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Overlaps
North-Southeast

Curator: Dorte Dahlin

Sharjah Art Museum

February 15 – March 12, 2000

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OVERLAPS : NORTH-SOUTHEAST

Overlaps: North-Southeast, a Danish Art Exhibition, to be conducted at the Sharjah Art Museum, is the result of fruitful efforts by the Directorate of Arts of Sharjah Government in association with the Royal Danish Academy for Fine Arts in Denmark, to realize the direct cultural communication among educators of different civilizations. The liberation of art from the conventional methods and the influence of modern techniques are logical in order to be in harmony with the modern information technology. With the support and great efforts from the prominent Danish artist Dorte Dahlin who has chosen eminent figures from Denmark to participate in this event, we put the event together with the scope of widening the relation between the artists of Denmark and the United Arab Emirates.

This is the time of major cultural and artistic transformations happening across the world by breaking the existing barriers among people and communities. The gap is being bridged and narrowed for the benefit of mankind and the horizon is thrown wide open to the talented creators around the world in their respective fields such as art, architecture, music, television, cinema, internet, etc..

The visit to Sharjah by the Danish delegation, consisting of artists, architects, sculptors, philosophers, poets and lecturers will be one with a difference. Our artists, architects and art teachers in the UAE are getting an opportunity to meet, discuss and debate with the team in their respective fields. The question of western art and culture, their freedom and its effects can be debated in comparison with the Islamic views.

Prof. Else Marie Bukdahl, the Dean of the Royal Danish Academy for Fine Arts, heads the delegation. Artist Dorte Dahlin (Co-ordinator), Mr Kent Martinussen & Mr Carsten Juel-

Christiansen (architects), Dr. Niels Jorgen Cappelorn (Head, Research centre, Copenhagen, Mr Abdullah Sabih (Researcher), Mr Lars Bukdahl, Mr Per Aage Brandt & Mr Salim Abdali (poets) are some of the notable members of the delegation, in addition to many other prominent figures.

The Danish Art Exhibition "Overlaps: North-Southeast" will be a treat to the creative minds of the visitors. We hope that our talented youths will make use and the distinguished Danish delegation's visit to its maximum, aiming towards a better world.

The Directorate of Arts organized this exhibition keeping in line with its aim of promoting art as a media of communication and mutual understanding among nations and cultures, benefiting the mankind. Once again we would like to thank the Royal Danish Academy for Fine Arts and artist Dorte Dahlin and other members of the Danish group, who has contributed to the event. We wish the team members a pleasant stay in the Emirate of Sharjah, the Arab Cultural Capital. The Directorate of Arts is always looking forward to catering our creative youths with novel and valuable artistic presentations.

**Directorate of Arts
Department of Culture & Information
Government of Sharjah**

Overlaps

North – Southeast

Danish Contemporary Art and Architecture

Sharjah Art Museum

February 15 – March 12, 2000

Prologue

The lines of development in European and Arabian visual arts, architecture and poetry have been crossing over one another for centuries. Sometimes, the meeting between the two cultures' often very different notions of art has triggered off new processes with respect to the establishment of form which ostensibly contain no direct memories of the original sources of inspiration. Other times, such meetings have resulted in a more distinctly readable influence.

Today, when both the information society and the network culture have promoted globalization, the contact between European-American art and Arabian culture has become intensified, and to a marked degree. However, no electronic communication can replace the personal dialogue between human beings. And no albeit perfect video- or computer images from virtual reality can replace the personal meeting with that art and architecture which are situated in the tangible world, which is the realm of the senses, and the space for the body and action. Therefore, reading poems aloud and presenting lectures will always have quite another kind of direct appeal and another way of fostering dialogue than any communication over the internet.

Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, has been well-known for quite some time now for its openness to other cultures and its efforts in creating a platform for a dialogue between the Arabian and the Western cultures. In order to expand this dialogue to also include Denmark, the Directorate of Arts, Department of Culture & Information, asked the painter Dorte Dahlin to be the curator of an art exhibition in the Sharjah Art Museum. The intention behind this exhibition is to display salient features of contemporary Danish art. Ms. Dahlin has chosen to supplement the presentation of the selected Danish artists with examples of recent Danish architecture projects, since there have always been so many connecting lines between architecture and the visual arts in

Denmark.

The interplay between architecture and the arts makes its appearance most distinctly, perhaps, in the many projects in the public space (site-specific projects) which Danish artists have been coming up with for hundreds of years and to which they are still devoting their labors, in the present day. It is precisely these kinds of projects which, in a most conspicuous way, can expand, alter or unify the space within which they are situated. And finally, these projects have the capacity to mark out new meanings while simultaneously preserving and elucidating already existing connections in the architecture, at open squares and plazas, and in the public parks . . .

In collaboration with her colleagues in Sharjah, Dorte Dahlin has decided that in connection with this exhibition project, there will be a number of poetry readings, lectures and workshops. Such arrangements ought to prove to be especially appropriate for intensifying the contact between representatives of the Danish art scene and cultural world and their counterparts in Sharjah. On this account, contemporary Danish poetry has been called in as an integral part of the project. In fact, it has certainly been the case that in Denmark, there have always been very close relations between the world of the arts and the world of poetry. Especially in the last twenty years, these two branches of art have inspired one another in a particularly distinct fashion. Finally, it has been resolved that the exhibition's fundamental themes ought to be illuminated and set into a historical perspective through a series of lectures which will presumably unearth crucial lines of connection between the Arabian and the European art and culture.

