

**WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS
SCHOOL PROGRAMS RESOURCES**

Fiber: Sculpture 1960 – Present Exhibition

January 30 – April 5, 2015



Artists

Lenore Tawney	Elsi Giauque	Robert Rohm	Olga de Amaral	Alan Shields
Beryl Korot	Ria van Eyk	Alexandre da Cunha	Alexandra Bircken	Ruth Laskey
Kay Sekimachi	Françoise Grossen	Faith Wilding	Sheila Hicks	Aurèlia Muñoz
Alan Shields	Sherri Smith	Ritzi and Peter Jacobi	Josh Fought	Sheila Pepe
Piotr Uklański	Sheila Hicks	Ed Rossbach	Magdalena Abakanowicz	Claire Zeisler
Jean Stamsta	Naomi Kobayashi	Diane Itter	Xenobia Bailey	Rosemarie Trockel
Anne Wilson	Haegue Yang	Ernesto Neto		

Organized by: Jenelle Porter, ICA Mannion Family Senior Curator

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<http://www.icaboston.org/exhibitions/exhibit/fiber/>

Exhibition Description

Fiber: Sculpture 1960–present is the first exhibition in 40 years to examine the development of abstraction and dimensionality in fiber art from the mid-twentieth century through to the present. Adapting age-old techniques and traditional materials, artists working in fiber manipulate gravity, light, color, mass, and transparency to demonstrate the infinite transformations and iterations of their material. Early pioneers such as Magdalena Abakanowicz, Sheila Hicks, Lenore Tawney, and Claire Zeisler demonstrated a revolutionary redefinition of fiber art in the 1960s and 70s, showcasing radical, non-representational forms. Fiber: Sculpture 1960–present addresses the cultural and critical forces that contributed to the initial efflorescence of the fiber revolution in the mid-century, its contraction in the 1980s, and its recent reclamation by contemporary artists.

Useful Links

Here are some texts from the catalogue, [Fiber: Sculpture 1960 – Present](#). Many of the works in the exhibition are addressed in the artist descriptions below.

Artist Descriptions:

- **Lenore Tawney**
Lenore Tawney's name for her best-known body of work, "woven forms," indicates her radical reconceptualization of fiber as a sculptural medium.
- **Elsi Giauque**
Elsi Giauque, a contemporary of Gunta Stadler-Stlölzl and Anni Albers, was among the first artists to reconceptualize fiber as a vehicle for abstract expression.
- **Robert Rohm**
Rohm, most noted for his rope relief sculptures, united the three currents by giving equal weight to issues of idea, process, and material.
- **Alan Shields**
Using fiber as a catalyst, Shields breaks down the distinction between painting, sculpture, and printmaking to develop hybrid structures that defy categorization.
- **Beryl Korot**
Beryl Korot's pioneering multimedia installations are constructed through the use of video, installation, feminism, fiber, and conceptual art.
- **Ria van Eyk**
By the late 1970s Ria van Eyk's work was based on grid compositions rendered in bold hues and anchored with black and white accents. She used color not only to reveal the fabric's structural truth, but also to create optical illusions such as figure-ground reversals and implied depth.
- **Alexandre da Cunha**
Alexandre da Cunha debunks the modernist myth of artistic autonomy by using utilitarian objects to mimic the gestures of historical abstraction.
- **Alexandra Bircken**
Twigs, stones, foil, wire, hair, clothing, newspaper, pantyhose, toys, dried fruit, and leaves are among the objets trouvés that Alexandra Bircken has captured in her woolen webs.

