

**ORIENTALISM AND ORIENTAL COLLECTIONS IN THREE FRENCH
NATIONAL MUSEUMS**

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ABSTRACT

ISABELLA D. ARCHER: Orientalism and Oriental Collections in Three French National Museums

(Under the direction of Dr. Sahar Amer)

This project focuses on Orientalist exhibitions of art and cultural artifacts from the Arabo-Islamic world in three French museums in Paris (the Louvre, the Musée du Quai Branly, and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration) in order to assess the extent to which a greater French identity is impacted by its interactions with the Other. Museums are an important part of France's history as a nation, and the history and growth of the French national museum network and its collections are a testament to the history and growth of the state. France's history and relationship with the Arabo-Islamic world, the "Orient," is also a longstanding cornerstone of French identity. The prominence of Arabo-Islamic art and culture in French museums and the ways in which museums have studied and curated these works establish the important role of Orientalist exhibitions in French museums and the Orient in French history.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNHI	Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration
MAAO	Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens
MQB	Musée du Quai Branly
PPD	Palais de la Porte Dorée

Chapter I

Introduction

Museums are an important part of France's history as a nation. In 1793, the French National Assembly established the world's first national, public museum in the Louvre palace. The creation of the Louvre museum was a sea change in the history and preservation of French culture, as the appropriation of French royal art collections into the property of the Nation and of the French people emblemized the country's transformation from monarchy to republic. In the two hundred-plus years following the Louvre's founding, national museums have played a significant role in the French nation building process. The history and growth of the French national museum network and its collections are a testament to the history and growth of the state (Bodenstein, 289).

But French national museums do not only preserve and protect French history and culture. They are also important spaces that showcase France's position in the world. That position, throughout the nineteenth century, was one of imperial power. As Felicity Bodenstein observes in "National Museums in France," French museums have throughout history benefitted from France's colonial enterprises. As such, the museum has contributed to founding France's identity on values and ideas that place this identity beyond national and political borders (289). The construction of French identity is in many instances one constructed in relation to other lands and cultures.

France's history and relationship with the Arabo-Islamic world, also known as the

Orient,¹ is a longstanding cornerstone of French identity. The Orient, Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism*, holds a special place in European Western experience; for France, this “special place” has frequently served as a national and cultural foil to French identity (1). French encounters with the Arab and Muslim worlds well predate the imperial period in medieval encounters such as the Battle of Poitiers, when Charles Martel’s battle defeated armies from the Umayyad caliphate of Spain in 732 BC/BCE. Other encounters are of a more fictitious nature, such as the story related in the eleventh-century epic poem *La Chanson de Roland*. In *Roland*, the history of a small battle at Roncesvalles between Charlemagne’s armies and the Basques is re-imagined as a confrontation between Frankish Christians and Saracen Muslims; the conflict is represented as a clash of right and wrong. The Christian versus Muslim rhetoric of the *Chanson de Roland* is an early example of West versus East and Oriental versus Occidental oppositions in French literary and artistic culture that depict the Arabo-Islamic world as inferior and France, by contrast, as superior. French interests in the Orient were also fed by Mediterranean travels and mercantile exchanges with the Ottoman Empire during the early modern period from the mid-fifteenth to mid-eighteenth century. Orientalism, the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth-century study and depiction of Arab and Islamic cultures by French artists, scholars, and scientists became an integral part of European material civilization and culture during France’s imperial period.

The immigration of Arabs and Muslims to France since the 1970s has also played a role in the formation of a multifaceted and multicultural French identity. At times, the French

¹The “Orient” is a term used to collectively describe what is today known as the Muslim-majority countries of North Africa, the Middle East, Iran, and Turkey. However, it should be noted that Turkey and Iran, while Muslim-majority countries, are not Arab countries. The conflation of Arab and Muslim into one term, “Orient[al]” illustrates a tendency to generalize the peoples and cultures from this part of the world, which is often referred to as the “East” and critically in post-colonial literature as the “Other.” My discussion of the Orient will focus on artifacts and representations of cultures and countries that are both Arab and Islamic, as such the description of “Orient[al]” will sometimes be used interchangeably with the description in “Arabo-Islamic” cultures.

have demonstrated an acceptance of Arab and Islamic influences on French culture, reflected in the popularity of couscous, *rai* music, and soccer players such as Zinedine Zidane (Amer, “Muslim Women in France at the Turn of the Millennium”). However, laws banning the Islamic headscarf and legislative attempts to teach France’s colonial history in a positive light in French elementary, secondary, and university education classrooms reflect the unease held by many French in completely accepting foreign cultures into the fabric of the French nation and French identity.

Tensions between France’s colonial past and its multicultural present have neither gone unnoticed nor been left unaddressed by national museums. The prominence of Arabo-Islamic art and culture in French museums and the ways in which museums have studied and curated these works establishes the important role of the Orient in the French museum and French history. This project will focus on the Orientalist exhibition of art and cultural artifacts from the Arabo-Islamic world in three national French museums in Paris (the Louvre, the Musée du Quai Branly, and the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration) in order to assess the extent to which a greater French identity is impacted by its interactions with the Other. This analysis of three different types of national museums in France’s capital city will highlight the importance of the museum to establishing and preserving French history and French identity.

In the first chapter, I discuss how the Louvre museum functions as an important political and cultural platform for French national history by examining the Louvre’s Orientalist curation of Arabo-Islamic artworks and its depictions of French colonial history. The Louvre, an art museum and a symbol of the French nation following the Revolution of

1789, is France's most popular and famous museum and is located at the center of the city in the 1st *arrondissement*, or neighborhood.

Since the 1990s, a number of French national museums of colonial history founded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have closed and their collections transferred to new museum spaces. The second chapter discusses the Arabo-Islamic exhibits and curatorial styles and missions of two newer French museums, the Musée du Quai Branly and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration. The Musée du Quai Branly is an anthropology museum of non-Western cultures strategically located in the shadow of Paris' most prominent landmark and tourist attraction, the Eiffel Tower, and across the street from a French memorial to victims of the Algerian War in the 7th *arrondissement*. The Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, a social history and community museum, is also located on the grounds of a former colonial exhibition, the 1931 Exposition Universelle, across from the Bois de Vincennes. However, like the controversial topics exhibited in its museum space, the CNHI is both literally and figuratively outside the center of Paris and the conventional Parisian national museum circuit frequented by most tourists.

Although the Louvre, the MQB, and the CNHI are three very different types of museums, the histories of these museums and the controversies surrounding their exhibits and development reflect the interest in Oriental collections and the persistent influence of Orientalism in different museum environments. An analysis of the extent to which these new museums are able to accomplish their founding missions of creating cultural dialogues evidences the complex nature of promoting a multicultural message in national French museums. As such, these museums and their exhibits provide valuable context for current tensions regarding national acknowledgment of France's multicultural identity.

Much of the information in this study comes from the museums themselves, such as museum publications, informational labels, and audio guides. Primary source materials, such as newspaper articles and excerpts from speeches, provided additional information for research and study. A number of photographs of the museums, and many descriptions, in whole or in part, are based on field research conducted by the author in July 2009 and June 2011. These resources and research are supplemented with comparative, contextual analysis of relevant academic texts and theoretical literature from art history, museum studies, anthropology and cultural studies, among other disciplines.

Chapter II

The Louvre Museum

Susan Vogel writes that museums teach both consciously and unconsciously, “a system of highly political values expressed not only in the style of the presentation but in myriad facets of its operation” (200). This section establishes the “political” values expressed by the Musée du Louvre (the Louvre), France’s largest and most significant cultural institution. This section will first discuss the history of the Louvre’s collections and the role of the museum in the establishment of French identity during the French revolutionary and colonial periods. The analysis will then turn to the history of the Louvre’s collections of Oriental and Orientalist art. The Louvre’s preservation and renovations of these collections, from 1793 to the present, reflect the importance of France’s colonial conquests in French national history. Finally, after discussing the recent controversies regarding the contemporary integration of non-Western art and motifs in the museum’s permanent collection and architectural structure, I interrogate the role of the Louvre as a universal museum today.

The Louvre: Royal to National to Universal Museum

First built as a defense tower in the early eleventh century, the Louvre (Figure 1) became a royal palace during the twelfth-century reign of Charles V. The palace’s structure and architecture was changed and expanded over the next seven centuries by generations of French monarchs until Louis XIV built the palace of Versailles outside Paris in 1674. The exodus of the king and his court to Versailles led to the Louvre’s usage as an exhibition

space for the royal art collections that had not been transferred to Versailles. These collections were open to the public for multi-week showings from 1699 until the late eighteenth century. Beginning in 1699, sections of the palace were used as artist studios and exhibitions galleries for the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, whose showings in the Salon Carré of the Louvre became known as “Salons.” Following the closing of the nearby Luxembourg Galleries in 1779 (considered by some to be France’s first ‘public’ museum open to the public two days a week), Louis XVI’s Director General of Royal Buildings, the Comte d’Angivillier, suggested that the Louvre become a central, public museum whose establishment would reflect national pride and royal glory (Oliver, 9).

Although d’Angivillier’s plans were disrupted by the French Revolution in 1789, plans to turn the Louvre into a public national museum were not laid aside. Inspired by Enlightenment philosophy, the mission to create a “great museum of Europe” was adopted by the French Revolutionary government. Ten days after the fall of the Bourbon monarchy on August 19, 1792, the National Assembly decreed that the Louvre was to become a national public museum. The necessity of this project was recognized in a decree by the Assembly which declared that “bringing together at the museum the paintings and other works of art to be found dispersed in many locations” was a matter of “urgency” (McClelland, 91). The fact that the establishment of a national museum was deemed an “urgent” matter in the midst of the French Revolution is a powerful demonstration of how royal institutions were transformed into public symbols of French nationalism.² Furthermore, the creation of the Louvre museum, which opened weeks before the Reign of Terror in France from 1793-1794,

²The Bibliothèque Nationale is another such example—the royal library became the property of the state following the French Revolution.

also enabled scholars and specialists to study, protect and preserve art works from the chaos and vandalism occurring outside the museum's walls.

The conversion of royal property into a public, nationally owned collection represented the Revolution's triumph over royal despotism, and the Louvre became a purveyor of a new enlightened national identity. The transformation of the royal collections into national property, and the accessibility of these collections to the public enabled the National Assembly to fashion a new space for the Enlightenment values of collective ownership and equal, universal access to State-owned art by way of the public museum structure.

In transforming the Louvre palace into a national museum, the Louvre museum and its collections reframed French identity by marking the creation of a new world order with France at its helm (Duncan, 93). In the late 1790s the Louvre became a monument of French intellectual and imperial glory as the collections grew with the arrival of new artworks and objects seized during Napoleon's territorial expansions (Figure 2). Its collections swelling with antiquities from ancient civilizations and paintings of foreign conquests and cultures, France, through the Louvre museum, positioned itself as not just a national museum, but also as a "universal" museum qualified to safeguard the world's treasures for the benefit of mankind (McClelland, 7).

The establishment of the Louvre as a universal museum whose encyclopedic collections of art and artifacts from the great historical civilizations were owned by and open to the public provided a new context for objects from previous collections to be harnessed to new social purposes. As Tony Bennett explains in *Birth of the Museum*, the establishment of universal and public museums in Europe often entailed a transformation of cultural resources

and fashioned new spaces of representation (33). The Louvre's display of paintings and sculptures from imperial ventures, McClellan notes in *Inventing the Louvre*, encouraged visitors to regard these objects as "trophies of war," representations of French prowess and success abroad (11). The Louvre's acquisition of spoils of war and their incorporation as nationally owned treasures (*biens nationaux*) illustrate how the cultures of foreign territories, in particular those from Oriental lands, became an integral part of French culture.

The absorption of "war trophies" as a part of France's national heritage illustrates how the Louvre's museum's "universal" mission of preserving and showcasing the world's cultures and civilizations enables the museum to appropriate foreign artworks and artifacts with the Orientalist mission of representing the Other. Although the Louvre has, in recent years, returned a selection of illegally-obtained antiquities to Egyptian authorities, these returns are extremely rare and generally only occur when recent acquisitions are discovered to be the product of illegal excavations.³ But where no records or evidence exist for the sale or stealing of antiquities, the Louvre, like other universal museums such as the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, are reluctant to repatriate objects that have been in the museum's collection for hundreds of years and are considered to be world treasures with international cultural significance.

Imperial History in the Louvre I: Bonaparte's Egypt

In *Ancient Egypt at the Louvre*, a 1997 publication of the Louvre museum to commemorate a major renovation of the Egyptian Antiquities Department, the curators celebrated the history of the Louvre's ancient Egyptian collection, one of the largest in the world. The curators began their story of the Department with an overview of the origins of

³For example, the decision to return a set of painted wall fragments in 2009 was made when Egyptian archaeologists discovered the fragments (purchased by the Louvre in 2000 and 2003), had been chipped off and sold by plunderers in the 1980s.

the collection. Ancient Egyptian objects have been a part of the Louvre since its founding in 1793 in a small display of Egyptian statues from the former royal collections. France's archaeological heritage is detailed by descriptions of one hundred and thirty of the collection's objects, as well as information about each object's acquisition so that readers may "discover how each piece was brought to light and to pay tribute to the generations of archaeologists who devoted their lives to exploring the Egyptian land" (Andreu et al, 11).