We are very grateful that the Department of Culture & Information and the director and staff of the Sharjah Art Museum have so generously and hospitably made possible not only the realization of this art- and culture-project but also the personal meeting between the Danish participants working in the spheres of art, architecture, poetry and art history, and their

colleagues from the art- and culture-life in Sharjah. We are certain that the Danish participants will gain an experience that is both inspiring and instructive. We are also convinced beforehand that contacts between the cultural scenes in Denmark and Sharjah will be forged here, and that this may lead eventually to the creation of new exhibitions and projects.

We wish to direct a warm round of thanks to Dorte Dahlin, who has arranged this exhibition

and the appurtenant poetry readings, lectures and workshops in collaboration with her colleagues in Sharjah. Her efforts here constitute a grand and most deserving achievement.

Finally, I would like to thank the Directorate of Arts, Department of Culture & Information, for the trust that has been bestowed on me by being named "protector" of this project.

Else Marie Bukdahl
D. Phil., Rector of the Royal
Danish Academy of Fine Arts
Protector of the exhibition

Carsten Juel-Christiansen
Professor, the Royal
Danish Academy of Fine Arts

Introduction

The moon's Arabia. The star's
– the sand crystals' infinite Arabia

When, on one evening this year in the latter part of April, I saw a shadow-flash of dreams floating in above the desert and Sharjah between a thin crescent moon and the city's constellations of houses and trails in the sand, I had no idea that in the course of just a few days I would no longer be able to differentiate the surface of my own skin from the warm air and that now, only a year later, we would already be standing with the first fruits of an intense and personal cultural collaboration between Denmark and Sharjah.

As a participating artist in the 4th International Biennial in Sharjah - where about forty nations were represented - I was also witness to a symposium that had been arranged on a grand scale. The central theme was the relation between The Global and The Local.

As a logical extension of this cultural manifestation, it seemed entirely obvious to me to suggest what has now flowered into the present exhibition project, implemented with the participation of Danish visual artists, architects, poets and scholars who have all been busy for many years with the questions that have cropped up in connection with the ongoing development of the information society. Here, the visual arts, which are perceived as being autonomous forms of realization, have most distinctly played their part in unveiling aspects of the high-tech information society - its conditions and its influence on the single individual, on society and on political networks and structures. New methods for the formation of images and of space, and similarly new ways of thinking, have emerged from an ocean of complex questions about our times and about the shifting conditions under which we live.

My proposal was received with such an enchanting openness and generosity that after only a few

meetings at the Sharjah Art Museum, I was asked to get started with the preparatory work in Denmark. With regard to the selection of artists, I must mention here that they have been chosen simply because they represent different individual visual interpretations of the super-ordinate artistic and cultural questions which require further illumination. It is not only a matter of problem-fields that are common to European and Arabian art life but also an unveiling of artistic interpretations and a number of the most conspicuous connecting lines between Danish and Arabian art and architecture.

Through their initiative, the Department of Culture & Information in Sharjah has demonstrated a farsighted and open praxis that will play a significant role in establishing the requisite platform for art and for thinking within the context of a global society. And with this, what will emerge is a firm foundation for a thorough and collaborative way of working with the problems that the information society's rapid production of knowledge and its "simulation culture" have produced. Moreover, such a platform will provide room for an ever increasingly intense discussion of how our own national identities and religions can be preserved while at the same time we can open up our eyes and become inspired by the particular culture and development that we see in other kinds of peoples.

*there is only one way in - and that is out
there is only one way out - and that is in*

Søren Ulrik Thomsen

Dorte Dahlin
Artist, curator
Copenhagen
October 1999

Else Marie Bukdahl
The World of Reenchantment

Western Fascination with Islamic Art

Successive new departures and a multiplicity of the most diverse forms of expression have always characterized artistic development in Western Europe. Variation is thus the essence of its art. In Islamic art, however, there is, as the expert on Islam David Talbot Rice has remarked “much greater uniformity, both with regard to time and to space.” The Muslim artists did not – like, for instance, our renaissance artists – seek to interpret the new and unexpected, but “remained attached to the model whose merit had been sanctioned by time and convention, seeking to renew its appeal, rejuvenate its character, by subtle variations of detail.”¹ The Danish historian of architecture Steen Estvad Petersen does not doubt that “it is this continual ennobling of formerly adopted values and norms that creates continuity and a refinement that is without parallel in other cultures.”² This is why the Islamic artistic universe has so often been called the “place of enchantment.” Not only has it fascinated Western European artists, but it has also directly inspired their artistic creations, yet always in a different way. And this is how it remains today.

In the 20th century, Western European painters and sculptors have primarily been interested in the Islamic artists’ wonderful talent for creating forms of expression that – as the art historian Ernst J. Grube has expressed it – “are not a reflection of reality, but a picture of the themes that serve to overcome the momentaneous and limited individual appearance of a work of art. It is thus

that an art work is raised in the real world to an endless and eternal existence.”³

Old Islamic art also contains challenges to modern American and European artistic trends of art and to the new departures that have begun to make their entry into the Arabic art world during the past few decades. For, as David Talbot Rice puts it, studies of Islamic art reveal “that the great concern with self and self-expression which so much obsesses the artists of today in the West is not necessarily to be regarded as an essential in the production of good art.”⁴

The new art forms and the breakdown of hierarchical order

At the end of the 1960s the international art world was marked by a series of departures that expanded the concept of art and came to exercise a great influence on the artistic production of the following decades. For these departures involved a direct and indirect critique of the kinds of art in which a predominant aspect was the interpretation of the individual’s emotions and opinions and which were determined by a longing for the unified culture that had been lost. The artists responsible for these departures directly faced their present time and were inspired by the recent scientific and philosophical innovations and by a constantly changing society. They succeeded in creating new art forms that uncovered new orientations and revealed that the visual arts have a special signification both for our understanding of the surrounding world and for our interpretations of the interplay between the local and the global and between the national and the international.

