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Seeing in Stereo: A Study of the Market for
Orientalist Copies in Lebanon

Kirsten Scheid



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Abstract

Orientalist artwork of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced thousands of canvases depicting an exotic, erotic East. Such pictures depended on a repertoire of stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. Though this artwork fell out of favour with Western art history, and was later discredited as racist and imperialist in motivation, it has recently begun to find appreciators again, many of whom hail from the Arab world, the very people said to be vilified by such depictions. This paper will look into the workings of the new international market and into how contemporary Arabs respond to the stereotypes contained within it. The research cited is based on a twining of the study of the social life of objects and interviews conducted with Lebanese patrons and painters of Orientalist artwork. Building on Homi Bhabha's analysis of the play of stereotypes in colonial encounters, the paper will examine the deployment of the Orientalist repertoire of stereotypes in relation to the Arab world's role in the New World Order. In conclusion, the argument is made that stereotypes need to be examined as productive features in intercultural interaction. Any move that would counter stereotyping discourse, whether intellectual or graphic, must confront the appeal of the kind of vision that stereotyping makes possible.

Keywords

contemporary art in Lebanon, Arab art market, Orientalism, stereotypes

I. Mummies—First Sighting

Opening in September 1997, Sha'aban Lawand's exhibition at the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism featured hand-painted reproductions of European Renaissance and Academic paintings. These pictures were all given bilingual titles, Lawand's signature, and prices from \$300 to \$4000. At the official opening of the exhibition, the General Director of Tourism made a short speech in which he asserted that in such exhibitions, which 'cultural tourists' attend, customs, traditions, and ideas meet, and become an important means of achieving peace. The April Accords, following Israel's atrocious 'Grapes of Wrath' venture, had finally been implemented securing a needed reprieve for the reconstruction boom, and this minister was interpolating Lebanon and this art, borrowed yet original, copied yet creative, traditional yet modern, into plans for a 'New Middle East.' (Unsigned, 1997)

An attentive host, Lawand offered to tell me about the pictures' history. While he led me to see through the canvases to their subject of generalized Arab traditions, my 1980s training in Western art history pulled me to see through them to a very different referent: the eighteenth and nineteenth century pictures of 'the East' made by the 'traveller-painters' of European empire. In terms of this alternative history, finding these pictures in Beirut, at this exhibition was like finding an army of mummies risen from the dead. I invoke mummies, the dead who fail to stay in their graves, not as a jab at an exotic bit of Oriental religion but as a trope in East-West relations that indexes the evolutionist theory of the march of time and progress. Long before Edward Said's scathing critique of Orientalist epistemes (1978), the associated artwork had been moved off museum walls into 'gloomy basement[s]' and out of Art's history (Ackerman, 1997: 6). The reason was less the derogatory nature of many of the pictures' content than the *depassé* academic realist style in which most were painted. Indeed, in standard art history training for the past half century, the style had been barely discussed, only mentioned along with the sum of 'Nineteenth-century Academic Art' to prepare the way for the triumph of Impressionism, Cubism, and so on. Buried once by an art movement and a second time by an academic movement, the Orientalist pictures that had somehow managed nearly a century later to come back from the dead *in Arab countries*, or on New York City's Fifth Avenue at a *Lebanese-run* museum of fine art, posed a paradox for more than one viewer (Kino, 2000; Benjamin, 1997).

While the first burial of Orientalist art had canonized changing tastes at the turn of the nineteenth-century, the second had responded to a re-evaluation of the canon's formation. Scholars motivated by the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 unearthed the artwork not to revive it but to confirm its death-state by revealing how exactly Europe's high art had been implicated in its imperialism (Cf. Nochlin, 1989; Porterfield, 1994). In light of these revisionist studies, the circumstances which brought these mummies out of the basements has provoked much comment: Arabs themselves, the very people found to be degraded in and through this style of depiction, are responsible for defining it anew as an object of desire. Wealthy Arab patrons predominate among the clients for this genre at London and Paris auction houses, fuelling their exponential rise in value, while innumerable shows like Lawand's of hand-painted reproductions of Gérôme and co. supply an ample portion of the local art market, at all economic levels. A bit gleefully, this phenomenon has been declared a vindication of the Orientalists: 'collectors, *even those from the Eastern lands* Gérôme was supposed to have vilified in his Orientalist works, buy his paintings, hang them in their houses: love him' (Ackerman, 1997: 8, my emphasis). Indeed, it seems to some that the French critic Gautier was right after all when he praised Fromentin's submission to the 1861 Salon thus: 'If Islam did not forbid them painting, the Arabs would represent themselves in just such a way' (Quoted in Benjamin, 1997, 32). Was not that what Lawand and the minister at his show were in fact assuming?

Although the purveyors of Orientalist art now expound upon its 'all-around aesthetic appeal,' (Kaylan, 2000) it is noteworthy that in doing so they are quick to return the clients to their geographical and ethnic origins. In addition to Ackerman's phrase quoted above, there is Forbes

magazine's discussion of Mathaf Gallery, the longest and perhaps most active promoter of Orientalist art for Arab clientele in London:

Mathaf's traditional Mideastern clientele prefer more precise, less florid representations of their own culture, and even a Matisse, who dabbled in the subject, would find few takers among them. (Kaylan, 2000)

This sentence spans an incredible chronology, from the 'traditional' past supposedly embodied by the clientele, to their present preferences, to their future, possible purchases. It is as if the authentic Arabs, coming from a specific region, merely manifest their ethnicity like DNA in their taste for this art. Their identity pre-exists and remains unchanged by their activity. By re-inscribing the new clientele in their side of the East/West divide, the commentators both universalize the pictures' appeal and restore their objectivity as mirrors of the Arab self despite their makers' backgrounds. Therefore, the question must be confronted, in what way are the patrons of these pictures Oriental, or put otherwise: if 'the European culture gained strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self,' (Said, 1978: 3) then whose self does that 'mirror' show when hung on the walls of homes in Beirut, Amman, Baghdad, and Casablanca?

