

Letter from the Editor

It is with great sorrow that I open this Letter not with the customary itinerary of the issue's content, but rather with a request that we pause to acknowledge the recent passing of Richard C. Martin. This represents a great loss for our field and for the community of scholars dedicated to the *Review of Middle East Studies* in particular. We will commemorate his contributions to the profession via research and service in our Spring issue, but here I would like to take the time to reflect on the pivotal role he played in reshaping *RoMES* and introducing me to the beauties and travails of the publication in the Spring of 2017. I have fond memories of the days I spent with Rich and then-Managing Editor Ashleigh Breske in the offices, cafes, and restaurants of Virginia Tech. Admittedly, I showed up in Blacksburg with some trepidation, anxious about assuming responsibility for *RoMES* and worried that I would not be able to continue Rich's efforts to transform it into a space for intellectual exploration and scholarly ingenuity. Rich, over computer screens, bookshelves, bar counters, and café tables, helped to soothe my nerves and lay out guidelines for the journal's future. His personal ethic of dedicated service to the field continues to shape my own commitment to *RoMES* and his spirited leadership of the *Review* will continue to animate its pages for years to come.

The December issue turns our attention to a phenomenon we ignore at our peril: the role of social media in shaping new platforms of belief, regulation, and activism. Commissioned by Associate Editor Jörg Matthias Determann (Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar) and organized by Jocelyn Mitchell (Northwestern University, Qatar) and Sean Foley (Middle Tennessee State University), this issue of *RoMES* features a collection of essays on Public Media and the Gulf that moves from Instagram to Twitter to YouTube to capture the moving target of online discourse as both a productive and regulatory space. Sahar Khamis introduces this online public sphere as one of "contestation, creativity, and change" and the contributors move across geographies (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council) in order to investigate how #blockades, tweetstorms, and online forums create new mechanisms for alliance even as they reanimate regional rivalries and enable tools of surveillance.

We follow this themed focus into the Curator's Corner and Pedagogical Perspectives columns. Maya Allison, Chief Curator for NYU Abu Dhabi,

provides a pointed and powerful critique of the international art world that retains an emphasis on a world divided by the fixity of artistic references to art “over there” and “over here.” She invites us to reflect on how best to understand the referents of “here” and “there” from the perspective of an Abu Dhabi public. Sumayya Ahmed (University College London, Qatar) continues to address vexed questions of identity and locale in her pedagogy column on reading Neha Vora’s *Teach for Arabia: American Universities, Liberalism, and Transnational Qatar* with a cohort of faculty dedicated to self-critical university studies. Both essays challenge us to think about the role MESA members might play in shaping academic inquiry as a “zone of encounter” that resists reproducing social and geographic asymmetries.

The *Review* is also dedicated to capturing the dynamism of Middle East studies in print and in online media, and the outstanding work of Terri DeYoung (University of Washington) forms the review Spotlight on literary achievements and publications. Our reviews section also contains a snapshot of developments in cinema, new approaches to historical and architectural inquiry, and methods for analyzing shifts in past and contemporary geopolitics. The Middle East Studies in Action section turns our attention to the MESA protocols drafted by the Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee (ASH) and serves as a reminder that ethical scholarship also requires a commitment to safeguarding members and the varied publics we serve from abuses of power and discriminatory behavior. As Middle East Studies in Action also incorporates undergraduate and graduate experiences, here we present an interview with slam-poetry artist Amal Kassir (Colorado University) conducted by Nina Zietlow (Scripps College). The interview focuses on questions that connect Kassir’s family history and her Syrian-American identity to her poetic aesthetic as a framework for social engagement.

The wide range of Middle East studies reflected in the pages of the *Review* relies on the dedicated labor of our Associate Board Members. It is their regional and field expertise that transforms the *Review* into a vibrant space of critique and exploration. Together we work to realize some of the goals I initially expressed in my application for the position of *RoMES* Editor: mainly, that the *Review* will model an online presence shaped by international voices that might help to redefine academic and public discourse in an increasingly volatile present. The articles we commission move across the varied terrains of our professional lives. In a moment when domestic and global politics renders our work all the more pressing, *RoMES* seeks to encourage a collective effort to reach across boundaries,

subvert the walls that bifurcate our worlds, and follow Maya Allison's call to question the metageographies of "over there" and "over here". As we write our books and articles, teach our students, and engage with policymakers we hope that the pages of the *Review* provoke conversation and reflection on how we present and represent past and contemporary lives. We look forward to working with MESA members to ensure that the *Review of Middle East Studies* consistently reaches across borders so as to open new modes of sociopolitical praxis and intellectual inquiry. ✦

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