The three most dominant departures were designated as *Minimal Art*, *Land Art*, and *Conceptual Art*. *Minimal Art* expressed the first sharp break with the currents in modernism – for

1. David Talbot Rice, *Islamic Art* (London, 1965), p. 7.

2. Steen Estvad Petersen, *Paradishaven og ørkenen* (The Garden of Paradise and the Desert) (Copenhagen, 1995), p.

3. Ernst J. Grube, *Islamisk kunst. Milepæle i verdenskunsten* (Islamic Art. Milestones in World Art) (Copenhagen, 1971), p. 11.

4. David Talbot Rice, op. cit., p. 258.

instance, abstract expressionism – that endeavored to recreate mythological ideas from earlier times or conceptions of existence as a well-ordered whole. In *Minimal Art*, the closed pictorial space that expressed this endeavor was replaced by open, parallel sequences that preserved the idea of a space without fixed limits. The objects created by the representatives of *Minimal Art*, among them Donald Judd, may be simple and open, but are at the same time sharp and precise. They thus have an intense visual power and a strong space-creating effect. Finally, the often violent emotional tensions of the expressionistic art forms were replaced by a subdued sensibility. In this way, the connection between the artistic ‘I’ and the work was weakened in favor of emphasizing the interplay of the work, the viewer, and the space. *Minimal Art* pulled the viewer away from the longing for previous eras’ interpretations of existence as a solid whole, instead stimulating the viewer to turn towards his or her surroundings and society.⁵

In *Land Art* the artist’s material is nature itself or natural phenomena. Robert Smithson, one of the most prominent representatives of this art trend, created vast projects actually formed as monumental interventions in or reconstructions of the surroundings. This very activity gave him the possibility of exposing infinite cosmic space, nature’s continual cycles of deconstruction and reconstruction, and its many prehistoric layers. For instance, in the desert in Utah, USA, he has created a spiral-shaped project called the Spiral Jetty (1970). It is constructed with big blocks of rock and installed in a shallow lake where red corals leave sparkling traces of color on the rocks. This work reveals what he himself has described as “layers of the earth’s history.”⁶

The general aim of *Conceptual Art* – as one of its founders, Joseph Kosuth, phrases it – is best defined as “investigations of the concept of art.” Analyses like these led to constant reevaluations

of the familiar conceptions of art, thus inspiring artists to create new forms of expression. It is an activity that generates new ideas that do not necessarily need to be physically implemented.⁷ This activity uncovers in particular all the levels in contemporary reality where the visual arts can operate and either manifest their particular kind of information or pave the way for new ones.

At the end of the 60s, a number of Danish artists were interested – based on their individual viewpoints – in disengaging themselves from the modernistic closed system of internal relationships and from the longing for the notion of life as a coherent whole that was prevalent in previous eras. Among these, artists such as Hein Heinsen, Bjørn Nørgaard, Paul Gernes, Stig Brøgger, Peter Louis-Jensen, Mogens Møller and Per

Kirkeby. At this early date, especially Mogens Møller, Hein Heinsen, and Stig Brøgger each made unique contributions to the American trends of *Minimal Art*, *Land Art*, and *Conceptual Art*, influencing them with conspicuous new European accents. The elaboration of these highly varied contributions also led to a refinement of their concept of art, resulting in unexpected answers to just how the idiom of the visual arts might create new patterns of meaning and spatial formations.⁸

The reality of the 70s was complex and stratified, and it was also influenced by many intersections between the distant notions of unity in history and the near horizontal structures of our time, in which unity is dissolved into fragments. Not only new kinds of paintings and sculptures, but also other media and new genres were necessary if one were to hope to capture the many different junctures and layers in the cultural and social life of this decade. Installation art is one of the new genres that attempted to accomplish this task. For precisely this art form unfolds in space,

7. Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy – parts 1, 2 and 3,” *Studio International*, October, November and December, 1969.

8. See Else Marie Bukdahl, “The Break with Modernity and the Emergence of Postmodern Art,” in *Northern Poles* (Copenhagen, 1986), pp. 368-376.

5. See John Copland, “Interview with Donald Judd,” *Artforum*, June 1971.

6. See Robert Smithson’s article, “The Spiral Jetty” (1972), reprinted in Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (New York, 1979), p. 114.

investigates the world, its conditions and its imagery, while at the same time establishing unexpected links to the surrounding society.

The challenges to art and culture in information society. The fascination of the silent desert

In the 80s information society began to make a serious impact, and its influence on the world of science and on the worlds of art and culture became more and more apparent. This development continued with increased strength in the 90s. Information technology not only undermined the geographic boundaries between individual countries, but also between world regions, thus encouraging globalization. Close electronic contact as well as effective communication were created between areas within both art and science which had previously had but few surfaces of contact. The new technology also made epoch-making progress possible within natural science, and made the picture into a central medium of documentation. This led to a new and fruitful discussion of the relationship between representatives from the two worlds – that of science and that of art – that had often been separate previously, indeed had actually been opposed to each other. In addition to this, both artists and scientists made unique interpretations of a world that – as the Nobel prize winner Ilya Prigogine expresses it – “is branded with the mark of radical uncertainty.”⁹ This meant that the ideas of space, locality, and the body were continually in a process of transformation. But the explosive growth of information society also created ever new challenges to the art and culture of all countries, just as it – almost drastically – changed our time-honored ideas. Only a narrow space was left for slowly developed values and art forms. And even our fundamental ideas of man, object, and nature as such seemed to disappear in a network of codes and signs, just as our firm concepts of death and the origin of life

began to crumble. On the whole, information technology created what has been called a “culture of simulation” or a “virtual reality,”¹⁰ where humans relate to models instead of to a reality that they can embrace with their own senses and personal experiences, and that may be best characterized as the space of sight, the body, and action.

