Part 3: Crafted Identities

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“What Is Colonial Art? And How Can It Be Modern?”

Design and Modernity in France and Morocco, 1925

In 1925, responding to a call for “modern” arts and products from the colonies, the French Protectorate of Morocco participated in the International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris. The Art Deco Exposition is best remembered for its promotion of a new French “*style moderne*” in architecture and applied and decorative arts.¹ The Exposition was pivotal to international conceptualizations of modern design in the first half of the twentieth century. Less well recollected is that the Exposition took place at the height of the French colonial empire’s global expansion following World War I. The colonial world permeated it. Raw materials extracted from colonized landscapes were ever present. Hardwoods from West Africa, Madagascar, French Guiana, and Asia displaced European pine and poplar in carpentry throughout the Exposition.² European artists and designers experimented with motifs and forms referencing recently excavated ancient Egyptian and classical artworks and found inspiration in the aesthetics of cultural works from East Asia, Central America, and West and North Africa with the heightened access to these regions made possible by colonial expansion. The impact of the colonial world was not simply in the source of visual inspiration and raw materials it provided. Rarely addressed in contemporary scholarship,³ the Art Deco Exposition also presented an important opportunity for artists, designers, and government agencies based in the French colonies to articulate their relationship to the transforming international arts landscape.

Taking the Moroccan Section at the 1925 Art Deco Exposition as a case study, I explore the interrelated histories of colonialism and modern design, examining how art makers and patrons based in colonial societies responded to the demands of the globalizing art market. At the same time, I demonstrate how the innovative works fostered by the economic and social conditions of colonialism influenced broader

1 Jared Goss, *French Art Deco* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014); Bevis Hillier, *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s* (London: Studio Vista, 1968); Martin Battersby, *The Decorative Twenties* (New York: Collier Books, 1975).

2 Paul Léon, “Colonial Arts,” in *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, Paris 1925: Rapport général, Section artistique et technique*, vol. IV (Mobilier, Classes 7 et 8) (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1927), 54–55.

3 An exception is Roger Benjamin’s analysis of the North African and Colonial Pavilions at the Exposition in his book, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880–1930* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 213–19.

conceptions of artistic modernity even beyond the colonial sphere, as expressed in the context of the Exposition.

The Moroccan Section occupied a series of rooms in the North African Pavilion and was located in an area of the exposition dedicated to showcasing the arts of France's modern colonial empire (fig. 1). Crowded at the edge of the fairgrounds, these colonial displays—also including the pavilions of French West Africa and French Indochina, as well as the Pavilion of French Colonial Art, which exhibited furniture and decor designed by French artists specifically for use in the colonies—presented a surprising amalgamation of global arts and architectures that evoked the expanding geographical purview of “modern” design presented at the Art Deco Exposition. For Paul Léon, the Exposition's deputy commissioner and author of its *General Report*, despite the peripheral location of the colonial pavilions, the diverse arts and cultural products they exhibited spoke directly to the event's central objective of seeking out truly novel interventions in contemporary design. Observing the florescence of new and diverse arts in France and its colonies stemming from the “multiplying exchanges between the races” fostered by modern tourism, artistic residencies abroad, and “indigenous arts” revitalization programs, Léon asked the readers of the *Report* to consider newly urgent questions: “What is colonial art? And how can it be modern?”⁴

These questions also fueled ongoing debate within the French Protectorate of Morocco as to the possibility, and potential dangers, of innovation in Morocco's “indigenous” arts industries. The French Protectorate's approach to arts management in Morocco intersected with a larger political strategy initiated by Resident-General Hubert Lyautey (active 1912–25) to promote France's role as the legitimate “protector” of Morocco's traditional societal and cultural structures. His flagship programs, the Service of Fine Arts, Antiquities, and Historical Monuments (*Service des beaux-arts, antiquités, et monuments historiques* or SBA) and Service of Indigenous Arts (*Service des arts indigènes* or SAI), strove to revitalize Morocco's “indigenous” arts and architecture according to a carefully managed vision of cultural authenticity, locating the value of these arts specifically in their fidelity to shared knowledges and practices rooted in Morocco's distant past. For the members of the organizing committee of the Moroccan Section, all of whom were closely involved with the Protectorate's preservationist initiatives, the primary challenge inspired by the Exposition's call for strictly modern products was to promote a body of work that would be at once original while remaining “authentically” Moroccan.

In this chapter, I explore how the concept of “authenticity”—particularly as it pertains to “indigenous arts,” “crafts,” and other categories of artistic production typically associated with communities marginalized in colonial societies and art histories alike—has been wielded by various agents to express ideas about differential access to modernity. I propose that the challenge presented by the Moroccan Section, posed

⁴ Léon, *Colonial Arts*, 52.

Fig. 1: Pavillon de l'Afrique du nord, Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs modernes, Paris, 1925. Postcard.

by its contributors and critics as rooted in the irreconcilable opposition between authenticity and innovation or indigeneity and modernism, was instead based in the more insidious problem of agency and the denial of that agency to specific colonial actors and art makers according to racialized conceptions of artistic production.

