Fertile Idea for an Exhibition

"The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art and Society" is an exhibition of art by women with roots in the Middle East.

Posted July 16, 2012 by Karyn D. Collins

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Five years ago, Ferris Olin went to the prestigious International Istanbul Biennial curious to see what this major contemporary art event had to offer. She left determined to bring some of the magic she'd witnessed in Turkey back to her academic home, Rutgers University in New Brunswick, especially the work of women artists.

The result: "The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art and Society," a mammoth collection of exhibits, symposia, film screenings, lectures and performances by and about contemporary women with roots in the Middle East. "The Fertile Crescent," presented by the Rutgers Institute for Women and Art, runs from mid-August through mid-January in venues in Princeton, New Brunswick and elsewhere. (See fertile-crescent.org for details.)

The core of "The Fertile Crescent" is an exhibition of work by 25 female artists organized by Olin and Judith K. Brodsky, a renowned team that not only founded and direct the institute but are co-facilitators of the national Feminist Art Project.

"It's a sampling that we hope will provoke people to investigate some of this art further," says Brodsky, who, like Olin, lives in Princeton. "A lot of these artists are simply just not known in the U.S."

Olin says audiences, particularly in culturally diverse New Jersey, will see a common theme emerge among the artists even though they come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

"One of the things we see is the dissolution of borders and the ways in which people are crossing borders but retaining connections to their homeland," Olin says. "It's a very fluid situation and that lack of fixity is a theme that runs through a number of works and that many of the women address in different ways."

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