The rhetoric of the curators' tribute to the archeologists who brought ancient Egyptian culture "to light" echoes the Orientalist mentality of their colonial predecessors in Egypt. In the first chapter of *Orientalism*, Said recalls Arthur James Balfour's 1910 lecture to the House of Commons about the English occupation of Egypt. Balfour, having been asked on what grounds he was suited to speak on behalf of the Egyptians, answered by saying:

We [the British] know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately, we know more about it. It goes far beyond the petty span of the history of our race. (qtd. in Said, 32)

"To have such knowledge of such a thing," Said cautions, "is to dominate it, to have authority over it" (32). Like Balfour's insistence on knowing how to speak for Egypt, the history of the Louvre's acquisition, study, and exhibition of its Egyptian collection demonstrates an Orientalist tendency to speak on behalf of the Other. The positioning of European archaeologists as selfless explorers devoted to their task of documenting ancient, foreign cultures is precisely the type of rhetoric Edward Said describes as part of the European strategy to obtain a positional superiority over the Oriental.

Though the Louvre's collection does not include the majority of Egyptian antiquities acquired during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign⁴, numerous elements of the Egyptian collection's design portray or are influenced by Napoleon's campaign and the *Description de l'Égypte*, the comprehensive multi-volume study of ancient and modern Egypt compiled by the scientists and scholars who accompanied Bonaparte from 1798 to 1801. For example, the decorative grisaille paintings by Alexandre-Denis Abel de Pujol in the original Egyptian galleries of the Louvre's Sully wing depict hunting and harvesting scenes that are direct reproductions of illustrations of Egyptian tombs from the *Description de l'Égypte* (Andreu et al, 18).⁵ These grisailles frame Abel de Pujol's ceiling painting *Egypt Saved by Joseph* (1827). The bright, colorful ceiling painting is a depiction of a Bible story from Genesis where Joseph, favored by God, was made ruler of Egypt by Pharaoh and guided the Egyptians through years of famine (Figure 3). An allegorical representation of an Egypt needing to be saved by a greater power, the work depicts Egypt collapsing into Joseph's rescuing arms to escape the pursuit of famine, personified by a group of Furies. As in the grisaille paintings, the details in *Egypt Saved by Joseph*, such as Joseph and Egypt's headdresses, the statuesque depiction of the Pharaoh, and the detailed engravings on the temple in the background are informed by the *Description de l'Égypte* and the Louvre's collection of Egyptian antiquities which Pujol had studied in preparation for the painting ("Alexandre-Denis de Pujol"). Furthermore, Pujol's depiction of the dark-skinned Egypt

⁴Most of the objects seized and studied during France's Egyptian campaign from 1798-1801, including the famous Rosetta Stone, passed from French to British possession following the French defeat at the Battle of Aboukir (1799). Since then, these artifacts have resided in the Egyptian collection of the British museum.

⁵ The Louvre's Egyptian collection has moved several times in the museum as it has expanded. The Egyptian collection currently occupies galleries on the first and ground floors of the Sully Wing on the east side of the Cour Carrée and portions of the rooms surrounding the Cour Visconti on the lower ground floor.

falling into the arms of a Europeanized Joseph seemingly provides a biblical basis for European governance over Oriental cultures.

Leon Cogniet treats similar themes in an 1835 ceiling painting for the Department of Egyptian antiquities titled *Bonaparte, Surrounded by Scholars and Artists, as a Mummy is Discovered* (Figure 4). The painting shows a team of French and Egyptian workers excavating a mummy from a tomb as Bonaparte, barely visible, oversees the dig from the shade. Cogniet's scene is full of important contrasts with colonial implications—to the far right of the foreground, a French archaeologist appears to reprimand an Egyptian worker, below them, a French soldier looks proudly and tenderly at the gilded face of the Sarcophagus being lifted out of the ground as if it were his own child. Most symbolically, the figure of Bonaparte, though darkened by the shade, appears larger than life as his shadow, one with that of the tent, looms over the excavation as if to represent the shadow of authority France casts over Egypt. The story of Napoleon in Egypt is not limited to Cogniet's ceiling painting of Bonaparte, and the painting is framed on the ceiling by a bas-relief depicting four additional events from the Egyptian campaign: the Battle of Aboukir, the Revolt of Cairo, the Pardoning of the Rebels in Cairo, and the Plague of Jaffa ("Alexandre Denis de Pujol").

The intertwining of French and Egyptian history in the Egyptian collection is significant because the representation of Egypt emblazoned on the ceilings of the Louvre makes the history of the Franco-Egyptian encounter and the study of Egypt a part of the narrative of the national French museum. However, the Louvre's integration of non-Western civilizations and themes is not always so seamless. In 2000, former French president Jacques Chirac had the Louvre's Pavilion des Sessions, a ground floor space in the far corridor of the Denon Wing, redesigned as a forum to display art from African, Asian, Oceanic, and Native

American cultures (Figure 5). Chirac's addition, conceived as part of his vision to elevate non-Western art in national French museums and to make the Louvre a "truly" universal museum, was met with disapproval by a number of the Louvre's curators. Said Pierre Rosenberg, former director of the Louvre:

The Louvre does not have the vocation of presenting the arts of every civilization in humanity. Our collections have the more modest goal of illustrating the art of the Western World from the Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century, plus that of the civilizations of antiquity from which it sprung. That job is quite enough for us. (Price, 63)⁶

Rosenberg concluded by saying that it made "no sense" for the Louvre to showcase objects that would be better served by the then-future Musée du Quai Branly (MQB).⁷ The unpopularity of the Pavillon des Sessions' display of non-Western art illustrates the fact that not all art from the non-Western world is considered appropriate for exhibition in the Louvre, and reveals the Louvre's "universal" survey of art and culture to be a French-centered survey of a French-determined hierarchy of world civilizations and how they have informed the development of Western civilization.⁸

The exhibitions and artworks at the Louvre define the Orient in opposition to France by presenting imperial history in exhibitions and works of art that provide a selective history to visitors and viewers. Ancient Egyptian antiquities, though also from the non-Western

⁶ The Pavillon des Sessions is neither administered nor curated by the Louvre. This was done by the now-defunct Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens (MAAO) until it closed and was replaced by the Musée du Quai Branly which appropriated the MAAO's collection in 2006. (Bodenstein 306).

⁷ In the same speech, Rosenberg stated his hope that "when the Quai Branly Museum is built it will not be giving up its best pieces to an exhibit in the Louvre." Unfortunately for Rosenberg, the Pavillon, though administered by the MQB and not the Louvre, is still in operation. The MQB appears determined to keep a satellite presence at the Louvre: the MQB's mascot, a statue of a *chupícaro* from Mexico, is exhibited at the Louvre and not the MQB.

⁸ Although the collections of the MQB were largely acquired during France's colonial period which began in the mid-nineteenth century, a simple search of the MQB's online catalog reveals that many artworks in the collection predate the period in which they were collected.

world, are nevertheless deemed appropriate for inclusion in the Louvre collection because these pieces are seen to illustrate the development of Western civilization and French national history. As such, some aspects of France's imperial history, such as Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, are presented as part of French history in the universal museum. Other aspects, such as France's colonial ventures in Africa, Asia, and Oceania, are remembered and reconstructed differently and separately from national French history. They are hence exhibited in different museum spaces with other purposes and agendas such as the MQB (discussed in the following chapter).

Said wrote that France's study of the East "has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (2). Paintings such as Pujol and Cogniet's ceiling paintings that portray France's collection of Egyptian antiquities as archaeological treasures "saved" by French scientists and scholars, are appropriate for exhibition because they validate the narrative of French colonial expansion and positional superiority over the East. This theme will be discussed shortly in greater detail in the next section, an analysis of Orientalist artworks in the Louvre's Department of Paintings.

Imperial History in the Louvre II: Orientalist Art

The nationalization and appropriation of foreign cultures to construct an image of French identity is present in the masterpiece painting rooms of the Denon Wing of the Louvre. Visitors walking the halls that lead to the Louvre's most famous work, the *Mona Lisa*, may choose between two paths to reach Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpiece—a walk through the Grande Galerie, which features Italian art (much of it obtained by Napoleon's armies) or through masterpiece rooms of large-format nineteenth-century French paintings. The wide masterpiece rooms feature the most famous works of the great French Neoclassical

and Romantic masters of painting and are the ultimate representation of French art and artistic expression. Yet like the very inclusion of an Egyptian wing in a national French museum, images of Oriental cultures prominently featured in France's national galleries of painting illustrate the extent to which the East defines the West.

The French forays into Syria during the Egyptian campaign are memorialized in the Denon wing in Baron Jean-Antoine Gros' massive 1799 tableau *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa* (Figure 6). The Gros painting was commissioned to project a glorious message about French superiority in the face of foreign sickness and defeat was well-received at the 1804 Paris Salon. The painting's anatomic and ethnic depictions of the wounded, and the light and décor of the mosque make it, according to the Louvre audio guide, one of the earliest visual manifestations of Orientalism in nineteenth century art. Gros, who never traveled to the Orient, based the subject of his painting on the event of a visit by Napoleon (then, First Consul) to a makeshift hospital in Jaffa. The work, commissioned by Napoleon, depicts the consul as a fearless leader who against the advice of hospital doctors, reaches out to touch the wound of a plague victim with his bare hand. At the time, the contagion was thought to be transmitted by touching wounds, and as such, Napoleon demonstrates the fearlessness of the French in the territory of the Other. Unfortunately, the real history of Jaffa was much less heroic and the painting was commissioned to fight rumors spread by survivors of the conflict: Napoleon, far from merciful, had the Syrian prisoners in the battle executed by bayonet (to save on gunpowder, according to the audio guide) and was rid of his own wounded soldiers by poisoning them.

Gros' artistic representation of the actual events of the battle and his mythical message of French superiority and Oriental inferiority is more subtly and sensually echoed in

the paintings depicting exotic and foreign women by Jean-Dominique Ingres (*The Grand Odalisque*, 1814) and Eugène Delacroix (*Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, 1834) which hang a short stroll away from the Gros painting. The image of the harem woman, popularized by nineteenth-century painting and twentieth-century colonial photography, is one of the most enduring images of foreign women from Arab and Islamic cultures in Western art. Both the figure of the woman and the private space in which she was regularly painted—inside a harem, a bath, a garden—represented Western fantasies about the exotic female from fairy tales and the popular *Arabian Nights* stories published in the early decades of the eighteenth century by Antoine de Galland. The woman is also a visual metaphor for the territories and cultures of the geographical Orient to be tamed and conquered. Anne McClintock has carefully coined the term “porno-tropics” to refer to the way in which the continents of Africa, Asia and the Americas were libidinally eroticized in nineteenth-century male traveler’s tales in order to make them more accessible for the military expeditions of an imperial Europe. “Enlightenment metaphysics,” McClintock writes, “presented knowledge as a relation of power between two gendered species, articulated by a journey...the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior” (22). The fantasies of a world which is “feminized and spatially spread for male exploration,” McClintock continues, may then be “reassembled” and “deployed” with deliberate sexual implications in the interests of massive imperial power (23). As such, lands were feminized in order to better be penetrated by male explorers. The gendered representations of Oriental inferiority and Occidental superiority gave rise to fantasies of possession that manifested itself in numerous depictions of the Other in visual art.

Ingres' *Grand Odalisque*, painted in 1814, is one of the artist's earliest and most famous nudes (Figure 7). Although the figure is a product of the Neoclassical tradition of painting Greek nudes from antiquity, the painting caused a great scandal at the 1819 salon as it was exhibited without the pretext of a mythological subject. The odalisque, an Ottoman harem servant, is also infamous for her anatomically impossible figure, the elongated sensual curvature of her lower back the result of Ingres adding extra vertebrae in the spine. According to a recording for the Louvre audio guide by curator Sebastian Allard, Ingres gave the figure a longer, more slender back than that of a normal woman in pursuit of a "truly beautiful" figure. This beauty, Allard notes in the audio guide, is marked by a "disturbing sensuality," as the painting's exoticism derives from the contrast between the nude body and the opulence of her Oriental accoutrements of jewels, a turban, and the exotic-bird feather duster. The odalisque's posture is also remarkable because the pose, unlike many images of harem women and servants, sets up a dialogue with the viewer. Shown from the back rather than the front, the odalisque seems to invite the viewer with her eyes as opposed to her flesh to look upon the scene. Yet, as the audio guide points out, Ingres' unusual presentation of his subject in a long, thin frame, maximizes the impact of the figure's body by "imprisoning" her in a place that seems too small for her—in so doing, returning the power to the observer (Allard). The distortion of the odalisque's body and its enclosure into a small space are a porno-tropic gendering of the Orient as a female fantasy. The artists' imprisonment of the odalisque's body and her enclosure in a small space are representative of how foreign territories were feminized by European male explorers. The domination and imprisonment of the foreign, female territory is achieved in Ingres' painting by positioning the odalisque and by extension, the Orient as feminine, inferior, and submissive.