- **Ruth Laskey**
Despite their differences in color and shape, all the figures in Laskey's lexicon derive from the underlying structure of the twill weave.
- **Kay Sekimachi**
To achieve translucent and ethereal qualities in her work, Sekimachi wove synthetic nylon monofilament on a traditional twelve-harness loom, a combination of modern material and ancient technique that became her signature between 1963 and 1973.
- **Françoise Grossen**
Grossen's knotted and plaited rope sculptures eschew the four edges that delimited traditional tapestry, and boldly enter the third dimension by hanging from the ceiling or unfolding directly onto the floor.
- **Faith Wilding**
For over forty years, Faith Wilding has examined the social and biological construction of femininity through her writings, teachings, activism, and above all, her multimedia artistic practice.
- **Sheila Hicks**
Few artists have played as significant a role in the development of postwar fiber art as Sheila Hicks, and yet, to define her solely in relation to this medium would greatly undervalue her contribution to twentieth-century sculpture.
- **Aurèlia Muñoz**
Aurèlia Muñoz abandoned the figure-ground relationship of embroidery and began to knot directly in space using the ancient technique of macramé.
- **Alan Shields**
Using fiber as a catalyst, Shields breaks down the distinction between painting, sculpture, and printmaking to develop hybrid structures that defy categorization.
- **Sherri Smith**
Sherri Smith transforms silky mohair into a solid mountain range through the alchemy of weaving.
- **Ritzi and Peter Jacobi**
Ritzi in tapestry techniques, Peter in sculpture—each embodied a different side of “fiber art.”
- **Josh Faught**
Josh Faught's sculptures are layered with seemingly contradictory elements that coexist side by side: abstraction and representation, high art and kitsch, embarrassment and pride, and activism and disengagement.

- **Sheila Pepe**
Sheila Pepe's expansive environments are crocheted from commercial yarns, shoelaces, and rubber bands that activate the exhibition site by reaching into the rafters, creeping into corners, and sprawling into the visitor's space.
- **Piotr Uklański**
Dripping with sinuous fibers and postmodern irony, his woven and crocheted sculptures and installations engage contentious themes of nationalism and feminism from a position of cool detachment.
- **Ed Rossbach**
Shuttling between abstract and figurative modes, he employed a range of techniques and surface treatments, such as macramé, weaving, lacemaking, plaiting, knotted netting, looping, block printing, silk screening, photocopying, stenciling, painting, and tie-dyeing.
- **Magdalena Abakanowicz**
Magdalena Abakanowicz is interested in scale of tensions that intervene between the woven form, rich and fleshy, and the surroundings.
- **Claire Zeisler**
Claire Zeisler's forms fashioned exclusively from fiber reflect her belief that the medium itself should determine the structure of her work.
- **Jean Stamsta**
Stamsta's interests reflect broader trends in fiber during the late 1960s and '70s, a period that witnessed a shift from small-scale, two-dimensional pictorial wall hangings to massive, volumetric sculptures positioned on the floor or suspended in space.
- **Naomi Kobayashi**
In her sculptural stacks of red cotton yarn, Naomi Kobayashi brings the dualities of nature into harmonious balance.
- **Diane Itter**
In an era of fiber art dominated by colossal sculptures made of rough, undyed materials, Diane Itter's brilliantly colored, finely detailed linen miniatures overturned nearly every prevailing convention.
- **Xenobia Bailey**
Xenobia Bailey uses abstract forms to narrate a powerful parable about African-American history.
- **Rosemarie Trockel**
Trockel makes woolen "paintings" are emblazoned with computer-generated abstractions resembling minimalist or color field paintings, or sociopolitically charged symbols such as the swastika, the hammer and sickle, and the Playboy and Woolmark logos.

- **Anne Wilson**
Salvaged lace, faux fur, and human hair are among the many soft materials that Wilson has mobilized at various points in her career to explore the mechanisms that transmute the “body into culture.
- **Haegue Yang**
Haegue Yang’s multimedia work capitalizes on the capacity of fiber to participate simultaneously in the seemingly incompatible discourses of formalism and social commentary.
- **Ernesto Neto**
Neto’s fiber works are biomorphic in form, these materials recover the sensual and erotic dimensions of human experience that are suppressed and regulated through social codes.

Catalogue Essays:

- [The Materialists](#) by Jenelle Porter
Porter writes a detailed essay on the history of fiber art from 1960 – present.
- [About 10 Years: From the New Tapestry to Fiber Art](#) by Jenelle Porter
Porter talks about the transformation of the tapestry into a form known as “fiber art”. She explains how the category of sculpture expanded by a generation of artists who approached art making with radical new ideas.