Existing studies of art and design in early twentieth-century Morocco have focused on the interventions of the SBA and SAI as tools of colonial “soft power” oriented toward the social and political disenfranchisement of the local Moroccan population.⁵ Central to this body of analysis are the “traditionalizing” discourses and practices⁶—often entailing claims regarding cultural authenticity—through which the

⁵ Hamid Irbouh, *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco, 1912–1956* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 16–19; Janet Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Gwendolyn Wright, “Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900–1930,” *The Journal of Modern History* 59, no. 2 (June 1987): 291–316 and *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

⁶ Wyrzten, for example, argues that the protectorate’s prerogative to see Moroccan society, history, and culture as static “tradition” existed alongside the notion of the protectorate itself as a “developmentalist” or “modernizing” force: this representational paradox was mediated through “a strict classification of, and division that separated, the ‘traditional’ native and ‘modern’ European, a dis-

French Protectorate government consigned Morocco's artistic practices to a distant past while introducing modernizing reforms in other arenas, including urban design and architecture in the French *villes nouvelles*.⁷ What is rarely discussed, however, is how individual artists working in the French Protectorate of Morocco positioned themselves in relation to this colonial field of cultural production as a strategy for participating in the globalizing field of modern arts. To this end, I focus on the work of one particular artist who contributed to the Moroccan Section, the Algerian ceramicist Boujemâa Lamali (ca.1890–1971), and I examine how he actively mediated systems of value rooted in, on the one hand, the preservationist interests of the colonial arts administration in Morocco and, on the other, the demands of the transnational market for art and design.

Negotiating Moroccan Modernisms at the Art Deco Exposition

The organizing committee for the Moroccan Section consisted of prominent members of the first colonial administration in Morocco that had under the direction of Resident-General Lyautey developed an ambitious program of arts and heritage management throughout the decade preceding the Exposition.⁸ As recent studies have demonstrated, the activities of the French Protectorate's arts administration played

tion Chatterjee refers to more generally as the 'rule of colonial difference.'" Jonathan Wrytzen, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 23–24.

⁷ Physically and socially segregated from the historical *madinas* where the majority of Morocco's Muslim and remaining Jewish populations were required to live during the colonial era, the *villes nouvelles* constructed by the French administration beginning in the 1920s provided new living quarters and commercial edifices designed for use by European residents of Morocco. While the Protectorate attended to the restoration of the *madinas*' historical buildings, emphasizing in particular those with medieval origins, it sponsored an architectural program in the *villes nouvelles* intended to embody the new French-Moroccan political association through a so-called hybrid aesthetic of French modernist architecture and historical Moroccan craftsmanship. For scholars such as Janet Abu-Lughod, this deliberate aesthetic differentiation between "French" and "indigenous" spaces in Protectorate Morocco reflected a colonial ideology supporting a violent disparity of resources and opportunities along racial lines (Abu-Lughod, *Rabat*).

⁸ The architects of the pavilion were Maurice Tranchant de Lunel, the first director of the SBA, and Robert Fournez, who would later design the Moroccan pavilion for the 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris alongside the famous architect and urbanist Albert Laprade. Its commissioners were L. J. Nacivet, assistant-commissioner for the Morocco Pavilion at the 1922 National Colonial Exposition in Marseille and director of the Paris-based Office du Maroc, and Victor Berti, a close colleague of Lyautey and commissioner of the 1915 Franco-Moroccan Exposition in Casablanca.

Fig. 2: Main Entrance to the Moroccan Palace, Exposition nationale coloniale, Marseille, 1922.

a critical role in supporting Lyautey's strategy for colonial governance in Morocco.⁹ Contrasted with the assimilationist policies of the early French colonial government in Algeria (1830–1956), Lyautey's model of indirect rule in Morocco—envisioned as a reciprocally beneficial “association” between Morocco's monarchy and the French protectorate residence—required complex representational strategies by which agents of the French state affirmed their respect for Morocco's “traditional” social structures and cultural practices through the strategic preservation and (re)invention of Morocco's past.¹⁰ Alongside an extensive program of architectural preservation and restoration, public exhibitions of Morocco's visual cultures domestically and

⁹ Irbouh, *Art in the Service of Colonialism*; Wright, “Tradition in the Service of Modernity;” Wright, *The Politics of Design*; Abu-Lughod, *Rabat*; Rabinow, *French Modern*.