Many of the philosophers and aestheticians – such as for instance Jean Baudrillard, who uncovered the disadvantages of information society – referred to the desert, both physically and symbolically, as a fascinating, extensive space completely void of pictures and dense patterns of meaning. The silent desert was thus conceived as a place of refuge or a meditative space for contemporary humans, who are constantly exposed to an intense bombardment of pictures that destroy the possibilities for concentration:

“The natural deserts tell me what I need to know about the deserts of the sign. They teach me to read surface and movement and geology and immobility at the same time. They create a vision expurgated of all the rest: cities, relationships, events, media. They induce in me an exalting vision of the desertification of signs and men. They form the mental frontier where the projects of civilization run into the ground. They are outside the sphere and circumference of desire. We should always appeal to the deserts against the excess of signification, of intention and pretension in culture. They are our mythic operator.”¹¹

As early as 1969, Robert Smithson had anticipated this view of the desert: “The desert is less “nature” than a concept, a place that swallows up boundaries. When the artist goes to the desert he enriches his absence and burns off the water (paint) on his brain.”¹²

This fascination with the desert as a place

9. Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos. Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (London, 1984), p. 313.

10. See Norbert Bolz' article, “Basic features of the culture of simulation,” in *Images from afar*, edited by Anders Michelsen and Frederik Stjernfelt (Copenhagen, 1996), pp. 173-177.

11. Jean Baudrillard, *America* (1986), translated into English by Chris Turner, 1989, pp. 63-64.

12. Robert Smithson, “Earth projects. A Sedimentation of the Mind,” *Artforum*, September 1968, reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York, 1979), p. 89.

without cultural traces, a place that for this very reason calls for imaginative power, has influenced numerous Danish artists since the 70s. In the 80s, the desert was mainly conceived as a symbolic and genuine place of refuge in a society filled to the brim with pictures and signs.

As a countermove to information society's immaterial world, the fictitious space of the "culture of simulation" and the tendencies of televi-sion to level and smooth out differences, these artists have concentrated on creating another

place of refuge through recapturing presence, materiality, and breadth of view. These were precisely the aspects that disappeared in the dense flow of intangible pictures and abstract signs occurring in information society. But this recapturing has taken place on contemporary terms and through new categories of form or pictorial strategies. Especially through different types of site-specific projects in public spaces – in

squares, parks, in front of or inside buildings – these artists have created new localities and spaces that visualize opinions, forgotten perspectives or images of our world that cannot be expressed through information technology and thus are able to meet the challenges from information society in a particularly intense way. This is perhaps especially true for the public spaces where sculpture or sculptural objects are prominent. This may not only be because sculptures are present in space to a greater extent than in paintings, but also because the body are involved more directly in the experience of sculpture, which actively draws the viewer into its visual field. Or, as Henrik B. Andersen puts it: "To walk around the sculpture is to understand the sculpture with one's entire body. It is to understand the sculpture on its own terms – no two walks around the sculpture are the same."¹³

13. Henrik B. Andersen, "Noter til det der står stille. Udkast til en skulptur-poetik" [Notes on That Which Stands Still. Outline for a Poetics of Sculpture], in *Kritik*, no. 137, 1999, p. 50.

Complex visual effects, new projects in public spaces, and the dialogue with Islamic art

A number of the artists who participated in the new departures of the 60s and 70s – for instance, Hein Heinsen, Mogens Møller, and Stig Brøgger – created quite a few works in the 80s and 90s that not only serve as counterparts to the immaterial world of information society, but also contain traces of an interest in Islamic art.

The refinement of the categories of form in sculpture and the intensification of its complicated network of relations to the surroundings which Hein Heinsen carried out in the 80s and 90s appears in fact as a breaking point in the intense production and circulation of immaterial pictures that takes place in information society. His non-figural sculptures, which contain not one but many centers, are split into an infinity of specific and extremely complex forms constantly creating new cuts in their space and forming a series of local spaces. He himself has emphasized that his sculptures form "a combination of incompatible spatial sizes," because "the coherent space became a multiplicity of spaces that glide into one another."¹⁴ When walking around Hein Heinsen's sculptures – which are sometimes cast in bronze, sometimes carved in stone – one finds that new connecting points are always appearing in one's field of vision. They stimulate the viewer not just to see, experience, and think in new and unexpected ways, but also to create for herself new unifying interpretations of the surroundings. These features characterize the large monumental work *Sculpture 87* (fig. 31) in a special way. The tension between the different categories of form in this sculpture, and their structure, scale, and figuration, give it plastic plenitude as

14. Hein Heinsen, "Værk, grænse og hvirvel" [Work, Boundary, and Vortex], exhibition catalogue, *Den Frie Udstilling* (Copenhagen, February 25 – March 12, 1989), p. 40. See also Lars Morell, "'Parting with the Classical Work,' a Conversation with Hein Heinsen," in *Skala. Nordic Magazine of Architecture and Design*, nos. 17-18, 1989, p.13.
15. Mikkel Bogh, "Lethed og tyngde, den nye skulptur," in *Kunsten i mediernes tid* (Lightness and Heaviness, New Sculpture, in *Art in the Age of the Media*), vol. 10 of *Ny Dansk Kunsthistorie* (Copenhagen, 1996), p. 141.