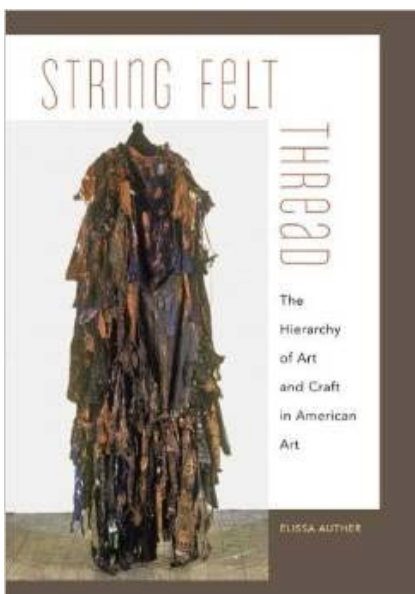
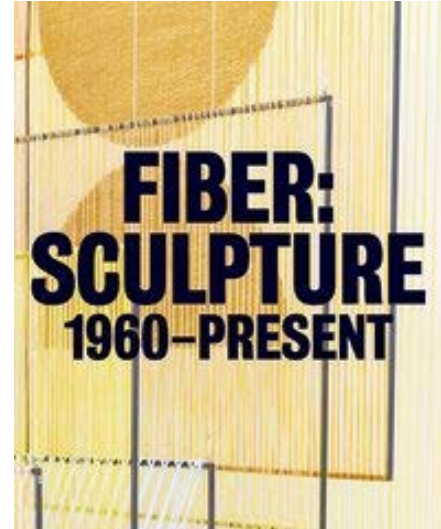
Other Links:

- [Fiber Art: The Queer Kid on the Bus](#) by Steven Frost
From the Art 21 Magazine, Steven Frost talks about how fiber artists have to face the association of being ‘queer’.
- [Specific Objects](#) by Donald Judd
Donald Judd’s influential 1965 essay “Specific Objects,” in which the sculptor/critic sought to wrap words around a new direction in art, one that proposed a progression of modernism toward “specific objects,” that is, objects that were neither painting nor sculpture, but an entirely other genre.

Recommended Books

[Fiber: Sculpture 1960- Present](#)

This book documents the developments in the field of fiber-related art over the past half-century. The 1960s saw a revolution in fiber art. Where once the focus was on knotting, twining, and coiling thread into works that were immediately recognizable, and therefore connected to utilitarian crafts, fiber artists of the later 20th-century began to experiment with abstract forms that were closer to sculpture than craft. Influenced by postmodernist ideas, these works are the product of experimentation with materials and technique while at the same time confronting important cultural issues. This book traces that development from the mid-twentieth century to the present. In the words of Bauhaus weaver Anni Albers, the expressive quality of fiber is essentially a “language of thread.” That language is beautifully displayed in full-color spreads and individual illustrations in this book. Scholarly essays address the feminist movement of the 1970s; the expanded use of materials in the ‘80s and ‘90s; and the more recent employment of fiber as one more material in the creation of freestanding works. In addition to a section of fullcolor illustrations, this book also includes profiles of all of the genre’s most influential artists.



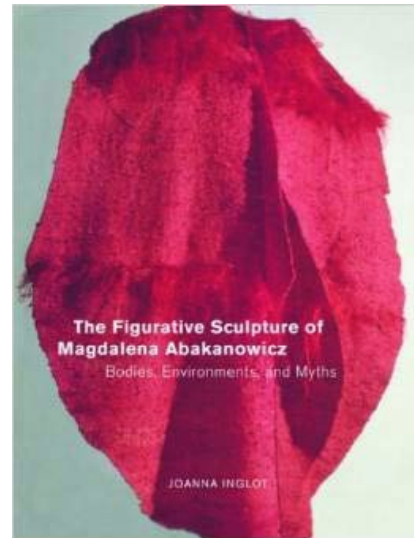
[String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art](#)

String, Felt, Thread presents an unconventional history of the American art world, chronicling the advance of thread, rope, string, felt, and fabric from the "low" world of craft to the "high" world of art in the 1960s and 1970s and the emergence today of a craft counterculture.

[The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz](#)

In this first scholarly art historical analysis of Abakanowicz's figurative sculpture, Joanna Inglot penetrates the myth of isolation that surrounds and obscures this internationally celebrated artist to disclose the artistic, sociopolitical, and cultural context in which Abakanowicz has lived and worked.