¹⁰ Wyrzten, *Making Morocco*; Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014) and *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance, 1860–1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

abroad expressed the Protectorate administration's determination to restore Morocco to a medieval "golden age" in its cultural history.¹¹ To this end, exhibitions presented by the Protectorate's arts administrations prior to the Art Deco Exposition promoted Morocco's local arts through a system of value rooted in this archaizing vision of the country's artistic heritage. For example, while the 1917 Exhibition of Moroccan Arts in Paris encouraged comparison between Morocco's modern decorative arts and masterworks in the emerging discipline of Islamic art, the architects of the Moroccan Pavilion for the 1922 National Colonial Exposition in Marseilles reproduced fragments of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century structures in Morocco's built landscape to create an architectural pastiche evoking an image of Morocco as a living medieval kingdom (fig. 2).¹²

The Art Deco Exposition, however, required the French Protectorate administration to evaluate Morocco's modern artistic landscape according to different parameters. Organized by the French government to promote its country's leadership in contemporary international design, the Exposition's guidelines forbade contributors to exhibit historical works or reproductions. For the designers of the Moroccan Section, as one journalist put it, this meant "no Tour Hassan, no Koutoubia, no Djemaa [mosque] of Fez or Meknès, no ancient carpets, no copies of mosaic fountains ... All of that's the past and, this time, the past is forbidden."¹³ The central challenge for the designers of the Moroccan Section at the Exposition, then, was how to identify value in Morocco's contemporary arts without recourse to visual comparison with a historical corpus. How could they present artistic products from Morocco that would at once be entirely new—or modern—and yet still authentically Moroccan?

The challenge of expressing participation in an international modernity while inflecting this universal quality with one's distinctive national, regional, or cultural identity was shared across the Exposition in national and colonial pavilions alike. Despite the event's official guidelines, the solution proposed by many exhibitors was to draw strategically upon the past to articulate the trajectory of their modernizing efforts. For example, as Jared Goss notes, proponents of the *style moderne* that would characterize France's contribution to the Exposition argued that it "was distinct from manifestations of the movement in other countries by its embrace of its national past as the intellectual point of departure for creating something new."¹⁴ The novelty of the works exhibited in European pavilions most often consisted, on the one hand, in applying new technologies or industrial materials to familiar forms or, on the other,

11 Nadia Erzini, "Cultural Administration in French North Africa and the Growth of Islamic Art History," in *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850–1905*, ed. Stephen Vernoit (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 71–84.

12 Ashley V. Miller, "Tents, Palaces, and 'Imperial Souvenirs': Mobilizing Cultural Authority in the French Protectorate of Morocco," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 9, no. 1 (2018): 51–75.

13 "Le Maroc à l'Exposition des arts décoratifs," *France-Maroc*, no. 101 (April 1925): 79–80.

14 Goss, *French Art Deco*, 3.

in looking outward to foreign, and particularly non-European, visual cultures for a source of aesthetic "revitalization." Likewise, the designers of the Moroccan Section at the Exposition strove to present a vision that mediated past and present, universal and local, by looking to aesthetic qualities, materials, and techniques characteristic of Morocco's historical craft industries and pre-Protectorate-built landscape, while reinterpreting these elements to create furnishings and interior decoration amenable to the tastes and demands of the contemporary international consumer. As one journalist explained, the exhibit's commissioner, Victor Berti, and his colleagues thereby sought to evoke in the rooms of the Moroccan Section "a comfortable villa offering all of the contemporary conveniences, but executed with purely Moroccan materials and strictly according to Moroccan methods."¹⁵

The overarching design of the Moroccan Section attempted this conscious fusion of "Moroccan methods" and "contemporary conveniences" by referencing features of a historical Moroccan residence while reorganizing them according to current notions of the domestic ensemble. The spatial arrangement of the 1925 "villa" diverged greatly from that of the typical Moroccan *dar* (house), the latter characterized by a series of rectangular rooms opening onto a central atrium providing natural light and airflow, the function of each room changing according to need or season. In contrast, the rooms in the Moroccan Section and their furnishings were designed to reflect the specific function of each space: "The dining room, the office, the *hammam* of the villa must be precisely a dining room, office, and *hammam*, that is to say, must respond to our modern conception of the different rooms and their particular comforts."¹⁶ Similarly, the *General Report* announced that the concept of designing a furniture "ensemble" specific to the function of a particular space and integrated through a guiding aesthetic, rather than decorating a room with an assortment of unique furnishings and *objets d'art*, was one of the defining attributes of the new international modernist movement.¹⁷ This combination of vernacular domestic architecture with developing modernist conceptions of space and function extended to the arrangement of furnishings and decoration within each room. For example, while the Moroccan Section's "salon" incorporated common features of Moroccan interiors, including a carved cedar ceiling of horizontal planks (*berchla*), plain whitewashed upper walls with a decorated lower register, and tile flooring, it also bore attributes anathema to the historical architecture of Morocco's pre-Protectorate Muslim neighborhoods, such as large outward-facing windows and a monumental wood and brick fireplace supporting a massive picture frame (**fig. 3**). The designer of the "office/smoking-room," a Moroccan furniture maker known as Bel Hadj, rejected standard practices in Moroccan interior design altogether by covering the room's walls entirely in wood panel-

¹⁵ "Le Maroc à l'Exposition des arts décoratifs," 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

¹⁷ *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs modernes: Rapport général*, 9–10.

Fig. 3: “Salon” in the Moroccan Section, Exposition des arts décoratifs, Paris, 1925.

ing rather than designing a revetment organized into registers of different motifs and materials as typically encountered in the private residences, mosques, and *madrasas* restored by the French Protectorate’s arts administration (figs. 4, 5).