Just as Ingres' odalisque is the preeminent example of Western male Orientalist fantasies of the female Other, Eugène Delacroix's 1834 painting *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* is the unrivaled example of the supposedly authentic Oriental harem (Figure 8). One of the most famous paintings in the history of Orientalist art, the *Women of Algiers* depicts a scene from Delacroix's alleged visit to a harem in Algiers. In 1832, Delacroix, a young Romantic painter who had already achieved success in the Paris Salon, was invited to join an ambassadorial delegation to the Moroccan sultanate, visiting Spain, Morocco, and Algeria over the course of three months. The trip had a profound impact on the young artist, who frequently returned to his travel sketchbooks to create subjects for later paintings. The scene of *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* is based on sketches executed during artist's alleged brief, secret visit to an Algerian harem. This visit to a private Muslim interior—the first by a European artist—was considered to be the first authentic male gaze into the private domain of the colonial territory. Lounging in relaxed poses, Delacroix's women invite not only the painter, but the Western viewer into their home where their bodies become pornotropic territory to be thrust upon and consumed. The stories and images from Delacroix's journey influenced generations of subsequent painters, and later photographers to visit Oriental lands both in search of exotic artistic inspiration and to document France's colonial expansion. Their depictions of an exotic and feminized Orient provided a visual justification for France's imperial expeditions abroad and framed the invasions as paternalistic civilizing missions which validated the military control of foreign territory.

The Louvre's Orientalist paintings give viewers a selective profile France's colonial history. While some images, such as Gros' *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa*, manipulate historical facts to present a pro-French historical narrative, others, such as Ingres'

Grand Odalisque are the product of Orientalist fantasies that reverberate with imperial desire. The diverse ways in which Orientalist paintings link France's national history to its colonial enterprises demonstrate the significant role of Orientalist studies in the construction of French identity during the colonial period.

The Louvre Pyramid

France's dependence on Oriental motifs as a way to express its political and cultural identity is manifested not only in its collections of the palace's interior, but in the Louvre's exterior architecture as well. Despite controversy, the construction of the Louvre Pyramid in the 1980s and the test of a new Department of Islamic Arts to be completed in 2012 may be understood as part of the greater French and museum narrative of the establishment of a French identity and positional superiority vis-à-vis the Other.

The construction of the Louvre Pyramid in the palace's Cour Napoleon was one part of a series of renovations to the Louvre proposed by former French President François Mitterrand in the 1980s. In 1981 Mitterrand announced the decision to build the *Grand Louvre*, an expansionary project where the museum would acquire the Richelieu wing of the palace complex (at the time, Richelieu was occupied by the French Finance Ministry) and the museum would be connected underground by a large reception area to link the labyrinth wings and corridors of the palace together into a grand, cohesive museum space. The architect chosen by Mitterrand to head this project was Chinese-American architect Ieoh Ming Pei, who designed a subterranean central reception area and the now landmark large glass pyramid entrance and windows. In a 2009 interview to mark the 20th anniversary of the completion of the *Grand Louvre*, Louvre president and director Henri Loyrette recalled how

the Pyramid was described as a “gigantic gadget,” its construction decried as a “sacrilegious” and “despotic act” (Stamberg, “Landmark at the Louvre: The Pyramid Turns 20”).

Although some of this criticism stemmed from the fact that the underground mall that was part of the Pei renovation became home to a McDonald’s and France’s first Apple store, the fact that many French were unhappy with Pei’s design was not an unusual or even unexpected reaction. From the nineteenth-century implementation of the Haussmann apartment building style to the construction of the Eiffel Tower and the Centre Georges Pompidou, the “new” has always taken some getting used to before being absorbed and accepted as a part of the Parisian architectural landscape and identity. The Pyramid, interpreted by many critics as a not-so-subtle Pharaonic testament to Mitterrand’s presidency was also considered to be too different from the rest of the Louvre, its presence at the heart of the museum viewed as a threat to the Louvre itself.

Yet Mitterrand’s *Grand Louvre* project, when viewed in a historical context, was not an aberration but rather the most recent in a long line of renovations to the Louvre by which the leaders of France memorialized their legacies. The excavation of the Cour Napoleon required for the Pyramid’s construction revealed the extent of this legacy, exposing the foundations of the palace built and expanded by Charles V, François I, Cathérine de Medicis, Louis XIII, Louis XIV, Napoleon, and Napoleon III (Cinquin et al, 70). As Chantal Cinquin and Mark Aumann have explained, the Louvre is a site “saturated” with the signs of power of French history, and the discovery of these architectural remains, each built to extend the palace, place Mitterrand’s expansions in sequence with the endeavors of his political predecessors of the previous centuries.

However, the Louvre Pyramid also obviously recalls another set of architectural endeavors ordered by national leaders: the construction of pyramids of ancient Egypt. Just as the Egyptian pyramids were designed as tombs to commemorate the greatness of the Pharaohs, so Mitterrand's pyramid seemingly immortalizes his presidency and cultural legacy in France's most important and popular museum. The placement of the Pyramid in the Louvre's Cour Napoleon has been described as an ironic decision by Cinquin and Aumann, who call the idea to install a pyramid in the courtyard bearing the name of the emperor whose campaign marked the Western rediscovery of Egypt a curious tribute to France's former imperial relationship with Egypt (70). Yet the structure of the Pyramid, though vastly different from the architecture of the original palace, blends relatively cohesively and smoothly into the museum's architecture. Unlike the Obelisk of Luxor, a monument from Egyptian antiquity gifted to France in 1893 by Mehmet Ali that juts out of the middle of the Place de la Concorde, the construction of the Louvre Pyramid—whose clear glass panes allow visitors to see through the structure to the wings of the original palace—affirms the more absolute power of the museum to absorb the Egyptian structure into its own self and identity (Figure 9).

The Pyramid, then, serves several purposes in the national French museum space. First, it may be considered an important architectural and cultural addition to the Louvre which makes the museum more accessible to the public, and advances the Louvre's founding ambition to serve as a symbol of France's rich patrimony available for all to visit and admire (Oliver, 22). The Pyramid also served Mitterrand's ambition to present himself as a purveyor of culture and cemented his legacy into the permanent museum fixture and French cultural landscape by following in the footsteps of his political forebears who. And finally, by

employing an ancient Egyptian motif to embody Mitterrand's legacy and make the Louvre more accessible, the museum and its patron continued to participate in the Orientalist process of using foreign cultures to express a French identity. The success and prominence of the Pyramid illustrate the degree to which Orientalist art and architecture has become a part of the museum itself. By integrating an architectural motif from ancient Egypt as an entryway to the museum, the Pyramid represents both the absorption of Oriental cultures into the Louvre's exhibits and the museum's very structure. In so doing, the construction of the Pyramid reflects the role Orientalist artworks play in the construction of not only the Louvre museum, but French identity.

The New Department of Islamic Art

The Louvre's most recent major renovation is the construction of a new space to house the museum's newest department, the Department of Islamic Art. The new space will showcase the highlights of the Louvre's substantial collection of Islamic Art in a new structure in the heart of the Denon Wing in the Cour Visconti. The Department's construction is scheduled for completion in 2012 and, like the Pyramid in the Cour Napoleon, the project has been marked by controversy imbued with political, historical, and cultural significance.

The idea for the Department came from Former President Jacques Chirac, who stated in a 2002 speech that the creation of such a department would "highlight the universal vocation of this museum and will be a living example of cultural dialogue" ("Islamic Art in the Louvre").⁹ Of course, the Department's founding was not the first attempt at cultural dialogue in France: the Institute of the Arab World, a center built by France in partnership

⁹The question of museums creating cultural dialogue and Chirac's legacy will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter.

with eighteen Arab countries to promote international cooperation and cultural exchange had existed since 1988. In the years following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and France's participation in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the creation of an Islamic Art Department in a national French museum was a symbolic French-led gesture by Chirac to publicly display an appreciation for the Muslim world by paying tribute to its cultural past in the France's greatest museum.

In many ways, the creation of the Department of Islamic Art recalls that of the original Louvre during the French revolution. Like the 'urgent' appropriation of the royal collections in 1792, the creation of the Department of Islamic Art similarly brings thousands of works of Islamic art dispersed across French museums and other Departments of the Louvre into one location so as to present the collection in 'exemplary conditions' (McClellan, 91). The Louvre's previous display of Islamic arts, exhibited in a handful of cramped gallery rooms in the Louvre's Department of Near Eastern Antiquities, were absorbed into the new Department of Islamic Art along with the Islamic collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and the Louvre's collections of Islamic art works held in storage.

The Louvre's decision to create a Department of Islamic Art was a project that received the support of a number of Muslim-majority countries. In 2005, Saudi prince Walid bin Talal donated the largest gift ever received by the Louvre, \$20 million USD towards the construction of the Department of Islamic Art. This gift was followed by donations from the leaders of Morocco, Kuwait, Oman, and Azerbaijan. In a statement made during the signing of the donation agreement, Prince Walid declared that "relations between Europe and the Islamic world are going through a turbulent period," and that the new wing would "assist in the understanding of the true meaning of Islam, a religion of humanity, forgiveness and

acceptance of other cultures" ("The Louvre Gets \$20 Million for New Islamic Wing"). Yet as great as the gifts and the prince's aspirations were for the Department of Islamic Art, the Department, like the rest of the Louvre's collection, consists of objects from pre-history to 1848.¹⁰ The exhibition of Islamic arts dating from the seventh century to the early nineteenth history will doubtless be rich and compelling exhibition of Islamic history, but it will also be one that falls short of engaging with the contemporary issues that prompted the construction of the wing in the first place. By constraining the exhibit's exploration of Islamic art to past historical periods and movements, Prince Walid's "true meaning of Islam" is confined to the pre-twentieth century, inadvertently limiting the mission of creating cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, by entrusting the task of changing public Western perceptions of Islam to the French curators of the Louvre, the foreign donors implicitly invite the West to once again speak "for" the Other. This implied invitation reinforces the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient which have historically reiterated European superiority over Oriental backwardness (Said, 7).

The contract to design the new Department's architecture was awarded to French and Italian architects Rudi Ricciotti and Mario Bellini in 2005. Like the Pyramid, the designs for the Department of Islamic Arts have also aroused controversy. A number of critics believe the project's flexible roof, which has alternately been described as resembling a "sail," "flying carpet," and "giant glass headscarf," draws too much attention to itself and away from the Louvre and its collections (Figure 10). In a demonstration of how quickly the past is forgotten, the Department of Islamic Art's architecture is seen by some as threat to the

¹⁰Western art created after this date is exhibited at the Musée D'Orsay which showcases art works from 1848-1914, and contemporary art from all nationalities is exhibited at the Centre Georges Pompidou, which collects works by artists born after 1870. Nationally-owned non-Western art (fine art and decorative arts) are exhibited in specialized museums which generally originated as galleries for the Expositions Universelles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Louvre's classic identity. "Unlike the pyramid or other prior expansions of the Louvre, [the Department of Islamic Art exhibition space] aims at becoming a piece of art itself and rivaling the collection," Jérôme Auzolle, an architecture critic based in Paris, points out ("In Paris, Islamic Art under a Flying Carpet").

Ironically, the roof, which is commonly referred to as "the Veil," draws unwanted attention to France's internal cross-cultural conflicts with its Muslim population (Figure 11). The presence of "the Veil" in a national public museum recalls the "veil" debate over the right of Muslim women to wear religious headscarves in public schools. In 2005, headscarves were deemed "conspicuous religious symbols" by the French government and subsequently prohibited in public schools and other arenas, and in 2010 France banned the wearing of full-face veils in public places. Unlike the department of Egyptian antiquities and the Orientalist paintings on display around the Cour Visconti, the Department of Islamic Art appears to make no effort to connect its collections with their French-linked past or present. Though ostensibly well-intended, the Louvre's proposition to exhibit "the juxtaposition of various cultures and the constant exchange between the different regions of the Islamic world" limits the discussion of Islam to its presence in Muslim-majority countries ("Department of Islamic Art"). The omission of France's history and its interactions with the Islamic world before 1848 in the collection and curation of these objects is a missed opportunity for discussion and reflection of a past that informs the pressing cross-cultural relationship in need of discussion in France today: the one between France and its ever-growing Muslim population.