Examining Abakanowicz's representations of the human body from the fiber works of the 1960s known as Abakans through her War Games and outdoor environments of the 1980s and early 1990s, Inglot shows how these works engage the international art scene and the figurative sculpture of postwar Poland, and how they reflect a particular generation's experience of war and communism. With reference to Abakanowicz's use of national symbols and ceremonies drawn from the public and political discourse of the 1970s and 1980s, Inglot explains the complexity of the artist's attitudes toward contemporary politics and the troubled history of her native country.



Useful Videos

- [String, Felt, Thread: Challenging distinctions between art and craft](#)

Elissa Auther chats about her book, *STRING, FELT, THREAD*, and the artists and artworks behind it. The book is an unconventional history of the American art world that chronicles the advance of thread, rope, string, felt, and fabric from the "low" world of craft to the "high" world of art in the 1960s and 1970s, and ultimately illuminates the centrality of fiber to contemporary artistic practice. Auther engages far-reaching debates in the art world: What accounts for the distinction between art and craft? Who assigns values to these categories?

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Hassan Hajjaj: My Rock Stars Experimental, Volume 1, 2012



About the Artist

Hajjaj, born in 1961 in Larache, Morocco, moved to London in 1975, and now divides his time between London and Marrakesh. Best known as a photographer, he also employs video. His work depicts a globalized society that pushes and blurs the boundaries of cultural identity—whether African, Arab, or Western.

Exhibition Description

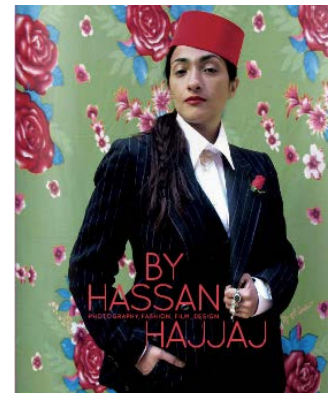
My Rock Stars: Volume 1, the first American solo show by Moroccan-born artist Hassan Hajjaj. The body of work produced for this exhibition is a continuation of Hajjaj's 'Rock Stars' series, in which the artist portrays his close personal friends in the guise of 'rock stars'. Taking his pop-up studio through Morocco, London and Paris, Hajjaj's approach combines the spontaneity of street portraiture with the language of fashion photography, creating an image that simultaneously evokes urban culture and the haute couture of glossy magazines.

Draping traditional woven mats on the street, the artist outfits his subjects in colorful and quirky costumes that he has designed. Suits sewn from found fabrics and industrial food packagings are combined with bold accessories, and the resulting portraits are encased in wooden frames lined with products sourced from Moroccan markets - items such as food tins, matchbooks, pigment bottles and Arabic alphabet blocks. Through costuming, posturing and mise en scène, Hajjaj blends African, Arabic, European and Western cultural signifiers in a vibrant fusion of contemporary globalized society. The identities of this international collection of musicians, dancers, fashion designers, capoeira masters and restaurateurs have been obscured, and these personal inspirations from Hajjaj's life have been immortalized as his very own 'Rock Stars'.

Recommended Books

[BY HASSAN HAJJAJ: PHOTOGRAPHY, FASHION, FILM, DESIGN](#)

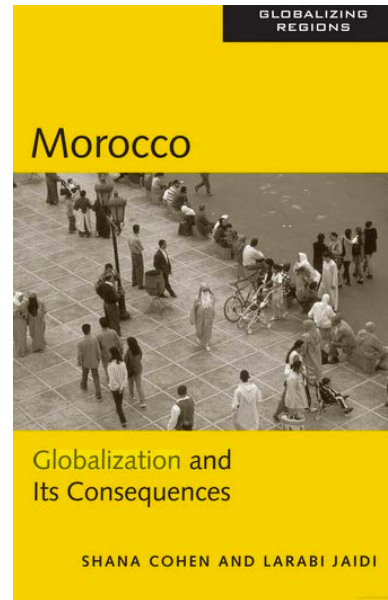
Now in his mid-career, the acclaimed artist-photographer Hassan Hajjaj has had many lives that inform the work he creates today. This timely publication explores how his upbringing in Morocco and London, his experiences in fashion and interior design, and his adventures in the music industry influence the vibrant colours, joyful spirit, and visual rhythm of his highly sought-after images. (free publication)



