

MUSEUM AS HUB: BIDOUN LIBRARY PROJECT

AUGUST 4–SEPTEMBER 26, 2010
FIFTH FLOOR



Bidoun Library Project, image by Babak Radboy, 2010.

The Bidoun Library Project at the New Museum is a highly partial account of five decades of printed matter in, near, about, and around the Middle East. Arrayed along these shelves are pulp fictions and propaganda, monographs and guidebooks, and pamphlets and periodicals, on subjects ranging from the oil boom to the Dubai bust, the Cold War to the hot pant, Pan-Arabs to Black Muslims, revolutionaries to royals, and Orientalism to its opposites.

For its North American debut, the Bidoun Library turns the page on the twentieth century: more specifically, the period after the Second World War, set against the context of the Cold War, when the Middle East as we know it came into its own. It was the heyday of the printed page, perhaps the last period in which the predominant forms of the written word were the book, the newspaper, and the periodical magazine. Looking back, the printed matter of the last century appears increasingly opaque as it recedes further and further from active circulation. A library, then, is entropy.

The motif of the exhibition is *the object of the book*—the book as object of material production, and the book as a vector for material objectives. Both notions were at play in the publishing projects of the Cold War, when the First and Second World Wars contested at the level of word and image. The Russian International News Agency produced Central Asian photo books; so did the US State Department. The politico-cultural magazine *Tricontinental*, produced in Havana by the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and disseminated on university campuses across

“For those who don’t know the Middle East, it may be well to mention that this is not a work of satire.”

—F. M. Esfandiary, *Identity Card: A Novel*. New York: Grove Press, 1966.

the Third World, mirrored the magazine *Transition*, produced in Africa, edited by an Indian, and funded by the CIA.

Crucially, nearly all of the 700-odd titles on display were acquired specifically for this exhibition, the shape of the collection dictated primarily by search terms on the World Wide Web rather than any intrinsic notion of aptness or excellence. Searching for “Arab,” “paperback,” “1970s,” and “<\$3,” the *Bidoun* librarians acquired dozens of books about the Oil Crisis, the cruel love of the Sheikh, and the lifestyles of the nouveau riche. A similar search for “Iran” produced its own set of types and stereotypes. They did not set out to find the *best* books about, say, the Iranian revolution; in a sense, they looked for the worst. Or rather, they tried to look at what was there.

Since 2008, the Bidoun Library has been exhibiting source materials and artist projects that pertain to, grow out of, or extend the work of the quarterly magazine *Bidoun: Arts and Culture From the Middle East*. Like the magazine—and like the Museum as Hub itself—the Bidoun Library is at once a space, an archive, and a network of collaborators. Since its inaugural installation in Abu Dhabi in 2008, the Bidoun Library has partnered with an array of international art institutions and collectives, including the Lebanese comics journal *Samandal* and the Turkish artist’s book publisher Bent, as well as Art Dubai, Ashkal Ahwan: The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, and 98weeks Project Space in Beirut.

This exhibition is organized by the magazine *Bidoun: Arts and Culture From the Middle East*.



Tricontinental Magazine, Issue 27-28, November-February 1972.

bidoun.com

The Bidoun Library is presented in partnership with Abu Dhabi Art. Bidoun would like to recognize the support of the Emirates Foundation, the Bohlen Foundation, and the Foundation for Arts Initiatives.

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Librarians

Babak Radboy
Tiffany Malakooti
Nelson Harst
Sohrab Mohebbi
Michael Vazquez
Negar Azimi

Lenders

Kurt Thometz
Achal Prabhala
Raymond Foye
Robin Mackay
Ali Radboy
Mitra Sedaghat Manesh
Fatima Al Qadiri
Mohammed Al Qadiri
Nima Jahromi
The Brooklyn
Public Library

Volunteers

Christopher
Lopez-Thomas
Joseph Waller
Barrett Hanrahan
Nathaniel "Dodge"
Greenley
Vartan Avakian
Aldona Watts
Ghazal Hashemi
Ofurhe Igbinedion
Gloria Maximo

Volunteers

John Greenberg
Jen Reinhardt
Khalid Al Gharaballi
Nesa Azimi
Avena Gallagher

Public Programs

THURSDAY, AUGUST 5, 7 P.M.

"Museum as Hub: Bidoun Library Project" Opening Event

To mark the opening of "Museum as Hub: Bidoun Library Project," the magazine *Bidoun: Arts and Culture From the Middle East* presents selected readings and video clips from the Bidoun Library collection. In addition, for the opening day of the project, *Bidoun* has invited booksellers usually found outside the New York University library to set up shop outside the New Museum as an extension of their project and as a provocation.

FREE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 7 P.M.

Margins of Error

An audio-visual extravaganza of The Bidoun Library Project, this event features a historical reenactments, misreadings, poorly transferred film screenings, and a slideshow. Presented by the editors of *Bidoun*, with special guests Fatima Al Qadiri and Anand Balakrishnan.

\$6 MEMBERS, \$8 GENERAL PUBLIC

Visitors can participate in free, docent-led public tours of the Museum's current exhibitions Wednesday–Friday at 12:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 and 3 p.m. For information on group tours, please visit newmuseum.org/learn or call 212.219.1222 x235.

New Museum First Saturdays For Families take place on the first Saturday of every month from 10–12 p.m. and are free to the public. Tickets are given on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, please visit newmuseum.org/learn/school_and_youth or call 212.219.1222 x235.