Let me be clear: I am not interested here in considering the exquisite purchases of the incredibly wealthy Arabs, the Gulf emirs or Syrian arms traders whose patronage of original works by Orientalists has set the pace for Christies' and Sotheby's (Musée Nicholas Sursock, 2002; Kino 2001). In cases such as that of the prince of an Arab sultanate who decided in 1993 to found a museum for Orientalist art in his country (Barakat, 2001), the new patrons have a direct link to and cause for identification with the original imperial patrons, having been put into power by the colonial process and regularly restored to totalizing power through neo-colonial re-engagements in the region. However, the matter of copies involves greater local participation: someone to make the copy, someone to sell it, and a third to buy it. It is a practice stretched across many other daily social interactions, and one reoccurring, for makers and sellers, on a daily basis. The case of the widely spread patronage of copies of Orientalist paintings demands extended consideration precisely for its dissemination across classes, sexes, educational backgrounds, sectarian groups.

Out and about in post-war Beirut,¹ printed copies of David Roberts' lithographs could be bought at the up-scale *artisanat* shops, and antique stores, and especially at the newly institutionalized flea market that since 1994 has brought Beirutis back to their recently bulldozed downtown *suqs*. Oil-painting reproductions feature alongside Egyptian-imported simulations of British and French antique furniture. A good number of galleries were largely devoted to selling expensive copies of Orientalist paintings. Outdoor street festivals promoted to attract Lebanese returnee-tourists and investors of the post-war era allowed amateurs to rent stands and sell their copies. Up-scale bookstores in all sectors of Beirut stocked catalogues of the artwork, and locally produced books and magazines dealing with a range of topics used Orientalist images for their cover art (Cf. Abu Samra, 1997). From the tourist brochures for Lebanon in travel agents' offices around the world to the hotel lobbies that welcomed new arrivals, Orientalist reproductions marked the way. Yet in all this panorama of resurfacing Orientalist imagery, very few people *wear* the clothes depicted on the canvases, frequent sites mirroring the architecture displayed, or re-enact in their daily lives any of the scenes portrayed, for that matter. So what relationship(s) pertain(s) between the new viewers and the long-ago viewed?

A focus on the market with its historical specificity disallows ethnicist assumptions of timelessness such as that found on Forbes' web-site. In order to follow pictures through the market, we will need to employ Said's contrapuntal method (1993: 66-7), moving between the original canvases painted by European 'travel-painters,' the sites of current reproduction, and the interiors of contemporary reception. I will argue that the artwork studied does not belong to any of these places exclusively. Tracking the social biographies of copied pictures will cultivate an understanding of how art has been

1 This description is based on my field research in Beirut between 1994 and 2000.

employed historically to create socio-cultural differences, act upon them, or undermine them. Perhaps the uncompromising similarity of the copies to the original artworks produced may disclose, to paraphrase Taussig, the difference-making that is at the heart of our disciplines (1993: 7-8). Why should a people's art be different indeed? Looking at the contemporary Arab art-market for Orientalist paintings requires an analysis of the cross-cultural formation of the self, something squarely at odds with both nationalist art history and ethnic-oriented anthropology. I hope with my examination of the currency of copies, borrowed across the very cultural divides they inscribe, to return to the historical frame the notion of an authentic, culturally expressive Art, the visual analogue of the authentic Self.

II. Mummies in Mirrors—Second Sighting

Lawand did not call attention to the status of his pictures as copies, but in later years, painters or dealers would sometimes use in their selling practices a catalogue of originals to attest to their copying skills. To this end, certain pictures became market hallmarks, setting the standard for the best copying of the most difficult, detail-replete scenes. On several occasions, dealers called my attention to a picture reproduced in a book practically everyone had: *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting*, by Lynne Thornton (1994). At \$20 the pocket-sized book was a good bargain; containing about 180 richly reproduced pictures on 192 pages. Out of these pictures, the Preparations for the Marriage of the Sherif's Daughter in Tangiers by José Tapiró y Baró, was repeatedly remarked upon. Indeed, it was one Lawand, too, had copied. Under an archway studded with *muqarnas*, amidst a profusion of luxurious cloths and jewels, a young bride receives a touch of *kohl* for her eyebrow from one servant while another arranges floral garlands. One dealer testified to the utter facility of the Iraqi artist Qais al-Sindi by noting that the latter had 'done' the picture for him more beautiful than the original' on three occasions (Alleik, 2001a). To prove his claim he brought out a glossy print he had made of the copy for the purpose of putting his best stock on a web-site. Or again, when I was seeking artists to participate in a show I was in the process of curating, a young man encouraged me to consider his aunt. In the course of his assuring me that she was very talented, he noted that she had copied an incredibly difficult piece of Orientalist minutiae—yes, in fact, it was Tapiró's Preparations. Apparently a surprising coincidence, the reasons for this uncanny repetition deserve closer scrutiny.

Though there were many other topics relating to her own work which the painter-cum-copyist, Fitam Mrad would have preferred to discuss, when I asked her about the copy, she recalled for me the following: The client, having seen her work at a friend's house, had given her a call proposing a copy of Tapiró's picture. When he didn't call back after hearing her price, she assumed he had found her too expensive. Two years later, however, he called again and commissioned on the condition that he see her work before paying for it. One and half months later she presented the client with what he thought was the finished piece. She recalls telling him, 'If I were devious, I could say it is and get my \$3000 for practically nothing, but I'm not. This is just an *ébouche*' (Mrad, 2001). She had worked in acrylic to get a sense of the details. It took her another five months to complete the final, oil-on-canvas work. Upon handing it over, she let him know that had she known how tiring it would be, she would have asked for much more money. The customer was very pleased according to Mrad. She doesn't know what happened to the piece, but she had assumed he had bought it to re-sell for a higher price. His telephone number still in her book, she was able to give it to me to arrange an interview.

