

Opening speech in connection with the exhibition *Written images. Arabic Calligraphy*, The Royal Library in Copenhagen, May 25th 2007.

It is both a great honor and a great pleasure for me to open the exhibition with calligraphic works from especially the Sharjah Centre for Arabic Calligraphy and Ornamentation in the United Arab Emirates. The exhibition is created in cooperation between the Royal Library in Copenhagen and the Department of Culture and Information, Directorate of Art in Sharjah, The United Arab Emirates.

We are all very pleased that the Minister of Culture Abdallah al Owais and Art Director Hisham Al Madhloum have the opportunity to participate in the opening of the exhibition which they – together with their colleagues at the Royal Library, especially Stig. T. Rasmussen – have worked so vigorously to realise. We are very grateful that also Tagelsir Hassan was able to come to the opening. He is a prominent artist who has worked primarily with calligraphy. In the following days he will demonstrate to us how this art form is created.

The Sharjah Centre for Arabic Calligraphy and Ornamentation has one of the finest collections of traditional and contemporary calligraphic art in the Arab world. The Royal Library has always had an interest in Islamic literature and art and have acquired calligraphic works of high quality in their collection. It is therefore a result of fine cooperation between two institutions in the two countries that is going to take place today. And this exhibition is another one of the many cooperations that Denmark has had with the Arab world since the 18th century, where relations between them were created, thanks to especially the scientist Carsten Niebuhr.

Sharjah has been called “The Cultural Pearl” in the Golf. This is due to the fact that this Emirate has long been known for its fruitful and successful endeavors to create a dialogue between the Arab world and Europe. Sharjah has often been singled out as a nation where His Highness Sheik Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, his ministers and other staff members have been working to realise their firm conviction that *“Art and Culture are among the very best instruments for bringing about a better understanding between different cultures.”*

Education, research, art and culture have been a very high priority since the establishment of the Emirate of Sharjah. Many well-known universities and several museums have been built, which also provide platforms for collaboration and dialogues between researchers, artists and different cultural personalities from all parts of the world. Since 1993, the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information has held an international Biennale, which has been constantly

expanded and which has given rise to a network of ever-new and different forms of cooperation, such as the Nomad Academy.

The painter Dorte Dahlin and I were chosen in 2001 by the former Danish Secretariat for International Cultural Relations to draw up a cultural exchange program between Denmark and Sharjah. It was confirmed and signed by the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information in 2004. Selected groups of Danish artists, architects, poets and humanists were chosen by the later called Nomad Academy to create exhibitions and other activities. This Academy has over time greatly expanded, and has in particular had close relationships with The Department of Culture and Information in Sharjah. Several exhibitions were arranged with the Arab artists in Copenhagen and with Danish artists and architects in Sharjah. Studies for Arab artists was established in Copenhagen and a workshops were created by Danish artists in Sharjah. Finally, lectures and exhibition catalogues and books were published in English and Arabic. The first negotiations on the exhibition we are about to open today took place in Sharjah in 2005 in collaboration with our Arab colleagues, Ingrid Fischer Junge representing The Royal Library, Dorte Dahlin and I the Nomad Academy.

In the 20th century and in the new Millennium, Western European artists, art historians and scientists have primarily been interested in the Islamic artists' wonderful talent for creating forms of expression that – as the Islam-expert Ernst J. Grube has described it – are not 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 therefore that an art work is raised in the real world to an endless and eternal existence.”

The Muslim artists often links the momentaneous, the apparently limited – with eternity itself. Thus, both in Sharjah and in many other Arab countries, such as Jordan, one can observe how the ancient form of calligraphy has inspired prominent artists to create works in which calligraphy are interpreted in a number of surprising and unexpected ways.

Old Islamic art also contains challenges to modern American and European artistic trends of art and all the new departures that begun to make their entry into the Arabic art world during the past four decades The Arab artists 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, between the national and the international and between tradition and innovation.

It is with great pleasure and expectation that I declare the exhibition open.

Else Marie Bukdahl
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Member of Nomad Academy