In addition to engaging with new conceptions of space and interior decoration promoted by the Art Deco Exposition, the Moroccan Section also drew upon the expertise of an existing community of artists and designers in the French Protectorate of Morocco whose careers reflected the transcultural mobility identified by Léon as one of the defining characteristics of the modern design environment. While previous exhibitions of Moroccan art organized by the French Protectorate featured a combination of historical artifacts and contemporary works produced under the close guidance of the SAI, the 1925 Exposition emphasized the relationship between this administration and an independently growing commercial industry for decorative arts and design in Morocco. Tranchant de Lunel and his fellow Moroccan Section committee members engaged local businesses and artists in Morocco, including the Etablissements Barbier of Casablanca, who furnished wrought iron electric chandeliers; Jacques Majorelle, the French painter and decorative artist, who designed the Section’s “salon” and “dining-room”; Bel Hadj, lead designer of the “office/smoking-room,” who traveled between Paris, Marseilles, and Morocco to manage teams

Fig. 4: "Office/Smoking-room" in the Moroccan Section at the Exposition des arts décoratifs, Paris, 1925.

of artisans to complete the woodwork for the exhibit;¹⁸ and Boujemâa Lamali, whose work we examine in the following section.

Subsequent to the Exposition, celebratory reviews of the Moroccan Section applauded its designers for achieving truly original works while critics decried a collection of objects that imitated rather than advanced Moroccan art. According to one review published in the Morocco-based periodical *France-Maroc* in April of 1925, the consistent combination of so-called modern and indigenous elements displayed throughout the Moroccan Section, present within each ensemble as much as in the craftsmanship of the smallest article of decoration, resulted in the impression of a "double originality."¹⁹ Four months later, however, another review appeared in which

¹⁸ "Le Maroc à l'Exposition des arts décoratifs," 80.

¹⁹ Ibid., 79–80. Benjamin notes that Henri Gourdon, the director-general of public instruction in Indochina, similarly praised the colonial exhibits at the 1925 Exposition, exclaiming: "They have the potential to be original, and they are by no means out of place in an exposition of *modern* decorative arts," Gourdon, "Les colonies et les protectorats à l'Exposition des arts décoratifs," *Le monde colonial illustré* 3, no. 24 (September 1925): 194; cited in Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, 215.

Fig. 5: Interior of Al-Attarine Madrasa, Fez.

the author, an anonymous critic writing under the *nom de plume* of “El Aqça,” argued that the exhibit was only an “elementary and naïve” cooptation of Moroccan art with dangerous implications for the country’s already endangered indigenous arts.²⁰ How were two critics, both writing from the French Protectorate of Morocco, able to see such divergent qualities in these works?

While these critiques seemingly addressed the problematic role of innovation in a body of work defined by and valued for its fidelity to visible markers of cultural “authenticity,” instead they were rooted in perceptions about the identities of the transcultural group of artists involved in designing the Moroccan Section. Specifically, they questioned how the artists fit, or did not, within stratified notions of creative agency that excluded so-called indigenous actors from participation in the modernizing trajectory to which the French colonial project aspired. In examining the work and career of one contributor to the Protectorate’s exhibit at the Exposition, Boujemâa Lamali, however, we will see not only the mechanisms through which such concepts as “authenticity” and “indigeneity” were affixed to a fluctuating body of material things, but also how the instability of such connections—between the conceptual and the material—created a space in which different actors could forge identities that did not so easily map onto the racialized social structure within which the “colonial arts” were supposedly contained.

Boujemâa Lamali’s “Revival” of Moroccan Ceramics

Boujemâa Lamali was a ceramicist originally from the High Kabylia region in northern Algeria whose own career was intimately connected with the French colonial system of art education and craft revitalization in North Africa.²¹ As a young man, Lamali studied at the École nationale des beaux-arts in Algiers. In 1914, the French resident general of Algeria, Charles Luteaud (active 1911–18), sent Lamali to France to work with

20 El Aqça, “Chronique Moghrebine,” *France-Maroc*, no. 105 (August 1925): 1. The “Chronique Moghrebine” was an opinion piece included in every issue of *France-Maroc*, beginning in 1923 when publication of the journal moved from Paris to Casablanca; “El Aqça” was probably a pseudonym for the editorial staff based on the phrase “al-maghrib al-aksa,” another name for Morocco meaning “the far West.”