The painting (or re-painting?) had been commissioned by a man who had recently returned from Canada to establish a Mercedes dealership in Beirut. He introduced himself as aesthetically 'sensitive': having studied photography in college for two years, he practiced advertising photography successfully for some time (Name withheld, 2001c). Though the wealthy businessman now, in his forties, scoffs at the idea of pursuing the art form further, considering it a youthful diversion, he emphasized to me that this minor artistic experience was expressive of his character. When I went to interview him at his dealership, he had Mrad's copy brought from his house for me to view. As we stared together at the very finely worked canvas, he said that he had seen another copy of Tapiró's picture at a friend's house in 1994, and that he had been so impressed by the picture's colour and

intricacy that he wanted his own copy. It had taken him four years of searching in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, including contact with al-Sindi (whom he rejected), to find an artist whom he thought was capable of the ‘perfect copy.’ In his recounting of the quest, the commissioner emphasized his own ability to perceive and judge workmanship. His story was as much about his dutiful rejection of numerous artists as about his delightful triumph in actually finding one worthy. And while on the one hand he said of himself, ‘I like those small *détails*. I’m very picky about such things,’ on the other hand, he never bridged his sense of style and traditional Arabic craft with his ethnic identity. Flatly refusing any connection of his preferences with his forebears, he asserted that paradigm of individuality: ‘It’s just a matter of taste.’ Further, although Tapiró’s piece is a perfect example of the picturesque, of a story set up stage-like to draw the viewer in, the commissioner was not the least bit interested in the story. He was interested, rather, in judging the execution of the story and in acquiring a singular reproduction of that execution for his own living space.

It would be disingenuous to treat the Mercedes-dealer’s interest in Preparations as a mere chance meeting of two entities adrift in time and space. Just as this patron is clearly involved in the re-creation and re-interpretation of the picture, so might the picture itself have somehow been implicated in the creation of him as a contemporary individual member of a specific society. To ignore this possibility would be to overlook wilfully the picture’s own investment in the creation of a particular representation of Arab culture and concurrently of an identity for a European viewing audience. It would be to overlook, as well, the history of this picture as a commodity, competing in a market with other goods and contributing to the development of a market whose existence eventually participated in the dealer’s own self-formulation: local photographer in his youth, purveyor of imported luxury items in his maturity. Likewise, it would be fatuous to treat Mrad’s probably sincere disinterest in her copying of Preparations as a natural artistic response to a lesser category of work. In what way, the question must be posed, has the picture itself been part of a formulation of socio-aesthetic hierarchies and so-called civilizational ones? To deal with these issues, historical attention must be directed to Tapiró’s work and its receptions.

III. A Mummy-To-Be in the Cemetery Called Rome

José Tapiró y Baró (b. 1836—d. 1913) executed the first painting of this picture in Rome, probably between 1860 and 1876 (Thornton, 1994: 88). Tapiró came to Rome with his more famous comrade Mariano Fortuny y Marsal (b. 1838—d. 1874) from the newly industrialized provincial Catalan town of Reus. When they arrived in Papal Rome, a modest city of 165,000 residents, Fortuny, for one, is said to have been disappointed by what struck him as ‘a vast cemetery visited by strangers’ (Ediciones Dolmen, 1954). The phrase vividly points to the decline of Rome’s role as the center of economic, diplomatic, and artistic production. But Rome’s emptiness was not all barren. Here the Spanish artists could find in the back streets the precious flotsam and jetsam of a cross-Mediterranean current: commingling Persian, Turkish, Maghrebi and Levantine pottery, jewellery, glass-ware, clothing, carpets, furniture, and arms that testified to fortunes built up through decades of mercantile contact and recently on the down-swing (Champney, 1881: 26, 33). The Orientalist style was already very much in vogue, in Rome as in Paris, and there is no reason to suppose, as many art historians do, that Tapiró and Fortuny did not become aware of it until after their trips to Morocco.² More likely, it was these artifacts and this style that encouraged them to regard the ‘Orient’—a name that described best the accumulations of the curiosity shops rather than any particular place across the Mediterranean—as an important artistic resource. And a most accessible source for the ‘Orient’ had long been the province of Tangiers.

2 Champney (1881: 24) mentions finding that in the sketch-book Fortuny used at age nine there were ‘[t]urbaned Turkish heads scattered through it, with camels and Moors, copied probably from the pages of his geography [...]’

Access indeed was the reason for Fortuny and Tapiró's reaching to Tangiers, for it was access to mercantile routes and commodities that North Africa diverted from the failing Spanish empire (French Consulate of Tangiers, 1862: 183-186). When in 1859 General Juan Prim, a fellow Reutian, led a Catalan contingent against the inhabitants of Tetuan, in an attempt to contain the pirates based there, Fortuny was sent to document Catalan battle-glory (Dizy Cosy, 1997). So when Tapiró followed his friend to Tangiers, he went in the manner of Delacroix: documenting not the Orient so much as European self-abrogation of the right to represent it. Witness the Cuban art historian's 1881 response to Fortuny's African pictures: 'On his return from Morocco, Fortuny transferred his African impressions to canvas. The Arabs, whom the Catalonians had subdued, and who wanted to kill him, now posed for him.' (Martí, 1954)

The young women in Tapiró's small watercolour and gouache do not seem to be posing; rather, they seem to be caught in the act of getting ready to pose. For brevity's sake, my discussion of Tapiró's picture will focus on four compositional elements: 1) its status as a non-portrait; 2) its medium ethnographically transparent medium; 3) its balance of conventionality and difference; 4) its construction of racial interest.

First, despite the title's indication of a particular woman in a particular place, the picture clearly deviates from the several portraiture conventions it invokes. Carpets had long been used to situate portrait-sitters by both creating a measurable space in which to position the sitter logically and rendering that space a luxurious connotation of the sitter's wealth and cultural importance (Sweetman, 1991: 14-16). But in Tapiró's picture, the carpet pushes the portrayed subject to its far end, and the area it maps out is filled with clutter that bumps up against the lower border of the scene. The space produced is literally 'ob-scene' in that it undermines the sense of controlled distance between viewer and object (Crary, 1993: 126-7). Demurring from contact with the viewer and resisting all signs of liveliness, the bride is the antithesis of personal expression, that motive of any contemporary European portrait (Lutz & Collins, 1993: 97). Located between conventions of portraiture and newly developing modes of spatial projection, the Sherif's exotic daughter is tangible but not quite an individual. Like her attendants, she is, rather, a type, a configuration of concise physical signs—here dark curly tresses, crooked nose, thick lips, and pigmented skin—that were carefully categorized by Europe's anthropometricists (Cowling, 1989). Behind this type hangs a mirror defining her as an object of vision. Yet the white *hayek*-covered chair readied for carrying her to her betrothed's house insists that hers is a carefully managed visibility with potent social consequences. She is the focus of other agents' plans and activity, a social locus in the place of an individual, caught for a moment of quiet voyeurism between her own potential awareness of herself in the darkened mirror and disavowal of her physical presence under the white, coarsely woven *hayek*.