The decision to create a department of Islamic Art in the Louvre can be understood as a commitment on the part of the Louvre to expand its study of Islamic art and showcase its

collection to the world as a purveyor and protector of culture. However, the museum's "universal" mission of exhibiting cultures is one that retains a measured historical scope of said culture. The presence and attention afforded to Arabo-Islamic art and motifs in the Louvre collections are popular and politically acceptable allocations of resources as long as France is playing its role of an (Orientalist) protector of culture. Yet when Arabo-Islamic designs such as "the Veil" draw attention to contemporary French political and cultural issues, their integration into the museum structure upsets the positive efforts intended by the "Islam" exhibit and challenges the pro-imperialist artworks and exhibitions elsewhere in the Louvre. Like the exhibition of non-Western art in the Pavillon des Sessions, the architecture of the Department of Islamic Art is perceived as a threat to the Louvre's mission and identity because it engages with contemporary political cultural issues that are typically outside the Louvre's scope.

Although the Louvre's collections of art and antiquities from around the world make the palace a universal museum, the Louvre's mission may be understood to be more one of national cultural preservation than as a site for intercultural exchange. The Louvre's Orientalist collections and artwork and its use of Oriental-inspired architecture are largely intended as platforms to showcase a national narrative of French history. While the Louvre's collections feature works from or featuring the Orient across its departments, the exhibition of Orientalist art and collections are intended to be viewed as a part of the French museum and assessed in the context of their place in French history and French identity formation. The following section analyzes how two different and more recently established national museums, the Musée du Quai Branly and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration

engage with art from the Orient and Arabo-Islamic themes with the specific intention of fostering cultural dialogue.

Chapter III

The Musée du Quai Branly and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration

“Museums attempting to act responsibly in complex, multicultural environments are bound to find themselves enmeshed in controversy:” so state Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine in their introduction to *Exhibiting Cultures* (5). Karp and Lavine use the example of an exhibition of Hispanic art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas, to discuss the difficulty museums have in managing a multicultural message. Although the curators had intended the exhibit to serve as an introduction to Hispanic art for a general audience not familiar with the artists and styles, the exhibit, “Hispanic Art in the United States,” was criticized for omitting political forms of Hispanic art. The show also received criticism for focusing too intently on folkloric and primitive artworks and “stripping” works of their linkages to the social arenas fundamental to Hispanic art and cultural expression.

The Hispanic exhibit in Houston exemplifies the difficulties faced by any museum that engages with a multicultural audience or shares a multicultural message. This chapter will compare the missions of two major national museums in Paris that expressly treat themes of multiculturalism, and the challenges of exhibiting controversial aspects of French history: the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB), which opened in 2006, and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI), which opened one year later in 2007. I will focus on the development of these museums and the purpose they serve in the French national museum landscape and shaping French history and identity. I am especially interested in identifying

the ways national museums exhibit Oriental cultures to the public, and the extent to which these museums spaces are able to truly foster the cross-cultural dialogue prescribed as their goal by their founders and curators. In addition, I investigate the significance of the location of these museums in the Parisian landscape, as the location of each museum is highly symbolic of the place of multiculturalism, immigration, colonialism, and the levels of acceptance of Arab and Muslim cultures in French society today. For each museum, I will first discuss why and how the museum came to be founded, and the history of the space or structure that houses the museum. I will then highlight examples of exhibits from each museum's collection that demonstrate how Arab or Muslim cultures are represented, and conclude by discussing the significance of the museum and its exhibitions in the context of French museums and French identity.

The Musée du Quai Branly

Located in a building designed by Jean Nouvel, the esteemed architect of the Institut du Monde Arabe, the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB) is described in museum publications as a “cultural museum” which offers an “innovative” and “diversified” approach to non-Western cultures (Exhibition Map, Musée du Quai Branly Permanent Collection). The museum was commissioned in 1995 by former French President Jacques Chirac who, either in the spirit of or perhaps in competition with his predecessor President Mitterrand's *Grands Projets*, declared his intention to showcase “France's faith in the virtues of cultural diversity and dialogue” in a new museum (“Chirac Leaves Controversial Legacy with Monument to African and Asian Culture”). Located 100 meters from the Eiffel tower, the MQB received its name from the museum's location on an embankment (*quai*) named for nineteenth century French physicist Edouard Branly. However, within the MQB's history—from its location to

its original name of “Musée des arts premiers” as well as its exhibition of its collection of Oriental and other non-Western cultures— are details that cloud the museum’s prescribed prerogative (“Narratives of Colonialism”).

One hundred years earlier, the grounds of the Eiffel Tower were the site of another ethnographic display: the human zoos of the Expositions Universelles. These exhibitions of indigenous peoples, Tony Mitchell writes, were designed to set up the non-Western world as a living museum that objectified non-Western cultures by creating living, breathing displays of the colonial Other to be experienced by a domineering European gaze (293). Although the founding of the MQB approximately one hundred years later was intended to have exactly the opposite effect, the legacy of the Expositions Universelles and their colonial zoos and museums feeds directly into the MQB: not only is the MQB built upon the same soil as the colonial zoos, but an incalculable number of the artifacts in the MQB originated from the Expositions Universelles cultural pavilions-turned-colonial-turned national museums. Many of the objects in the MQB’s collection came from Musée de l’Homme in Paris, which had exhibited the skeleton and genitals of the “Hottentot Venus” Saartjie Baartman until 1974, and also from the now-defunct Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens, which did not date or record the history of artifacts acquired before or during the colonial period (“Chirac Leaves Controversial Legacy with Monument to African and Asian Culture”).

Chirac’s vision for the MQB eerily echoes that of nineteenth-century Orientalist scholar Sylvestre de Stacy. De Stacy, whose pupils included future Louvre Egyptian antiquities director Jean-François Champollion, dreamed of establishing a museum that would be a “vast depot of objects of all kinds, of drawings, of original books, maps, accounts of voyages, all offered to those who wish to give themselves to the study of [the Orient]....

each of these students would be able to feel himself transported as if by enchantment into the midst of, say, a Mongolian tribe or of the Chinese race, whichever he might have made the object of his studies” (qtd. in Mitchell, 165). Though not intended as such, the MQB would have undoubtedly surpassed de Stacy’s wildest imaginings for such an institution.

Although the museum was founded to place the art of the non-Western world on equal footing with the collections of the Louvre, the MQB’s architectural execution and curation keep the MQB from demonstratively espousing the equal dignity of the world’s cultures. In a 2006 speech to commemorate the opening of the MQB Chirac stated that the art in the MQB were pieces to “rival the finest examples of Western art” in reference to the Louvre’s collections of Western art and its disapproval of the Pavillon des Sessions (Address by Jacques Chirac). But unlike the various art Departments at the Louvre, which are distinctly separated by medium, civilization, and/or national origin, the MQB’s homage to non-Western art has a homogenizing effect on the collections. The cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas though breathtakingly exhibited in the MQB, are only presented in dialogue with each other and not with French or Western art. The MQB, claimed by Chirac to be designed to “hold up the infinite diversity of peoples and arts against the bland, looming grip of uniformity” actually makes the collection’s diversity nearly indiscernible by presenting the artworks in an infinite looping space that, dim and cavernous, makes it difficult for visitors to distinguish where Africa ends and Asia begins.

East and West, on the other hand, are duly separated by the MQB’s jungle-like foliage which, contained by tall glass walls, obstruct views of the museum from the busy Quai Branly. Looking up, visitors may spy the Eiffel tower’s spire upon entering the grounds (Figure 12). The museum itself, a large rectangular building paneled with earthy browns,

reds, and yellow metals, is raised above the ground, standing on leg-like columns that support the exhibitions within. Visitors to the permanent collection are invited up a walkway that spirals upward as words and text in different languages are projected on the floor, flowing downward like water in a multimedia installation called the “River”. Upon reaching the top of the walkway and the “River,” visitors then walk through a dark, intestine-like tunnel before emerging into the dramatically lit cavern of the MQB’s permanent collection in the center of large rectangular central room. Museum guide pamphlets and signs encourage visitors are encouraged to travel around the length of the rectangle, moving clockwise around the four corners of the non-Western world: Oceania, Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Figure 13).

The cavernous darkness of the museum’s main collection, and the limited information presented on the labels has frustrated many of its visitors and critics. In “Paris Primitive,” an in-depth study of the MQB, Sally Price reports that the vast majority of the decisions about how to exhibit the objects came from the building’s architect, Jean Nouvel. Nouvel’s devotion to the aesthetic harmony of not only the cave-like mezzanine of the permanent collection but in fact, to almost every aspect of the MQB (including the dishes and glassware used in the MQB’s rooftop restaurant) resulted in a highly naturalistic but educationally limited structure whose fluid organic exhibition of objects is easy to walk through but difficult to learn from (146). Nouvel opposed placing informational or contextualizing films, photographs, or documents in close proximity to the objects because the labels were thought to distract from the museum’s nature-inspired conceptual design. As a result, viewers seeking more information of pieces are often forced to step away from the object to search for labels. Once labels are located, visitors then have difficulty reading the text: Price quotes one

museum viewer's advice that "visitors might be encouraged to take a small torch for use in some areas if only to avoid straining the eyes" (148).

The darkness of the exhibitions is problematic for French historian Gilles Manceron, a scholar whose criticism of the museum reflects the problematic nature of the MQB's design as a site for cultural dialogue. "Many historians feel France has not come to terms with the real history of its colonial era. This idea of a jungle or a forest surrounding the museum, a place where you will discover the 'dark continent' is a problem," Manceron said, "as if these other continents are still savage, exuberant, dangerous and primitive. These are all the old clichés that still abound in France" ("Chirac Leaves Controversial Legacy with Monument to Asian and African Culture.").

Although the MQB's jungle-like exterior and heart of darkness interior draw unintentional parallels to colonial impressions of Africa as a menacing continent out of a Joseph Conrad novella, explorations of the somber realities of France's colonial history and the provenance of the MQB's African artworks are literally and figuratively left in the dark. Like the Louvre's Department of Egyptian Antiquities, the MQB avoids mentioning the colonial provenance of these objects and instead focuses on the story of the explorers who brought the artworks to France. Artworks are acknowledged in the Africa itinerary to have been collected during nineteenth century "exploration missions," a euphemistic title for the colonial missions that sent the objects back to France for display at first, the Expositions Universelles and later, in colonial museums. The fact that the colonial nature of many of the missions that brought back non-Western artifacts to France is left out of the MQB's descriptions seems to be proof of France's simultaneous discomfort and inability to reconcile the negative aspects of its colonial history in the museum setting. By describing the French

presence in Africa as a series of “exploration missions” in the Africa itinerary, the imperial nature of collecting in the nineteenth-century is avoided. Instead, the museum attempts to focus on a less politically-volatile mission of exhibiting and preserving culture for public consumption in the museum setting.

The categorization of late nineteenth and early twentieth century artifacts as the objects of ‘contemporary’ non-Western societies often teeter dangerously between ethnographic and neo-Orientalist in several exhibits and label descriptions. The MQB’s affirmation that their displays of non-Western cultures are representations of “contemporary societies” is especially problematic when the objects, many of which date from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, are curated as timeless products of traditional cultures. The following exploration of a selection of Arabo-Islamic artistic and cultural traditions on display at the MQB will illustrate the difficulty described by Karp and Levine of managing a multicultural message in the museum environment.

The Homogenization of Oriental Societies

In an Asia itinerary display label, the MQB states that its Asian collections are designed to complement the “ancient history” on display at the Louvre by focusing on the daily lives and practices of “contemporary societies.” The definition of late nineteenth and early twentieth century artifacts as contemporary representations of non-Western societies invalidates both the colonial history of the objects as well as the contemporary cultures and societies whose artistic traditions are not represented in the museum. In an informational video called “Parures de femmes orientales” about Oriental women’s decoration and adornment practices, the text of the title screen informs visitors that “depuis des millénaires, les femmes orientales ont utilisé les produits que leur offre la nature pour embellir leur

corps.”¹¹ Although each image is titled with a description of the adornment and the country where the photo was taken, the video does not provide a geographic definition for the “Orient” show in the video. Although works from countries typically described as “Oriental” in the history of French studies of Arab cultures (Algeria, Morocco, the Levant, etc.) are all present in the MQB’s collection, there is no specific collection of objects or geographical grouping for the “Orient.” Pieces from the Arabo-Islamic world, which range from clothing and ceramics to rugs and religious artifacts, are spread across the museum’s Asian and African collections.

The perceived homogeneity and timelessness of the Orient of nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse resurfaces in the “Parures” video, copyrighted by the MQB in 2005. The video is a compilation of undated photographs of women wearing henna, kohl, and jewelry that alternates between these images and short descriptions of the history of these adornments (Figure 14). Although the origins for specific photographs are unknown, the images are attributed to four Western travel photographers and ethnographers active in the Levant and the Arab Gulf, most of whom published travel photography books in the mid-to-late twentieth century.¹² The women and traditions profiled in the video are from small tribes living in remote regions of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman, whose pre-oil boom cultures are presented as secret, authentic practices full of meaning. For example, the practice of drawing in henna is described by the video as a clandestine and superstitious language to protect the wearer. This idea is enhanced by the photographs of women’s spread palms which

¹¹Translation: For millennia, Oriental women have used products offered to them by nature to adorn (embellish) their bodies. Note: All translations in this thesis are my own, unless otherwise noted.