well as complexity. The art historian Mikkel Bogh rightfully remarks about this work that it “towers like a cluster of crystals growing wild – impossible to synthesize in one glance, impossible to reduce to an underlying, geometric principle.”¹⁵

Several of Hein Heinsen’s bronze sculptures, especially *Sculpture 85* (fig. 3) contain the sequences of form inspired by his meeting with the Islamic stucco work ornament, often used for decorating the mihrabs in the mosques. They are primarily the ornaments called stalactites or beehives because they consist of different combinations of often deep three-dimensional forms that produce striking contrasts between plays of light and shade. Rather than emphasizing the construction of a building, these richly profiled sculptural registers hide it, creating intricate patterns of complex formations that spread out across the surface and seem to be able to continue indefinitely. These pattern effects therefore suggest an experience of infinite, cosmic space and divinity. The surfaces of the forms are often polychrome, sometimes painted in radiant colors, sometimes covered in gold leaf. The intense flood of light, primarily created by the golden surfaces, heightens the experience of the infinite. This is true for the Iwan in the mosque Masjid-i-Jami in Isfahan, Iran (fig. 1).¹⁶ Hein Heinsen’s *Sculpture 1985*, which consists of three abstract elements – cube, cylinder, and amorphous mass – twined in a spiral movement, is inspired by this decorative art. For the amorphous mass and the sharply profiled forms that spread out across the sculpture in a multiplicity of complex sequences evoke associations to the Islamic stalactites. Precisely because this sculpture continually alternates between density, multiplicity, and sharpness, it can grasp the numerous aspects of the visual environment. It is without a hierarchical construction, containing instead many openings or means of access. It directs attention toward boundlessness, drawing the viewer in as a fellow player. In this way, the viewer is confronted with a world full of presence and open to for breadth of

view and outlook, and that thus creates a contrast to the closed and immaterial system of information society.

During the past 20 years Hein Heinsen has created many monumental works in public spaces such as city squares, train stations, parks, and churches.

His combined sculptural and architectural project in the park at the manor house Sophienholm, near Copenhagen, illustrates the conflicts between present-day and former conceptions of space, sculpture, and ornamental gardening. This park, created by the French architect J.-J. Ramée, was inspired by the English romantic garden, which was laid out in such a way as to appear as if it had not been created by human hands but by nature itself. The English garden is imitated wild nature – in contrast to the Islamic garden, which is characterized by efforts to guard against the wild nature present in their part of the world – the fascinating but barren, parched desert that only blooms for a very brief period of time. Instead of the small temples or gothic ruins that usually decorate the English romantic garden, a Norwegian log cabin was built in the park at Sophienholm, on the fringe of the wood that slopes steeply down to the lake. It is precisely in this dramatic location that Hein Heinsen finished his major project entitled *Eremitagen og bjergbestigersken* (The Hermitage and the Mountain climber) (1993) (fig. 4). Through this work he created a new space where the viewer is not only able to experience German romanticism’s visualization of the overwhelming gulf between our fragmented world and the dream of unity, but also the space of today with the many focusing points. A block of the same size as the foundation of the house (11 x 5 x 2 m), cast in light cement, is projected through the wall of granite blocks, out over the edge and turned so that it faces North, towards Norway. The turn creates a big “rock projection,” making manifest a dangerous abyss. A couple of steps issue from the southwest corner of the foundation, forming a platform for a bronze statue in the shape of a body trying to raise itself but kept down by the surroundings. These attempts are frozen solid in its enfolded

16. Steen Estvad Petersen, op. cit., p. 32, fig. on p. 33.

forms. The statue is not placed in the small or big center of the project, but stands in an uncertain place next to its base and slightly out in the abyss. A cement stairway in the shape of a half circle radiates from the base where it protrudes from the granite wall, but its center is displaced in respect to the sculpture. Ascending or descending the stairway, the viewer uncovers different aspects of the relationship between the statue, the abyss, the surrounding landscape, and the Norwegian house. In general, Hein Heinsen has created a new open space with a visualization of our contemporary unpredictable world, where each new order always steps out on the edge of chaos. And he has inserted this space in the romantic landscape garden.

In the 80s and 90s, Mogens Møller also created an impressive series of monumental sculptural projects in public spaces. They each uniquely express a subtle multiplicity of different conceptions of space and subtle visualizations of hitherto hidden but vital layers of meaning in European and Arabic art and culture. In addition to this, they are always characterized by an open and flexible site-specific focus, resulting in their accentuation of characteristic features and perspectives in the place where they are situated, while at the same time new points of intensity and outlooks are added. Mogens Møller's sculptural works are on the whole intense fixed points or enigmatic monuments in a transitory and unsettled time filled with an ever denser flow of immaterial pictures. These sculptural projects stimulate the viewer to experience in a way that is closer to the world and the sculptural material than the many new visual media are able to.

This is true for, among others, the sculptural project that he has created for what is itself an enchanting place, a small island out in the picturesque Gudenå stream near the city of Randers in Jutland. The core element in this project, called *Guldkrugken i Paradishaven* (The Golden Urn in the Garden of Paradise) (1991) (fig. 5), is a large, elegantly shaped golden copper urn, from the top of which a column of atomized water springs. During the day the urn is covered with shimmer-

ing reflections from the sunlight, and its golden surfaces flash and gleam. At night it captures the muted moonlight and is thus swathed in a dreamlike light. When the winter snow falls and the pearls of dew freeze into ice, the urn is surrounded by an intense yellowish-white light that dims its contours. The urn itself spans a network of historical references to the vessels that have been important articles for everyday use for centuries and to those that have been used in different religious ceremonies. As an example of the latter kind, one might name the enigmatic pot found in Iraq not long ago, and that is filled with as yet still undeciphered written characters¹⁷ (fig. 44). However, the actual references contained by Mogens Møller's memory-filled urn are not revealed; the viewer himself must guess. The entire project thus has an aura of secrecy and carries a special fascination. At the foot of the urn is a small figure, called the female storyteller, who has jumped out of the stream. With a gesture, she encourages the art of storytelling to be resumed.