The medium chosen by Tapiró to present the Tangierian bride is a combination of watercolour and gouache. The transparency of medium has been used to make it seem that the objects themselves are reflecting light into the viewer's eyes. Tapiró has focused light into tight, too-close space, where no atmosphere interferes between the viewer and the objects. He creates 'drastic clarity—luminous, dazzling, stunning...blinding' (Geertz, 1988: 68). The words are Clifford Geertz's, from his discussion of the ethnographic tone with which, he argues, ethnographers crafted 'anthropological transparencies': descriptions rendered in a purely 'declarative' tone from a 'clear and fixed point of view' to offer 'visualizable representations of cultural phenomena' that could demonstrate that 'the established frames of social perception [...] are fully adequate to whatever oddities the transparencies may turn out to picture' (1988: 64). It is not surprising that ethnographers and *peintres-ethnographes* sought the same effects of immediation, yet Tapiró's rendering of difference that is dazzlingly close is, also, a work in familiarity. Clearly it invokes conventions set by professional predecessors in their representations of the Eastern maiden at her toilette.³ These conventions include the presence of a

3 Examples of these conventions in other works are Delacroix's *Jewess of Algiers* (1833) and *Women of Algeria* (1834); Alfred Dehodencq's *Jewish Bride in Morocco* (c.1860); and Chasseriau's *Eastern Interior* (1854).

mirror, unshod feet and kicked-off slippers, extravagant vestment, clashing skin tones, and space that is cushioned and half-screened.

That these conventions were repeated in perhaps thousands of pictures should make them not prosaic but provocative, for like stereotypes—agreed-upon social facts that being so obvious they need be referenced only noddingly—their every usage seems to require a repetition. Bhabha has argued that the ever-present currency of stereotypes stems from the ambivalence they seek to tidy-up and continue to produce (1994). By reducing experience to one aspect, these convenient contractions of knowledge introduce an eerie sense of discrepancy and urgency between the highlighted aspect and the shadowed aspects. Their productive deceptiveness lies not in their being false but in their being overly emphatic of one trait. Hence, the necessity of multiplying the difference both in register and in quantity. Indeed, upon closer scrutiny we find in Tapiró's *Preparations* significantly less difference than might be expected in some areas and excessive difference in others.⁴ For example, the slave's blackened role to perform menial labour accentuates the whitened bodies' role to perform a different task, perhaps sexual service, as Pollock has argued (1999a), or perhaps the symbolic service of leisure, as Veblen (1967) and McClintock (1995) have asserted. Through high/low or leisure/labour contrasts, Orientalist pictures invariably associate black skin with slavery and, also, insist on the complementarity of the two, naturalized, social classes. Yet the racial-chromatic scheme Tapiró has effected necessitated certain exclusions. Whereas the whole picture demonstrates the painter's ability to observe and master detail, this major element of the bridal ceremony, much commented upon in travellers' tales, is one detail missed: *henna* applied to hands and feet.⁵ I find it striking that the painter who gave so much labour-time to reproducing textile ornament excluded body-decoration. Yet a *henna*-painted hand is only half-white and half-brown. It does not chromatically emphasize racial difference.

The trope of 'extreme otherness' accepts at face value the insistence that difference simply exists—a claim that was itself the basis of representational validity. Geertz's own handling of the 'declarative tone' of 'anthropological transparencies' belies acceptance of this assertion, for he is interested only in how the declarative tone renders, in his words, the 'oddities' of 'cultural phenomena' assimilable. I want to emphasize how difference was being crafted to a specific degree during the nineteenth-century by techniques that were still under formation. Having availed himself of the conqueror's privileges to the utmost not only by cutting through the crowds but by excluding them entirely and creating a marriage ceremony for the solitary viewer, Tapiró's distilled certain picturesque elements. What is left of the ceremonial press and communal participation is an emphasis on Arab female passivity, textural luxuriousness, and conjugal climax. In this suitably exotic setting the mirror both hangs like a pale-blue halo radiating an internalized gaze *and unlike* a shiny talisman preventing the evil eye. The picture Tapiró has provided is thus an exotic marriage scene that is an ethnic variation on metropolitan marriages. Thus rendered, did the Tangierian bride prove for her viewers the naturalness of that new Western creature, the 'domestic woman' of the metropole, by producing its worldwide spread? (McClintock, 1995: 160)

It is not known who originally bought this painting from José Tapiró y Baró. What is known, however, is that his corpus of small watercolour busts of ethnic types appealed to Anglophone industrial magnates (Tomkins, 1989; Johnston, 1971). These collectors were capitalist liberals who performed social good works, such as founding sanitary commissions and national art museums. Their art collecting was but half of a Maussian exchange-system that imperial industrialism was establishing during this period: 'While the Western world exported its industrial revolution to the rest of the globe,

4 Had the artist wished to insist on a vision of ethnographic picturesque, he could presumably, have called upon the type of information that travel-writers and ethnologists were attempting to provide to contemporary European audiences: the reports of sheep being slain at the bride's feet, eggs being cracked on her head for fertility, wheat being cast over her head, needles and salt placed in her right slipper, etc. (Cf. Delacroix, 1995; Legey, 1935; and Westermarck, 1914.)

5 Well-known to Europeans of the time, see Westermarck, (1914, 137-164). Also, in pictures, the matter was tackled by Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702-1789) and Rudolph Ernst (1854-1932), among others.

it also began to import information about other cultures' (Celik, 1992: 1). The analysis applies not just to the fairs themselves but also to the paintings that were displayed there—and Tapiró's often were. In this context, Oriental pictures became assertions, too, of the inevitable superiority of industrial systems, through their displays of Oriental laziness, backward markets, tyranny, and excessive wealth improperly invested. (Morton, 2000: 70; Rydell, 1998).