¹²The photographers cited at the end of the film are, in order of appearance: Maria Maréchaux (French), Thierry Mauger (French), Photography Shelagh Weir (British), and Jean-Claude Chabrier (French).

simultaneously show off the henna designs yet also seem to ward off the gaze of the photographer by stopping the camera from coming any closer.

Though ostensibly photographed for anthropological research, the “Parures” images and descriptions of women wearing henna, kohl, and traditional jewelry evoke the pornographic women of Orientalist painting and pornographic travel photography (Figure 15). The late nineteenth century saw a burgeoning number of European photographers traveling East to cater to the growing public interest in information on exotic peoples and cultures (Maxwell, 38). In France, photographs of non-Western peoples first emerged at the Expositions Universelles and in the colonies, where highly erotic photographs of North African women became popular with pied-noirs and tourists alike.

The rise of travel photography coincided with the rise of visual pornography and the popularity of the pornographic postcard (Sigel, 860). While pornographic images of Western women were censored or sent in envelopes, these criteria did not apply to images of “foreign nor colonial” women (or men). “Pubic hair, genitalia, and nipples could pass by the censors,” Sigel explains, “if the card portrayed a colonial or foreign subject” (Sigel, 861). The relaxed standards for censorship and representations of the colonized in their natural dress and habitat instituted racialist images of colonial subjects and foreign people.

As such, the emphasis on adornment in the “Parures” video recalls colonial photographers’ usage of clothing, particularly veils, and jewelry to accentuate the nakedness of colonized subjects (Sigel, 862). While the MQB’s discussion of female adornment in Oriental cultures provides visitors with information of how these adornments were traditionally worn in Levantine and Gulf societies, the absence of information about how Oriental adornment was used by the West to exoticize and sexualize foreign women’s bodies

is absent. By only presenting information about the traditional uses of these adornments and not their colonial usage, a Franco-Oriental cross-cultural dialogue about the history of adornment is limited to one perspective.

But while the history of Oriental female adornment is displayed only from the Western perspective, the history of another Oriental tradition is displayed in a significantly more globalized point of view. The history of veiling, the subject of colonial fascination and contemporary frustration in France is addressed by the MQB in “Voiles de Visage,” a display of nineteenth and twentieth-century face veils from the Arabian Gulf countries (Figure 16). Although the heavily decorated nineteenth and twentieth-century face veils on display at the MQB are examples of traditional national costumes that have largely disappeared from wear and circulation in Gulf countries today, the MQB makes an impressive effort to talk about the global history and practices of veiling, engaging in a truly cross-cultural dialogue between the Arab world and the West:

Nous ignorons quand et où apparaît la coutume pour les femmes de se voiler le visage. Les plus anciens témoignages iconographiques proviennent de Grèce et datent du Ve-VI^e siècle avant J-C. Il s'agit de figurines en terre cuite représentant des femmes effectuant un pas de danse. Le voile qui recouvre leur visage, ne laissant apparaître que les yeux, est sans doute l'attribut d'une danse rituelle dite « danse au manteau. » La Bible évoque aussi le port du voile du visage. Le voile qui couvre les yeux de la Bien-aimée dans le Cantique des cantiques (IV, 4) apparaît comme un ornement qui met en valeur la beauté du visage. Au 2^e siècle après J-C, Tertullien de Carthage parle élogieusement des femmes d'Arabie qui cachent leur visage ne laissant apparaître qu'un œil. Au moyen âge, la coutume du port du voile de visage est attestée dans diverses régions du Moyen-Orient comme en témoignent de nombreuses miniatures. Le voile de visage a évolué au cours de siècles tout comme les valeurs qu'ils véhiculent. Ses formes et couleurs ont changé au gré des modes et des influences régionales. Cette coutume vestimentaire, vieille de plusieurs siècles, s'est perpétuée jusqu'à nos jours. (Musée du Quai Branly)¹³

¹³Translation: We do not know when the tradition for women to veil their faces first appeared. The oldest iconographic documents come from Greece in the 5th and 6th centuries B.C. Clay images depicted women engaging in a type of dance. A veil covers their faces, only letting the eyes show through. It is most likely a

By describing the veil as a custom that has been practiced in many different ways by many different cultures over the centuries, the “Voiles de Visage” exhibit demonstrates the rich and diverse history of the veil as a form of adornment. The inclusions of a Biblical reference to veiling and the existence of veiling practices in pre-Islamic history establish the plurality of veiling traditions, including veiling as adornment in the Christian tradition, in and outside the Orient. Interestingly, the fact that the MQB is able to speak clearly about veiling as a form of adornment but not as an expression of religion appears to reflect the divisive political debates about Islamic veiling in France.

The MQB’s omissions of Islam and the history of face veiling as a religious practice in the “Voiles de Visage” exhibit are important because the Islamic veil is one of the most controversial religious symbols in French debates about multiculturalism. Since 1989, when three Muslim girls in the northern town of Creil were sent home for wearing headscarves to school, debates about veiling practices have occupied French newspapers, airwaves, and political discussions as a threat to French identity. Legislation that outlawed Islamic veils in 2004 was constructed as part of a general secular ban on “conspicuous religious symbols” in schools and some public and governmental spaces. The passing of a French law in 2010 which made the covering of the face in any public place (including shops and the streets) illegal has been critiqued by both Muslims and non-Muslims in France to specifically target wearers of full-face Islamic veils such as the *niqab* or *burqa* (“France Enforces Ban on Full-face Veils in Public”). Like the 2004 law, the 2010 law was presented as legislation designed

prop in a ritual dance called the “coat dance.” The Bible also makes mention of face veiling. In the Song of Solomon (4:1) the veil that covers the eyes of the Beloved is described as an adornment that highlights the beauty of the face. In the 2nd century AD Tertullian of Carthage speaks highly of Arab women who hide their faces, only letting one eye show. In the Middle Ages, the practice of veiling is documented in many regions of the Middle East in miniature paintings. The face veil has evolved over the course of the centuries, like the values it has espoused. Its shape and color have changed according to fashion and regional influences. This centuries-old clothing custom has perpetuated until today.

to defend women's rights and re-state the liberal and secular traditions of French society. However, both laws were largely seen and understood to be part of a growing right-wing French movement to counter the influence and presence of Islam in France. Proponents of the law argued that the 2010 law was actually designed to "liberate" Muslim women and was a demonstration of France's refusal to tolerate veiling, perceived by right-wing officials to be a "subservient" garment and "tomb of women" ("France Wakes Up to a Burqa Ban as Sarkozy Unveils a New Era"). Unfortunately, the law and its supporters did not realize that the bill not only violated the freedom of expression of the majority of veiled women who choose to wear full-face veils but also endangered a small proportion of Muslim women in France who are forced to wear the veil by obligating them to remove it.

This absence of perception and understanding of the purpose and function of Islamic veiling practices was also present in the 2011 MQB show "L'Orient des Femmes (vu par Christian Lacroix)" ("The Female Orient as seen by Christian Lacroix"), a temporary exhibition curated by the titular French fashion designer (Figure 17). Decrying the "somber" veiling of post-1970s Islam, the exhibition description for "L'Orient des Femmes" promised visitors a show that would "unveil" the richness of the Orient and its women in a dazzling array of color and cloth:

Depuis les années 1970, l'image et la physionomie de la femme du Proche-Orient ont changé. De nos jours, ce que l'on nomme « la tenue islamique » s'impose partout. De couleur sombre, elle recouvre le corps des femmes sans en rien laisser paraître et conduit, de fait, à l'abandon progressif des costumes traditionnels orientaux entraînant la disparition des derniers témoins d'un art vestimentaire séculaire.

En exposant pour la première fois une sélection de robes traditionnelles venues d'une vaste zone située en plein cœur du « Croissant fertile », du nord de la Syrie à la péninsule du Sinaï, le musée du quai Branly donne aux visiteurs la possibilité de découvrir la diversité des modes de vie et des coutumes des populations proche-orientales.

Il dévoile alors un autre visage de la femme orientale en portant un regard neuf, vif et esthétique sur leurs créations traditionnelles. (“L’Orient des Femmes Vu Par Christian Lacroix,” Musée du Quai Branly)¹⁴

Though the exhibit was three years in the making, the exhibition dates for “L’Orient des Femmes” from February 8, 2011 to May 15, 2011, curiously coinciding with the moment that the 2010 law banning full-face coverings went into effect on April 11, 2011.¹⁵ Although the goals of the exhibit were noble—to give voice to the women and clothing traditions that were ‘silenced’ by Islamic rule and legislation of dress in recent decades—the symbolic ‘liberation’ of Muslim women in an exhibit celebrating nineteenth century clothing while French Muslim women’s right to veil was being violated outside was an ironic coincidence that highlights the neo-Orientalist nature of the MQB Lacroix exhibit as well as the French government in their attempts to act on the Other’s behalf. This attempt to speak for and liberate the Oriental woman is the very embodiment of Said’s description of Orientalism as the Western style for “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over” the Other’s culture (3). Despite its efforts to present a descriptive informational history where cultures dialogue ‘together,’ the Musée du Quai Branly’s mission is compromised by its inability to reconcile its colonial past together in multicultural message that serves a multiplicity of persons and perspectives.

¹⁴Translation (from MQB official website): Since the 1970s, the image and appearance of Near Eastern women have changed. Today, what we call "Islamic dress" imposes itself across the region. This dark costume completely covers the body of woman, leaving no part visible, and is in fact leading to the progressive abandonment of traditional eastern costumes, causing the disappearance of the final remnants of a secular art of clothes. By exhibiting for the first time a selection of traditional dresses originating from a vast area at the heart of the "Fertile Crescent", from Northern Syria to the Sinai Peninsula, the Musée du Quai Branly offers its visitors the opportunity to discover the diverse ways of life and costumes of Near Eastern women. It unveils a different face of the Oriental woman, taking a new, lively and aesthetic look at their traditional creations.

¹⁵Interestingly, the show also coincided with the 2011 “Arab Spring” movements for political change and reform in which women were active participants.

The Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration

The third museum space of interest in this study is that of the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI), France's first immigration museum which opened one year after the MQB in the eastern outskirts of Paris in 2007. Situated in the Palais de la Porte Dorée (PPD), a building constructed for Paris' 1931 Exposition Universelle, the CNHI's mission of recognizing immigrant contributions to France has made it a controversial site of French cultural heritage.

The history of the PPD provides an important historical context for the development of the CNHI. The building was constructed as a showroom for the 1931 Exposition Universelle, held in the Bois de Vincennes across the street. Three decades before the Algerian revolution and the dissolution of France's colonial empire, the 1931 Exposition was a display of the diverse wealth and resources of France's overseas colonies and territories. The Exposition showcased the fruits of France's colonial endeavors with displays of native temples and houses, as well as the highly popular and economically lucrative attraction of human zoos. The PPD was created as a pavilion to exhibit showcasing France's political, economic, and moral contributions to its colonial possessions (Price, 98). The friezes on the PPD's exterior, which still exist today, feature frescoes of exotic animals as well as laborers in France's African, Asian, and Oceanic overseas territories who toil under the auspices of an allegorical *France civilatrice* who graces the building's doorway (Figure 18). After the Exposition Universelle, the space became a permanent colonial museum, the Musée de la France d'Outre-Mer, overseen by the Ministry of Colonies until 1960. Following France's exit from Indochina and its war with Algeria in the 1950s, the name of the museum was changed to the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens (MAAO) and the museum was re-

structured as an ethnographic museum, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. The museum did not receive national museum status until the 1970s, and even with this distinction, the PPD's cellar aquarium (built in 1931 for the Exposition Universelle), a natural-history exhibit, remained the PPD's most popular attraction. Even today, a majority of visitors visit the Aquarium in conjunction with their visit to the zoo in the Bois de Vincennes across the street from the PPD, skipping the CNHI exhibits altogether ("Une Collection en Devenir"). Despite the efforts of MAAO director Cécil Guitart to re-brand the museum as a place for a dialogue of cultures by integrating contemporary art into the museum's collection in 1992, the MAAO was plagued by administrative and bureaucratic upheavals throughout the 1990s, so much so that parts of its collection were acquired by the MQB to become a permanent part of that museum's collection. The MAAO closed its doors in 2003, and the 'dialogue of cultures' slogan was adopted by the developers of the MQB shortly thereafter (Price, 99).

