

Fundamentalists and Other Arab Modernisms

At a moment when the Arab world is in turmoil, it seems relevant to assess what remains of the pan-Arab project; a transnational political and cultural project, born in the early 20th century, coinciding with the birth of modernism in the region.

The seeds of that modernist project arrived mostly from the European colonial powers. These attempts at modernity started materializing with the early development of the young nation-states. It is important to note that the nation-state, and thus the notion of nationalism, arose in the region mainly as a consequence of colonialism.

But soon enough, the ideological bases of the national projects were losing their dynamic, giving way to other forms of economical and socio-political ideologies. This happened to coincide with the exhaustion of the modernist project in the Arab world, voiding it out from its initial agenda and bringing forward ostentatious images of a blindly imported and sometimes baseless modernity.

The exhibition is conceived as a subjective and non-exhaustive reading of the architectural legacy of the last 100 years across the Arab World, paralleled with a brief overview of selected socio-political events that took place during that period. It includes the documentation of a hundred buildings, laid out flat without any claim of qualitative architectural judgment. While some of the featured buildings can be perceived as inspiring applications of the modernist principles, others can be considered symptomatic of the tendency to embrace modernism as a trend rather than a project.

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