



University of Exeter

Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies

Centre for Gulf Studies

Virtual Seminar Series

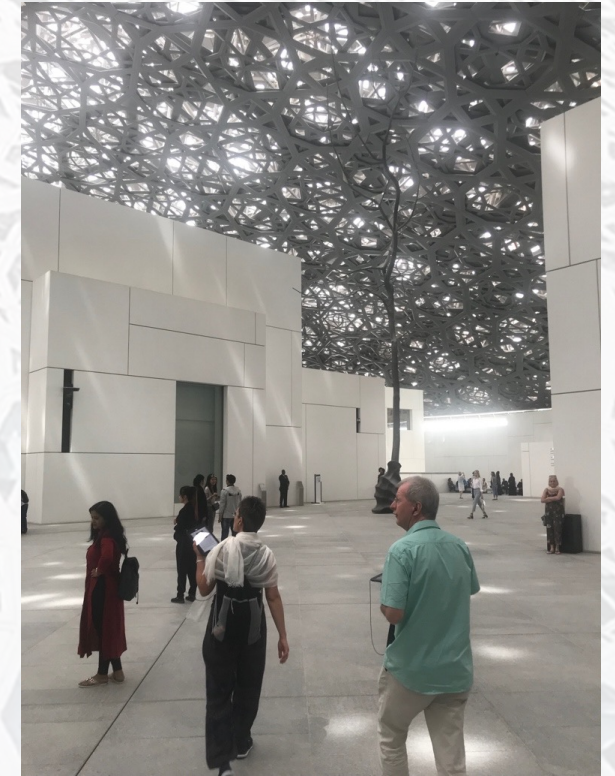
Tuesday 14 November 2023, 17:00

Maia Holtermann Entwistle (QMUL)

Constructing Culture: Art and Racial Capitalism in the Gulf

The contemporary Gulf states are investing heavily in art and culture. Since the early 2000s, a bumper crop of new or transformed museums, commercial galleries, art fairs, heritage sites, arts festivals, and cultural districts have opened their doors to the public. Artists, curators, cultural institutional managements, and dealers working in the Gulf are keenly aware of how the cultural production occurring across these new spaces is shaped by censorship and underpinned by the exploitation and dispossession of migrant construction workers. Many are therefore also conscious of the limits on cultural production's capacity to induce value shifts and drive decolonisation. Yet progressive politics – particularly decolonialism – remain the niche that this new cultural scene is carving out for itself in the global artworld.

This talk prises apart this seeming contradiction, exploring “culture” as an agent of economic and urban development and a key site of political governance. Unveiling the shifting and unstable interplay between the material and immaterial dimensions of art and culture, it examines how this rapidly growing cultural scene is produced by a host of intersecting disciplines, global industries, and associated technical abstractions. By reconstructing the circuits of labour, goods, ideas, and capital that underpin them, this talk uses art as a vehicle to probe how race and capitalism combine in places such as the Gulf that exceed the colonial and racial taxonomies forged in the transatlantic slave trade and European colonial encounter.



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