

Aesthetic Interventions for Social Justice Across the Maghreb

AIMS Conference

January 09-10, 2025-Tunis

With the participation of Hassan Darsi, Lamis Saidi, and Selma and Sofiane Ouissi

The AIMS 2025 conference aims to bring together artists, critics, and scholars to reflect on the intersections of art and social justice across the Maghrib region in the 21st century.

With a long history of struggle for emancipation from forms of domination –both foreign and domestic– aesthetic interventions in the Maghrib have struggled to find representation and circulation in the public sphere. Amazigh art and film have recently emerged as a fertile corpus with a historically rich past; and, recently, modern Maghribi citizenries have shown a growing tendency towards viewing culture and creative expressions as circulating “from below.” This too, draws on a longstanding tradition of combining and cohabitation between artistic endeavors such as tapestry, textiles, jewelry and calligraphy, for instance, that originate in early forms of social and cultural expression.

We propose to explore new local, national, and transnational interventions for equity, access, participation, and rights in the Maghrib. We invite papers that focus specifically on aesthetic interventions for social justice, opening up a range of explorations of “art/human/social/spatial/temporal/ intersections as [interdisciplinary] entanglements” (Mundel and Rice). If intellectual and artistic commitment was originally focused on political rights and expression, social justice theory offers a wider lens and includes a further degree of activism. We aim therefore to anchor the conference in the tenets of social justice, founded on examining quests for access and equity both at the collective level and in view of the individual as an agent for social change. As such, the conference is built around fostering collaboration between artists, activists, and researchers and identifying the challenges and opportunities faced by artists and arts organizations working in the public sphere. The aesthetic interventions we seek to examine in relation to social justice ideas and ideals include literature and cinema, the visual and performing arts, as well as music and fashion. Further, we aim to focus on works that intervene to raise consciousness and denounce abuses, build around place and community, and motivate individuals to act for social change. Our intention is to explore the place of art and culture in extending pluralism and access, foregrounding a Maghrib that is increasingly free and creative.

Questions we would like participants to address include, but are not limited to:

-What are the dimensions of aesthetic interventions for social justice: what is their scale, where are they located, are they temporary or permanent, to what degree are/were they public and openly accessible?

-What, if any, is the social responsibility of the artist and/or the intellectual?

-To what degree does self-representation play a part in aesthetic interventions for social justice? How does self-representation counter self-censorship?

-What is the context and impact of the increasing visibility and consecration of Maghribi cinema on the global stage?



-Did aesthetic interventions play a role in the aftermath of the recent environmental disasters in Libya and Morocco?

-How are Maghribi artists reacting to the Palestinian question and how do they conceive of and express the question of solidarity?

-What live networks and connections exist between Maghribi artists, cultural creators, and activists? How do these connections differ in reach, audience, and intention from museum initiatives (such as the establishment of the Fondation Nationale des Musées in 2011 and the Musée Mohammed VI in Rabat in 2014) and recently inaugurated spaces (such as the Musée d'art moderne/MAMO in Oran)?

The conference will be held in Tunis at the Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines (CEMAT) and will be open to the general public. The event is sponsored by the American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS). We will provide hotel rooms and meals for all conference participants. In addition to this, we will cover the travel costs for all scholars currently working at North African institutions. Papers may be presented in Arabic, English or French. Conference attendees may be asked to participate in recordings of the *Maghrib in Past and Present | Podcasts*. Selected participants will subsequently be invited to contribute to a special edition of the *Journal of North African Studies*.

For consideration, please send a 200 to 300-word abstract by June 1, 2024 to aims2025tunis@gmail.com.

Organizing committee
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