21 Although critical studies of Lamali have yet to be published, descriptions of his life and work are included in several surveys of pottery in North Africa. See, Jean-François Clément, “Quelques artisans d’art de la fin du XIX^{ième} siècle ou de la fin du XX^{ième} siècle,” *Horizons Maghrébins: La droit à la mémoire* 30, no. 70 (2014), Special Volume: *La Céramique dans le Maghreb actuel: Artisan, artisans d’art et artiste (le cas de l’Algérie)*, ed. Jean-François Clément, 17–44, 30–44; André Boukobza, *La Poterie marocaine* (Boulogne-Billancourt: Publication Jean-Pierre Taillander, 1987), 151–54; and Philippe Alléau, “Boujemâa Lamali, le précurseur,” in exh. cat. *Sèvres Saï: Le renouveau de la céramique en France et au Maroc autour des années 30*, ed. Florence Slitine et al., 84–111 (Sèvres: Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, 2007).

specialists at the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, where he studied ceramic techniques alongside an international group of students.²² In 1919, after Lamali's further study in Spain, the director of the SAI, Joseph de la Nézière, advised Resident-General Lyautey to appoint Lamali as the regional indigenous arts inspector of Safi in southwestern Morocco. By 1920, Lamali had established his own pottery workshop in the region, training and employing thirty to forty students at a time.²³ Invited to participate in the Art Deco Exposition of 1925, Lamali submitted several decorative works, largely table lamps and vases, that exemplified his interest in combining Moroccan pottery forms with techniques derived from his study of global ceramic production.

Lamali worked under the auspices of a French Protectorate arts administration whose activities were simultaneously informed by Lyautey's preservationist philosophy and geared toward preparing the country's "indigenous" arts industries to meet the demands of the commercial market imagined for these arts. In 1918, just prior to Lamali's arrival in Safi, Lyautey had overseen the creation of the SAI to "centraliz[e] all questions concerning indigenous artistic production and especially for overseeing the manufacture and sale of its products."²⁴ The SAI understood the commercial market as both the reason for its existence and as a corrupting force from which indigenous arts must be shielded. Responding to this tension, the director of the SAI, Prosper Ricard (active 1920–35), dedicated himself to developing a system of arts inspection that would at once encourage commercial initiative within Morocco's arts and craft sectors while "protecting" artisans and consumers from the corrupting pressures of the market. As recent studies have demonstrated, the SAI's approach to balancing these requirements under Ricard's guidance resulted in a constant shifting of the parameters of "authenticity" against which contemporary artistic products were measured in order to accommodate the social and economic realities of the domestic and international commercial markets.²⁵

The actual process of renovating local art industries and centers of production involved a delicate orchestration: SAI arts inspectors like Lamali were tasked with

²² Alléau, "Boujemâa Lamali, le précurseur," 30–31.

²³ J. Goulven, "L'Histoire de la céramique à Safi," *France-Maroc*, no. 5 (1925): 83–84.

²⁴ "Le Service des arts indigènes," in *Historiques de la Direction générale de l'instruction publique, des beaux-arts et des antiquités (1912–1930)*, 145–61 (Rabat: Protectorat de la République française au Maroc, 1931), 17.

²⁵ Muriel Girard, "Invention de la tradition et authenticité sous le Protectorat au Maroc," *Socio-anthropologie* 19 (2006), <https://socio-anthropologie.revues.org/563>, consulted September 23, 2015; James E. Housefield, "Moroccan Ceramics and the Geography of Invented Traditions," *Geographical Review* 87, no. 3 (July 1997), 401–407: 403; James Mokhiber, "Le Protectorat dans la peau: Prosper Ricard and the 'native arts' in French colonial Morocco, 1899–1952," in Driss Maghraoui (ed.), *Revisiting the Colonial Past in Morocco* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Claire Nicholas, "Of Texts and Textiles...: Colonial Ethnography and Contemporary Moroccan Material Heritage," *Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 3 (2014): 390–412.

encouraging certain trades without killing off others, introducing new techniques to allow for a larger scale of production without overwhelming the local population of artisans, and promoting particular forms, motifs, and products that they judged to be both culturally authentic and at the same time potentially attractive to European consumers. In some circumstances, inspectors attempted to meet these requirements through modifications to the larger structure of production, shifting the channels through which products entered the commercial market or artisans received raw materials, for example, while attempting to avoid changing the aesthetic character of the articles produced. In an autobiographical essay, Lamali explained the task assigned to him as arts inspector involved, paradoxically, "trying to improve manufacture without *touching* the current state [of production]." ²⁶ In other instances, inspectors encouraged the production of specific motifs or formats that would be more attractive to a European customer. For example, shortly after the Art Deco Exposition, the Algerian-born artist Azouaou Mammeri (regional arts inspector of Marrakech from 1929–48) received instructions from Ricard to replace as much as possible the Fez-influenced floral motifs prevalent in the urban arts of Marrakech with geometric motifs inspired by the crafts of the Amazigh (Berber) communities in the south. ²⁷ In every case, regional arts inspectors engaged in a continuous process of selection.

For Lamali, the task of selecting and transforming elements of Morocco's visual and material cultures to adhere to the Protectorate administration's directives proved a central feature of his creative experimentation. Lamali's own account of this process reveals acrobatic feats of revisionist history supporting a narrative of Safi's artistic heritage that suited his vision for the industry's contemporary renovation. On arriving in Safi, Lamali embarked on an investigation of the history of its ceramic production, relying particularly on oral histories given by the relatives of artisans and the last two remaining *ma'alam*s (master artisans) themselves. ²⁸ Subsequently, he applied his own technical experience and broad knowledge of ceramic techniques to make improvements to the Safi industry. His first order of business was to recreate a blue

26 Boujemâa Lamali, "Les Poteries de Safi et leur rénovation (Extrait d'une conférence donnée à Rabat, le 23 janvier 1934)," *Nord-Sud* (1934), 13. Edmund Burke has described a similar paradox that pervaded Lyautey's initial approach to Morocco's political and social realms as a policy of introducing "modernity without change" (Burke, *The Ethnographic State*, 9).

