless a number of Tunisian potters, some of whom are known internationally, seek to resurrect the artistic quality of past centuries.



TURKEY

The town of Iznik in Turkey was already an established center for the production of under glazed pottery, when, in the last quarter of the 15th century, craftsmen began to manufacture high quality objects with a frit ware body and painted with cobalt blue under a colorless lead glaze.

The meticulous designs combine traditional Ottoman arabesque patterns with Chinese elements: this change was the result of the patronage of the recently established Ottoman court, who greatly valued Chinese blue- and- white porcelain.



UNITED KINGDOM

In the 20th century, American musical influences started dominating popular music. Young performers across the world began producing their own versions of American music, in particular the rock & roll from the late 1950s.

This led, in the 1960s, to the so-called British Invasion of pop and rock music acts in the United States, most prominently The Beatles. Britain has had an immense impact on popular music, in great part thanks to its linguistic and cultural links with the United States, the Commonwealth (Australia, Canada among others), and its former colonies. The British spearheaded the development of many of the major trends in popular music, from pop, to New Wave, to the Britpop of the nineties.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Pop art is a movement that emerged in the mid 1950s in Britain, and in the late 1950s in the United States. Pop art employs aspects of popular mass culture, such as advertising, comic books and mundane cultural objects. It avoids elitist culture, and infuses the banal and the kitsch with a dose of irony.

Pop artists notably used mechanical means of reproduction or rendering techniques. Product labeling and logos figure prominently in their imagery, as seen, for instance, in Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans series.



UKRAINE

With mentions as ancient as Herodotus' travels in the fifth century BC, Ukrainian embroidery is a practice deeply embedded in national culture. The national garb of Ukraine is the vyshyvka, an embroidered costume consisting of a white tunic ornamented not only on the sleeves, but also often on the neck, bosom and cuffs, usually with red or black patterns. Ukrainian embroidery appears also on ornamental towels called rushnyky, or on fabric used as shrouds or sacramental covers in churches. Practiced all over Ukraine and typically the work of women, embroidery styles vary according to region, each displaying its own geometric patterns, and floral or animal motifs often connected with local beliefs, myths, and superstitions. Still, these form a distinctive Ukrainian style of folk art, which the Soviet-era policy of Russification was not able to stifle.



VIETNAM

Growing in Vietnam since the Stone Age, rice has shaped the country's culture for centuries, its cultivation spurring the development of civilization in the Mekong Delta, commonly called the "Rice Bowl" of Vietnam.

Rice shaped the Vietnamese rural landscape, with its endless rice terraces, and is not only a staple of the national diet, eaten at every meal, but also an integral part of life. It is even considered a god given gift, since, as folk legend has it, in ancient times, rice was not harvested, but summoned by people's prayers, so that a large ball of it would appear in every house.



YEMEN

Yemen is one of the oldest centers of civilization in the Near East. Its relatively fertile land and adequate rainfall relative to its neighbors helped sustain a stable population.

The ancient Greek geographer Ptolemy indeed described Yemen as Eudaimon Arabia –Fortunate Arabia. Although Yemen's pre-Islamic civilization began in the 4th millennium BCE, Sabaean Studies (the study of the cultures of Ancient South Arabia), is very young, since this civilization remained unknown for much longer than other Middle Eastern ones.



The depiction of the shell dressed in a variety (46) of symbolic cultural executions, is the physical and spiritual core of the « Perpetual Identities » project.

The shell collection in six editions of which 4 complete editions representing 46 countries are intended for foundations, museums and private collectors. Each is handmade, using different materials, including ceramics, porcelain, resin, wood, and iron. Most are produced by their native country's artisans. The dimensions are 75 x 20 cm. The base and top are made of brass and/or iron.



THE BOX

A replica of the boxes used during the Lebanese war.





THE ARTIST

Born in 1960, Katya A. Traboulsi is a Beirut based multimedia artist whose practice is characterized by the emotional intensity with which she confronts the effects of the Lebanese civil war. Both her painting and sculptural works are characterized by her bold use of colour, which disrupts the viewer's expectations of the dark subject matter they are confronted with. Her solo exhibition ***Perpetual Identities*** (2018) held at the Salah Barakat Gallery saw presented 46 hand-crafted replicas of Lebanese war bomb shells adorned with colourful patterns, beads and sculpted forms, thus transforming these destructive military objects into beautiful, ornate vessels. In 2013, Traboulsi published ***Generation War***, a body of work that traces the story of photojournalists who witnessed the civil war during the 80s – an homage to their efforts and a political project that seeks to record the country's complex histories. Traboulsi lived and worked in Dubai from 1989 till 2016 before retuning to her native Beirut. Her work has been exhibited internationally since 1986 in Paris, London, Dubai, Kuwait, North America, the Algerian museum of Modern Art and the International Armory Show in NYC.



SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY

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