



New database documents missing modern Iraqi art

DENTON (UNT), Texas — Hundreds of lost works of art from the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad are documented in a new database that became publicly accessible this month, thanks to seven years of research led by Dr. Nada Shabout, a University of North Texas associate professor of art history and a leading expert on modern Iraqi art.

Called the Modern Art Iraq Archive, the database at <http://artiraq.org/maia> has become one of the most comprehensive collections of information about the artworks, many of which disappeared from the museum after lootings and fires following the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

“This database is only the beginning, as we hope that others will contribute more information that will continue to shed light on modern Iraqi culture,” Shabout said. “Few of the lost works of art have been recovered, but having information about them in this database is the next best thing. Otherwise, it’s as if they never existed — and a large part of modern Iraqi culture would be lost.”

The Modern Art Iraq Archive contains about 700 items, including about 460 artworks and about 230 documents related to the art, including exhibition catalogs; newspaper, magazine and journal articles; personal letters; and sketches.

Shabout plans to expand the database to include even more modern Iraqi artworks from the late 19th century to the 1990s — not just those from the museum. The open-access database is designed so that members of the general public can contribute images and information. She is still seeking information about many of the works, including their whereabouts and original location in the museum.

Shabout, a former Iraqi resident, began her quest for information about the artworks during a visit to Iraq in 2003. Since then, she has interviewed artists, museum personnel and art gallery owners in her continuing search for information. Shabout received two fellowships from the American Academic Research Institute in Iraq in 2006 and 2007 to conduct the first phase of data collection. In 2009, she received a \$50,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Institute of Museum and Library Service to create the

database, which is a joint effort of UNT, the Alexandria Archive Institute and the School of Information at UC Berkeley.

She is co-editor of the book “New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century” and the author of “Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics.” She earned a Senior Fulbright Scholar grant to teach a course in contemporary Arab art history at the University of Jordan in Amman from September 2008 to February 2009. She is a long-term advisor to Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar, and was a guest curator for two of the museum’s inaugural exhibitions in December. Shabout also serves as director of the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Studies Institute at UNT.

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