Chirac's decision to sanction the creation of a national immigration museum in 2004 was a realization of an idea that had been germinating for over a decade in the minds and plans of immigrant interest groups and historians ("President Sarkozy and France's Right Snub the Opening of New National Museum of the History of Immigration"). However, the decision to establish an immigration museum in a building that had been used to propagate France's colonial endeavors was met with resistance by a number of scholars of colonialism and immigration, such as Benjamin Stora who stated that the choice of the PPD created confusion, and Pascal Blanchard, who claimed that the use of the PPD as an immigration museum "negates" colonial memory (qtd. in Hall, 32). Speaking in response to these critiques, future CNHI director, Jacques Toubon, a French minister and politician who

worked closely with Chirac on the project, said that it was precisely because the PPD had been a site of pro-colonial ethnographic propaganda that it was an appropriate site for the new immigration museum:

Lieu de glorification de la mission civilisatrice de la France, [le CNHI] deviendra l'institution culturelle qui portera à la conscience de tous les Français l'apport décisif des immigrés européens et coloniaux à la construction du pays. (qtd. in Blanc-Chaléard, 138)¹⁶

Toubon argued that turning the PPD into an immigration museum would link France's immigrant present to its colonial past, embodying a change in French perspective in regards to immigration and its colonial legacy. In the wake of the MAAO collections move to the MQB, the establishment of a new center of multicultural exchange in the former colonial palace appeared to be an effort to revive a meaningful focus on the Other in the PPD.

"Neither the relationship between colonization and immigration," Toubon promised in 2005, "nor the situations of persons from the overseas departments and territories will be neglected" (Price, 101). The opening of a museum of immigration seemed to represent the advent a revised history, a 'new homage' to the multicultural origins of the contemporary French state.

And yet, the museum's opening was still plagued with controversy in 2007: On October 8, two days before the official opening of the CNHI, President Nicolas Sarkozy created the Ministry of Immigration and National Identity. The ministry is responsible for monitoring and reigning in the flow of immigrants to France, as well as promoting a French identity that according to SOS Racisme activist Nesmah Kerbach, "divides people...between migrants and French people born in France" (Bernault, 140). The creation

¹⁶Translation: Once a site that glorified France's « civilizing mission, the [CNHI] will become a cultural institution that will raise awareness in all French people of the decisive contributions of European and colonial immigrants to nation-building.

of this bureau caused an uproar at the CNHI, where eight of the twelve CNHI historians resigned in protest against the new ministry. Neither Sarkozy nor the new Minister of Immigration and National Identity, Brice Hortefeux, attended the museum's opening on October 10 ("President Sarkozy and France's Right Snub the Opening of New National Museum of the History of Immigration").

The question of how to address immigration and by extension, race and colonialism in France and French history has been a contentious topic since at least 2005 when French schools, from research university programs to children's education, were required to study France's positive contributions to its colonies, presented as "civilizing missions" (Price, 41). Although the short-lived legislation was retracted in 2006, to France's political right, the CNHI's recognition of French multiculturalism appears sacrilegious in a country where official recognition of ethnicity is banned (Price, 40). Though racism is a serious social issue in France, discrimination goes largely unlabeled in the public sphere, where data about ethnic or religious affiliation is not collected nor used to quantify people outside the categories of "French" or "foreigner" (Price, 40). The CNHI thus challenges the longstanding idea of a uniform French identity by dividing France's population into ethnic, religious, and social categories.

***La machine à rêve* by Kader Attia**

The CNHI's permanent exhibition space is split into four separate parts to tell the story of immigration to France from the nineteenth century to the present (Figure 19). As immigrants from Muslim-majority Arab world make up the greatest percentage of immigrants to France, art and information about Arab and Muslim immigrant issues feature prominently in the museum's exhibits ("French Muslims fight for Recognition and

Respect”). Visitors begin in the “Prologue,” a series of maps with chronological and demographic information about immigration. Interestingly, information about immigration is not limited to French trends but includes a number of global migration patterns, such as Mexicans to the United States and South Americans to Spain in addition to French immigration and emigration trends. Although the three sets of maps hanging from the ceiling in the “Prologue” contain a variety of interesting fact and figures, it is the modern art installation *La machine à rêve* (“The Dream Machine”) that draws visitors’ attention and interest (Figure 20).

La machine à rêve, a 3-D installation of a mannequin examining the selection of a vending machine at the entrance to the “Prologue” is the creation of Kader Attia (b.1970), a French-born artist of Algerian extraction who studied at the l’Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. His original *machine à rêve* installation was presented at the Venice Biennale in 2003 and depicted a man in a hooded jump-suit emblazoned with the word “Hallal” examining the choices of a vending machine whose wares included marriage kits, gold credit cards, and gin, among other items for “sale.” For the CNHI, Attia created a female version of the first installation in 2008. The female mannequin wears a stylish black “Hallal” tracksuit, her head veiled in a fashionable “Hallal” brand silk scarf as she surveys the choices of her dream vending machine. The machine, Attia has explained, is meant to represent the dream of integration held by a number of young girls in France who feel that they are not accepted in French society. The CNHI installation, created in 2008, alludes to the integration difficulties faced by Muslim girls and women who wear the headscarf as well as the commercial nature of identity. The serious yet disturbingly comical mix of items in the vending machine from France and the Arab world showcase the conflicts and choices

immigrants face in their attempt to become a part of French culture. The vending machine in the CNHI displays everything from *chadors*, a type of Islamic veil, in plastic bags and packets of *chorba*, a traditional North African soup to the candy, condoms and cigarettes one would expect to find in regular Western vending machines. Of the machine's traditional and non-traditional selections competing for the viewer's attention, two pamphlets are also for sale in the display: one, a publication entitled "Comment perdre son accent de banlieue en trois jours" ("How to lose your *banlieue* accent in three days"), the title written across the book in French and Arabic (Figure 21). The second, a small pink guide, is entitled "Comment rencontrer le musulman charmant" ("How to meet a charming Muslim man"). All of the products—from *chorba* to *chadors* to condoms—bear the stamp "*halal*" on their labels, a mischievous yet meaningfully deliberate detail. The Arabic word *halal* means lawful, and in the Islamic context, in Muslim-majority countries, it is used to express moral permissibility. Food that has been prepared according to Muslim dietary laws, for example, is usually marked as *halal*, like the *chorba* packets in the vending machine. By putting a *halal* label on everything in the vending machine, and corrupting the word with two L's into a brand name (the mannequin's track suit and the faux brand-name pencil cases for sale in the vending machine are labeled "hallal"), Attia expresses how the practice of consuming another culture and the strict observance of one's cultural rituals become all-consuming as words and labels lose their meaning ("*La machine à rêve* de Kader Attia"). The still figure of the mannequin choosing an item from the vending machine reflects the struggle of French immigrants who frequently feel compelled to choose between a desire to belong to a new society and the wish to hold onto their heritage in a new and unfamiliar setting.

“Reference Points” in the CNHI Permanent Collection

Moving out of the “Prologue,” the visit continues into the CNHI’s main exhibition space, a large room titled “Repères”¹⁷ which summarize the history of immigration to France in nine thematic sequences. These sequences present the history and experience of immigration to France, the acquisition of French nationality, and contributions of foreign cultures to the arts, language, and everyday objects. The exhibition takes its name from the titular “points of reference,” vertical columns that present the historical material and archival resources such as documents, photos, and film abstracts in a multi-media presentation that reflects the multicultural history of French immigration (Figure 22). However, the *approche croisée* (“intersectional approach”) the museum uses to present the history of immigration using a variety of media and perspectives appears in many of the exhibit sequences which attempt to gloss over the hate and hardship immigrants encountered on French soil.

The CNHI’s reluctance to tackle some difficult questions of French history is illustrated by the CNHI’s contradictorily-named exhibit on French xenophobia titled “Hostile France, land of refuge.” The exhibit’s criticism acknowledges the French fear of others, yet mitigates this fear by emphasizing to the museum-goer that this type of fear is typical of any encounter with people of different backgrounds. “In every era,” the museum guide’s introduction to the “Hostile France” reminds the reader, “public opinion reinvents the figure of the foreigner who doesn’t assimilate.” Is this to say that foreigners who do assimilate are no longer loathed? Comments from museum visitors who visited the CNHI shortly after its opening expressed experiences to the contrary. One anonymous visitor stated that in spite of being born in France, he felt as though he was not accepted by his country, saying “I’m still

¹⁷The literal translation of the French word “Repères” is “bearings.” The CNHI English exhibit title is “Points of Reference.”

referred to as someone ‘of immigrant origin’ and not as a real Frenchman.” Another visitor with an immigrant family heritage echoed these comments in an anecdote from his family history: “My great-grandfather was a French colonial official and he received a Legion d’Honneur...but I will always be considered here as a foreigner. The French have all these words about universalism and such, but it’s not something they act out in daily life” (“New Immigration Museum in France Celebrates a Changing French Society”).

Though many parts of the “Répères” exhibition descriptions sound apologist or defensive, they do acknowledge the difficulties encountered by immigrants during the nineteenth century and in some subtle instances, the discrimination many immigrants experience today. “With each wave of immigration,” the “Hostile France” introduction text in the museum guide reads, “grievances return; with each crisis, tensions are exacerbated.” Is this a reference to the 2005 banlieue riots in the outskirts of Paris, which began when two North African youths were chased through a power grid and electrocuted while running away from the French police? Or does it reinforce the tensions of the ongoing veil debate and arguments over secularity? Although life as an immigrant in France is difficult and assimilation seemingly evasive, the “land of refuge” component of the exhibit seems to espouse a positive message of hope and change. “From one era to another,” the text concludes, “there are French people who turn their back on xenophobia and choose solidarity.” It is this solidarity that fuels the museum’s work, in spite of its muted displays on France’s hot-button immigration and multiculturalism topics.

Mother Tongue by Zineb Sedira

The CNHI’s solidarity with the immigrant populations whose story it aims to share is best demonstrated in the creative and compelling visual and conceptual art installations by

artists of immigrant origins. By enabling artists to share their work and stories in the museum setting, the CNHI is able to present a wider series of perspectives than museums such as the Louvre and even the MQB. One such perspective, from the “Répères” “Diversity” sequence, is a powerful video triptych called *Mother Tongue* (2002) wherein artist Zineb Sedira problematizes questions of language and dialogue in the immigrant narrative as well as on the larger stage of Franco-Arab relations (Figure 23).

Sedira, the French-born daughter of Algerian parents, has lived and worked in England since 1986. She created *Mother Tongue* by interviewing her mother in the first video, her daughter in the second, and her mother and daughter in a third video. Each interview is shown on a screen, the three screens placed together in a row with headphones dangling from each television so that visitors may hear the conversations. In the first video, Sedira asks her mother questions in French and her mother understands the questions but responds in Arabic, her native language. In the second video, Sedira’s daughter asks her mother questions in English, the language she has learned growing up in the UK, and her mother replies in French. The mother’s reply is also understood by the daughter, who studies French in school. However, communication breaks down in the third video where the grandmother and granddaughter are supposed to speak to each other. A language gap emerges: both grandmother and granddaughter understand French, but the language is neither person’s mother tongue, and the two family members share more silence than words in the video clip.

Sedira considers the lack of communication in the third video an alternative way of conveying meaning. In an exhibition in Brooklyn, Sedira explained that her mother never learned French as a way to demonstrate her rejection of France and its behavior after the

Algerian war for independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Reminiscing on her family's early years in France after the war, Sedira explains that "[her parents] experienced a lot of racism, and my parents felt a sense of failure that they had to bring up their children in that culture. They were angry that the French had managed to divide their Arab identity too, setting Algerians against each other by giving French citizenship to Algerian Christians and Jews but not Muslims, so that...Algerians would turn against each other" (qtd. in "Mother Tongue").

Sedira's exhibit reflects not only the growing linguistic barriers between generations of families who have immigrated to a new country, but also a concern with the unsaid messages and meanings of silence in discourse. Like the silences of the grandmother and granddaughter, the silences and spaces in the CNHI for alternative discourses or definitions of immigrant culture might better be understood as spaces pregnant with unspoken or unrecognized meaning and importance. The silences in the CNHI might function as a representation of the unsaid and those whose voices have been historically silenced; their lack of voice in the national museum venue symbolically represents their exclusion from national immigration debates or recognition as contributors to France and French identity.

The CNHI's Contemporary Issues and Donation Galleries

However, unaddressed stories and experiences are the subject of the CNHI's last two exhibition spaces, "L'espace de questionnements contemporains" ("Contemporary Issues" room) and the "Galerie des Dons," ("Donations Gallery"), a growing collection of personal items, photographs, and other archival materials donated by immigrant families and accessioned into the CNHI's collection. The purpose of both of these rooms is to enhance and continually expand the CNHI's exploration of immigration history and issues in France.