27 Girard, "Invention de la tradition et authenticité." Ricard's interest in promoting the Amazigh arts of the Marrakech region was probably a symptom both of his particular interests as an ethnographer, as well as his recognition of the marketability of such arts. Likewise, in 1919 the Protectorate arts administrator Jean Gallotti explored the uncanny "modern-ness" of certain Moroccan arts and their likeliness to appeal to French artists and consumers, singling out the country's Amazigh arts, which he admitted might even "adapt better to our contemporary fashions" than the more "refined" Islamic or urban arts of Morocco (Gallotti, "Les Arts indigènes au Maroc," *Art et Décoration* (1919), 80).

28 See Goulven, "L'Histoire de la céramique à Safi,"; and Lamali, "Les Poteries de Safi et leur rénovation."

Fig. 6: Studio of Boujemaâ Lamali (Safi, Morocco), cylindrical faience pot decorated with Middle Atlas carpet motifs, ca. 1931.

glaze made from local materials to replace the cheaper glaze that had been imported from England in the previous century; he also strove to replace with pottery shapes inspired by common domestic objects the “Hispano-Mauresque” forms that had inundated local workshops following a major commission by a visiting Spanish consul in the late nineteenth century. In justifying his artistic innovations, Lamali referred to the new forms’ and techniques’ deep connections to the region’s historical material cultures: “I did not invent forms, I simply took the forms of amphora used to store food, water, and oil in Safi. These forms had an incredible amount of character; some of them had Roman origins.”²⁹ After accomplishing his goals, however, Lamali was still unsatisfied and returned to his local informants from whom he discovered that the Safi industry had once been dominated by a succession of *ma’alams* from Fez, in the north of Morocco, living in southerly Safi during

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the works of ceramic produced during this time consisted not only of blue and white, but also polychrome specimens. Rather than reject these historical influences as external to Safi-bound traditions, Lamali instead used this new information to gain approval from the SAI to produce contemporary polychrome pottery in Safi. According to Lamali, the SAI’s immediate response to his request was, “as long as this manufacture had once been practiced in Safi, there was no reason not to take it up again.”³⁰ Emboldened by his later success as an exhibitor at the 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris, Lamali pushed his innovation even further, developing a special technique of under-glazing that, in his own words, “appl[ied] a Persian technique to the pottery of Safi”³¹ (**fig. 6**).

For the Art Deco Exposition, Lamali experimented with ways not only to combine different techniques derived from his study of European, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Moroccan pottery production, but also to create visual references across art forms that

²⁹ Lamali, “Les Poteries de Safi et leur rénovation,” 13.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

were the domain of separate craft guilds and art makers in Morocco. For example, in the Moroccan Section’s “salon” stood a large vase designed by Lamali that brought together motifs derived from Amazigh pottery, medieval revetments from Fez, and recent European decorative arts (**fig. 7**). Deviating from the radiating organization of designs commonly employed in Moroccan ceramics, the vase’s exterior decoration was divided into five separate registers, each presenting a motif repeating horizontally around the diameter of the vase. The curved lip of the vessel, as well as its base, was painted with simple black zig-zagged lines punctuated with small black and red dots, evoking the unglazed painted terra-cotta vessels produced for everyday use in northern Morocco’s rural Rif Mountains, while its neck bore a polychrome design of stylized lilies colored in washes of blue, gold, light pink, and green against a mottled red and white ground, bridging the organic inventions of Art Nouveau designers of the previous decades and the bold geometric abstraction of the new *style moderne* emerging at the 1925 Exposition. Framed within triangular borders of gold, the central register presented repeating black vegetal motifs against a terra-cotta-colored background, referencing the incised ceramic tile work integral to the interior design of elite medieval architecture in Morocco, such as the Attarine madrasa in Fez (**fig. 8**). Finally, the bottom half of the vase displayed Lamali’s interpretation of Middle Atlas carpet design with a series of interlocking diamonds painted in green, red, blue, black, and gold against a stark white ground where Lamali’s signature appeared. Lamali explained that he was interested in incorporating Amazigh textile motifs into his ceramics for his submission to the Exposition because of their visual affinity to current aesthetic tendencies he recognized in international design: “As the Exposition des arts décoratifs modernes of 1925 approached . . . I gave it some thought, and observing that décors with vibrant colors were taking pride of place, I thought of applying the decoration found in Zaïan carpets to pottery.”³²

Fig. 7: Vase designed by Boujemâa Lamali, displayed in Moroccan Section “Salon.”

32 Lamali, “Les Poteries de Safi et leur rénovation,” 13.

Fig. 8: Detail of Al-Attarine Madrasa revetment, Fez.

