



Venue

Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33
14129 Berlin

ZMO-Colloquium Winter Term 2018/2019

Performing Gender and Sexuality in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia

Thursday, 27 September 2018, 5 pm s.t.

Performing Critique in Chaza Charafeddine's "Divine Comedy"

Lecture by **Charlotte Bank** (Berlin)

The photography-based series "Divine Comedy" (2010) by the Lebanese visual artist Chaza Charafeddine offers a subtle critique of the changing sexual mores in Middle Eastern/Islamic societies. Charafeddine inserts contemporary portraits of members of Beirut's underground transgender and gender fluid community into collages created by using a combination of reproductions of Persian and Mughal miniatures and popular Islamic imagery from the mid-20th century. Charafeddine portrays her models as strongly symbolic creatures, such as angels, the Buraq, brides, sultanas, but also as playful beings such as composite creatures of peacocks and women or as a "fruit lady". The models are presented as beautiful, elegant and refined and the portraits are placed in juxtaposition with classical Islamic imagery of court scenes involving celebrations, music and dance and young lovers, Sufi religious practices or imagery from various versions of the Miraj Nameh. By linking classical Islamic visual and literary culture, where notions of gender appear to have been more diverse, to contemporary notions of queerness, the series creates a space within which to negotiate new understandings of sexual identities without denouncing the Islamic cultural heritage.

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Charlotte Bank (PhD in Arabic, University of Geneva; Magister Artium in Near Eastern archaeology, Assyriology and art History, University of Heidelberg) is an art historian and independent curator. She was a member of the research project "Other Modernities: Patrimony and Practices of Visual Expression Outside the West" at the University of Geneva from 2013 to 2016. From January to March 2018 she was postdoctoral fellow at International Scholarship Program at Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz / Museum of Islamic Art. She is currently preparing the publication of her PhD research on the contemporary art scene in Syria 2000 - 2010.