The “Contemporary Issues” room, which consists of four interactive video screens visitors can use to consult additional information about immigration issues not mentioned in the permanent collection, was created because the “Répères” exhibition could not cover all aspects of immigration in France. Although the “Contemporary Issues” room acknowledges the room for debate about the contested history and issues of immigration in France today, the placement of these issues, whose categories include “women,” “cultural diversity,” and “republican principles,” in separate section away from the “permanent” history in “Répères” allows the CNHI to engage in a direct discussion of French immigration’s most politically and culturally volatile topics. The “Galerie des Dons” room and program encourages visitors of all backgrounds to review and appreciate stories and objects from immigrant narratives, and for visitors who are immigrants to France to participate in the project by contributing their family’s story through gifts, deposits, or loans of objects to the museum for educational display purposes. By enabling visitors to create and contribute to a national museum collection, and debate its contents in the contemporary issues room, the CNHI makes a valuable concerted effort to engage its visitors in its content as well as its objectives, in so doing becoming a national museum that truly serves and belongs to its public. The “Galerie des Dons” also constructs a new history of Franco-immigrant relations that eschews an Orientalist or neo-Orientalist narrative as immigrants and their descendants are able to speak for themselves through their gifts to the museum.

While the Musée du Quai Branly and the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration were founded during a similar time and in a similar spirit, each institution reflects different aspects of France’s national history and French efforts to create cultural dialogue. The MQB’s collection is a testament to France’s longstanding interest in collecting

art and cultural artifacts from its colonies. The MQB's founding principle that creating a space for non-Western art in the French museum landscape elevated non-Western artifacts out of France's colonial history or restrictive native cultures is a noble intentioned yet problematic and neo-Orientalist solution to questions of qualification and classifications of Western and non-Western art. Although the CNHI does not address the most contentious issues of immigration and French identity formation in its galleries, the thematic organization of the museum and the space it gives immigrant artistic voices and museum visitors to contribute to the museum and its collections. These initiatives help fill the historical gaps fill in some of the gaps in French history to present a more nuanced and diverse dialogue that better reflects France's multicultural past and present.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

By comparing and contrasting the Louvre, the Musée du Quai Branly and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, this study analyzes the space and place of Orientalist exhibitions and objects from the Orient in three French national museums in Paris and how these exhibits reflect the importance of the Orient on the construction of a notion of Frenchness.

As France's flagship museum and the first national, public museum of its kind, the Louvre has been an important repository of French history since its conception. France's imperial Orientalist history is prominently featured in the Louvre in the Department of Egyptian Antiquities, the Department of Painting, and the new Department of Islamic Art, among other spaces in the museum's collections. However, contemporary Oriental renovations to the Louvre, such as the Pyramid of the *Grand Louvre* project are viewed as foreign intrusions into the supposedly traditional French museum landscape. The controversy over the contemporary integration of Orientalist motifs in the Louvre's architecture, which are seen to disrupt the Louvre's traditional framework, highlights a reluctance or avoidance by the museum to recognize the pivotal role of the Orient in France's present reality. This schism fractures the museum's position as an emblem of French identity.

With the slogan "Là où dialoguent les cultures" ("where cultures meet in dialogue") subtitled below the museum name in pamphlets and other publications in print and on the web, the Musée du Quai Branly is a space that actively seeks to foster cross-cultural dialogue

by elevating the art and traditions of the non-Western world in a museum space on par with the Louvre's grandiosity. The collections of the MQB were created largely from the collections of former colonial museums to be reassembled as a new national museum prominently located in the shadow of France's most famous monument, the Eiffel Tower.

However, the exhibition space of the MQB, organized loosely by continental regions, is configured in such a way that the permanent collection of African, Asian, Oceanic, and American art is conflated into a homogenous non-Western territory. Furthermore, though the majority of artifacts on display in the MQB's permanent collection were amassed during the nineteenth and twentieth century and the objects themselves date from previous centuries, the collections are presented as artifacts from "contemporary" non-Western societies. Finally, a focus on aesthetic harmony over educational materials in the museum space and the neo-Orientalist tone of the MQB's existing guide itineraries and informational panels reflect France's ongoing difficulty to avow the negative history of its identity as a former colonizing power. Though founded with the best of intentions, the MQB's display of non-Western cultures is only able to engage in a relatively limited cultural dialogue.

The Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration represents a third type of museum, one that directly engages with Oriental cultures in conjunction with French history in a mélange of art and informational displays. Where the MQB invites visitors to examine its collections as explorers following in the footsteps of nineteenth-century missions, the CNHI's visitors have the opportunity to become participants in the issues on display at the museum.

The CNHI's commitment to being "not only a museum" is reflected in the title of the museum, which eschews the word "musée" for "cité." The use of "cité," a word traditionally

used to describe city centers or “hearts” of cities creates an appropriate double-entendre for a museum representing a plurality of French experiences: today, the word “cité” is also used to describe immigrant neighborhood enclaves outside central Paris. The museum’s focus on visitor participation and involvement, most notably through the “Galerie des Dons” space but also throughout the permanent collection, invites visitors into the heart of the museum space to engage both as spectators and as participants. Although the CNHI avoids directly addressing the more contentious questions of religious discrimination and France’s colonial history in its programming, the museum is nonetheless an encouraging and inspiring new space that adds additional nuance to discussions about immigration and national identity in France both in and outside the museum.

It is important to remember that the questions that arise from the study of these museums and the themes they actually and purportedly embody are but a survey of the ways in which Oriental collections are exhibited and Orientalism manifests itself in French national museums. The collections, construction, and renovations of these three museums reflect only a small portion of the constant building and re-building of Orientalist collections in the French museum landscape, and the story of the Orient in French national history.

The history and development of the Musée d’Orsay, a museum that has a gallery devoted to Orientalist painting and exhibits works of art with Orientalist and non-Western themes throughout its collection of late nineteenth and early-twentieth century works, is one such venue of interest. Anthropological museums, such as the Musée de l’Homme, or cultural centers, such as the Institut du Monde Arabe, are additional sites whose study and exhibition of Arabo-Islamic arts and cultures would provide interesting comparisons and/or foils to the museums analyzed in this study.

The use of the French national museum to cultivate political currency and influence is another topic of ongoing interest and one that merits ongoing surveillance for future projects. Current French president Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to follow in the steps of his predecessors and create a cultural legacy for his presidency will take the shape of a new museum of French history, the Musée de l'Histoire de France. Housed in France's National Archives, the museum, founded in 2010 and currently under construction, is overseen by the Ministry for Immigration and Identity. Its establishment caused new furor among French historians who conducted sit-ins to protest the creation of a museum with a "neo-nationalist" and "anti-immigration" message they believe is a part of Sarkozy's 2012 re-election strategy ("French Historians Rally Against Sarkozy's "legacy" Museum"). Whether the museum includes or excludes France's Orientalist heritage, and how it deals with non-Western, non-European and non-French collections, Sarkozy's new museum will doubtless be another source of information about the ways in which French museums continue to establish a French identity.

APPENDIX OF IMAGES

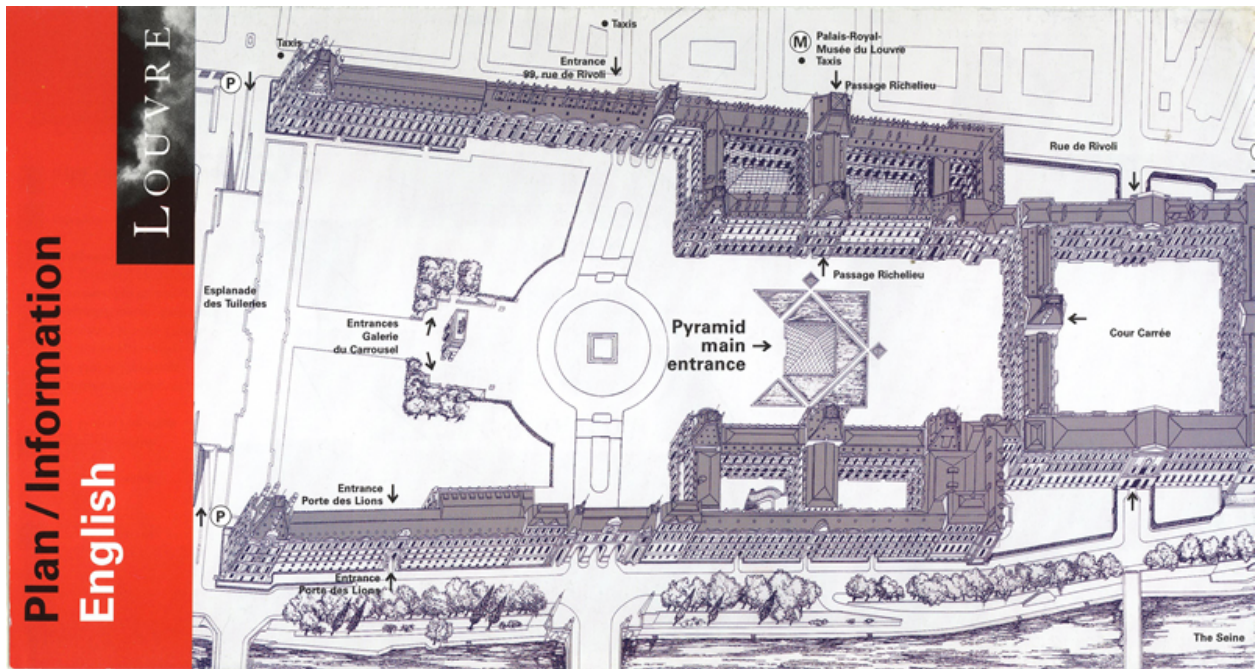


Figure 1. English-Language Plan of the Louvre Museum (exterior cover). Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

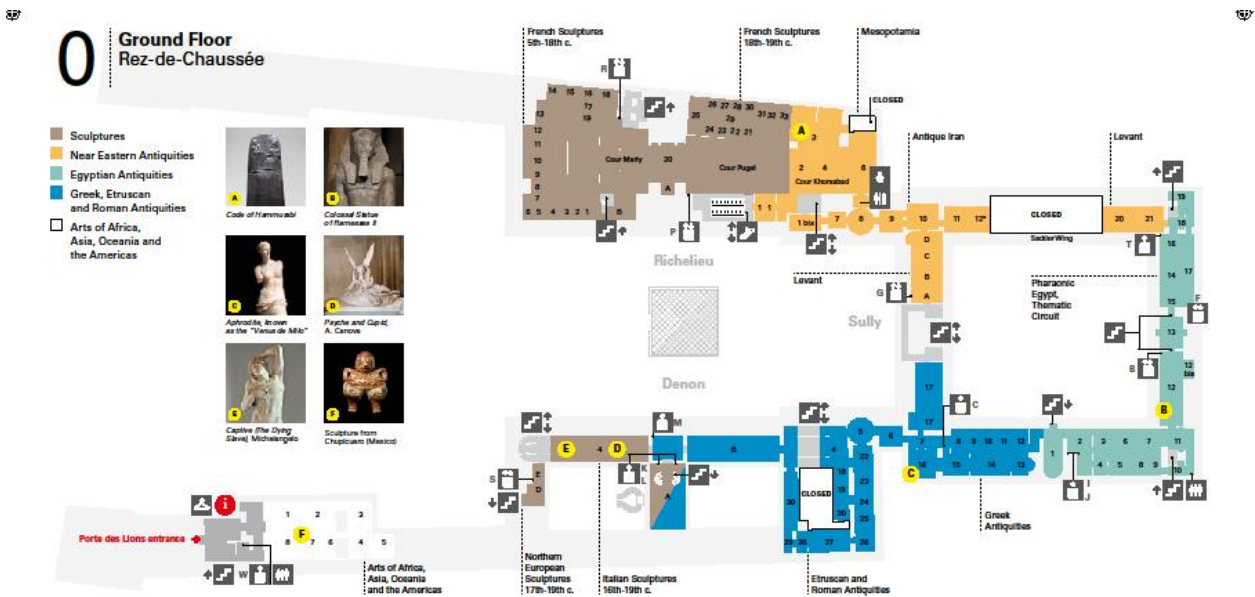


Figure 2. English-Language Plan of the Louvre Museum (Ground Floor). Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.



Figure 3. Abel de Pujol, Alexandre-Denis. *Egypt Saved by Joseph*. 1827. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.



Figure 4. Cogniet, Leon. *Bonaparte, Surrounded by Scholars and Artists, as a Mummy is Discovered*. 1835. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.