Lamali was awarded a silver medal at the Art Deco Exposition.³³ His success as an artist was continually validated with honors bestowed by industry authorities at the event and at subsequent expositions in Marseille (1922) and Paris (1931 and 1937). The broader commercial market of the 1920s and 1930s further evidenced his success. In 1925, one journalist remarked that the triumphs of Lamali's ceramics workshop at international exhibitions had inspired a number of important commissions from France and abroad, so that "pottery, just like grain, [had become] a major export product of Safi."³⁴ As James Housefield suggests, the SAI's support of Lamali's experimentation was directly connected to its commercial intentions for Safi's pottery industry, which they hoped would "[offer] an alternative aesthetic to balance the traditional ceramic aesthetic establishment in Fès."³⁵

That the French Protectorate's arts administration considered Lamali's idiosyncratic artistic inventions to be an important contribution to the revitalization

³³ Goulven, *Histoire de la céramique*, 84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 83–4.

³⁵ Housefield, *Geography of Invented Traditions*, 403.

of Morocco’s indigenous arts industries may suggest that the dilemma purportedly faced by the organizers of the Moroccan Section at the Art Deco Exposition was, in fact, mere pretension. Indeed, as noted above, Lamali and the Section’s contributing artists were already embedded in a colonial arts landscape shaped by the dynamic relationship between the Protectorate’s preservationist interests and the modernizing conditions of the transnational commercial market. And yet, throughout the 1920s and into the following decade, official correspondence and literature published by members of the SAI and their critics revealed a pervasive anxiety over the potentially deleterious impact of the growing commercial market for Morocco’s colonial arts on the indigenous arts ecosystem. In a letter to Morocco’s director of public instruction in 1928, Jules Borély (director of the SBA from 1925 to 1935) even suggested that those arts nurtured by the SAI for nearly two decades should no longer be called “indigenous arts” because they had been so thoroughly appropriated by the demands of a foreign clientele.³⁶ To understand Lamali’s particular success amidst this contentious environment, we must return to the diverging reviews of the Moroccan Section published in *France-Maroc* in 1925.

Authenticity and Agency in the Colonial Arts

Where one critic discerned a level of “double originality” in the Moroccan Section’s exhibit for the Art Deco Exposition, another recoiled at its imitative depravity. Both reinforced colonialist notions of “indigenous art” as a distinctive category of cultural production circumscribed by its authentic relationship to inherited values unmarked by exogenous influence. For the first reviewer, the exhibit’s success lay in its careful maintenance of indigenous features within a modernist (non-indigenous) framework, thereby subscribing to what Roger Benjamin calls a theory of “associationist aesthetics” that projected the French Protectorate’s policy of cultural and political association—and the stratified social structure through which it was justified—onto evaluations of the works produced under its tutelage.³⁷ For this reviewer, then, the success of the Moroccan Section’s exhibit lay not in its correspondence to specific visual parameters of “authenticity”—for, as we have seen, these were constantly fluctuating—but rather in the racialized division of creative labor he imagined it to express. For El Aqça, however, the Moroccan Section evidenced the fragility of this carefully ordered hybridity. Leveraging his critique particularly at the work of Jacques Majorelle, a French artist who incorporated elements of the Marrakech region’s local

³⁶ Jules Borély to M. le Chef de l’Instruction publique (Jean Gotteland), “Rapport sur le peintre Mammeri,” May 2, 1928, F095, Archives du Maroc (ADM), Rabat.

³⁷ Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, 215.

visual cultures into his own decorative arts practice and who was responsible for designing the Section's "salon" and "dining-room," El Aqça argued: "It is one thing, indeed, to be inspired by an art, and another thing to have adopted its production ... No art dies in becoming a source of inspiration for [other] artists. But there are artists who can kill a primitive art, in wanting to do it too much themselves."³⁸ Likewise, in Marrakech, SAI administrators complained that, in the face of Majorelle's own successful decorative arts business, "local traditional leather goods [had] been disappearing more and more because all of the manufacturers in the souks [had] begun to copy Majorelle's models."³⁹ Claims that a French artist had successfully captured the market for "indigenous" leatherwork in Marrakech only reinforced anxieties expressed by Borély and Al Aqça alike over the dangers a transcultural colonial arts environment, such as that represented by the Moroccan Section at the Exposition, posed for the integrity of Morocco's indigenous arts.

But how did Lamali escape such criticism? Neither French nor Moroccan, his identity as an art maker and the works he produced did not easily fit within the parameters of "associationist aesthetics"; nevertheless, he was continuously praised by the Protectorate administration for his innovative mediation of Moroccan craft traditions with aesthetic tendencies expressed in international modernist design.⁴⁰ I propose that his particular success lay in his ability to speak the French Protectorate's language, avidly positioning his own work and identity within the framework—and inconsistencies—of its preservationist lexicon. His ability to claim special access to Safi's "indigenous" arts, both as an internationally-schooled ceramics expert and as a North African himself, solidified his status within the SAI; at the same time, his long-term relationship with the French colonial administration facilitated his access to and mobility within the broader international arts community.