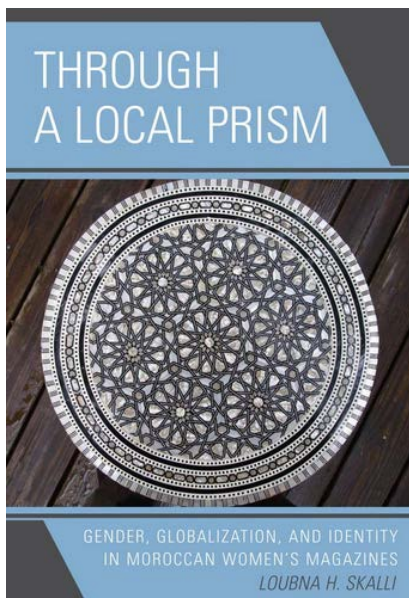
Morocco: Globalization and Its Consequences

Cohen and Jaidi trace the development of contemporary Morocco in the Islamic world of North Africa, which is currently at the forefront of the clash between Western-style development and the politicized Islam that now pervades the Arab world.

By applying globalization theory to detailed accounts of everyday life in an Arab society, the book is uniquely suited to students. Morocco in particular is a good place to look at this extremely important confrontation. It is among the most liberalized Islamic states, yet it is also in the midst of a revival of politicized Islam, which has its own globalizing agenda. The authors detail how this clash pervades Moroccan culture and society, and what it can tell us about the effects of globalization on the Arab world. Morocco is extremely close to the West in terms of physical proximity, and it is a favoured spot for Western tourists. Yet its closest neighbours in social terms are Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia, all of which have directly experienced the effects of politicized Islam in the last quarter century.

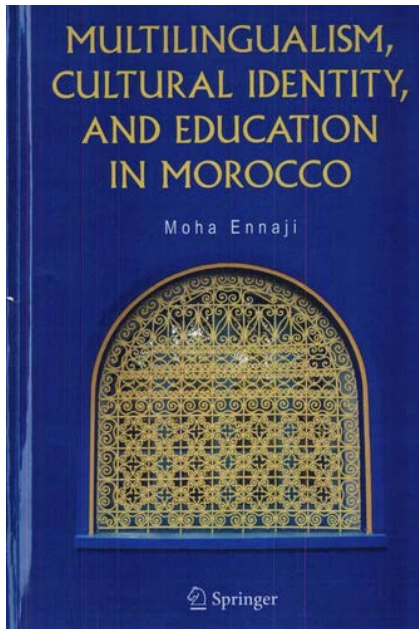


Through A Local Prism



In *Through a Local Prism*, Loubna H. Skalli explores the forces of global cosmopolitanism, European and American, as they collide with local definitions of self, gender, and community in the Arab and Muslim culture. Since the late 1980's, Morocco, a post-colonial Muslim country, has faced dramatic political, economic, and sociocultural changes. Utilizing Moroccan women's magazines, Skalli explores the tensions and intersections between global forces and local traditions with close attention to their impact on gender definitions among Arab Muslims. Drawing on communication, media, and cultural theories, Skalli's research redefines culture, gender, and national identity in the context of the globalized world. The focus on the Middle East makes this book of great interest to scholars and students of cultural studies, communications, and women's studies.

Multilingualism, Cultural Identity, and Education in Morocco



In this book, I attempt to show how colonial and postcolonial political forces have endeavoured to reconstruct the national identity of Morocco, on the basis of cultural representations and ideological constructions closely related to nationalist and ethnolinguistic trends. I discuss how the issue of language is at the centre of the current cultural and political debates in Morocco. The present book is an investigation of the ramifications of multilingualism for language choice patterns and attitudes among Moroccans. More importantly, the book assesses the roles played by linguistic and cultural factors in the development and evolution of Moroccan society. It also focuses on the impact of multilingualism on cultural authenticity and national identity. Having been involved in research on language and culture for many years, I am particularly interested in linguistic and cultural assimilation or alienation,

and under what conditions it takes place, especially today that more and more Moroccans speak French and are influenced by Western social behaviour more than ever before. In the process, I provide the reader with an updated description of the different facets of language use, language maintenance and shift, and language attitudes, focusing on the linguistic situation whose analysis is often blurred by emotional reactions, ideological discourses, political biases, simplistic assessments, and ethnolinguistic identities.

