

THE SEAS AND THE MOBILITY OF ISLAMIC ART

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The Sea is the Limit

We Need to
Talk about Migration

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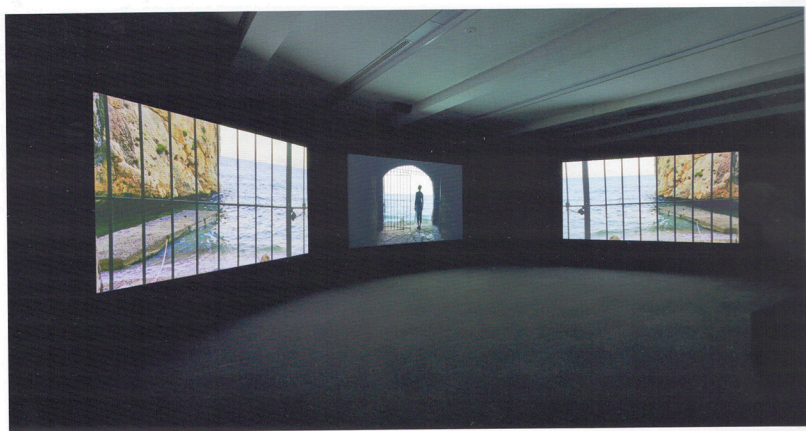




Fig. 15.5 (above) Susan Stockwell, *Trade Winds*, 2019. Paper currency, found materials, and coins; installation view at St. Peter's Church, Cambridge

Fig. 15.6 (opposite) Susan Stockwell, *Trade Winds*, 2018. Paper currency, found materials, and coins; installation view, York Art Gallery

At the same time, its satirical tone also addresses the expectation, experience, and behavior of art biennial visitors. In *Baida* Makhacheva achieves a powerful effect of mirrored resonance, where the viewer feels both trapped and lost, being at once the observer and the observed, the victim of oblivion and the perpetrator of forgetting.⁹

The theme of journeying and migrating by sea is also explored in the work of London-based artist Susan Stockwell, where previously used objects are infused with new meaning, tackling the issues of geopolitics, postcolonialism, migration, and power. These ideas are materialized in the stunning and evocative installations *Sail Away* (2015) and *Trade Winds* (2016; Figs. 15.5, 15.6).¹⁰ The latter—consisting of a flotilla of small boats made from old paper currency, stamps, tickets, and maps—explores the mythological connotations of boats as symbols of transition from the material into the spiritual world, and as carriers of our dreams, as well as vessels for adventures, escapes, and journeys. The delicate and playful nature of paper boats is subverted by the duality of their meaning as they bring associations of colonial trade.

Fig. 15.7 (opposite) Susan Stockwell, *Finesilver-Blackgold*, 2016. Digital print on silk crepe, 91 x 31 cm (36 x 12 1/4 in)

In *Finesilver-Blackgold* (2016) the artist uses a famous image of the slave ship *Brookes*, a diagram depicting the stowage of slaves on a boat, layered over a ledger card that Stockwell found in a disused garment factory in Texas (Fig. 15.7). This work comments on the historical and contemporary imperial trades pursued by the world superpowers, hungry for economic expansion. Stockwell's piece strongly resonates with the *Rescue Operation* photograph taken from a helicopter by Massimo Sestini in 2015, depicting a hugely overcrowded boat traveling with migrants across the Mediterranean.¹¹

The unnerving similarities between the slave ship image used in *Finesilver-Blackgold* and Sestini's photograph create powerful parallels between the historic slave trade and current human trafficking. Further tracings of past histories are seen in *Blood Lines* (2015), a three-dimensional maplike sculpture made from old wooden bobbins and red thread and assembled as a tension piece. Resembling airplane route maps or underground rail lines, the work traces the imaginary routes symbolic of current and past migrations.¹²

Reflections on trauma and migration are powerfully rendered in the work of Baghdad-born artist Mohammed Sami. Sami's background as a political refugee who came from Iraq to Sweden in 2007 informs his paintings. Sami's works resonate with post-traumatic experiences that mirror the stories of refugees and migrants who are conflict survivors. The intensity of memory that is rippled through Sami's charged palette and the tightly devised compositions of his paintings are indicative of narratives that are both personal and ambiguous. The viewer is confronted with painted compositions that describe elements of real and imagined interior and exterior spaces. The language of Sami's paintings has almost cinematic qualities, where colours, shapes, and shadows of seemingly ordinary objects are intensified to an almost unbearable pitch, enhanced by the sense of unearthed memories and complex emotions that charge them. Sami's handling of paint is both visceral and controlled, while his manipulation of textures is at the same time intuitive and constructed. The paintings seem tightly held together yet there is an underlying feeling that everything in them is on the brink of collapse. The paintings offer complex painterly interplay between everyday objects, interiors, and mises en scène.

The interplay between shadows and light occupies primary place in the theatrical sets of Sami's canvases. *Sunday* (2019) portrays a sun-flooded



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Front cover: Attributed to Miskin, *Noah's Ark*, c. 1590 (see Fig. 1.7)

Back cover: Bowl, 9th century (see Fig. 7.2)

Page 2–3: Reena Saini Kallat, *Woven Chronicle*, 2016 (see Fig. 1.5)

Page 6: Stoneware dish, from the Belitung shipwreck (see Fig. 7.7)

Part One opener: "Bahram Gur Slays a Dragon," from the Great Mongol *Shahnama*, c. 1330–40 (detail of Fig. 2.5)

Part Two opener: "The Capture of Port Hoogli June–October 1632," from the *Padshahnama*, 1656–57 (detail of Fig. 10.8)

Part Three opener: Isaac Julien, *Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007, (see Fig. 15.2)