The tall fountain entitled *Wiedewelt 1731* (1999) (fig. 6), which Mogens Møller erected in the garden in front of the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen, adds new visual and spiritual qualities to its surroundings, and at the same time uncovers links to Islamic ornamental gardening. By virtue of this fountain, the library garden, which is surrounded by high walls and buildings, becomes an even more closed, poetic space, creating an atmosphere that invites concentration and uninterrupted reading. But while the Islamic garden is bordered by the quiet and vast desert, this one is surrounded by heavy, noisy traffic and the city's stressed inhabitants. The library garden's poetic atmosphere is enhanced through the calm rhythm of the water falling softly down over the sculpture, the fragrance of the many flowers, and the shifting reflections in the calm ornamental lake. Just as in the Islamic garden, the combination of sounds, scents, and visual

17. The clay pot with tablets (with nailletters) was unearthed February 10, 1990 at Al Masaab Al Aam (Iraq) by the archaeologist Dr. Al-Azzawi from the Directorate of Heritage at the Department of Culture and Information in Sharjah.

impressions creates a suggestive experience of unity. The sculpture itself, placed on a small granite island in the middle of the basin, consists of an 9,5 meter high column in the shape of a double cone. It supports two smaller double cones and reveals – as Mogens Møller himself puts it – that “outline and centre have drifted apart under influences from outlooks in which they could no longer be upheld as a credible unity and as an acknowledgement of how space can be conceived.” In this way, that which Mogens Møller calls “cryptic or secret spaces between the contours and axis” are

created.¹⁸ In the sculpture there are – again, as he himself puts it – “two cryptic or secret places, partly the one just mentioned, partly in the diagonal of the column where the sides of the two cones meet. Here the cones are “pushed” together 2 centimeters, whereby a cut appears that turns out to be a double hyperbole.”¹⁹ The sculpture is open while at the same time being characterized by a dense visual force. When the library visitors walk around the basin, the sculpture shifts between appearing stable and unstable, closed or open. This shift is intensified by the water flowing down it. Sometimes the water is shaped like a large dome that blurs the contours of the sculpture and makes it seem like a vision. Sometimes the water falls calmly down the sculpture, seeming to envelop it in a gauzy silver curtain. The entire fountain with its many connecting lines to its surroundings thus gives the viewer highly varied experiences of the unexpected interplay of liquid and solid. Next to Mogens Møller’s project stands a statue of the famous Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. In this way the world of reflection and the world of the book are tied together by the artistic universe.

Precisely because so many of Mogens Møller’s sculptures contain an extensive and refined network of associations to the public space in which they are placed, it has been his desire to create a work in Sharjah that is integrated into the local natural surroundings and contains pictorial references to poetic Islamic imagery. The dreamlike mood that the Arabs were experts at evoking pervades their moonlit gardens in a particularly suggestive way, where one can enjoy the cool nights in the dim light of the moon. The gardens were planted with light, preferably white flowers that reflected the moonlight. Together with the soft glow from the rows of living lights, the moonlight also created golden reflections in the many murmuring brooks. Through the peaceful playing of music and the reading of poems, the garden’s cosmic ambience was enhanced.²⁰ To

18. The quotation is from Else Marie Bukdahl’s book *Wiedewelt. From Winckelmann’s Vision of Antiquity to Sculptural Concepts of the 1980s* (Copenhagen: Edition Bløndal, 1993).

19. From an unpublished text from 1991.

20. Steen Estvad Petersen, *Paradishaven og ørkenen* (The

21. Mogens Møller’s project is still on the sketch plan. It will in all probability be finished and erected after the closing of the exhibition.

22. Steen Estvad Petersen, op. cit., p. 32.

Mogens

Møller, the desert with its endless expanses, enigmatic mirages, and moonlit firmament carries a fascination that is just as strong as the one characterizing the moonlight gardens. In a dim grotto in the desert surrounding Sharjah, he has planned to place a concave mirror that captures shifting images of the moon, creating a new moonlit poetic space reminiscent of the old Arabian moonlight gardens.²¹ In addition to this, mirror glass was often put in the richly colored mosaic patterns in the garden's tiled passages or in the ceilings or floors of the garden pavilions. They "reflected the light like faceted gems. Everyone who has been in the desert at night and admired the crystal-clear starry sky recognizes the theme."²²

Stig Brøgger's artistic work has not been determined by a linear development but by a dual movement with two extreme points: emptiness or boundlessness and fullness or denseness. Precisely these contrasts characterize the Arabic art

world, although in a different way. In Islamic art the endless desert is always present as the counterpoint stimulating the creation of imagery and inspiring the artists to develop complicated patterns in their often incredibly refined and brilliantly colored ornaments.

During a trip to the United States in 1969, Stig Brøgger became fascinated by the empty, desolate American landscapes and the vast deserts. This encounter with these landscape spaces devoid of cultural layers left new traces in his own artistic activities. Hence, the same year he created a small *Land Art* project in the Nevada desert which he entitled *Buske, Nevada* (Bushes, Nevada) (fig. 7). By modifying nature, he constructed a visual impression in a place without images. By utilizing the photographic technique in a special way, he has maintained this new pictorial effect.