The point to emphasize is that 'the industrial world,' 'the Western world,' etc. became identities through such activities of depiction and display. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (developed contemporarily) suggests that for the upper industrial class purchasing Orientalist paintings was, for a period, an important target for the activity of expending acquired money in the pursuit of achieved status (1967). It, also, compels us to look at the actual content the pictures could be seen to put on view. Although more study of the original audience for such pictures is necessary, two points can be noted: 1) That 'domestic women' were just as much 'appearing' as they were supposedly 'disappearing': they were being called into credible existence through art techniques even as they were apparently slipping out of grasp into the lost pre-industrial, 'natural' world cultivated by an evolutionary science of the globe. And, 2) that the art techniques of the academy were being developed and transported out of the metropolises to the colonies not only by travel-painters but also by colonial stipends for 'talented' native students (Artun, 2004; Scheid, 2004). Thus, art techniques that could literally carry the viewer across a representational divide between exterior and interior, between industrialized and pre-industrialized, *at once* established that divide and a path to cross it.

The purpose of this lengthy consideration of the structure of Tapiró's picture has been to underscore its betwixedness. I have elaborated on the picture's strategies for depicting 'Arab culture' in order to suggest that the 'Arab culture' it reveals is of a particular concoction, associated with a specific historical moment and conjunction of conventions. Acknowledging the genuine artistic labour that produced this picture sometime in the 1870s and set it into the international market will serve to encourage recognition of any new artistic or viewing labour that goes into the reproductions and re-interpretations of it a century later. There is no ontological category called 'Arab culture' deposited in the picture and one hundred years later mystically compelling its re-appearance, like a mummy that must rise. Paintings need to be regarded as part of the process of culture-formation, whereby 'culture' is the enigmatic grounds for effecting 'discriminatory practices,' for choosing the mirror that will double or the stereotype that will reduce—both ambivalent fixative procedures (Bhabha, 1994: 114).

At its very broadest, the definition I have used of Orientalist art is based on the relationship between subject and object, between painter and painted, and assumes their fundamental difference. This is the definition that problematized the resurfacing of the art genre by Arab invocation. There is no reason that people not trained in Western art history would hold such a definition. Considering the way it has been disseminated in Arab countries through Franco- and Anglophone publications, Tapiró's picture must be considered for how it has been 'taken in-the-reading' (Boon, 1999: 226; cf. Bal, 1996). Given the historical and textual framings, and given the belief that art should speak for itself, especially when it is painted so 'crystal clear,' one way to understand what Orientalist art is and is heard to be saying to contemporary Arabs is to examine their copies as they make and interact with them. For sake of consistency, I will again focus on Preparations, as it has been copied and commented upon, although I will draw on observations of interactions with other Orientalist works as well.

IV. Mummies on the Market—Third Sighting

Sometime in the early 1980s, Tapiró's Preparations reappeared on the market at an auction outside of Paris. It was spotted by Lynne Thornton who requested a slide reproduction from the auctioneers for her forthcoming book on Orientalist art (Thornton, 2001). Thornton had recently authored a standard text on Orientalism (1993) and had worked for Sotheby's for ten years. In her account of the resurfacing taste for Orientalist art, she speaks frankly about the sales practice of creating books whose purpose is to provide the necessary documentation to satisfy potential clients of the pictures'

investment worthiness (Benjamin, 1997: 35). Thus the books she and her publisher ACR produced should be viewed both as documents of the nineteenth-century Orientalist production *and* as sales catalogues to encourage late-twentieth century purchasing. Preparations went on the dust cover of the \$120 ACR volume *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting* (1994). The catalogue series has now increased to eleven, all the while supposedly merely documenting a trend in taste that it, itself, is feeding. To beat market saturation, galleries and artists eagerly await each new catalogue's new source-material for their copy industry. The copy-artists and sellers refer to the books to secure the authority of their copies, and the books quote these Arabs' approbation for their own restored authority, as in Ackerman's already-noted vindication of Gérôme (1997). This internality should only underscore that the 'people of Middle East, north African descent,' as Benjamin called them, who rely on these sources are not getting closer to their 'roots' or 'heritage' but to an international production and circulation mode.

That one part/parcel of the industrial revolution should rejoin another cannot be regarded as happenchance. When Anglophone magnates' pictures and Lebanese car-dealers converge we are invited to glimpse social processes from new angles. In this sense it becomes highly revealing that a Beirut-based Mercedes-dealer came across a copy of Tapiró's fascinating painting in a friend's house in 1994, or that he later found an illustration of it in a glossy-paged coffee-table book from which he could commission his own copy. Likewise, it is most relevant that the car-dealer interacted with the picture through a heightening of his sense of individuality, experienced as taste. To understand these issues further, we should follow the standard art historical technique of provenance. Although developed to track authenticity, guaranteeing art-objects a quasi-sacralized status outside of commodity flow, this technique is just as useful for tracking inauthenticity, or the over-determined creation of copies and their commodification.

Set beside the originary catalogues, standard-setting copies of Preparations, such as that by al-Sindy, provide for many sellers not only a dazzling display of artistic prowess but also a vicious display of military prowess. For it was the militarily imposed siege of Iraq that cruelly forced the transformation of a society from one producing 'Art' to one producing 'Eastern scenes' or 'European *tableaux*.'

The copied pictures that they were sending [in 1994] from Iraq to Lebanon were by artists who were really good, college professors, ones who had studied well, who had represented Iraq in Europe previously -- really good. And they need to eat. Imagine yourself an artist of a very high level, I mean... (Alleik, 2001a)

Only when the American-led siege broke Iraq's economy and crippled its thriving art market did a whole generation of recent graduates of the best art-schools in the Arab world discover that painting copies could be more lucrative than developing a personal style, or pursuing a career in computer science, for that matter. Almost 60 new galleries catering to customers of copyists opened in Karadé al-Dakhil area of Baghdad between 1992 and 2001 (Younis, 2001). At just one of those institutions, some thirty artists, aged 20-45, work 'twenty-four hours a day' to each produce fifty or sixty pictures per month. Although conceivably any style could be copied, about 70% of copies made were, in the spring of 2001, of Orientalists. For Beirut and the Arab world, the addition of Iraqi artistic skill after 1994 to the Orientalist copy market was what really gave it its boost, making goods of reliable quality widely and cheaply available. Before that time, few professional artists would bother to do such work beyond their academic training. The ones who did, and who had the level of skill to offer something someone would want to buy, were quite demanding in their prices: \$3000 - \$7000 for a 1 x 1.5 meter painting.