Modern design in the early twentieth century was fueled by networks of transcultural interaction, the large-scale extraction of material resources, and the implementation of new structures of human labor entailed in the project of European colonial-

³⁸ El Aqça, "Chronique Moghrebine," 1.

³⁹ Chef du Bureau économique de Marrakech (Martin) to Chef du Service du commerce et de l'industrie de Rabat, July 23, 1925, Archives du Maroc, Rabat (ADM). Likewise, upon taking the post of regional indigenous arts inspector of Marrakech, Azouaou Mammeri was weary of Majorelle's cooption of these arts and complained that Majorelle and fellow Marrakech shop owner René Benezec had "corrupted the taste of some 150 artisans who copied their models without understanding what they were doing," Mammeri, quoted in Felix Marcilhac, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Jacques Majorelle (1886–1962)* (Courbevoie, Paris: ACR Edition, 1988), 92.

⁴⁰ This narrative concerning Lamali's work continues to be perpetuated in recent exhibitions in Morocco dedicated to Safi's colonial-era ceramics industries, such as: *Sèvres Safi: Le renouveau de la céramique en France et au Maroc autour des années 30*, Espace d'Art Actua, Casablanca (April 19 – June 15, 2007), and *Céramique de Safi: Entre histoire et gestes ancestraux*, Espace d'Art Actua, Casablanca (April 19 – September 28, 2018).

ism.⁴¹ Along with growing recognition of modernity’s expanding geographical and cultural space, as expressed in commentary surrounding the Art Deco Exposition, came competition and anxiety over who had the right to participate in its articulation. Colonial administrations like that of the French Protectorate of Morocco developed programs of arts education and commercial production that positioned their respective nations and colonies in leading roles within the globalizing design field and, at the same time, reinforced conceptions of social and racial hierarchy that justified the human exploitation necessary to this colonial-era economy.⁴² Within this context, malleable concepts such as “authenticity,” “indigeneity,” and “tradition” were powerful tools for expressing ordered hierarchy within an increasingly interconnected global arena. It is crucial to recognize, however, that this discourse of differentiated access to modernity did not in reality describe the experiences and identities of the diverse actors and art makers engaged in the production of modernist works.

In *Mapping Modernisms*, Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips identify “indigeneity” not as an inherent quality, but as “a designation whose application during the colonial era relegated a set of globally dispersed modernisms to the margins of art history.”⁴³ They explain that one of the central aims of their volume is, therefore, to elucidate the important place of arts produced by colonized and indigenous artists within the global history of modernism “despite the constraints imposed by imperialist structures.”⁴⁴ I further contend that art historians committed to redefining modernism as a global and transcultural phenomenon must not only seek out evidence of resistance to imperial structures and ideologies, but also consider the creative possibilities available even *within* these systems. Boujemâa Lamali’s case indicates

41 Deborah Silverman has likewise explored the complex ways in which European imperial interests in Africa, and specifically King Leopold’s violent exploitation of labor and resources in Central Africa, infiltrated the material and aesthetic frameworks operative in the articulation of the Art Nouveau movement in Belgium at the end of the prior century. Notably, in contrast to the theories of “associationist aesthetics” developed in French colonial North Africa during the early twentieth century, which emphasized an ordered cross-cultural collaboration, according to Silverman the discourse surrounding Art Nouveau design in Belgium obscured its indebtedness to the visual, material, and human “resources” of the Congo Free State. Deborah L. Silverman, “Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part I,” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no. 1 (2011): 139–81.

42 French colonial administrations outside of North Africa also developed programs of “indigenous” arts pedagogy that took the French Protectorate’s policies as inspiration while reflecting differing racialized ideologies applied in different regions of the French colonial empire. For discussion of French colonial arts policy in West Africa, for example, see Amanda Gilvin, “Teaching African Artisanry, Seeing African Labor: Persistent Pedagogies in Twentieth-Century Niger,” *Critical Interventions* 8, no. 1 (2014): 74–95.

43 Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, “Inside Modernity: Indigeneity, Coloniality, Modernisms,” in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, ed. Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, 1–32 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 16.

44 *Ibid.*, 3

strategies by which diverse individuals expressed modern subjectivities within the restrictive social environment of the French Protectorate of Morocco. It is crucial to recall that he thrived as an artist within this context not only by navigating colonialist conceptions of “authenticity” and “indigeneity” pertaining to Morocco’s arts, but by actively participating in their construction. Stories like his are not often featured in histories of modern art precisely because of their association with mechanisms of colonial control; and yet, in failing to consider such stories, we risk overlooking a whole body of creative work that was indeed crucial to the articulation of modern art—such as the products of colonial indigenous arts schools and “crafts” more broadly—and, meanwhile, deny their makers agency. This essay thus suggests the importance for further research into the diverse material pathways, social relationships, and creative processes through which different kinds of modern art makers imagined themselves and their work in relation to the past and to the rapidly changing present, whether against or along the contours of the colonial arts landscape.