His major series of pictures, *Skrifter, Tyrkiet* (Writings, Turkey) (1971), now hanging in the

Technical University of Denmark in Lundtofte, is a counterpart to his *Land Art* project. This series is influenced by his meeting with Islamic art and culture, in which closeness, materiality, and the multiple cultural layers are manifest. The different paintings in this series reveal that it is the pictorial fullness and the surfaces with the often daring, intense colors as well as the different, the unexpected, and the foreign in Islamic art that have fascinated him. This series of pictures also visualizes the difference between prominent sides of European painting and Islamic art and culture.

In the 80s, Stig Brøgger began to cultivate painting with renewed intensity, implementing new pictorial strategies. But he often grouped his paintings in series or installations. He has given one of his most monumental installations, consisting of nothing less than 205 paintings, the poetic title *Flora Danica*. Through the most diversified pictorial strategies and colors and through unexpected spatial forms, he has interpreted the complexity of life, its lightness and weight. This symphony of abstract layers of color and shining figurations – just as numerous and intense as the ones that distinguish the Islamic mosaics – expresses all that verbal language cannot communicate, primarily existing in its own wonderful way. Or, as one of the prominent

French philosophers, Jean-François Lyotard, puts it in his interpretation of *Flora Danica*:

"The flowering is an allusion to intimacy between a look and the flesh of the visible which needs no rules or problematic. The abundance of colours, the freedom in the way they are laid out, the way they are modulated prevent the look from worrying about their presence. The colour (as "here is me") is ignored, it does not speak because it has

Brøgger *Flora Danica – The Event, The Strife, The Heterogeneity. An Installation of 205 paintings*, Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, March 3–April 15, 1990, pp. 21–22. Jean-François Lyotard, *Flora Danica. La Sécession du geste dans la peinture de Stig Brøgger* (Paris, 1997), p. 31.

24. See the exhibition catalogue, November 1968, for the Jutland Art Gallery, and "Erinnerung an die Zukunft," ta' 6 1/2, 1968, p. 25.

23. Jean-François Lyotard, "The secession of gesture in *Flora Danica*," published in the catalogue for the exhibition Stig

no articulation or “temperament”. It gives itself to pleasure under the cover of an undefinable diversity. Colours are certainly still phrases, even here, but they are like those in Eden before Adam bit into knowledge. They are, as Kierkegaard explains, as inarticulated as the affect-phrases of *infans* before the advent of (articulated) language.”²³ Stig Brøgger has made numerous projects in public spaces. The choice of space or location has always been an essential element of his artistic activities. As early as 1968 he expressed this view as follows: “The choice of space is a determining factor. Different “spaces,” different experiences. So I create different spaces. These are the object of continuous change. New “spaces” appear – expand or shrink. This also depends on the “building materials.”²⁴

Stig Brøgger created a project for the library and cultural center in Hinnerup that establishes connecting lines to the place where it is located in an original way. A prominent element in the library is the many spatial displacements that have thus also become an important point of orientation in his project. A particularly conspicuous element in these displacements is the balustrade that visually links the first floor with the level of the second floor. He has – as he put it himself – “chosen to treat the entire balustrade as an object whose front is oriented towards the library functions taking place on the first floor. Here one is far from the “object.” The back forms the wall of the reading room on the second floor. The spatial quality here is completely different. For here one is close to the “object,” which has three “book-case holes” for periodical shelves and an over-look with a view of the large main room of the library.”²⁵ The project is thus constructed around an interplay of space, object, and painting. Two big red and yellow areas are painted on the large white surfaces of the balustrade, and a painting of the same size is hanging on it but in a specially constructed frame corresponding to the three “bookcase holes” of the back, painted red, yellow, and blue respectively. Over and below this is written in big black letters: “THIS IS A LIBRARY – IT IS NOT A PAINTING” (fig. 8). But the mirror image of this text is written on

several axes on the work’s “front” and “back,” such that an inverted and non-inverted text stand next to each other. The letters serve – like in Islamic ornament – both as signs that generate signification and as ornaments that create variation and contrastive effects in the large areas of uniform color, while at the same time accentuating their intensity.

New pictorial strategies and spatial formations with associations to Islamic art and new site-specific projects

In the beginning of the 80s, a number of young Danish artists also left the preferred forms of expression of the 70s in favor of painting. Inspired by the renewal of this genre, which took place in the international art scene at the end of the 70s, they created new pictorial expressions and figurations. The central artists behind this breakthrough were Anette Abrahamsson, Peter Bonde, Peter S. Carlsen, Claus Carstensen, Torben Christensen, Dorte Dahlin, Erik A. Frandsen, Berit Jensen, Kehnet Nielsen, Jens Nørregaard, Nina Sten-Knudsen. They inscribed figures and pictorial signs on the canvas with quick, dynamic brushwork. Most of their works may be regarded as registrations and exposures of the loss of meaning and the effacement of subtleties created by the compact flow of images in the media world.

As early as the mid-eighties one could observe that most of these artists began to stop registering the fragmented world of information society and to leave behind the quick brush strokes in order to create instead unique counterparts to the immaterial world of information society and the labyrinthine mirror room of the world of television.

This is particularly true for Dorte Dahlin. To her the artistic creative process is a way of apprehending reality. Art is not merely mirror images of the surrounding world we know so well.