Another boost to the copy-market came from a second aspect of the 'peace' imposed on the Middle East in the 1990s by America's military and political interventions. The signing of the US & Saudi-sponsored Ta'if Accords in 1992 announced the official end of Lebanon's civil war and the beginning of the era of an IMF/World Bank-guided economy. As hostilities tapered off, a massive influx of returning émigré-investors changed Beirut's demographic landscape. These return migrants fuelled an explosion of both the apartment and art markets. 1996 was a banner year for gallery openings in the

city, up by 30% from the previous year, and offering as many as 36 shows per month. The ‘chaotic growth’ provoked much comment. In an exposé, journalist Rola Abdallah, noted that Beirut’s galleries displayed abstract, surrealist, naturalist, and realist views, etc. all in an atmosphere of self-evidence. Doing nothing to help the audience ‘digest the displayed works,’ the galleries simply ‘forced [the audience] to relate to works which are mostly hybrid and lack roots’ (1997). One gallery-owner who had made it her mission to promote young local artists working in such styles, suggested to Abdallah that the return of classical figurative art should ‘not just be disregarded’ but be viewed as a popular response to the galleries’ elitism. In my own apprenticeship in 1997 in two upper-echelon Beirut galleries, I found that customers were expected to know what they want, and when they ask for the dealer’s advice, they were encouraged to rely on their immediate reactions, their ‘taste.’ Lower-cost stores differed in how much they displayed at once but not in their emphasis on individual taste as a purchase motive. These sellers, too, did not seek the interventions of art history to explain to their customers what products they should want. They assumed that the buyer had in mind certain colours, style, and price range and so knew the reasons for wanting a particular view.

Much like Goupil’s famous strategies developed with Academic painting in the nineteenth-century to capitalize and cultivate new bourgeois and lower-middle class markets for art (Dahesh Museum, 2001), Beirut’s market of the 1990s developed a series of categories targeting and enrolling many levels of customers. In terms of price and intricacy, Taiwanese-made copies amount to album cards; Chinese, Egyptians, and Jordanians are on par with photogravures; European art school students equal limited prints; and commissioned professional Lebanese or Iraqis reach the level of the ‘original’ oil painting. With so many invocations of ethnic/national difference, it is useful to consider how entangled the identities marked by selling terms can be. Indeed, at The Mohammad Rahhal Gallery all the pictures are ‘of Spanish origin, made by art-academy students there’ (Hammoud, 2001). Let us scrutinize this Spanish origin. Frequently, canvasses are under-painted in China and then shipped *en masse* to European countries for final touches, certificates and Western signatures. This is how they ‘come from’ Spain. Shall we call Hammoud’s version of Preparations a Catalan-Spanish-Moroccan-American-Chinese-Spanish-Lebanese image?

Indeed, the copied artwork is very like a hyphenated ethnic group. Analysis of hyphenated identities, Ma argues, must not surrender one side of the hyphen to take the other as the truer refuge of identity. The existential dilemma lies in negotiating binary oppositions, neither term of which fully sum up the proposed identity or experience. Therefore, our examination of hyphenated artwork must seek ‘to hold in view the space’ of juncture, ‘a blank that signifies perennial contestation and negation’ (Ma, 2000: 68). To reduce a painting to any one of its phases of existence would be to ignore wilfully its mobility, an aspect that was cultivated by its portable canvas format with great deliberation and success, and that perhaps it, in turn, has cultivated for many participants, in situations of ambiguous social (local and international) hierarchy⁶ (Cf. Baxandall, 1972).

The hyphenating-process can be observed in the consistent inflection of certain traits of the copied artwork for sale in Beirut. First, if watercolour and gouache were wonderfully suited to the portrayal of ‘anthropological transparencies,’ the oil in which all of the reproductions were executed in Beirut deliberately emphasizes the painter’s handiwork, his/her belaboured ability to rise to the standard of luxury art. In some renditions, the traces of the hand are so built up as to stand off the canvas (sometimes with a gesso underlayer), and many viewers in shops scrutinize this aspect closely to determine that these are hand-painted not printed copies with brush-strokes touched in. One point to draw is that if Tapiró’s picture provided a good bargain for its buyers, the commodity aspects of the picture have been further highlighted in its reproductions. Recall the praise bestowed upon Mrad: ‘It was a big job for her. It cost her a lot of time’ (Name withheld, 2001c).

6 The possibility for paintings to be constitutive of social status in periods of ambiguous social boundaries has been discussed as a general concept by Daniel Miller (1991: 135-136) and more specifically for paintings by David Halle (1993). See a case for class immobility via art appreciation in Bourdieu, 1984.

Second, the anthropometry is largely erased from most copies, with the effect of ‘sweetening’ the bride’s face. For example, in Lawand’s copy, her face is noticeably transformed by arched eyebrows, long lashes, and a tiny heart-shaped mouth, and contrasts sharply with the kohl-applier’s mean haggishness. Or, in another version at Rahhal Gallery, the ‘*Sultana*,’ as Hammoud called her, has a rounder face, broader forehead, and shortened nose (Hammoud, 2001). She receives a bright smile from the woman applying her *kohl*, acknowledging perhaps that this is her special day. The flattering attention to the bride’s facial features makes the picture’s subject a key character instead of a ceremony. It ‘showed an Arab bride,’ as Hammoud asserted, which was, of course, why so many people wanted to give it as a wedding-present to brides and grooms whose own ceremonies might include corseted and hooped white dresses, three-tiered cakes with a fine tribal sword to cut through them, a bridal procession starting at the elevator, and dancing to pop music from three languages.⁷

Still, despite these minor changes, as well as some alterations in detail and cropping, the main thrust of the pictures is reproduction. It is an impulse that threatens to undermine the market in the originals (MacDermot, 2001). Upon hearing that a major dilemma faced by London’s pre-eminent seller of Orientalist originals is whether to publish more catalogues to spread interest in its collection, or not, to prevent copying that diminishes the originals’ value as unique items, a young Beirut-based artist-cum-dealer chuckled: ‘We should sue him for wrongly appropriated property’ (Alleik, 2001b). Alleik’s nonchalant revenge upon copy-right laws relies upon geo-cultural distinctions: views that were ‘stolen’ from the East by sly tactics that traversed established boundaries of visibility, are ‘stolen back’ by painters and dealers who knowingly undermine the market value of the unique, provenance-authenticated originary art object. The same Iraqis who exhibited in Europe and held parity with that art-world prior the siege now use their skills to reproduce laboriously, in a medium that highlights with oily sheen their hand motions, the ultimate anti-commodity, Art - that very commodity that over a century ago was employed to inscribe the Arab world’s lack of commercial and industrial development and consequent ripeness for colonial coercion into the commodity-market and subsequent necessity of enforced underdevelopment and industrial backwardness. It’s not exactly a return of the oppressed, or a turning of the civilizational hierarchy on its head, but it causes a bit of mirth in some circles.