Useful Links

- [The Taymour Grahne gallery](#) in New York provides Hajjaj's work images, press and news articles.
- [An Interview with Hassan Hajjaj](#) by Shannon Ayers Holden
Holden talks with Hassan about his style of art and his exhibition My Rock Stars: Volume 1.
- [An Interview with Artist Hassan Hajjaj](#) by Erin Yokomizo
Yokomizo focuses on Hajjaj's exhibition My Rock Stars: Volume 1.

- [Moroccan Historical background](#) (from the book Multilingualism, Cultural Identity, and Education in Morocco) This chapter provides a historical background of Morocco.
- [Language, Culture, and Identity](#) (from the book Multilingualism, Cultural Identity, and Education in Morocco)
This chapter is concerned with issues of language, culture and identity with evidence from the Moroccan context.
- [Globalization Changes the Face of Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industries](#)
This report serves as a basis for discussions by participants in a "Tripartite Meeting on the Globalization in the Footwear, Textiles and Clothing Industries". This article discusses labour and employment issues relevant to the TCF industries and is expected to provide guidance for national and international action to promote employment, basic workers' rights and sound working conditions throughout the sector.
- [THE WORLD IN DRESS: Anthropological Perspectives of Clothing, Fashion, and Culture](#)
An anthropologic look at the world's material culture, consumption, clothing practices, and style diversification.
- [Garment Factory Workers in the City of Fez](#)
Since the 1980s, garment manufacturing has burgeoned in Morocco, and labor on the garment shop floor has become the domain offemales. This article examines the history and development of the garment industry in Fez, Morocco, and the nature of women's experience as garment factory workers. In particular, the author explores the cultural assumptions that render the employment of young and unmarried females more acceptable than that of mature, married women.

Useful Videos

- [Artist Interview With Hassan Hajjaj](#)
Hassan Hajjaj's work addresses issues of consumerism and branding in a cross-cultural context, combining elements of contemporary fashion and design with art historical portrait formats that are enriched by handcrafted frames.
- [Short Documentary: Moroccan Artist Hassan Hajjaj](#)

- [Hassan Hajjaj](#)
London-based photographer Hassan Hajjaj describes his journey from a small fishing town in Morocco to being the toast of the international gallery scene, eager for his witty, sunny and colourful depictions of contemporary Marrakesh culture.
- [Hassan Hajjaj and His Biker “Kesh Angel”](#)
Hajjaj discusses his exhibition “Kesh Angel”.

Related Themes to Explore

Social Identity

(Relating to both Exhibitions)

A social identity is the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group.

Social Identity Discussion Questions to think about:

- What are some ways in which people express their identity? In literature? In music? In clothing? In their homes?
- How do the artists' identities come through in their work?
- Compare and contrast the artists in the two exhibitions with respect to how their different background affects their work.
- What social responsibilities/role do you have?

Activity to do:

Write an essay or poem that answers the question “Who am I?” Consider the ways in which you express your identity or are defined by others. What aspects of your identity are easily noticed and which are hidden? To what extent is our identity determined by the society in which we live?

Gender Identity

(Relating to the Fiber Exhibition)

Gender Identity Explanation:

All societies have a set of gender categories that can serve as the basis of the formation of a social identity in relation to other members of society. In most societies, there is a basic division between gender attributes assigned to males and females.

Fiber art and gender:

Historically, fiber art was seen merely as feminine handiwork, as fiber artists were equated with hobbyists. Feminist artists and art historians of the 1970's protested to validate women's unrecognized household production as fine art. These feminist artists produced work that moved fiber from the status of a utilitarian material to a sculptural medium.

Gender Identity Discussion Questions to think about:

- Discuss the idea of protest in relation to personal identity as well as local, national, and global events.
- Why do artists choose to work with specific materials? What ideas can an artist convey through the human figure? How?
- What current events and historical issues have been protested? Are there differences between what has been protested in the past and what is protested now?
- Discuss the different ways women have been represented overtime. What messages about women do these images convey?
- Who writes history and how do we come to 'know' about the past? How can art contribute to our understanding of past cultures/societies or of historical events?
- What accounts for the distinction between art and craft? Who assigns values to these categories?