26. Cited from an unpublished text from 1999.

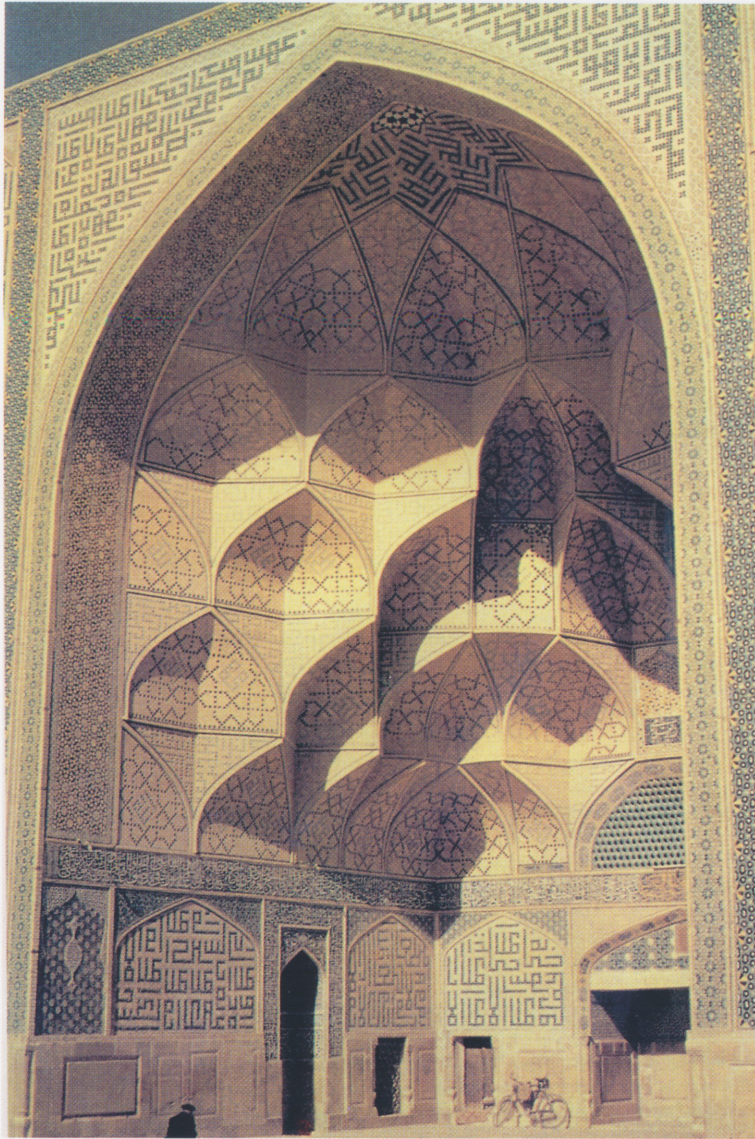


Fig. 1. Masjid-i-Jami mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

الشكل (١) مسجد ، أصفهان ، إيران

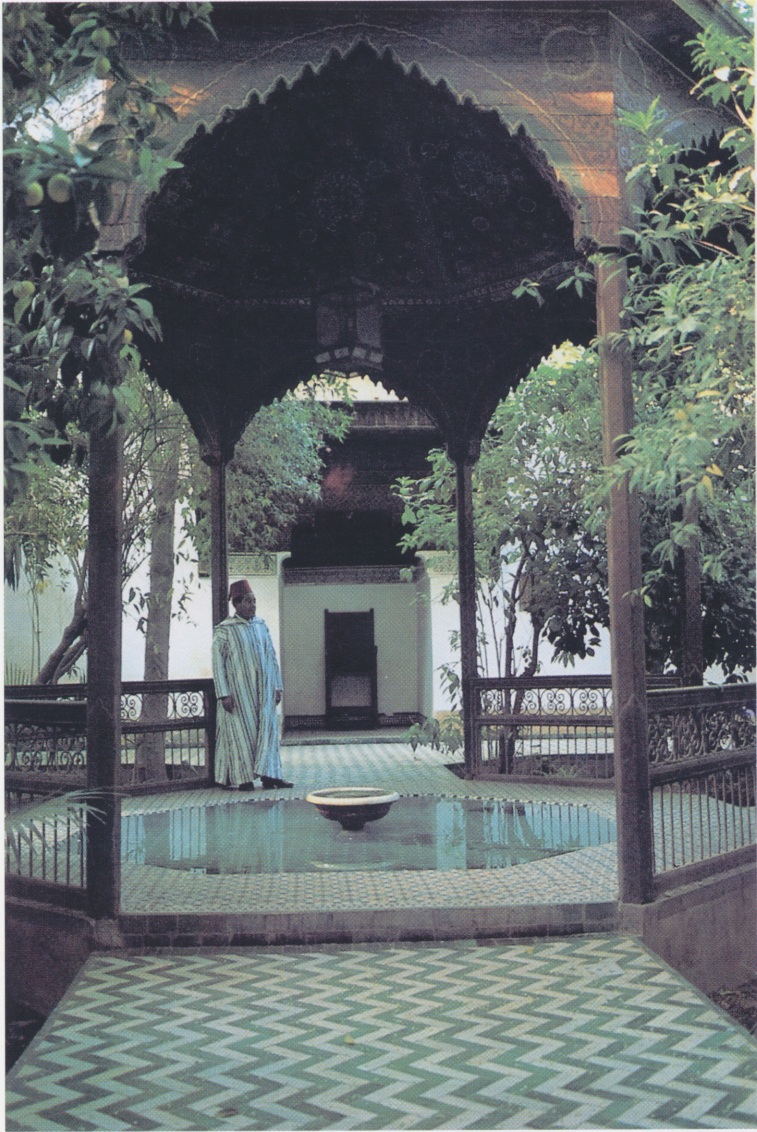


Fig. 2. Dar Si Said. Marrakech, Morocco.

الشكل (٢) سي سعيد ، مراكش ، المغرب