V. Mummies in the Mirrors of Modernity—Fourth Sighting

All this talk of the copyists’ and dealers’ identities leads us consider the identity of who is buying the pictures today. When I put the matter to the shopkeeper Hammoud, his response drew (on) class distinctions in Lebanese society: Only a few people, he asserted, like ‘European *tableaux*’—they are ‘the velvet class’; but ‘everyone’ wants ‘Orientalia’ (Hammoud, 2001). This was the exact opposite of the answer I had received when I put the question to the receptionist at Kourani Frames. She divided Lebanese society into two classes regarding these pictures: first the ‘open-minded and educated—they like Orientalists’; second the ‘uneducated who want to be *classe*—they like Europeans’ (Rania, 2001). A similar question was put to Salih Barakat, vigorous dealer of original Arab art in the university-section of Beirut, for an interview with *The Atlantic Monthly* (Kino, 2000). He explained that ‘ordinary people’ took refuge in the academic art of the Orient, which ‘had the double virtue of advertising one’s conversance with the West while depicting highly familiar subject matter’ (Barakat, 1997; cf. Kino, 2000). Contrarily, Mr. Joseph, who sold his copies out of a little shop next to a rug-dealer, asserted there is no internal division in taste for this art; all people like this art because ‘Arab taste follows contemporary European fashion’ (Joseph, 2000). Mrs. Tabbara, also small-scale seller, contracted the assertion this way, ‘People buy *pour acheter*’ (Tabbara, 2001). Or again, Iyad Rustom, a Jordanian-Iraqi go-between bringing a batch of fresh yet familiar canvases for whole-sale in Beirut, offered the following account: ‘Arabs find their heritage in these pictures. They see the simplicity of

7 This is not a fleshed-out ethnographical description here; I only draw on my memory of the weddings I have attended or heard about between 1993-2001.

life one hundred years ago, and they know there are still villages living that way' (Rustom, 2001). Less politely, one antique-dealer who found this new fad for Orientalism exasperatingly *déclassé* sighed, 'No matter what you do, *on est en Orient. On vie en Orient*' (Aramouni, 1996).

Are these discussions of taste and class drawing on distinctions present in Lebanese society or drawing them into existence? Without denying the existence of numerous social boundaries and mechanisms that limit social mobility (Saadeh, 1993), I would venture that the processual element of class distinction must be considered more carefully, and that a formerly colonized context like that of Beirut provides an important locale for doing so. I cannot guess exactly how 'the velvet class' corresponds to the 'open-minded and educated', nor can I expect to devise a careful statistical analysis of the purchasers from such classifications—although I should say that I experienced enough surprises coming across Orientalist art in unexpected places that I constantly found my own developing social categories overrun. What is noteworthy, I would argue, is how this artwork became, for people interacting with it, an index of allegedly pre-extant social classifications, but also a site for enacting those divisions. The sellers generally expected people to rely on their taste to choose and in so doing to fulfil a vague social destiny. However, in their assertions about their customers, the sellers, keen observers to be sure, generally accepted the premise that people want (and get) a mirror, oily but not expensive, of their cultural background. The paradox is that the mirror can thus create, at some level, the entity reflected, by imbuing it with a new ontological status.

One of few collectors willing to talk to me, despite her qualms about not having anything of relevance to say to an 'art expert,' had recently moved back to Lebanon after a decade living in Dubai. She invited me into her living room to talk about her collection (Name withheld, 2001b). The setting is critical. The snub 'décor art', for visual material that is apparently used to frame furniture, implies that just about any artwork will do the job. However, copies of Orientalist artwork have been welcomed into Beirut homes only very recently, and, once bought for domestic use, the artwork was most often hung in areas of the house devoted to reception. Furthermore, no living rooms that I viewed had been remodelled on their Orientalist paintings' example. What do the pictures add to the areas of communal living? What type of interaction, talk, or daydreaming becomes possible in their presence? Pointing to a large canvas hanging in the more formal sitting-area, my hostess recalled her experience buying it:

I don't claim that *I know* much; I claim that *I feel* at ease. If I am at ease with a painting or not...so I bought this painting. [...] So I just looked at it. I would go around, and to me, these people are real! I loved the colours, the carpets...I can't tell you. (Name withheld, 2001b)

Explaining that she had been able to compare it with other copied Orientalists in acquaintances' houses, the collector said she had surmised that this was a very good quality copy. Her story of acquisition then moved to telling how she had inventoried her possessions and possibilities before deciding, had known exactly where it would go in her house and what elements it would accentuate. She now receives admiration for her choices from her visitors, 'even the expert decorator.' Her obvious pleasure in discussing her choice points to an assertion of her ego through the painting:

I love this painting. I don't care if people say they hate this painting. To me, a painting has nothing to do with the neighbour.... (Name withheld, 2001b)

Aesthetically, there was another clearer connection between the collector and the canvas in her living room:

By the way, I love the intricate work; I love details. I pay attention to details in material, you know. I love workmanship, not just in painting, in anything. (Name withheld, 2001b)

She connected the execution of the picture to her own time-consuming practice decorating cakes. Homemade chocolates were duly brought out: I was invited to savour these luscious examples of attention to detail. In her discussion of her copy, there is visible effort made to identify certain aspects of her self through the picture, the way it was made, the form of representation. This is how she would depict such a scene were she presented it in real life. My gloss deliberately invokes Gautier's claim for

Fromentin, but I hope I have made it clear that at least this collector sees this scene through the prism of ‘taste’ (apparently pre-cultural) rather than ethnicity or culture.