Figure 5. Pavillon des Sessions. Musée du Quai Branly. Photograph : Arnaud Baumann



Figure 6. Gros, Antoine Jean. *Bonaparte visiting the Plague-Stricken in Jaffa*. 1799. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

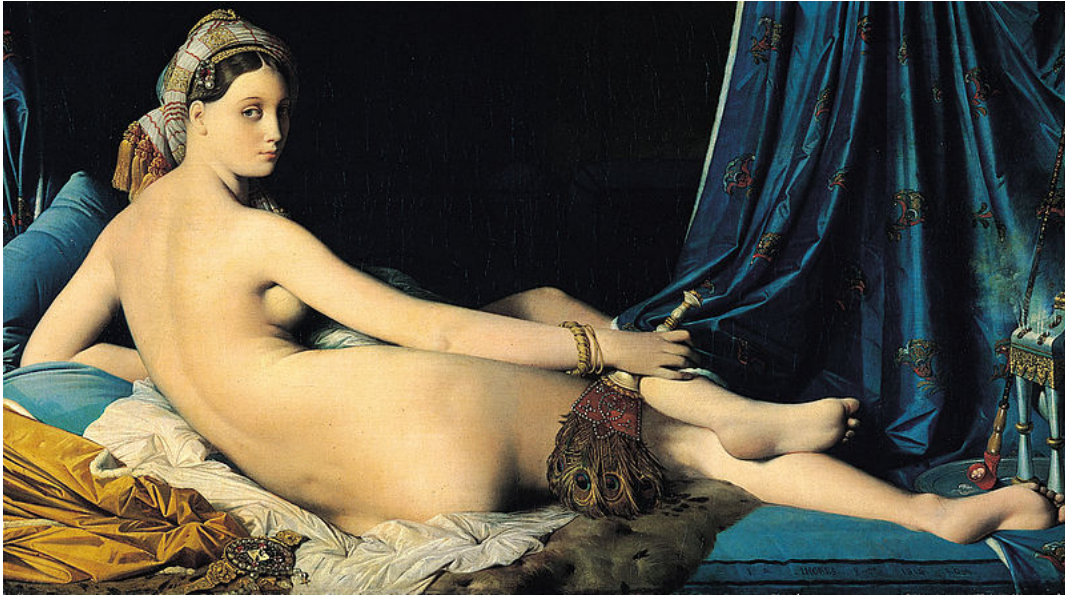


Figure 7. Ingres, Jean-Dominique-Auguste. *The Grand Odalisque*. 1814. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.



Figure 8. Delacroix, Eugene. *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. 1834. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.



Figure 9. The Pyramid. Musée du Louvre. Photograph: Isabella Archer

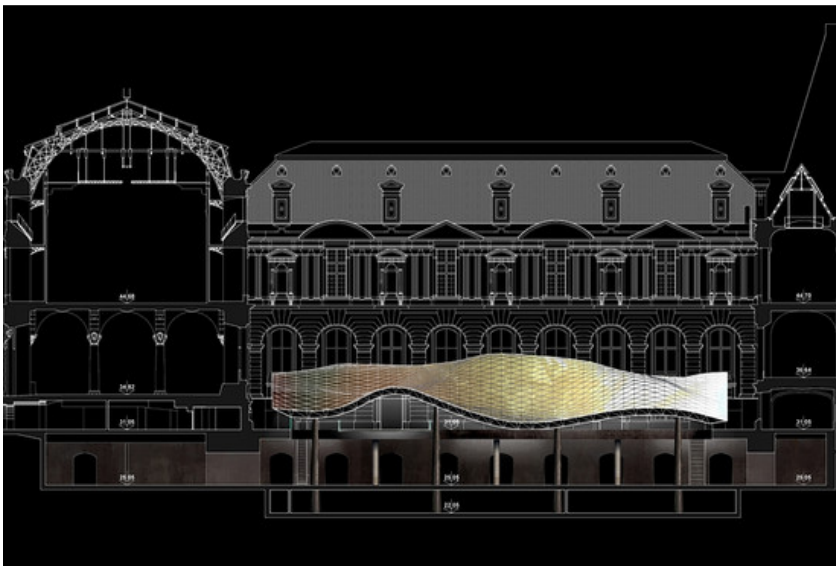


Figure 10. Bellini, Mario and Rudi Ricciotti. Model for the Department of Islamic Art in the Cour Visconti. Musée du Louvre.

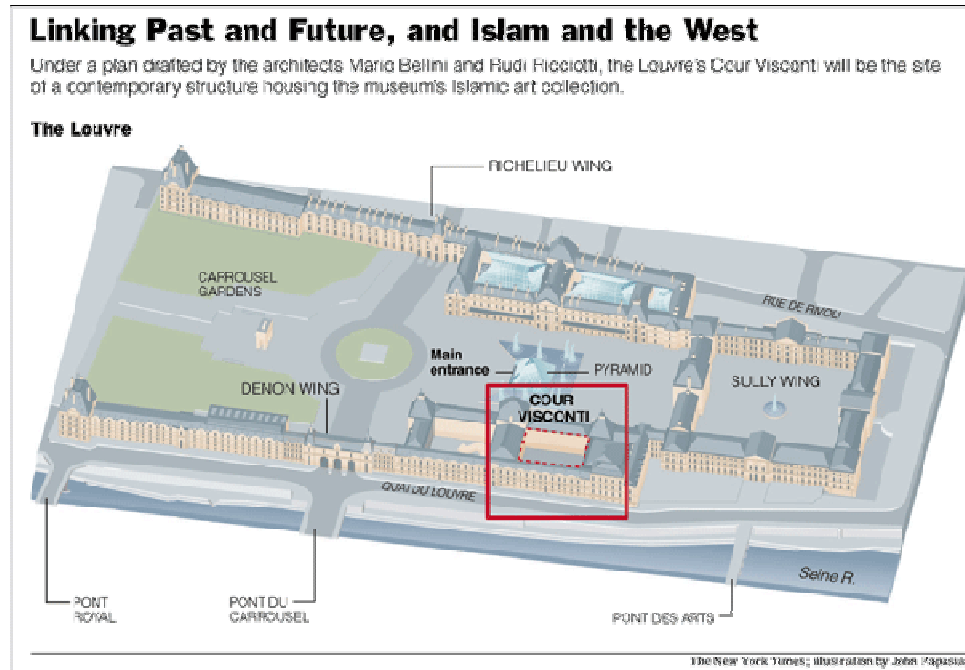


Figure 11. New York Times Multimedia Graphic of the Louvre and the Cour Visconti. Illustration by John Papasian. From the Article “Louvre Gets \$20 million for new Islamic Wing,” published July 28, 2005.



Figure 12. Entrance to the Musée du Quai Branly with the Eiffel Tower in the background. Photograph: Isabella Archer

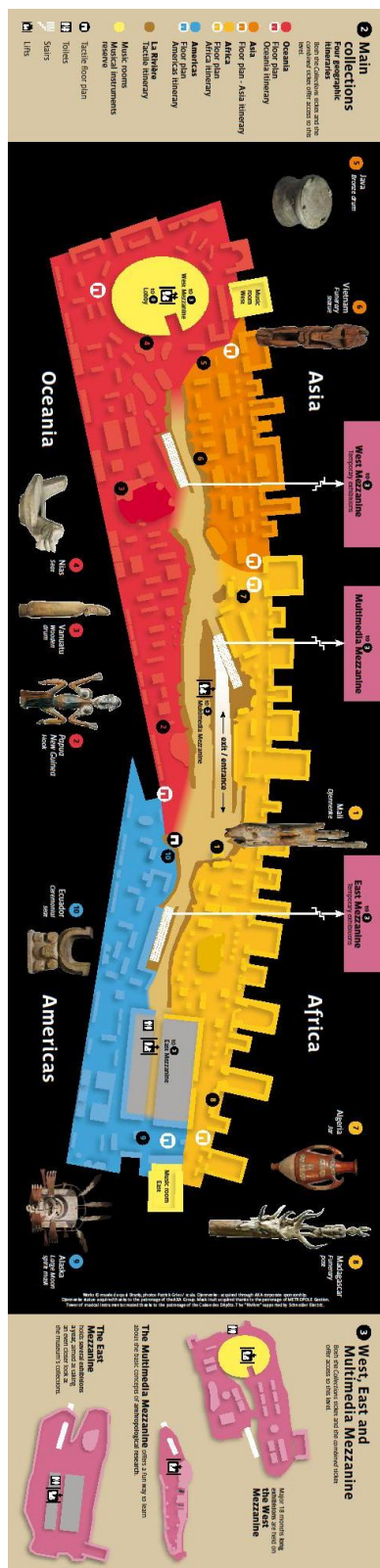


Figure 13. English-language plan for the Musée du Quai Branly (Main Collections). Musée du Quai Branly.

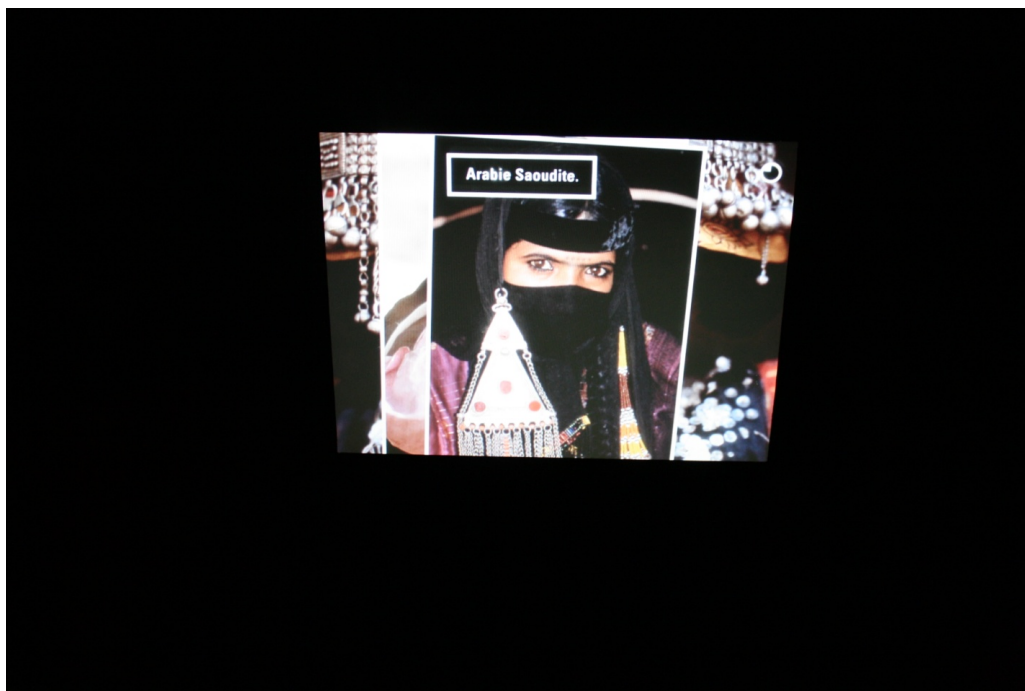


Figure 14. Video still from the “Parures Femmes Orientales” video installation at the Muse du Quai Branly. Photograph: Isabella Archer



Figure 15. “Algérie—Mauresque voilée.” French colonial postcard. Collection Idéale, Paris.



Figure 16. “Voiles du Visage” exhibit, Musée du Quai Branly. Photograph : Isabella Archer

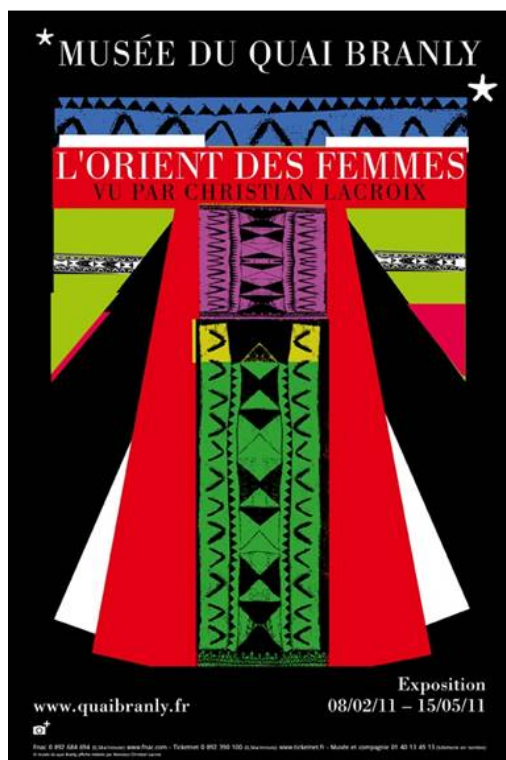


Figure 17. Promotional poster for the 2011 Musée du Quai Branly exhibition « L’Orient des Femmes vu par Christian Lacroix. » Musée du Quai Branly.



Figure 18. Exterior façade of the Palais de la Porte Dorée. Photograph : Isabella Archer



Figure 19. English-Language Map of the CNHI Permanent Collection. Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration.



Figure 20. Attia, Kader. *La machine à rêve*. 2008. Mixed media installation. Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration. Photograph : Isabella Archer



Figure 21. Attia, Kader. *La machine à rêve* (detail). 2008. Mixed media installation. Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration. Photograph : Isabella Archer



Figure 22. The “Répères” exhibition photographed from the sequence “Hostile France, Land of Refuge.” Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration. Photograph : Eva Allouche



Figure 23. Sedira, Zineb. *Mother Tongue*.2002. Video multimedia installation. Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration. Photograph : Isabella Archer

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