Cultural Identity

(Relating to Hassan Hajjaj Exhibition)

The formation of Moroccan Identity:

Colonial, and postcolonial forces, amongst other factors, have reconstructed the national identity of Morocco. The experience of colonisation was dramatic because it highlighted a strong conflict between the values and beliefs of two different cultures, Muslim and Western.

Hajjaj's expression of the Moroccan Identity:

Hassan Hajjaj's photographs and videos are of his close friends who are dressed in blends of African, Arabic, European and Western, cultural signifiers of our contemporary globalized society. Clothing, branding, etc. is intimately associated with presentation of the self and others'. The clothes we wear communicate many different meanings such as identities, values, and class.

Cultural Identity Discussion Questions to think about:

- Describe yourself using 25 words. How do you know these things about yourself? How is your identity related to groups, communities, or other social structures? How is it related to personal experience.
- How does your own biography affect the work you make and the things you think about most often?
- How are transformations of people, places, and things documented?
- Which of your possessions have you acquired, consciously or unconsciously, to enhance your status — designer label clothes or shoes? A car? A piece of jewelry?
- Can artists, works of art, or writers, and works of literature provoke change or transform our way of thinking? How?

*[Art 21, Educators' Guides](#)

Although these educational guides are about different contemporary artists, they provide great discussion questions regarding the common themes present within contemporary art.

Useful Terms

Basic Vocabulary

1. **Warp:** (in weaving) the threads on a loom over and under which other threads (the weft) are passed to make cloth.
2. **Weft:** (in weaving) the crosswise threads on a loom over and under which other threads (the warp) are passed to make cloth.
3. **Abstract:** an image that emphasizes formal elements (line, shape, etc) rather than specific, recognizable objects.
4. **Representational:** an image which shows recognizable objects
5. **Content:** the subject, topic or information captured in a photograph
6. **Expressive:** concerned with communicating emotion
7. **Geometric shape:** simple rectilinear or curvilinear shapes found in geometry, such as circles, squares, triangles, etc.
8. **Organic shape:** shapes based on natural objects such as trees, mountains, leaves, etc.
9. **Subject:** the main object or person(s) in a photograph
10. **Theme:** a unifying or dominant idea in one work of art or in a collection of works
11. **Intention:** reason(s) why the artist made a work of art
12. **Documentary photography:** photographs whose main purpose is to record a place, person(s) or event.
13. **Landscape:** an image that portrays the natural environment.
14. **Portrait:** an image that portrays an individual or individuals.

Visual Elements

1. **focus:** what areas appear clearest or sharpest in the photograph? What do not?

2. **light:** what areas of the photograph are most highlighted? Are there any shadows?
3. Does the photograph allow you to guess the time of day? Is the light natural or artificial? Harsh or soft? Reflected or direct?
4. **line:** are there objects in the photograph that act as lines? Are they straight, curvy, thin, thick? Do the lines create direction in the photograph? Do they outline? Do the lines show movement or energy?
5. **repetition:** are there any objects, shapes or lines which repeat and create a pattern?
6. **shape:** do you see geometric or organic shapes? What are they?
7. **space:** is there depth to the photograph or does it seem hollow? What creates this appearance? Are there important negative spaces in addition to positive spaces? Is there depth created by spatial illusions?
8. **texture:** if you could touch the surface of the photograph how would it feel? How do the objects in the picture look like they would feel?
9. **value:** is there a range of tones from dark to light? Where is the darkest value? Where is the lightest?

Composition of Photo

1. **angle:** the vantage point from which the photograph was taken.
2. **background:** the part of a scene or picture that is or seems to be toward the back.
3. **balance:** the distribution of visual elements in a photograph. Symmetrical balance distributes visual elements evenly in an image. Asymmetrical balance is found when visual elements are not evenly distributed in an image.
4. **central focus:** the object(s) which appears most prominently and/or most clearly focused in a photograph.
5. **composition:** the arrangement or structure of the formal elements that make up an image.
6. **contour:** the outline of an object or shape.
7. **contrast:** strong visual differences between light and dark, varying textures, sizes, etc.

8. **framing**: what the photographer has placed within the boundaries of the photograph.
9. **setting**: actual physical surroundings or scenery whether real or artificial.
10. **vantage point**: the place from which a photographer takes a photograph.