I asked the collector what she saw in the picture: Men discussing something that is very interesting to them, carpets, one on the sofa and one behind hanging, all leading her ‘back in time; I love that era.’ Which era? She reasoned that this was the Abbasid era, or perhaps the Fatimid, either Iraq or Egypt. In her discussion, she was fully aware that the original of her picture had probably been painted in the last-century by a traveller-painter ‘who liked *what* [he] *saw* or else [he] wouldn’t have wasted [his] time on this,’ she reasoned (My emphasis). History classes at her Beirut high school had taught her that Arab society had gone through many distinct phases. Still, her understanding of the scene represented involves a significant time warp, whereby painters of one hundred years ago were able to see first-hand Arab life of one thousand years before.

This was, in fact, a very common time warp in people’s approaches to the representations: interpreting them as century old reflections of long-dead ancestors from an Arab society of a millennium ago: the era of Harun al-Rashid, with all its courtly opulence, intellectual brilliance, and comforts of a secure empire. Through this antiquidation, the genre’s archaicisms and insistent anti-contemporaneity (cf. Nochlin, 1989; Fabian, 1983) become instead positive renderings of a glorious past recognized universally, in the universal standard of oil painting. Indeed, setting the pictures further back in time, this understanding subtly counters the Orientalists’ notion that *nineteenth-century* Arab society was a biblical or medieval *tableau vivant*, and sets contemporary Arab society on the secular, linear chronology that has been identified as a sign of the modern. (Makdisi, 2000)

The awareness of parallel histories and resulting potential identities frequently rises when observing Orientalist paintings in Beirut. One former minister who has an impressive collection of art by the pioneers of modern painting in Lebanon ‘confessed’ that he had gotten interested in them as a substitute for something he always had wished to own: Orientalists (Name withheld, 2001a). He was not, however, interested in owning copies, as he felt he would be degraded. I told the minister about my research on ‘Arab taste’ for Orientalist pictures. He responded, ‘It’s odd, when I look at them—you’re going to laugh—I look at them with the eyes of a Westerner’ (Name withheld, 2001a). Asserting that their representations of Arab culture, especially of the markets and palaces, were ‘true,’ the minister said he did associate with them, ‘as a Westerner! I’m not the one there [in the scene]. I’m the one doing the picturing.’ And who are they in the picture? ‘They are Arabs, but unlike me, an Arab who has been exposed to Western culture, they have not been so lucky.’ Listening to this remark, it seems reasonable to argue that the viewers, artists, and sellers are interacting with these pictures in ways that establish for them a strengthened notion of self. Still, it is not easy to say that the mirror casts an ethnic likeness. Rather the looking creates the eyes of bordering identities, the Westerner that peers, and the Arab who appears.

VI. Conclusion

Remembering the challenge to look *at* and not *through* the hyphens of culture-crossers, there is something that deserves careful consideration in the minister’s way of looking at pictures of ‘authentic Arabs.’ Perhaps the process of looking constructs a self-image for the minister that can only be glimpsed by viewing in stereo, as it were, or between ever-rearticulated stereotypes. If the axis of the stereotype, as Bhabha argued, is fixity not falsity, then the only escape is not to other stereotypes but to their contiguous frontiers. And if stereotypes constitute an ‘ambivalent text’ that, to ring true, must be reasserted, aggressively, anxiously, and yet with the complacency of the ‘already known,’ (1994, 81: 66) then to engage them in daily living *while* passing judgment on them, is to participate in what they make possible. The interest of certain contemporary collectors in Orientalist copies cannot be treated as a vindication of the painting’s veracity and benevolence, for this would require that Arab selves are simply inherited and born in an unchanging cycle. The transethnicity of cross-culturers is not one that rebels against stereotypes in their persuasive assertions. Yet it does not reaffirm them

either, for it only enunciates them twinned with counter-stereotypes. Rather this transethnicity seems to seek a point of overlap that subtly subverts the condition of stereotypical knowledge.

It, also, encourages me to rethink my original paradox which was guided by a culturally bounded notion of the Arab/Lebanese self. If we would say that Arabs are approving stereotypes of themselves, then we must assert that we know something definable and fixed about Arab selves. How could that be? Looking at copies of stereotypes may help improve analyses of culture, a notion which itself was formulated in interaction with industrialism and its twin, imperialism (Cf. Dirks, 1992). The mass migrations that have coped with imperialist incursions in the Arab world may be seen not as cultural aberrations but as strategies for surviving the bounding that takes culture for its basis. If the mummy must walk, it is interesting to recall when the Egyptian mummy began to walk out of the pyramids, across cultural boundaries.

Indeed, in certain instances, Orientalist artwork has been invoked in Lebanon specifically to promote such a crossing identity. Jrar Art Forum is the name of an art gallery that Hassan Trabulsi opened in the winter of 1996 in Mar Elias, a middle-class neighbourhood of Beirut. The name was chosen as a pun on the 'duel identity of art in the Arabic-Lebanese world,' Trabulsi explained to guests at the opening (Trabulsi, 1996). While *jrar* is the Arabic name for clay pots, with a French pronunciation, the name becomes Gérard, the surname of several French painters. Linguistically, it appears as if Arabic *turath* [heritage] is not just assimilable to modern life, ready to be recycled 'with a twist' as Trabulsi puts it, but was all along quasi-French anyway. In this market of 'turath with a twist,' the best-selling pictures on opening night were the copied Orientalists.

Framed off, painted in expensive oils, signed away to other makers, Orientalist stereotypes now hang directly copied on the walls of numerous Beiruti homes and public spaces. They may no longer be invitations to colonize but motivations to modernize. The strong visual accent of this kind of injunction may clarify productively, yet not exclusively, the ambiguities of the notion of modernity as it has been engaged in the formerly colonized regions beyond the metropole, especially those areas populated by returnee migrants. Viewing their re-painted forms, I argue that stereotypes need to be examined as productive features in social interaction. They provide a realm of play for individuals to build complex identities, a reference point to sound off. This is not to argue that stereotypes are positive, or that they do not foreclose the horizons of individual and group aspirations. Rather, any move that would counter discourse, whether intellectual or visual, must confront the appeal of the kind of vision that stereotyping makes possible.

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